Chapter – 2

Portrayal of Class Consciousness

Repression is the method by which the person is made to suppress the thoughts and ideas natural to him and makes him give mute submission to the dictates of the master. Internalization of the ideology of the dominant group, and repression of one’s own self leads to self contempt on the part of the oppressed. Thus, the effect of internalization was devastating and debilitating on the physical wholeness of the individual as a result of which the black person renounced his cultural or racial self and adopted the master’s mandates. He accepts the culture which rejects him and rejects the culture which accepts him. Internalization of hatred leads to psychic and cultural death of a person, and the person feels alienated.

So, a black is on an external search for identity. He or she has been treated more or less as a non-entity and realize that they have lost their individual identities. Hence, there is an innate desire in them to find their place in the world. Their attempts to carve a niche for themselves in the society end tragically. If a black self wants to be understood as good, this blackness must be overthrown. So the mission of the Afro-American novelist is to create a universe of critical and fictional meanings where black will no longer refer to negation. Morrison took this assignment as her mission and succeeds to a great extent. Thus her novels The
*Bluest Eye, Sula,* and *Beloved* have black protagonists who, in their attempts to find identity, undergo trauma.

Racism, sexism and classism signify the traumatic conditions under which African-Americans lived in white America. They are systems of social and psychological restrictions that have critically affected the lives of blacks, in general, and African-American women, in particular.

By the mid-seventies, African women writers like Paule Marshall, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison had not only defined their cultural context as a distinctly African-American one, but also probed many facets of the inter-relationship of racism, sexism and classism in their society. They not only demonstrated the fact that these three sources of oppression existed in black communities but also challenged the prevailing definition of women in male-dominated American society. They look at ways in which the quality of black women’s lives is affected by the inter-relationship of racism, sexism and classism. These are not separate entities but closely linked with each other.

Right from the days of slavery, the blacks, irrespective of sex had realised the cruel reality of racism: judged from the white man’s standards of life and beauty, the black man’s life became unbearable. Sexism, more oppressive physically and mentally was the cause of grievance to the black women who where sexually exploited by both the black and white men. Just as blacks as a group were
relegated to an underclass by virtue of their race, so were women have relegated to separate class by virtue of sex. Confronted on all sides by racial and sexual discrimination, the black women has no friends but only liabilities and responsibilities. Responsible for their own and their children’s well – being and future, these women had to face daily the reality of their relationships with white men, with white women, and, above all, with black men. But within the separate caste, a standard of woman was designed in terms of a class definition. The ideal southern lady image of eighteenth century America has been one of the dominant factories in America’s conception of woman. She was expected to be beautiful in an ornamental way, chaste, pious, married and eventually, a mother. She was obviously a white, beautiful and rich woman who did not work.

The ideal concept of woman in the society, then, is not only racist and sexist but also classist. And because black women were, by nature of their race, conceived of as lower class, they could hardly approximate the norm. Christian Barbara expresses the same idea in one of her critical works, ‘Black Feminist Criticism’ in the following way:

They had to work and, most could not be ornamental or withdrawn from the world; and, according to the aesthetics of this country, they were not beautiful. But neither were they men. Any aggressiveness or intelligence on their part, as unwomanly and tasteless. (79)
Thus, African women could not achieve the standard of womanhood on the one hand and on the other, they biologically females, with all the societal restrictions associated with the state.

So, to be black and at the same time, to be female is to suffer from the twin disadvantages of racial discrimination and pronounced gender bias no other social group has been subjected to such an unedifying spectacle of human debasement and depravity. Being black, the African women suffered from racism and as being females they were victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the white patriarches as well as the blacks. As former slaves, the white establishment forced them to live on meagre resources and were compelled to remain poor. In short, the black women in America were made victims of triple aspects – racism, sexism, and classism.

As sources of oppression of blacks, racism and sexism are allied and have a parallel existence. They are mutually interdependent and hence they arise from the same set of circumstances.

Gloria Wade - Gayles explains this phenomenon through the imagery of circles in his critical work “No Crystal Stair; Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women’s Fiction”,

There are three major circles of reality in American society,

Which reflect of power and powerlessness. There is large
Circle in which white people, most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a smaller circle, A narrow space, in which black people, regardless of sex, experience uncertainty, exploitation and powerlessness.

Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small dark exposure in which black women experience pain, isolation and vulnerability. These are the distinguishing marks of black Womenhood in white America. (20)

What one sees here is the omnipresent, all – embracing reality of racism as a common factor in the lives of all blacks, irrespective of sex. The black man faced with the hard fact of cruel reality, of racism realised right from the days of slavery that his colour and physiognomy were terrible handicaps, and such would mark him of as evil, despite all claims to the contrary. Judged by the White man’s standards of life, behaviour and beauty, his life became unbearable. Universal codes of societal and psychological praxis as laid down by the dominant white culture were forcibly thrust upon him.

Thus began the oppressive story of racism in America. It brought along with it pain, sorrow, bloodshed, death and, above all, the negation of an entire race. The African – American race was ghettoized, persecuted and viciously outlawed
from all avenues of decency, hope, progress and livelihood. Racism, as a life
threatening, non-nurturing force, exists even today, thus becoming the forum for
all types of discussion.

It is apt recalling the definition of Racism, as stated by a critic Calvin
Hernton in his critical work, “Sex and Racism in America”,

all of the learned behaviour and learned emotions on the part of a
group of people towards another group whose physical characteristics
are dissimilar to the farmer group, behaviour and emotions that compel
one group to . . . treat the other one group to . . . treat the other on the
basis of its physical characteristics alone, as if it did not belong to the
human race. (21)

The basic myth of racism, in other words, is that white skin brings with it
cultural superiority – that the white are more intelligent and more virtuous than the
black by mere fact of being white. On the psychological level, whiteness is
automatically equated with beauty and culture and blackness with ugliness and
slavery.

Racism started in America when white masters of the land brought the
first Africans in chains and used their labour to enrich their coffers. As a result,
black people soon ceased to exist as human beings in the white world. In this
context, it is worthy observing the reflections of Joel kovel on black’s status in one of his critical works, “White Racism”:

the White master first reduced the human self of his black slave to a body and then the body to a thing; he dehumanised his slave, made him quantifiable, and there by absorbed him into a rising world market of productive exchange. (22)

All that was left to blacks was their African soul which was also taken away by imposing white values on them. With the breakdown of their native values, they lost their authentic self and almost, invariably fostered feelings of inferiority. Whites created the institutions which blacks were finally ready to live by. Plakkoottam a critic, correctly observes, in his critical work, ‘Racial and Gender Discrimination in Fiction by Afro-American Women’ ,‘This form of racism was doubly injurious to the black race in that not much notice was taken of its invisibly corrosive nature’( 23). No wonder, it proved most devastating in its ultimate repercussions. Such was the first step toward the establishment of racism as an inseparable part of white American civilization.

Inspired by the climate of revolution and evolving black consciousness of the sixties, a period characterised by an almost evangelical struggle for personal and racial identity, Morrison chooses as the basic theme the subject of her first
major work, the obsession of blacks with an American standard of beauty that seems both inescapable and destructive.

_The Bluest Eye_ is a tragic tale of young black girl’s desire for the bluest eyes, the symbol for her of what it means to be beautiful, and therefore, worthy in society. The pivotal idea in the novel is the domination of the blacks by the existing American standards of beauty—blue-eyes, blonde hair, and white skin. It deals honestly and sensitively with the damaging influence of white standards and values on the lives of black people. It portrays in poignant terms the tragic conditions of blacks in a racist America. It examines how the ideologies controlled by the dominant group influence the making of self image of black women, thereby exposing the devastation caused by white cultural domination in the lives of African Americans.

