

Chapter Four

Black Identity

She does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature and by society; and yet she does not actively repudiate it: she is too divided internally to enter into combat with the world.

- Simon De Beauvoir

Identity is to find out one's belongingness in family and in society. Tracing the roots of an individual to ascertain their importance or value plays a pertinent role in one's search for identity. Roots of an identity are firmly grounded in relation to origin, place, culture and community.

Although slavery has come to an end in America, racism still exists. Abraham Lincoln was the President of America then. Slavery was officially abolished in 1865 with the Emancipation Proclamation brought by Lincoln. The Emancipation Proclamation was a policymaking order issued by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863. The novel *Sula* has the setting of the events from the 1920s. Sula and Jadine are women of this period. *Sula* was published in November 1973 and *Tar Baby* in March 1981. The civil war had ended and officially, slavery was terminated as a result of the abolitionist movements. Females had some freedom in what they were doing. However, there was budding segregation within the blacks. This segregation was based on lighter and dark skin color, riches and so on. There was great activism amidst Afro-Americans and others who were working to attain equal civil rights and opportunities. Many other contemporary writers of Toni Morrison's period have written novels centering on the theme of black self-loathing and racism. Notably Hal Bennett's primary concern is self-

loathing found among the black community. In his autobiographical work, *The Visible Man*, he recalls his mother telling him, “One day, my dear son, you’re going to find out that Negroes ain’t worth a damn” (79). He also stresses that Afro-Americans have been taught in many ways, “to harbor an intense dislike for themselves and for all things even vaguely resembling their color” (74). The feeling of worthlessness is the legacy of slavery for the blacks, which guides the actions of characters in fiction and people in real life so that they either succumb to it or fight against it.

Sula (SA) and *Tar Baby (TB)*, address the issues of racism and racial self-loathing resulting in the suppression of Afro-Americans particularly, women. The novels demonstrate black life under the triple oppression of sexism, racialism and classism. Black women have experienced great hardships and misery in the process of searching for identity and struggling for freedom and equality. In the late 1920s, the stock market crashed, leading to widespread depression and deep poverty. Skilled or unskilled, Afro-Americans and whites and mostly everyone underwent the crisis. The novels depict such disappointed people who are wiped out when they could not get decent jobs and have lost the determination to survive. Through laws known as Jim Crow laws, the Southern states were fervently segregated. There were separate facilities for travel, eating, drinking, school, church, housing and other services for Afro-Americans and whites. There was segregation and prejudice in the facilities that were rendered. There was partiality in giving opportunities, jobs and other benefits. Afro-Americans were frequently neglected. Afro-Americans were arrested and imprisoned if they failed to obey the segregation laws. The Civil Rights Movement grew with protests, nonviolent resistance, boycotts and rallies, which received increasing attention in the national media. Although some activists challenged the segregation laws in court,

their efforts went in vain. In other areas of life, such as on buses and in schools, racist incidents continued to cause trouble for the Afro-Americans.

Sula is set in the time scale after the Civil War in the United States and the consequent period of reconstruction. This was the period when the black people were actually being freed. The events of the book open in 1919, when Afro-American soldiers returned home from Europe after World War I and they did not receive as much reverence for their service as white soldiers. When they returned, many began working for civil rights, reasoning that if they were considered good enough to fight and risk their lives for their country, they should be given full participation in society. Sula is the protagonist of the novel and she is the kind of a black American woman who wants to be somebody in this world. She does not want to be simply a black woman. Moreover, she does not accept the traditional inferior life of black American women and she wants to become equal with the whites. *Sula* is an example of the part of the black American community of the twenties that thinks that to be a black person is a serious handicap. Sula is rebellious, fearless, resolute, and practical in her outlook. Ultimately, she could not achieve everything she needed. Despite the fact that she has attempted to become a part of the larger society and has sought after opportunities to partake in the affairs of American life, she is forced to return to her own world.

The novel, *Tar baby* is also set in a similar time period. The principal character of the novel, a black woman called Jadine, is another example of a black American woman who does not want to identify with her own parent culture. She readily embraces the white culture. Jadine has little relation to her black heritage. She is the kind of a black woman who really wants to make it. Jadine is a woman devoid of womanly traits like coyness, delicacy, and timidity. She is bold, independent thinking,

and possesses self-esteem. She has a different opinion about the whites than her close relatives and Son, the black man she falls in love with. Son, Jadine's lover, actually interferes with Jadine in fulfilling her wishes in a way that her self-confidence is destabilized. The quarrels they have about the way of life, of how a black person should live prove the fact to be a black woman and to live in a white society could lead to illusive ideas about oneself. Jadine is one of the black women who fears about not being accepted by the larger society and who does not want to remain in a minority. However, she is aware of the fact that she has been a part of it from her birth.

Both the novels *Tar Baby* and *Sula* deal with the flight from blackness. Morrison focuses on the theme of identity and on the search for it. Women's identity is not shaped individually, but in relation to others around them. Nevertheless, Sula and Jadine are against this old norm. The revolt against their community is a fight, which many Afro-American women made in the 1960s. They chose not to conform to the traditional roles as daughters, mothers, and wives. The problem of search for identity is very well connected with the theme of self-hatred and with the desire to be someone else in life. Self-hatred is also reflected in the characters Sula Peace and Jadine who long for race change. The self-hatred of Sula and Jadine is not too destructive as it is for Pecola. The main characters of *Sula* and *Tar Baby* actually want to get assimilated and accepted by the wider society and they want to be a part of it. They also have some voice in their life, which Sethe and Pecola never have had. They try to live a loud life. They have their own reasons for imbibing the mainstream white culture and they try to do almost everything in it. Morrison's conception of womanly perfection is characteristically unfolded from exploitation to emancipation in the evolution of the Black womanhood in these two novels. The women protagonists of these two novels are self-assertive, liberated and emancipated.

Sula is based around the black community of “The Bottom,” which is based on a racist act. The area becomes the property of Afro-Americans when a white man betrays a slave by telling him that the high, dry and eroded land up the hill is good for cultivation because it is the “bottom” of paradise. The white slave owner has promised his slave of the actual bottom (fertile valley) land. However, the greedy owner tricks his slave into accepting hilly mountainous land that would be difficult to farm and very troublesome. The slave is told “when God looks down, it’s the bottom. That’s why we call it so. It’s the bottom of heaven-best land there is” (SA 5). On the basis of this lie, a community is formed. The white community is formed in the actual fertile land in the bottom of the hill. This area is known as Medallion in the novel.

The main character of the novel, Sula, is from the black community, Bottom. Sula is very well aware of the role that the black community in the Bottom has. Sula knows that blacks are considered inferior there. During her adolescence, Sula realizes that she will be more satisfied if she has more opportunity to live a worthwhile life according to her own will. Sula finds her power not within her community, but in her rebellion against it. Once she insists while talking to her grandmother Eva, “I want to make myself” (SA 92). Sula wants to resist the system of segregation, which has been brought into effect in the Bottom. Sula’s opinions on this issue are apparent. It is evident that she wants to cope with the troubles concerning her race. Sula desires to go away and try something different from the way she has lived until then in the town. Though Sula is eager when she learns that her closest friend Nel is getting married, “Sula was no less excited about the wedding” (SA 84), she does not want to remain in the place of her birth. She does not want to marry and raise a family. Toni Morrison, in *Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation*, herself avers about the character Sula saying,

I always thought of Sula as quintessentially black, metaphysically black, if you will, which is not melanin and certainly not unquestioning fidelity to the tribe. She is new world black and new world woman extracting choice from choicelessness, responding inventively to found things. Improvisational. Daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out-of-the house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained and uncontainable. And dangerously female. (25)

Hence, Sula leaves the Bottom for a period of ten years to roam around the country; “She escapes to college, submerges herself in the city life” (*SA* back cover). Sula imposes a difficult task on herself. Sula tries to be both an African and an American and she attempts to move from one world into another. There are no proper details about the time period, when Sula has been away from Bottom in the book. However, it is known that she has many sexual relationships, both with black and white men. However, Sula does not find any place remarkable to quench her actual desires. Eventually, she comes back to the Bottom ten years later. It looks as if she has found out that she is not received by the white world and so she returns to her hometown. However, she comes back changed: “When she returns to her roots, it is as a rebel, a mocker, a wanton sexual seductress” (*SA* back cover).