_The Bluest Eye_ thus makes one of the most powerful attacks on the relationship between western standards of female beauty and the psychological oppression of black women. The crux of the novel is racism which devastates the self image of African female in general and African female child in particular. At the crux of the novel is the need for a pariah, the need of its members to have someone to look down upon and therefore enhance one’s constantly threatened sense of worth. The novel expresses the vulnerability of poor black girls and how easily they can become the pariahs in a white society.
Claudia and Frieda MacTeer live in Ohio with their parents. They take two other people into their home, Mr. Henry and Pecola. Pecola is a troubled young girl with a hard life, whose parents are constantly fighting, both physically and verbally. Pecola is continually being told and reminded of what an “ugly” girl she is, thus fueling her desire to be white with blue eyes. Throughout the novel, it is revealed that not only Pecola but also her parents had a life full of hatred and hardships. Her mother, Pauline, feels alive and happy only when she is working for a rich, white family. Her father, Cholly, is a drunk who was left with his aunt when he was young and ran away to find his father, who wanted nothing to do with him.

Both Pauline and Cholly eventually lost the love they once had for one another. While Pecola is doing dishes, her intoxicated father rapes her. His motives are unclear and confusing, seemingly a combination of both love and hate. Cholly flees after the second time he rapes Pecola, leaving her pregnant. In the end, Pecola's child is born prematurely and dies. Claudia and Frieda gave up the money they had been saving and plant marigold seeds in hopes that if the flowers bloom, Pecola's baby will live, but the marigolds never bloom.

_The Bluest Eye_ is not only the story of the destructive effects of interracial prejudice upon impressionable black girls in the Midwest, but also the account of African American folk culture in process. The belief that black was not
beautiful was however, one of the cultural hindrances to black people throughout their history in America.

This belief informs the tragedy of Pecola Breedlove who is at the centre of *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola comes from a very poor family. The Breedloves despise themselves because they believe in their own unworthiness. Pecola’s mother, Pauline, who works as a domestic servant in a beautiful house, hates the ugliness of her house, her daughter, her family and herself and, what is worse, blames her sense of unworthiness, on being black and poor. Having inherited the myth of unworthiness, the Breedloves can only live outlined saga to its expected conclusion. The novel, there force, becomes a myth that defines human worth and explores the potential greatness of the people who are waylaid by the beliefs they have adopted from outsiders.

The mythology Morrison explores in *The Bluest Eye* centres upon the standard of beauty by which white women are judged in America. They are taught that their blond hair, blue eyes, and creamy skins are not only wonderful but are the surface manifestations of the very best character God and Nature ever moulded. One can see how Pecola is forced to long for blue eyes like those of white children, so that she would be loved and accepted by both whites and blacks. As Ray Arunima observes:

Pecola Breedlove is a young black girl driven literally insane by the
pressure toward absolute physical beauty in a culture whose white
standards of beauty … are impossible for her to meet, though no
less alluring and demanding. Surrounded by cultural messages that
she is ugly by definition, she can achieve peace only by retreating
into schizophrenia. (61)

Pecola’s yearning for blue eyes – the white American standard of beauty –
is an external manifestation of the internal need to be loved and accepted by the
white community. Pecola, who never considers herself beautiful, is all admiration
for the eyes of the whites which she longs to posses through some miracle. Her
obsession with physical beauty leads to disastrous consequences. Morrison says in
one of his interviews in ‘Twayne’ :

When the strength of a race depends on its beauty, when the focus is
turned to how one looks as opposed to what one is, we are in trouble
. . . The concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest,
most pernicious and destructive ideas of the western world, and we
should have nothing to do with it. Physical beauty has nothing to do
with our past, present or future. Its absence or presence was only
important to “the white people who used it for anything they
wanted. (46)
But Pecola never realises this, as she has been under the spell of white cultural domination. All that she has experienced is repeated rejection and brutalization.

There are many instances in the novel which hurt Pecola into a feeling of isolation and pain because of her race. Her encounter with a fifty-two old white store-keeper makes her aware that for many people, she does not really exist. Even the black boys taunt her, at school. She becomes the scapegoat for their own humiliation and pain. Pecola’s mother, who works as a house-keeper in a white family, lavishes all her love and affection on her employer’s children reserving her slaps for her own hapless daughter. The reason for the tendency of black people to harass other black people is, perhaps, self-hatred induced by white hegemony. White standards corrupted the minds of black people in such way that black people have developed self hatred.

Thus as a black girl, Pecola undergoes all the traumatic experiences. She wants to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes, but the pity is that she is not allowed to. Excluded from reality by racial discrimination and inequality, Pecola goes mad fantasizing that that her eyes have turned blue and so fitted her for the world. She lost her balance of mind. Toni Morrison’s purpose in showing the readers the psychic state and the resultant behaviour of Pecola under of white domination is to expose the vicious genocidal effects of racism on the black girls.
The emptiness of her parent’s lives and their own negative self-images are particularly hurtful. Not only does their socio-economic status as poor blacks set them on the periphery of society, but their perception of themselves as ugly isolates them further, resulting in their self-hatred which is the most destructive element in their lives. Thus, Pecola in the novel is oppressed not only racially, but also sexually and on the basis of class distinction. The mother’s own internalization of the desirable woman as beautiful results in rejection of her own daughter, Pecola who cannot obtain such a standard not only because of her blackness but also because of her poverty. Nevertheless, at the initial stage of her career, Morrison’s focus is on racism which she considers as the primary obstacle of the Africans in America.

The major predicament that Toni Morrison considers in the novel *Sula* is the effect of racism upon black identity formation, and the effect of racism and sexism upon the identity formation of the black female. Morrison’s focus in this novel is on gender. The concept of gender with its relation to race and class forms an integral part of the novel.

The Bottom is a mostly black neighbourhood in Ohio, situated in the hills above the mostly white, wealthier community in the town of Medallion. The Bottom first became a community when a master gave it to his former slave. This "gift" was in fact a trick: the master gave the former slave a poor stretch of hilly land, convincing the slave the land was worthwhile by claiming that because it was
hilly, it was closer to heaven. The trick, though, led to the growth of a vibrant community. Now the community faces a new threat; wealthy whites have taken a liking to the land, and would like to destroy much of the town in order to build a golf course.

Shadrack, a resident of the Bottom, fought in World War I. He returns a shattered man, unable to accept the complexities of the world; he lives on the outskirts of town, attempting to create order in his life. One of his methods involves compartmentalizing his fear of death in a ritual he invents and names National Suicide Day. The town is at first wary of him and his ritual, then, over time, unthinkingly accepts him.

Meanwhile, the families of the children Nel and Sula are contrasted. Nel is the product of a family that believes deeply in social conventions; hers is a stable home, though some might characterize it as rigid. Nel is uncertain of the conventional life her mother, Helene, wants for her; these doubts are hammered home when she meets Rochelle, her grandmother and a former prostitute, the only unconventional woman in her family line. Sula's family is very different: she lives with her grandmother, Eva, and her mother, Hannah, both of whom are seen by the town as eccentric and loose. Their house also serves as a home for three informally adopted boys and a steady stream of boarders.

Despite their differences, Sula and Nel become fiercely attached to each other during adolescence. However, a traumatic accident changes everything. One
day, Sula playfully swings a neighbourhood boy, Chicken Little, around by his hands. When she loses her grip, the boy falls into a nearby river and drowns. They never tell anyone about the accident even though they did not intend to harm the boy. The two girls begin to grow apart. One day Sula's mother's dress catches fire and she dies of the burns. Eva, her mother, sees her from the window and jumps out into the garden.