“Young Woman’s Blues” was a song written and performed by Bessie Smith in 1926. Her booming voice on this record earnestly shares personal ideas of a radical black feminism that was felt by many women in early 20th century America. The lyrics of “Young Woman’s Blues” not only reject mainstream patriarchal values over sexuality, but confidently reinvents how under-classed black women perceived their own cultural and sexual existence. The lyric goes like this:

No time to marry, no time to settle down
 I'm a young woman and I ain't done runnin' round
 I'm a young woman and I ain't done runnin' round

Some people call me a hobo, some call me a bum
 Nobody knows my name, nobody knows what I've done
 I'm as good as any woman in your town
 I ain't no high yella, I'm a deep killer brown

I ain't gonna marry, ain't gon' settle down
 I'm gon' drink good moonshine and run these browns down

See that long lonesome road, Lord, you know it's gotta end
 And I'm a good woman and I can get plenty of men

(Smith 356)

In the above-mentioned song, Bessie Smith rejoices that she does not have to be held down in any passive marital relationship with a man. Alternatively, she enjoys possession of many lovers and freely chooses any sexual partner she wishes. The sexual liberation found in women's blues such as that seen in Bessie Smith's song can be interpreted as an immediate source of power and resistance for the next generation. Morrison delineates Sula as a representative of the emerging emancipated new women, who has broken the age-old traditions and conventions set up by patriarchy, racism and prejudice.

If *Sula* is read through the eyes of black feminism, it could be understood very well that Morrison wants to dismiss the negative representation of black American womanhood in several ways. And it is not only the character of a whore, which is the negative representation of the Afro-American woman that black feminist thought has acknowledged and tried to dispel. The timid good wife who absolves her husband of all faults is another role, which Morrison criticizes. It reminds us of the role of Indian

wives in Indian society. In Indian society, people like Nel, who conform to the rules are commonly seen. The role of the timid wife is filled by Nel in *Sula*. Nel is Sula's complementary figure and she is presented as the prudish and proper child who later grows up to be a selfless wife and mother. Nel wholeheartedly conforms to the stereotypes of traditional womanhood. She is everything that Sula was supposed to become but did not and would not. She is subordinate to Jude, her husband. Furthermore, Nel effectively keeps house, remains faithful and never goes against her man in any way. In brief, she releases her own identity in order to accept that of her husband, thus signifying that she has no identity and so cannot be said to be living her life on her own terms as Sula is.

Indian epics also depict the identity of woman as dependent on man. The two girls contrast significantly as Morrison ensures that they share one common element of their lives. Their characters and representations are not predictable, but inculcated. Just as Sula's promiscuity is exhilarated, so is Nel's role of the good wife. Morrison says, "Under Helene's hand the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (*SA* 18). She is forced to give up her identity and retains it only when around Sula, with whom she shares a sisterhood. This sisterhood is what Collins advocates as being essential in dispelling stereotypes. However, for Nel, that sisterhood is annulled by the conscience of the good wife. La Vincia Jennings in her book, *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa* says, "And Nel creates a scapegoat in Sula to absolve Jude of deliberate acts of moral evil, marital infidelity and familial desertion, which destroy their marriage. Nel abnegates Jude's potential for evil" (51). The "wife role" overtakes "sisterhood" and thereby threatening the concept of community once again. However, despite the good wife stereotype is adhered to initially, Toni Morrison later

challenges it via a process of self-realization, self-determination and the discovery of a sovereign identity. The realization comes as Nel rejects the stereotype.

Marriage is consistently perceived as damaging by Morrison. She states the following in relation to the institution and its effect on women like Nel, the good wife. She says, “Those with husbands had folded themselves into starched coffins, their sides bursting with other people’s skinned dreams and bony regrets” (*SA* 122). In doing so, she points out the importance of other elements of life through the eyes of Nel and Sula with particular emphasis on friendship. However, it is Sula who initially realizes the value of friendship in black womanhood. According to Morrison, Sula “... had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be – for a woman” (*SA* 121). Later this becomes ironical as Sula throws away the friendship with Nel by sleeping with Nel’s husband. However, Sula dies without having received Nel’s forgiveness. Only after Sula’s death, Nel realizes the true nature of the friendship of Afro-American women. Nel says, “All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude. We was girls together. O Lord, Sula,” and she cried, “girl, girl, girlgirlgirl” (*SA* 174). This is in agreement with Collins’s examination of black feminist thought and Morrison’s idea to push the women further with the aim of dispelling stereotypes. It is only after Sula’s death and burial that Nel’s insight sparkles. She realizes that it has been Sula and not Jude, whom Nel has missed through the years. Hence, according to Morrison, the love of the sisterhood is essential to survive and cultivate an identity rather than the tradition of marriage. This concept certainly discards the stereotypes of the whore and the good wife because it disproves the role of men in general. Consequently, it empowers women to forge their own destinies. This is undoubtedly an evolution of black feminist thought rather than in keeping with it.

Jadine in *Tar Baby* is a young black woman and works as a model in Europe. She is motherless and is brought up by her black aunt and uncle. She goes to meet them in Isle des Chevaliers in the Caribbean to spend two months. She comes to the island in order to get some rest, have a good time there as well as to think about herself. Her current job implies the fact that she is not the kind of a black woman who would like to care for a household at a white family's as her aunt actually does. Jadine is well aware of this ill-treatment of black women. However, she also knows that her aunt Ondine likes to work as a housekeeper at a white couple's house. The fact that Valerian, the employer and a friend of Ondine's, has financed Jadine's studies and hence let her have access to a big city might have helped Jadine to realize that opportunities for women in general can be better than her black family is used to. It gives the impression that this financial help is the reason for Jadine's longing to live in another world.

Valerian has made it possible for Jadine to meet the white world. Since Jadine has had the chance to see quite a lot of capitals in the world and try a way of living new to her, she develops a liking for the white culture, which may be seen as a beginning for her hunger for a change. She knows that there are different chances for blacks and whites. However, as a black woman, Jadine has managed to get ahead. She is thought to be a pretty woman. Jadine is conscious of the fortune that she has had but she wonders why everybody is transfixed by her: "The height? The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress?" (*TB* 45). The fact that she has had the prospect to work as a model leaves her in doubt about herself. However, she is sure that she would like to make it in the larger society.

The title *Tar Baby* is derived from an Afro-American folk tale of Brer Rabbit in Uncle Remus. His Songs and his Sayings were popularized by a white writer Joel

Chandler Harris in the late 19th and early 20th century. In his tale of Brer Rabbit, Uncle Remus, the black narrator, tells bedtime stories to the little son of his white employer. Brer Rabbit, weaker, but always able to outwit the stronger animals, is an animal symbolizing, both subversion and revolt. Brer Rabbit serves here as a trickster figure, having ability to manipulate the stronger animals. Harris's original version relates the incident that takes place between Brer Fox, a tormentor, and the clever Brer Rabbit. A white agriculturalist creates a tar baby doll to catch Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit tries to speak with the tar baby made of tar. However, the rabbit is unsuccessful in getting a response. Therefore, he hits it and gets caught in the tar. The farmer gets hold of the rabbit. However, the rabbit escapes by tricking the farmer and makes him throw into briar patch. Linda Krumholz notes that "in most readings of *Tar Baby*, Brer Rabbit is associated with black people struggling against white domination, and the tar baby is a deception created by white society that compels black people's complicity and entrapment" (274). In the tradition of Afro-American folklore, the tale has a moral. Morrison revises this folk tale as a love story between Jadine, the tar baby, an attractive Afro-American model influenced by white culture and Son, the rabbit trapped by the tar baby, a typical Afro-American outlaw.

Both the black heroines Sula and Jadine face the problem of doubt about their identity. The problem results from their experience with the world around them. Sula and Jadine have their own reasons for changing their blackness into whiteness. The society's treatment and the impact of the environment along with the ideals of the society are the principal factors that govern the behavior and attitude of these two protagonists in the novels. Both Sula and Jadine take the question of identity seriously and are concerned with their dissatisfactions, sadness, doubts and desires.