After high school, Nel chooses to marry and settles into the conventional role of wife and mother. Sula follows a wildly divergent path and lives a life of fierce independence and total disregard for social conventions. Shortly after Nel's wedding, Sula leaves the Bottom for a period of 10 years. She has many affairs, some, it is rumoured, with white men. However, she finds people following the same boring routines elsewhere, so she returns to the Bottom and to Nel.

Upon her return, the town regards Sula as the very personification of evil for her blatant disregard of social conventions. Their hatred in part rests upon Sula's interracial relationships, but is crystallized when Sula has an affair with Nel's husband, Jude, who subsequently abandons Nel. Ironically, the community's labelling of Sula as evil actually improves their own lives. Her presence in the community gives them the impetus to live harmoniously with one another. Nel breaks off her friendship with Sula. Just before Sula dies in 1940, they achieve a half-hearted reconciliation. With Sula's death, the harmony that had reigned in the town quickly dissolves.
Despite the periodic inclusion of racial concerns and its incidental incorporations of class-related issues, the novel begins and ends with an exposition of individual rather than group fulfilment. Sula, the protagonist suffers not only at the hands of whites but also at the hands of Blacks. Morrison is interested in this novel, in the struggle for individual rights, in general, and woman’s right in particular, rather than in the rights of African people as a collective.

Thus, in *Sula*, Morrison’s focus shifts to the black woman as an individual struggling towards freedom and selfhood. *Sula* is fundamentally a women’s novel, in the sense that it concerns itself with the feeling and affairs of women and the roles they assume, whether by choice or by force. It features the fortunes of women in two matriarchal households within the black community whose lives represent the range of choices possible for black women in white America. Even though a good deal of the action of the novel derives from the consequences of male and female relationships, it is the self perception of women and subsequent reactions of self-concept that are central to it.

The oppression of African women in the United States, especially in the first quarter of the twentieth century, is documented throughout the novel. The manner in which Morrison chooses to explore the nature of the women’s oppression is unique. She creates two female characters –Nel and Sula - neither of whom is complete in herself . The idea that Nel and Sula represent two halves of one person reverberates throughout the novel.
Nel and Sula represent the two sides of the coin that stands for the total human personality. The height of intimacy and friendship between Nel and Sula makes explicit what can be called their interesting life-long bond.

Their friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other’s personality. Although both were unshaped, formless things, Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes. (53)

In both Sula and Nel there is a quest for social and gender identity to which bonds created between them bear testimony and relevance. Both of them are drawn towards each other out of their awareness that their, as black females, are restricted by their community and by the outer society.

If the African people’s struggle for individual freedom is the primary focus of *Sula*, their racial struggle for national freedom is a secondary focus. Morrison is concerned with issues of national importance that reflect Blacks as Americans, and with those of local importance pertain to them as blacks. The culture in which the black lives is American, but his status as a black prevents his full participation in white American culture. Thus, racial issues are interwoven into the fabric of the novel throughout. The origin of Bottom with its roots in slavery and the lack of development of the Deweys are instances of the racism.
Morrison proposes that it is the pressures and false values forced upon blacks by white society that hamper the stability of the black family in general and woman in particular. She depicts in the novel the manner in which marriage, for instance, is regarded by male and female alike under the influence of white culture. Regardless of social or economic standing, all the residents of Bottom share the common belief that a woman alone is an incomplete being and that she can find respectability and fulfilment only in the role of some man’s mate. Tragically, the same woman who are the victims of this system help to perpetuate the system. For example, marriage for Nel constitutes embracing the very same repressive feelings that have left her bereft of imagination and a distinct sense of self. She recognises her individuality only when it is mirrored through someone other than herself. By marrying Jude, she dissolves the bond of interdependence she shares with Sula, only to substitute her husband in the place of her friend.

Morrison’s characters discover that they escape the black community’s socio-economic disorder only to face, later, the all encompassing psychological chaos characteristic of life in a society polarised along racial lines. Constant racism forms a continuity in the cycle of frustration from which the town folk cannot easily escape. The hostile environment that surrounds the blacks makes them helpless scapegoats. *Sula* thus signifies the horrid inevitability of black culture facing cruel distortion against the backdrop of white man’s oppression.
Beloved explores the most oppressed period of slavery in the history of African people. The novel is based on a newspaper clipping about a fugitive slave in Ohio who killed her own infant rather than see her return to bondage in the south. With the essence of this newsclipping, Morrison concocts the story of Beloved.

The novel concerns the story of Sethe and her daughter Denver after having escaped from slavery. Their home, 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, is haunted. Because of the haunting, which often involves objects being thrown around the room—Sethe's youngest daughter, Denver, is shy, friendless, and housebound, and her sons, Howard and Buglar, have run away from home by the time they are thirteen years old. Soon afterward, Baby Suggs, the mother of Sethe's husband Halle, dies in her bed.

Paul D, one of the slaves from Sweet Home, the plantation where Baby Suggs, Sethe, Halle, and many other slaves had worked, arrives home. He tries to bring a sense of reality into the house. He also tries to make the family forget the past. In doing so, he forces out the ghost of Beloved. At first, he seems to be successful, because he brings the family to a carnival, out of the house for the first time in many years. However, on their way back, they encounter a young woman sitting in front of the house. She has the distinct features of a baby and calls herself Beloved. Paul D, suspicious, warns Sethe, but charmed by the young woman,
Sethe ignores him. Paul D is gradually forced out of Sethe's home by a supernatural presence.

When made to sleep outside in a shed, he is cornered by Beloved, who has put a spell on him. She burrows into his mind and heart, forcing him to have sex with her, while flooding his mind with horrific memories from his past. Overwhelmed with guilt, Paul D tries to tell Sethe about it but cannot and instead says he wants her pregnant. Sethe is elated, and Paul D resists Beloved and her influence over him. But, when he tells friends at work about his plans to start a new family, they react fearfully. Stamp Paid reveals the reason for the community's rejection of Sethe.

When Paul D asks Sethe about it, she tells him what happened. After escaping from Sweet Home and making it to her mother-in-law's home where her children were waiting, Sethe was found by her master, who attempted to reclaim Sethe and her children. Sethe grabbed her children, ran into the tool shed and tried to kill them all, succeeding only with her oldest daughter. Sethe explains to Paul D, saying she was "trying to put my babies where they would be safe." The revelation is too much for him, and he leaves for good. Without Paul D, the sense of reality and time moving forward disappears.

Sethe comes to believe that the girl, Beloved, is the daughter she murdered when the girl was only two years old; her tombstone reads only "Beloved". Sethe begins to spend carelessly and spoil Beloved out of guilt. Beloved becomes angry...
and more demanding, throwing hellish tantrums when she does not get her way. Beloved's presence consumes Sethe's life to the point where she becomes depleted and sacrifices her own need for eating, while Beloved grows bigger and bigger. In the climax of the novel, Denver, the youngest daughter, reaches out and searches for help from the black community. People arrive at 124 to exorcise Beloved. While Sethe is confused and has a "rememory" of her master coming again, Beloved disappears.

Set in post civil war Ohio, this haunting narrative of slavery and its aftermath, traces the life of a young woman, Sethe, who has kept a terrible memory at bay only by shutting down part of her mind. The novel deals with Sethe’s former life as a slave on Sweet Home Farm, her escape with her children to what seems a safe haven, and the tragic events that follow. Although Sethe physically survives, she remains emotionally subjugated, and her desire to give and receive love becomes a destructive force.

On the socio-psychological level, Beloved is the story of Sethe’s quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness. She struggles with haunting memory of her slave past and the retribution of Beloved, the ghost of her infant daughter whom she has killed in order to save her from the living death of slavery. On a legendary and mythic level, Beloved is ghost story that frames embedded narratives of the impact of class, race and sex on the capacity for love, faith and community of black families, especially of black women.
Sethe, like Morrison’s other female protagonist, is a victim of both sexist and racist oppression. She is a runaway slave woman, a slave mother, who is brutally treated by white women, the school teacher and his nephews. Morrison explores a black woman self-conscious protest to the dual oppression. It is not only the sexual exploitation that Sethe feels most oppressed by, but the humiliation of her nurturing abilities as a mother—the stealing of her milk.