Sula, unlike Pecola, is an adult and she has the opportunity to leave her hometown. She has lived in other places, particularly in cities. Sula's return to the Bottom is accompanied by her change. Sula's change is very much apparent in the way she dresses: "She was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone could ever see" (*SA* 90). Sula is the black woman who desires to become somebody else and to make herself visible. Sula takes on indifferent ways when her neighborhood expects something else from her. Nel disagrees with Sula when she says, "The real hell of Hell is that it is forever" (*SA* 107). According to Nel, doing anything forever is not hell. However, Sula desires a change and she uses a lot of men. This act of hers could be because of her desire to fill up the emptiness and to search for an identity in her life. Later in the novel people in the Bottom, despise her for this. Sula goes on to say that, the whole Bottom is bad. She argues that she has been gone "not too long, but may be too far" (*SA* 96). Sula's status of a woman without a husband and without children is something that Bottom does not understand. Sula's grandmother once tells her granddaughter that she should have some babies, that this would settle her. But Sula responds, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (*SA* 92). For Sula, being a wife and a mother are not requisites for her selfhood.

Initially, Jadine seems to be sure of the priorities in her life as she is exposed to white culture. Jadine is a black woman who is glad that she has been given the opportunity to be educated. During one of their arguments, Jadine stands up for Valerian: "I was being educated... I was learning how to make it in this world" (*TB* 264). Jadine means by this world the one she lives in and not the one Son has in his mind. Son desires to settle in a small town that he comes from, Eloe. Moreover, both have different views on the life in New York, one of the cities that Jadine loves. Son, unlike Jadine, thinks that it is easy to live in New York, and he points out, "Make it in

New York. Make it in New York. I'm tired of hearing that shit... New York ain't hard, baby" (*TB* 266). Son does not feel the need to make it in that city, and he is not crazy about it at all. On the other hand, Jadine is mad about New York as well as about the elements of white culture: "New York made her feel like giggling" (*TB* 221). Moreover, Jadine thinks that if there is "a black woman's town in the world," it is New York. As she claims, "This is home" (*TB* 222). Jadine seems to be able to say where she is happy. However, she may not be really happy and it may be just her delusion.

The main contention of the novel is the denial of tradition and ethnicity by Jadine. She knows herself to be "inauthentic" and void when she sees the woman in yellow with the tar-colored skin. She says, "that woman's woman - that mother/sister/she; that unphotographable beauty" (*TB* 46). The woman in yellow identifies Jadine's inauthenticity and spits at her in spitefulness. Jadine alternately calls herself Jade and appreciates Picasso over Itumba masks and 'Ave Maria' over gospel music (*TB* 74). Karin Luisa Badt, in her essay, has briefly commented about the way Jadine took up white culture. She says, "Jadine has so willingly embraced white culture that she has become, literally, its cover model." She also says that Jadine, "has chosen to forget: her African American Roots" (567).

Both the female protagonists make an attempt to assimilate into the mainstream society that is very much different from their traditional one. These are Morrison's emancipated women. They are free and unrestricted. However, they have failed to attain "Empowerment." Both the heroines forget and neglect their black heritage and are not ready to be empowered. These black women living in the United States try to adopt white patterns in their own ways. They all have similar experiences and they all want to survive in the world according to their own ideas about a worthwhile life. Sula

changes her appearance as well as her manners so as to become more satisfied with herself. Jadine, because of her chance to live in cities, to meet all the pleasing experiences they offer and because of the freedom that she has got, do not need to identify with her own heritage.

Both Sula and Jadine struggle to lead a comfortable life, which would make them happier. Sula and Jadine try to break some barriers in their life. According to them, these barriers do not let them become an accepted part of the wider society. However, they are not able to keep their situations well in hand. To achieve complete satisfaction with the quality of their lives can be very difficult.

The novels *Sula* and *Tar Baby* are working through the constantly perpetuating, self-hatred, which is the result of frustration of being unable to live up to the ideals of white society. Ultimately, the tragic ending where the ground is infertile and the future is stunted is a message about how one needs to dig deep in the black earth to look for identity since the surface offers little in the way of nutrients for growth. The surface offers nothing for Pecola and Sethe and too little for Sula and Jadine. Sula and Jadine have dug deep in the white earth to look for identity and their effort goes futile and does not give them contempt and liberation. They neglect the black earth and hence they fail to bear any fruits.