One of the most damaging effects of the dual oppression of black women, against which Morrison writes, is murder of one’s own child. Murder becomes Sethe’s act of mother’s love, which she explains saying, “I took and put my babies where they’d be safe” (BL, 163).

She prefers to murder her daughter, Beloved, rather than see her in bondage. If it was possible for a black slave woman like Sethe to live with her family with dignity and self-respect in the America of 1850’s she would not have committed this hideous crime which was the mutilation of her vibrant mother love.

By choosing to narrate the real life and the actual experiences of a runaway slave woman, Morrison proves the power of art to demolish stereotype. Sethe’s experience is treated with many ironic overtones that point to certain paradoxes and many fundamental intricacies to her quest for freedom.

The feminist qualities that Morrison advocates through Sethe’s portrayal are the traditional beauty, strength, resistance and integrity of black women. She is
sensitive to feminists concerns and includes all those elements of black female experience in her text which are of compelling significance to a woman.

Toni Morrison seems to be at her best in documenting slavery and its aftermath. The treatment of slavery as beast of burden and the sexual exploitation of African women by European men are driven home to the readers. Morrison shows how slavery was slavery, on Sweet Home or any other plantation. For instance, Baby Suggs reveals that life for her has been one continuous cycle of oppression. Her past has been intolerable like her present. For a free African living in a slave society, life is not qualitatively different either. Morrison hence, demonstrates that the plight of the Africans can be extirpated only through a collective struggle.

Unity is the only way by which African people can survive. It is only when the African, through self or forced isolation, exists outside the collective that the struggle appears endless and the burden unbearable. Toni Morrison further shows that Africans all over the world are one people having the same history and sharing all the same plight since they are seen as one by those outside the African nation. Obviously, she wants African people to see themselves as one people, undivided by their class status. Thus, the novel brings home the fact that collective struggle is the only possible solution left to alleviate the oppression African people have been experiencing. Thus, the novel is story of the genesis of a culture and of a
people, who living on the edge of life and death, have managed to create that
culture and to keep their history alive.

Morrison relates the story of Joe Trace, a 50-year old sample-case
beauty products salesman, and his wife, Violet, a hairdresser, both of whom had in
1906 came to New York city, leaving behind all the traumas of their childhood.
Amidst the post war euphoria, the black community receives a jolt when Joe Trace
kills his paramour, an eighteen year-old creamy complexioned girl, named Dorcas.
Joe shoots Dorcas dead at a dance party because she has left him for another boy,
Action. His crazy wife crashes the funeral of Dorcas and disfigures with a knife
the dead girl’s face.

As Toni Morrison is deeply concerned with and committed to African
people in America, she uses each of her novels as a frame work for investigating
various solutions to the African’s race and gender oppression and class exploitation.
After proposing collective class struggle against capitalism, as a viable solution to
African’s problem in America, in Beloved, Morrison adds a new dimension to the
solution arrived at, in her next novel Jazz with its thematic emphasis on the unity
of women as a solution to gender oppression.

Since the African people are connected by their history and culture, the
solution to the problem of exploitation and oppression that women in particular
face is unity. The promotion of gender solidarity to the major theme in Jazz
suggests how acute the problem of gender oppression is in the African community. Separated from her man, who was either sold during slavery, or who left the black woman when he went to seek jobs in the North, the black woman had to depend on other women in the community.

It is the story of African women that Morrison is most anxious to present in *Jazz*, because it is only they who experience the triple oppression of gender, race and class. Morrison takes the current problem facing African people, relates it to a problem African women confronted in the 1920’s, and shows that the solution then and now remains the same. All African people were in danger of exploitive conditions caused by the changing U.S economy in the 1920’s- an economy that moved rapidly from slavery to industrialism, and the racism that is economy spawned. The results were the worst race riots in the history of America. If conditions for all African people were barbaric and wild, then conditions for African women were downright warlike. For, unlike African men, African women were also in danger from the sexism that, like racism, is spawned by capitalism.

Conditions of African women were no better in the south than in the north. The main reason parents gave for sending their daughters north was fear of molestation. So, while migrating, the Africans thought that they were coming to a tame place, free of exploitation and oppression, they were actually coming to a wild place, perhaps, even wilder than the south since racism and sexism were alive as much in the north.
Hence Toni Morrison advocates the dire need for gender solidarity through women bonding in her novel *Jazz*. While dealing with various racist and sexist issues, Toni Morrison looks at the concepts of women bonding as a means of coming to an understanding of the self in *Jazz* more than in any of her earlier novels. In this novel, Violet finds herself through her relationship with Dorcas, Alice Manfred and Felice. It is the identification of self with the Back women that leads Violet to discover the real self, as she goes out in search of Dorcas past, and encounters Alice Manfred, Dorcas aunt.

Violet the wronged wife is a many-faceted creature who admits too many selves within herself. She is described as being black and skinny. Once in the New York city, Violet experiences exploitive work conditions. Since she does not have any necessary licence to set up a hairdresser shop, she must be at the beck and call of women who want their hair done and accept lower wages as a result. The novel traces the path to the understanding of the self Violet comes to in her relationships which are not quite apparent with the other women.

When Violet tries to disfigure Dorca’s face at the latter’s funeral this act stunts the entire community. Violet convinces Alice as to why she had to disfigure the face of dead Dorcas. She makes Alice realise that she, a woman who had never held a knife to harm others, would definitely fight and kill for her man. This realization leads Alice to an understanding of Violet’s violent act of Dorca’s funeral. Thus Alice friendship helps Violet define herself and become self-
confident. She understands that she has been denying herself all along and that she has to make the most of it. Through her identification with Alice, Violet establishes her own identity and becomes a person even Joe learns to love and admire. Violet helps Alice to understand that there is no difference between African women in as much as all face a triple oppression based on gender, race and class.

There exists only two classes-owner class-capitalists and the ownerless class-workers. This is obvious from the following conversation between Violet and Alice:

They’re just women, you know. Like us…”
“Don’t they fight all the time/When you do their hair, you’re not afraid they might start fighting?”
“Only when they sober.” Violet smiled.
“Oh, well.”
“They share men, fight them and fight over them, too.”
“No woman should live like that.”
“No. No woman should have to. (JZ, 84)

From this conversation it is clear that both poor, uneducated African women and educated middle-class African women are victims of triple oppression..

The economic infrastructure of capitalism provides the basis for *Tar Baby*. It is from this capitalistic base that Morrison creates characters who
represent classes and defy classes; it is from this base that Morrison criticizes the system of capitalism and its horrible effects upon Africans.

When European explorers set foot on what they considered uncharted soil more than three hundred years ago, they imagined opportunity and freedom, adventure and wealth. However, what they created on this soil was a capitalistic machine that wiped out anyone or anything in the way, and they called it progress. The soil was not something to be treasured, it was something to rape; Native Americans were not people to share the land with, but people standing in the way of a destiny instilled by God himself. Capitalism lies at the core of our history like some mutant nutrient, sucking our resources dry and leaving our people with a shadow of an identity in the name of the dollar.

Shortly after these European explorers set foot on what was to become U. S. soil, communities began to evolve, sprang up slowly but eventually erupted like a field of dandelions. The need for labour coincided with the evolution of communities. Initially those who held these positions were the same individuals who were creating the societies; however, the toil soon fell into the hands of indentured servants.