Sula's change affects negatively her whole personality. Since Sula is not satisfied even during her life in the places outside her hometown, the negative reaction of Bottom to her new manners results in only increasing her doubt about herself. Sula is one of the many young women of color who have worked to make a better life but are not successful. Though Sula does not admit her defeat, she is soon aware of her failure in life. Sula's grandmother blames Sula for throwing her life away. But Sula gets

annoyed and replies in irritation, “It’s mine to throw” (SA 93). Sula knows that she has not succeeded in her life. Consequently, she prefers seclusion to other people and she refuses to do anything.

Sula begins to spend her time in bed. Morrison describes her act, “It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow. She had not been aware that it was sadness that she yearned for.” (SA 122). Sula’s reaction to the rejection in life is just an expression of self-hatred. Charles E. Silberman in his book *Crisis in Black and White* says, “there is no use in trying anything, joining anything, because you are just no damned good” (120). When Sula is sick, Sula and her close friend Nel have a conversation and Sula recalls Nel’s words: “You can’t do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man. You can’t be walking all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don’t” (SA 142). Sula must have been terrified of this sad position of black women and that may be reason for she has tried to make it. She says, “I know what every colored woman in this country is doing... Dying” (SA 143). Sula tries to comfort herself by saying, “I sure did live in this world” (SA 143). Though Sula tries to lead a worthwhile life which is different from the one that other black women have led, Sula is not satisfied and this eventually makes her down and lonely.

As for Jadine, she seems to prefer the patterns of white culture to the patterns of the black one. Initially, she is self-confident, she likes her way of life and she argues with Son about many issues. But after she falls in love with him, there is more pressure on her to encounter black standards. Son is an example of a black person who had a strong identification with other blacks. Son’s pride in being black is a threat to Jadine’s identification with white culture. Son is a threat to her freedom. Therefore, Jadine starts

to face the problem of her identity. She ends up in an internal conflict and she must fight with herself so that she could feel happy with her lover. The associated disagreement that Jadine herself faces between autonomy and femininity is akin to the conflict between Sula and Nel in *Sula*.

Jadine's inner tension and internal conflict is depicted well when she comes to stay at Son's father's town. This is the place, where Son would like to settle one day. However, Jadine does not feel secure and happy there. Jadine is troubled with Son's hometown, which has only black residents. Once, she has a dream about many colored women staring at her, when she asks the women, "What do you want with me, goddamn it!" (TB 258). Jadine gets frightened when she is among people who belong to her race. She also has huge discomfort when she encounters the traditional black culture. She is used to live with white people and their culture. There are whites even on the island. She is grateful to Valerian whom she likes. Jadine's own black culture scares her the most, since she has uprooted herself from her own culture. Hence, she is portrayed as the negation of a racial ancestral consciousness and her orphanhood is twofold. She loses her parents as a child and her connection to the ancient values and properties as an adult. Jadine is everything that integration aims to produce.

Jadine does not want to end up leading a traditional black life and feeling inferior. She needs "air, and taxi-cabs and conversations in a language she understands" (TB 259). For Jadine to be in a small town and among blacks means no life. Jadine herself considers black women inferior to white women. Hence, she is afraid of being one of them. However, she must be unhappy as Son's thoughts on black women in the city of New York imply something totally awful. According to Son,

The black girls in New York City were crying and. . . split into two parts by their tight jeans, screaming at the top of their high, high heels, straining against the pull of their braids and the fluorescent combs holding their hair. Oh, their mouths were heavy with plum lipstick and their eyebrows were a thin gay line, but nothing could stop their crying (TB 215).

According to Son, Jadine and other black women like her are hopeless. He perceives that black women do nothing but play whites. Nevertheless, Jadine wants to feel at least that she is a part of the larger society. That feeling gives her an inner sense of balance and equality. But the feeling may be just a misconception. The disagreement between Jadine and Son mirrors the conflict between individual identity and black identity dominating *The Bluest Eye*.

Hence, Sula and Jadine are caught up in their attempt at assimilation into the larger society. They dwell on their status in the society and on their living. For Sula, her insight into the failures in her life has brought self-hatred into herself and she starts to live in solitude. Morrison says that Sula starts to live in silence:

There, in the center of that silence was not eternity, but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning. For loneliness assumed the absence of other people, and the solitude she found in that desperate terrain had never admitted the possibility of other people (SA 123).