Apt are the observations of Johnson and Smith, when they record the plight of Afro-Americans:
Thousands of people—vagrants and ne’er-do-wells or honest farmers and craftsmen—were pulled from the villages and back roads of England, and later from the German Rhineland, by the promise of a new life. (Johnson & Smith, 35)

Africans, too, crossed the Atlantic as indentured servants. Unfortunately, the hope to get freedom after a period of indentured years soon melted into an everlasting existence as slaves.

The beginning of slavery, and the years that followed speak volumes of the horrifying effects of capitalism. The allure of wealth was quite maddening. Slavery and its evil repercussions swept across the land of the free with frightening pace. For those who possessed slaves, life was one of economic prosperity. Comfort was synonymous with life. However, the situation was far from the same for those who provided the comfort. The American dream was not colour blind, but colour conscience.

Torn asunder from the native womb of their communities, these Black Africans were shipped across the sea bound in chains. The smell of feces and urine hung free in the air, mingling with the odour of decaying flesh. Black American Mothers watched their sons slowly rot while they listened to their pitiable daughters cry, and fathers hoped that death would take their whole families. Here families were separated with the least possibility of reunion.
The scar of slavery is unimaginably crude which leaves indelible marks both on the physical and on the psychological plane. One, in fact shudders to the spine, on reading the lines of Johnson and Smith in their work, *Africans in America: America’s Journey through Slavery*, which unfold the horrific and blood curdling aftermath, that slavery had left behind on the lives of the Afro-Americans:

It was not uncommon to see a man’s, woman’s, or child’s back crisscrossed with raw scars, not uncommon to see Africans hobble about with missing feet, to see a ragged stump where a hand should be. It was not uncommon to see their eyes swollen shut, their heads bound in rusty iron contraptions, their bones broken. It was not uncommon to hear that someone alive was now dead. (48)

The scars have crossed geographical borders, bled cultures dry, and imprinted themselves on generations to come of African Americans. The allure of the dollar, the material wealth, the comfort, the power that accompanies the competitive nature of capitalism is the cause of this indelible scar. And those individuals who have profitted from slavery are white males.

Although Morrison’s *Tar Baby* is not a tale about the brutalities of slavery, as is in *Beloved*, it is a tale that calls into question capitalism and the ramifications it has had upon African Americans. The picture Morrison paints of capitalism is
not one of beauty alone, but it is colourful also on the canvas. Her picture is crimson, painted with the blood of those who have been discarded and destroyed in the name of progress. Visually, Valerian Street exemplifies the zealous pursuit of wealth and dominance by white males.

The system of Capitalism seethes with an underlying class system. Everyone within the household is a microcosmic representation of the class barriers that have existed in America for centuries. Philip Page notes this, when he writes in his work "Everyone was out of Place: Contention and Dissolution in Tar Baby",

The Street household resembles a stereotypical antebellum plantation, with its aristocratic and bigoted patriarch, its neurotic white lady, its house servants caught between class superiority over the field hands and their subservience to the whites, and its field hands who surreptitiously fight their ineffectual battles against the prevailing system. (112)

Valerian is a wealthy man and is a symbol of American capitalism. Doreatha Mbali aptly describes Valerian as "a typical capitalist who has made his fortune by exploiting the labour of the African masses and by stealing their land" (69)

Valerian has accumulated his wealth in the candy business. The roots of this business are in Caribbean soil where the main ingredients of candy—sugar and
cocoa—are produced. Those who laboured in these fields have been slaves performing backbreaking labour so that white men can thrive well. Valerian has ascended the social ranks within this system to its pinnacle.

Stelamaris Coser rightly points out the following observations:

Labourers from Haiti were hired to clear Isle des Chevaliers of its rain forest, ‘already two thousand years old,’ destroying animals, flowers and a river. Civilization marched onto the island in the guise of rich businessmen needing a tropical retreat from long northern winters. (107)

Valerian is the example of rich businessmen searching for a hiatus from northern winters. Valerian’s employees (slaves) have more than put the shoe horn in his boot, so the task is easier, though. They have found the material to make his boots. They have stitched the material to make the boots, and they have put his foul feet in the boots. Valerian in turn has walked on the people who have made him what he is, kicking them while they are vulnerable, dirtying their work and squashing them out.

Morrison’s creation of Valerian as the prototypical American capitalist does not end with the manner in which he has acquired his wealth. He reeks with the odor of capitalism and its foul aftertaste. He has created a home that has
desecrated the natural world, much in the same way as those colonists of years past did, believing it was their destiny from God. He has trampled the ground and slashed the trees in order to construct a house that will remind him of his childhood. He has called upon the labour of others to erect his plantation-like home, complete with servant quarters and servants. According to Philip Page, the house that Valerian has constructed "is the symbol of Valerian’s hegemony over nature, blacks, and females, and its ill effects suggest the damage inflicted by that system" (110-11). Within the physical structure are the individuals who make up the superstructure, the complexities of capitalism. Most pertinent here is the development of social classes that arise out of capitalism. Harold M. Hodges writes in his critical work, “Social Stratification”,

Most (Americans) are at least vaguely conscious of the truth that however loudly we proclaim the ideal of equality, we are a stratified people: that ours is in fact a multi-layered society, a hierarchical society in which whole classes of people are quite commonly accorded low, middling, or high social esteem, power, and material wealth. (65)

Within the text of *Tar Baby* class is a prevalent theme, characters fill a range of socio-economic positions from the filthy rich aristocrat to the dirt-poor labourer. Within the Street home Margaret is one of many subordinate figures to Valerian. Margaret is a shadow of a person. She is not a strong, independent woman. Instead
she is an extremely dependent woman who relies upon her physical beauty to accomplish anything. She married young and she married into money. Her ascent upward within the capitalistic social ranks can be seen in Morrison’s description of her traversing stairs.

She was on the two concrete steps of the trailer; the six wooden steps of the hand-built house; the thirty-seven steps at the stadium when she was crowned; and a million wide steps in the house of Valerian Street. It was just her luck to fall in love with and marry a man who had a house bigger than her elementary school. A house of three stories with pearl-gray S’s everywhere-on cups, saucers, glasses, silverware, and even in their bed. (TB 57-58)

Margaret’s beauty allowed her to stand at the top of the stadium and her beauty also allowed her "to fall in love with a rich man. For Margaret, her marriage to Valerian is luck coloured in gold, and she is a young, beautiful, ignorant woman whom Valerian can parade around and control.

The social hierarchy within *Tar Baby* extends beyond the relationship between Valerian and Margaret. Below the "neurotic white lady" is Valerian’s servants, or more aptly his slaves. Sydney and Ondine have worked for Valerian for some thirty years when Morrison introduces the reader to them. In that time they have become dependent upon Valerian for the very air they breathe. Like the
house slaves of yesteryear they have developed a sense of superiority to the lesser
field slaves. In so doing they have come to associate with their master’s racist ways
rather than identifying with their own people. As Sydney speaks to Son his deep
seeded capitalistic inspired superiority complex shows its ugly face:

You hide and you live in secret, underground, surface when you
cought. I know you, but you don’t know me. I am a Phil-a-delphia
Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name. My people
owned drugstores and taught school while yours were still cutting
their faces open so as to be able to tell one of you from the other.
(TB 163)

Sydney’s words cut to the bone with racism. He has chosen to identify with
his oppressors rather than the oppressed. Mbalia asks the question in her critical
work, “A Reflection of Morrison’s Developed Class Consciousness”, "all Africans
must ask themselves: Do I identify with my oppressor or my people?" .(68)

Obviously Sydney and Ondine, too, have identified with their oppressor and
capitalism. Sydney’s identification with his capitalistic oppressor can be seen in
the way he separates himself from Gideon and Therese by calling them "Yardman"
and "Mary," just as Valerian does. This desire for separation is inherent in a
capitalistic culture that separates individuals by class; it is a desire to feel superior
to at least one other person. However, both Sydney and Ondine are just one step
away from being in the same poverty stricken position as Gideon and Therese. Although they live in the house and identify with their oppressors, they are far from on the same level. Sydney and Ondine live a second hand life, exemplified by their living quarters:

The difference between this room and the rest of the house was marked. Here were second hand furniture, table scarves, tiny pillows, scatter rugs and the smell of human beings. It had a tacky permanence to it, but closed. Closed to outsiders. No visitors ever came in there. There were no extra chairs; no display of tea set. Just the things they use, Sydney and Odine, and used well. A stack of Philadelphia Tribunes piled neatly on the coffee table. Worn house slippers to the left of the doors. Photographs of women with their legs crossed at the ankles and men standing behind the wicker chairs, touching them lightly with their fingers. (TB 160)

Ondine, the subservient cook, shares Valerian’s racist and capitalistic ideology, too. She does not like her niece loving Son. Her desire is not out of a maternal love for Jadine; rather, she fears that her niece will fall in love with Son, a lower class Negro, who will embarrass them.

Although Ondine appears to be the all-loving caregiver of the household, who will work thirty years standing up in order to have her niece study in the best
schools, she is selfish. She feels that Jadine is in fact indebted to her. She displays the double-edged sword of hypocrisy when she told Sydney that

I take another one in my heart, your brother’s baby girl. Another not from my womb, and I stand on my feet for thirty years so she wouldn’t have to. And she couldn’t think of nothing better to do than buy me some shoes I can’t wear, a dress I shouldn’t, and run off with the first pair of pants that steps in the door. I can’t explain nothing no more. It didn’t used to be this way. Seem like folks used to take care of folks once upon a time. Old black people must be a worrisome thing to the young ones these days (TB 283)

Ondine’s words reflect the capitalistic attitude of indebtedness. She expects her niece to repay her maternal kindness in some way that resembles the nature of indentured servants, not a caring aunt.

Standing below Sydney and Ondine on the social ladder are Gideon and Therese. Gideon has witnessed first hand, the hypocrisy of social ascent in America, for Africans, where he toiled for twenty years and came back to the Caribbean with a leisure suit, twelve apples, two dollars and the sentiment that the U. S. is a bad place to die in. His attitude reflects his anti-capitalistic beliefs and his association with his own people. Although Gideon is ashamed of not
succeeding in a world that would not accept him, he cannot hold a grudge towards anyone.

Therese’s feelings toward the U. S. and its capitalistic system are much more vehement.

Therese said America was where doctors took the stomachs, eyes, umbilical cords, the backs of the necks where the hair grew, blood, sperm, hearts and fingers of the poor and froze them in plastic packages to be sold later to the rich. Where children as well as grown people slept with dogs in their beds. Where women took their children behind tress in the park and sold them to strangers. Where everybody on the television set was naked and that even the priest were women. Where for a bar of gold a doctor could put you into a machine and, in a matter of minutes, would change you from a man to a woman or a woman to a man. (TB 151)

In her words, Therese is very aware of the differences that exist between the rich and poor in a capitalistic society; she is also well aware of the atrocities that goes along with such a system. Her words, although only an opinion, describe how the poor Black Africans have been subjugated, oppressed, and mutilated by rich, white capitalists for their own vested interested.
It is through the character Therese that one gets Morrison’s most striking and bluntly honest feelings about how capitalism has ravaged the African community. Those who stand at the top of the hierarchy have been stripping the life off from Black Africans for generations together in order to mint money. The ambition by white males for making money has polluted the African culture, raped the African race, and irreparably damaged the entire African community.

The Street household can be interpreted as the microscopic representation of the macrocosmic agro-plantation class structures. Valerian and his shadow-of-a-self wife do resemble the aristocratic slave master and wife; Sydney and Ondine can be seen in the role of house slaves; Therese and Gideon fill out the hierarchical class structure in the fields. However, the allegory does not include Jadine and Son. But to view these two characters from a class conscious perspective is accurate. Morrison writes:

Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be. One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands. Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing?

(TB 269)

It is through this questioning that the reader sees Jadine and Son. Neither is directly a member of the plantation class system. Jadine is neither a field slave nor
a house slave like her aunt and uncle; nor is she a member of the ruling class like Valerian. She is not a strong independent African woman like Therese, nor is she a shadow-of-a-self woman like Margaret. She is without an identity and without a culture. Literally, she is an orphan and metaphorically she is an orphan from her culture.

Stories our parents tell us during our childhood etch indelible impressions in our minds. The traditional children’s story “Tarbaby,” for example, impresses on children’s mind the relationship between blacks and whites in American society through simple metaphor. The tar baby in the story symbolizes the troubles created by white people in which black people tend to get stuck. The set of symbols from this story can be seen in Morrison’s novel *Tar Baby*. The novel revolves around the tensions created by discrepancies between modern culture and archetypal gender roles along with cultural tradition. Morrison uses the tar baby image as a metaphor for the way that modern black people entangle themselves in these discrepancies.

In order to understand the references in Morrison’s *Tar Baby*, it is necessary to explain briefly the traditional story “Tar baby.” In the story, Brer Fox, representative of white society in Morrison’s *Tar Baby*, tries to catch Brer Rabbit, representative of black society, by making a baby out of tar and placing it in the road for Brer Rabbit to cross. When Brer Rabbit crosses the tar baby’s path, he attempts several times to talk to it. Due to its insistent silence, he proceeds to give
the tar baby the beating of its lifetime, becoming stuck in the process. He escapes from the trap by convincing Brer Fox that the worst possible punishment would be for him to throw Brer Rabbit back into the briar patch from which he came. Once back on his home turf, Brer Rabbit can easily remove the sticky tar from his fur and escape Brer Fox.

Jadine plays the most obvious role of the tar baby in the novel: modern white culture supersedes the black culture of her ancestors. Appiah, in his work “Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present”, says that ‘it gave her a sense of self that is based upon a denial of her own cultural heritage and an identification with one that is not her own’. (Appiah 284)

Her wealthy Anglo-Saxon benefactor, Valerian, provides her with the funds necessary to acquire a French education in Paris, where she begins a modeling career. Her education convinces her of the superiority of European culture over the culture of her African ancestors, and she attempts to justify why she distances herself from that culture.

Thus, she is a product of white society, endowed with white biases by a white benefactor. This undermines her role as a woman by replacing the traditional ideal of womanhood-maternalism -with the modern ideals of magazine glamour and pay checks.
Jadine’s westernization separates her from her African roots, a loss which she feels acutely, albeit unconsciously. This stirs formless thoughts from the depths of her mind to the point of surfacing into her conscious mind in the form of visions of archetypal African women. They thrust their breasts at her, attempting to wake her up to the emasculated product of white culture that she has become: Brer Rabbit is unsuccessfully trying to tear himself from the tar baby. As Barbara Sarason puts it,

She suffers from a confusion of social roles, particular functions that a person plays as a member of a social group, being sculpted into a role of educated pay check-earning previously set aside for white males while her body and unconscious scream at her that she remains a black woman”. (Barbara Sarason 90)

Morrison considers the adventuresome spirit that drives one such as Jadine to travel from place to place, a masculine trait. The presence of this masculine trait creates a sticky situation within Jadine. Through these visions, her unconscious, full of feminine archetypes that mismatch what she has become, tries to yank her free from this tar baby her westernization has made of her. The women in her visions are a warning about the dangers of rejecting her cultural heritage.
Conversely, the conscious part of Jadine gets stuck in the tar baby of the woman in the yellow dress that she sees in a supermarket in Paris. She goes on to describe her and says she symbolizes femininity and, like Brer Rabbit, Jadine wants to talk to the tar baby figure. However, the tar woman only spits at her, disrespecting her like the tar baby does Brer Rabbit.