As far as Jadine is concerned, she is threatened by her lover and his values. She is frightened by the black life of Eloe. Jadine feels trapped in a “rotten, boring, burnt-out and lifeless place” (TB 259). The mere thought of her being involved in a traditional

black life terrifies Jadine. Morrison stresses the fact that, the survival of black women in a white society primly depends on how they emphasize in loving their own race, their own culture and in loving themselves and not to be trapped in white dominance or white beauty standards. Sula and Jadine face these particular problems due to their discontent with the quality of their lives. Both these women have adopted an attitude for themselves towards the issue of assimilation into the larger American society. The particular ways in which the other characters in the novel attempt or disregard the assimilation adversely affect these main characters.

Sula does not accept the fact that she suffers from being alone, though her mind is crammed with soreness. Towards the end of her life, Sula starts spending her time in bed and she refuses to participate in the affairs of her hometown and the black people there. Sula looks as if she is proud of her loneliness when talking to Nel. She says, “But my lonely is mine” (*SA* 143). She does not accept that she may have been made lonely by anybody else. She goes on to say that Nel’s loneliness is different from hers and is inferior. She says, “Now your lonely is somebody else’s. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain’t that something? A secondhand lonely” (*SA* 143). That is why she wants to live according to her wishes and in isolation from others.

On the other hand, Sula also expresses feelings that are different from her pride, saying softly, “It will take time, but they’ll love me. . . When all the white women kiss all the black ones; . . . then there’ll be a little love left over for me” (*SA* 145-146). The reason why Sula expects love from other people now is that she has realized lately that she has been forced back into her own world. Sula’s attempt to participate in the larger society ends in vain. She has not managed to find her own self. Her self-destruction follows and she dies early, “As though for the first time she was completely alone –

where she had always wanted to be” (*SA* 148). Although dying, Sula feels independent. Sula’s apathy proves fatal for her. She knows very well that it will take a long time to improve race relations. She prefers to die rather than to live in conditions with which she is not satisfied. For Sula, the attempt at a better life has cost her a lot.

As far as Jadine is concerned, she suffers because of her love for Son. Jadine wants to lead a life, which is very different from his. Jadine’s attachment to all the values of her adopted culture is a large penalty to pay for her relationship with Son. Eventually, she is not able to live with him and so they part with each other. Jadine could not cope with the stresses that resulted from her identification with white culture. Son specifies her personality, “She was a model of industry and planning” (*TB* 267). Jadine makes sure that she does everything for accomplishing her dream. It is imperative for Jadine to have some patterns of white culture in her environment. However, both Jadine and Son soon come to the understanding that it is difficult to forget each other. Now it is too late to meet again. The love between these two people with entirely unlike attitudes towards their own heritage is almost fatal for Son. Jadine is irritated about her obsession for this true black man. Jadine goes back to Paris, she contemplates her parting and then she acknowledges, “A grown woman did not need safety or its dreams. She was the safety she longed for” (*TB* 290). Finally, Jadine rejects her love for Son and she creates the boundaries of her own self by her fixation on white culture. However, it is not said whether Jadine continues to stay in the white world of big cities or not. Hence, Toni Morrison has vividly described the possible results of racial prejudice of a black woman who has identified herself as a white woman and therefore adopted the prejudice of whites against her race. For Jadine to be a black woman means to be inferior and she is unable to accept that fact.

Therefore, the subject of a black woman's identification with the culture of the mainstream society has many negative effects on the black woman. The efforts of the female protagonists to get integrated into American society only result in major problems of their personalities. Finally, the lives of these characters are shaped and molded in an unpleasant way. It can be said that none of the characters are able to live under unfavorable conditions without any distress. Sula is not strong enough to bear the discontentment in her life. She is not able to deal with her situation and hence it seems as if she prefers to die early rather than feel a profound sense of shame. Jadine's adopted white culture and her longing to live according to her ideas make her love for Son impossible. Nevertheless, it is not easy for Jadine to discard her love for this black man. Sula and Jadine's experience with trying to be someone else badly affects their lives. Franklin and Moss say, "The great test of America's democratic tradition was the acceptance of blacks into the mainstream of American life" (432). The results of the characters' own choices are just the patterns of the consequences of discontentment with a black woman's status in a society.