Jadine’s preoccupation with her various tar babies causes many of her conflicts with other characters; in particular, Son. He receives the bulk of both Jadine’s positive and negative feelings that spring from her inner conflicts, and this is to be expected: he has all of the qualities that Jadine is missing and unconsciously desires. Son is the total opposite of Jadine: he is very black (all the way down to the dreadlocks), he comes from a very small, rural, all black town, and he has the unequivocal contempt for whites that characterizes isolated Southern blacks. This connection to his roots intrigues Jadine, luring her by both inviting her conscious self to shape him out of his lazy and old-fashioned ways and perking the ears of the women within her with the possibility of bringing the archetypal woman out in her. In effect, she becomes stuck on him. This is yet another example of Morrison using allusion to the original “Tarbaby.” Her European mindset tries to blind her conscious self to her obvious attraction to him all the way up to when they start having sex. The part of her that conjures up the visions of femininity also causes her ultimately irrepressible fascination with this archetypal African man. Her attraction to him surfaces through the filter of her
education, in his face she saw “Spaces, mountains, savannas - all those were in his forehead and eyes. Too many art history courses, she thought, had made her not perceptive but simple –minded”. (TB 158). The conscious, tar baby part of her mind rationalizes itself into denial of this resonance. This attitude of Jadine’s conscious self eventually causes the fights that lead to their split, for modern ideals are too deeply rooted in her to remove and they disagree venomously with Son’s more traditional ideals

Just as Jadine falls victim to Son’s stickiness, so does Son get stuck on Jadine. He is also aware of Jadine’s shortcomings as a black woman, and he attempts to mould Jadine into his own image with his background and ideas. On instance of Son wanting Jadine to have the same foundation as him is when he yells at her, “You’re not from anywhere. I’m from Elo” in one of their many fights while in New York (TB,266). Of course, Jadine’s will and background make her about as mouldable as a concrete pylon.

Morrison uses Jadine and Son to “illustrate the consequences of rejecting one’s cultural heritage” and by using the Tar baby story, she becomes a “cultural archivist” (Appiah 291). By creating a protagonist that cannot grow into the archetypal woman in her mind, Morrison gives the reader a way to understand the contradictions of the traditional verses the modern within Jadine and, by extension, within society. To become this woman, Jadine feels she would need to become
one of the fat black ladies serving pies in the church basement betraying the modern woman that she has become in the process. Regardless of humanity’s past and the archetypes sculpted by this past, Jadine’s modern environment, with all of its magazines and pay checks, sculpts her conscious mind. By considering this dilemma common to nearly all modern people, the reader can understand the cause and effect of a tar baby in one’s life.

Morrison has created Jadine as a character that cannot be pinned down within the class-centered Street household. Jadine does not live with her aunt and uncle; instead she lives upstairs, on a higher level of the social ladder. Valerian has paid for her to study in the best schools and in so doing he has wrapped the materialistic blanket, stitched by capitalism, around her. Jadine returns from school with an education in art history; however, her degree has left her ignorant of her own culture and assimilated into Valerian’s. Like the classic slave master, he has instilled an ideology within Jadine that has caused her to reject her own past, her own African culture.

Although Jadine does not fit into a social class within the Street household, she is symbolic of a position within the African community. Jadine is not a part of the ruling class, those of European descent; however, her expensive European education, sealskin coat, and behaviour patterns resemble her oppressors’ more than they do those of the African masses. Jadine is caught in between classes and
cultures. Philip Page rightly points out in his critical work, ‘Everyone was out of Place: Contention and Dissolution in Tar Baby’ ‘Jadine is divided between glitzy, white materialism and her maternal and racial instincts, and she can only see the two as mutually exclusive choices’ (116). Her decision to lean more towards her oppressor’s lifestyle points out the effect of capitalism to strip away an individual’s culture.

Even though Jadine has received a cultural makeover, she still remains aware of her cultural orphanage. Looking with amazement and awe at the African woman in yellow, "Jadine gasped; . . . Just a quick snatch of breath before that woman’s woman—that mother/sister/she; that unphotographable beauty" (TB 46). However, when the woman spits while looking at Jadine, she calls her a bitch. What implicates Jadine as a cultural orphan from this incident is her claim that the woman in yellow made her "feel lonely and inauthentic" (TB 48). If Jadine is affected by this incident it is not reflected in her actions. She continues to shun her culture. When Son arrives Jadine is repulsed by his very shabby appearance and odour.

…alone in her bedroom where there were no shadows , only glimmering unrelieved sunlight, his hair looked over-powering-physically overpowering, like bundles of long whips of lashes that could grab her and beat her to jelly. And would. Wild, aggressive,
vicious hair that needed to be put in jail. Uncivilized, reform-school hair. Mau, Mau, Attica, chain-gang hair (TB 113).

Although his hair is merely in dreadlocks, Jadine sees it as uncivilized, wild and out of control. His appearance and, more important, his aura scares her. He is reminiscent of the woman in yellow, a strong, prideful African comfortable in his identity, and not yet processed into the capitalistic machine.

Jadine once again reflects her cultural orphanage in her reaction to the naked African women who bare their breasts to her in her dreams. They are frightening.

The women in the night had killed the whole weekend. Eloie was rotten and more boring than ever. A burnt out place. There was no life there. May be a past but definitely no future and finally there was no interest. (TB 259).

The past has no importance for Jadine, only a future pasted on the covers of fashion magazines and mingling with European bourgeois matters. Ryan Judylyn says in his critical work "Contested Visions/Double-Vision in Tar Baby" that "Jadine is afraid that whoever this person might be, she will be faced with the same lack of choice, the same economic and socio political stagnation that these ‘swamp women’ face". (611). The system of capitalism instills an ideology that abhors
descent within the socio-economic class system. Even though Jadine is cognizant that she is a cultural orphan, she will not recapture her culture because she fears descent. In doing so she exemplifies the selfishness that accompanies capitalism. Jadine is completely absorbed in capitalistic ideals at the expense of being a cultural orphan.

If Jadine is seen as part of the African petty bourgeois, then Son is part of the subject class. He identifies himself with the African masses as opposed to Jadine, who rejects them. If Jadine is a symbol of capitalism and materialism, Son is a symbol of community and naturalism. He is extremely critical of capitalism and its evil effects upon Black Africans, exemplified by his thoughts at the Christmas dinner. Son sits and watches Valerian chew ham and is outraged at Valerian’s ease for having dismissed Gideon and Therese with a flutter of his fingers.

Son criticizes the manner that Valerian has accumulated his wealth, through business. Valerian has profited a lot by exploiting the backs of Africans. He continues to do so, by contracting Caribbean natives to construct his plantation palace in the middle of the rainforest and paying his labourers very low wages. Son says Valerian knows Gideon and Therese are thieves because nobody knew thieves and thievery better than he did and he probably thought he was a law-abiding man, they all did, and they always did
because they had not the dignity of wild animals who did not eat where they defecated but they could defecate over a whole people and come there to live and defecate some more by tearing up the land and that is why they loved property so, because they had killed it, soiled defecated on it and they loved more than anything the places where they shit.

(TB 203)

Son realizes how white Europeans have defecated on, discarded, and destroyed people and in order to get what they want: money and power. In doing so Morrison has created a character in opposition to Valerian, and capitalism.

As Jadine, Sydney, and Ondine turn their noses up away from the poor, exemplifying their primal scent for capitalism, Son feels a sense of community with the poor Black African class. Although he has not been to Eloé for eight years, he still calls it his home. Eloé is home because of the community, the antithesis to the selfish, individualism to capitalism; the antithesis to the petty African bourgeois that Jadine epitomizes. Son is moved to dizziness when he sees Alma Estee wearing the wig the colour of dried blood because he realizes that she is being jaded by the material image of beauty that capitalism creates, and its subsequent rejection of the African. Mbalia describes Son as being very conscious of not only race but also class.
He sees himself as a member of the exploited class, although he himself is not directly exploited. He understands that if African people in general are exploited, then he too is exploited, that if African people are not free, then he is not free (77-8).

It is this awareness of the importance of community that Morrison is trying to convey through Son. Son transcends classes; he is a man who is not bound to anything, not even a name. However, he is aware of and is conscious of his history, shown by his words directed at Jadine:

The truth is that whatever you learned in those colleges that didn’t include me ain’t shit. What did they teach you about me? What tests did they give? Did they tell you what I was like, did they tell you what was on my mind? Did they describe me to you? Did they tell you what was in my heart? If they didn’t teach you that, then they didn’t teach you nothing, because until you know about me, you don’t know nothing about yourself. And you don’t know anything, anything at all about your children and anything at all about your mama and your papa. You find out about me, you educated nitwit! (TB 264-65)

It is this awareness and close affinity towards the Black Community and the masses that separate Son from the selfish capitalism. In the eyes of Son, Africans
must resist capitalism’s oppression by being conscious of African history and remaining loyal to the African masses.

Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby* has called into question the idea of equality that Americans hold so dear to their hearts they are willing to lie in the face of it. Because behind the mask of equality is the wretched face of capitalism, an economic system that has filtered into the air that Americans breathe deeply into their lungs, the water that Americans drink, the very blood that pumps through American citizens. Capitalism is at the core of American life.

However, success within a capitalistic system is exclusive, bound within the vice of racism. It is the African blood has been shed for the prosperity of plantation owners; African families have been torn asunder so that white European families may have a better life than their forefathers; African culture has been stripped of its custom, tradition, history and reduced to colour. Stamped as *black*, they are asked to forget the brutal history of slavery and oppressive nature of capitalism, while assimilating into the enslaver’s culture. Morrison’s awareness of African oppression and the source of the oppression resonates in beautiful language and vividly striking images.

Within her novel *Tar Baby* Morrison peels back the layers of, and slit open the American history to dig at the ugly core. Her revelation to the world is that America’s system of Capitalism has destroyed the African American individual
and community, separating those who identify with the oppressor, those who are kept on the fringes of the ruling class; and those who identify with the African masses and who are kept in the gutters. Her conscious message is that African people must neither isolate themselves, nor reject their native culture.

Tar Baby, set on a Caribbean island owned by a retired Euro-American candy magnet-Valerian Street, focuses on a variety of relationships, within Valerian household between the butter/maid couple-Sydney and Ondine and Valerian and his wife Margaret, and between the indoor house servants and the household field servants. The central focus is on the relationship between the European-educated African-American woman, Jadine and a Florida-born African man, Son. Recognizing that people of African descent, no matter where they live, share a common identity, a common history, and a common oppression, Morrison uses the Caribbean island as an island that presents conflicting myths.

Toni Morrison’s emphasis in Tar Baby is on class struggle—the struggle between the ruling class and the subject class. Morrison has sufficiently matured to understand that the fundamental cause of the African’s oppression is the exploitive economic system of capitalism. Thus, racism and sexism, although equally oppressive are treated as by-products of capitalism in Tar Baby. Unlike Pecola, who struggles with the question of racial approbation, Sula, who struggles against the traditional role of African women, the two protagonists in Tar Baby-Son and Jadine must struggle together to resolve their opposing class interests in order to
unite. Though in love with each other, they are sharply divided in their attitudes to the dominant ruling class as well as to their own traditional culture. Symbolically, they reflect the schism that exists within African community—the class conflict that African people must resolve in order to form an effective, unified force against their primary enemy, capitalism.

Morrison’s most intricate exploration of the African petty bourgeois is, however, expressed through Jadine. Jadine is a brown white woman, Europeanized African, and an art history graduate. Though Jadine is a black woman, she loses her identity as a black woman and internalizes white values. She is a tar baby—a creation of capitalist America. Her behavioural patterns, dress, language, associations and ideology are all those of ruling class and demonstrate her hatred of Africa and all that is associated with it. Her fiancé is a wealthy European Parisian who will bring her wealth and unquestioned status. In fact, except for her aunt and uncle whom she visits only in troubled times, her acquaintances are all Europeans like her. Ideologically, she thinks like a European.

It is her attempt to be other than herself, that causes Jadine’s insecurity throughout the novel. As a Europhiliac, she feels threatened by African women who are not only ashamed of their identity, culture and beauty but also proud of dignity and heritage. The African woman in yellow is an example of one such women. What so mesmerizes Jadine and the others, who appear to be Europeans, is
the natural beauty of the African woman in yellow—a beauty based on the African’s own unique features, but not on those of another race.

In her characterisation of Jadine and Son, Toni Morrison accentuates initially the extreme differences in their cultures—the sophisticated, accomplished Jadine epitomizing the best of white culture, and the primitive, sensual Son representing the best of black culture. As a pair, they represent the schizophrenia inherent in being black in a white America. The hostility that is generated in their confrontation is an ironical racial tension. As they cannot solve their differences, their relationship becomes violent which is a manifestation of the psychic fragmentation of the culture as a whole. Jadine can never go back to the non-material, simple life of black folk inasmuch as she has become addicted to the white world. Similarly Son can never become a middle class black accepting western definitions of value and meaning.

From the moment that Jadine and Son meet, one is aware that the relation between them is antagonistic for Jane struggles on behalf of the interest of the ruling class whereas Son struggles on behalf of those of the poor class. Since these interests are diametrically opposed their can only survive if one of them is prepared to change. Son hopes that he can make Jadine so conscious of the plight of her people that she will see the vicious nature of capitalism and, thus commit ‘class suicide’. But unfortunately, what happens is the other way round. In persuading her of the negative effects of these values, Son gets trapped.
Thus, Toni Morrison explores the passionate love-affair of Jadine and Son to examine the conflict between the life and humanism of black culture and the deadness and materialism of white culture. Jadine, the beautiful black woman, finds herself torn between the rich white culture of Paris and the world of her black lover. On the other hand, Son finds himself torn between the poor black culture and the world of his petty bourgeois lover. Toni Morrison in the end shows clearly what the possibilities are for Son, a twentieth-century black man burdened with black cultural tradition and Jadine, a twentieth-century black woman who has reverted to negative white Western values.

Jadine’s inability to resolve the obstacles in her life prevents her from becoming whole. She fails to resolve the cultural conflict and personal fragmentation. Son, on the other hand, does emerge as one who gets back to his roots as to be in touch with himself. Hence he becomes close to achieving wholeness in the end inspite of a contradiction of his cultural life-style. Toni Morrison has juxtaposed black and white characters to dramatize the racial complexities that determine the American cultural landscape.

In *Tar Baby* Toni Morrison draws on the African American oral narrative tradition to expose the pitfalls of white middle-class aspirations for the black woman and to illustrate the consequences of her social and cultural misbehaviour. Although the novel illustrates the these consequences by examining the tensions inherent in the binary opposition of black and white, poor and rich,
female and male, African and European, the central reasons for Jadine’s divided consciousness have to do with rejection of the cultural constructions of race and mothering that are part of her African American heritage.

*Tar Baby* reflects Toni Morrison’s heightened class consciousness both thematically and structurally, projecting as it does the positive principles of traditional African society—humanism and collectivism. But unfortunately, this awareness does not enable her to propose a viable solution for the age-old oppression of the African people in America. Eradication of the plight of African people demands, not individual, but collective class struggle against capitalism— a unified African people who control their own destiny, extracting and utilizing only the positive from their past such as unity in struggle in order to build a better future.