Sula and Jadine attempt assimilation into American life in their various fashions. Since Sula and Jadine continue to counter racial prejudice, the achievement of their intended results is not easy. As black Americans have been constantly rejected in the dominant white culture, it will take a long time to improve the conditions of black women. Black women must deal with this fact accordingly in practical terms. Nevertheless, the issue of black women's identification with the culture of the dominant society as a way of assimilation into the society is not good. The lives of these characters prove that the attempt at assimilation in that way can become very damaging to oneself.

The quest for self and its cultural identity has been the main preoccupation of Morrison's novels. The quest is essentially demonstrated in the characters' efforts to survive their victimization and seek for psychic wholeness. When Sethe and Pecola are victimized physically and mentally, Sula and Jadine attempt to survive the psychic victimization by searching an identity for them. However, all these are the consequences of the slave trade, slavery, white idealization, Jim Crow laws and racism and so on. Morrison dramatizes the "devastating effect of chronic shame on her characters' sense of individual and social identity, describing their self-loathing, self-contempt, their feelings that they are, in some essential way, inferior" (Bouson 4). However, the impact of white values on the black community has complicated the issue of the black identity crisis.

The fact that Sula wants to be independent and searches a way of survival comes from her family. Both her mother and grandmother are strong in the attitudes they possess and are known to have great will power. Eva Peace is an independent black woman who fights to survive. Eva experiences the tragedy of being deserted by her husband. Eva's husband BoyBoy, in addition to being a womanizer, drinks a lot and often abuses Eva. BoyBoy leaves Eva after five years of a disgruntled marriage. Eva is left with little choice with her young son who is still only a baby and Hannah is only five years old. Under the harsh geographical and social surroundings, to make a living is the most important thing for the black people. Eva uses her last piece of food to save her son in a cold and dark night and she then goes away to try to find a better possibility. Later, she returns and she is alleged to have deliberately placed her leg in front of a train to collect insurance money so that she could return and provide her family. Eva is the conventional strong black mother who dedicates her entire life for her children and her choices in life are wholly dictated by her concern for her children's

survival. She uses her own strength and own way to survive, to support her family, and to show her love and sacrifice to her children. Eva is also the kind of a lady who concerns herself with the perpetuation of her community. Eva is shown to take care of the homeless. She houses many people in her home. She boards newlywed couples in her rambling house and offers them advice. By depicting Eva Peace, Morrison displays that they have a solid place in bearing the black culture and traditions and in establishing a positive self-identity.

Morrison herself has talked about the character Sula to Robert Stepto in an interview. She comments, “Sula—I don’t regard her as a typical black woman at all. Moreover, the fact that the community responds to her that way means that she is unusual. So she’s no the run-of-the-mill average black woman” (Stepto 483). Similarly, she has spoken about Jadine in an interview. Morrison says that Jadine should be the Tar Baby who should have represented the black woman and who should have brought things together. She says, “Tar Baby is also a name, like “nigger,” that white people call black children, black girls, as I recall.... At one time, a tar pit was a holy place, at least an important place, because tar was used to build things.... It held together things like Moses' little boat and the pyramids. For me, the tar baby came to mean the black woman who can hold things together” (Le Clair 27).

Iola Leroy, a novel written during 1892 by Frances Harper expresses the significance of liberation for black women following modernization. Frances Harper was a black abolitionist and suffragist. To understand better about the disapproval of Jadine in *Tar baby*, it is good to glance at *Iola Leroy*, one of the first novels published by an Afro-American woman. Iola is a woman of mixed descent and daughter of a plantation owner. She has grown up bearing in her mind that she is a white. Iola is

kidnapped and is told that she has black blood and is forced and sold into slavery in the Deep South. Union soldiers then save her during the Civil War. At that moment, Iola Leroy has two choices. She could either pass for the white at the end of the war or stay with her own people. However, Iola chooses to ally herself with her race. At the time of Jim Crow segregation, the decision of Iola is a significant act that can be charged with idealism. The counterfeit of an intellectual elite committed to the cause of the race is an important theme in Harper's novel. Harper's novel stresses the fact that, education is accessible and rendered as a good investment. Education enables the black Iola to uplift her race. However, Morrison wrote *Tar Baby* a century later. The situation is absolutely different. The black woman protagonist of *Tar Baby* is the antithesis of Iola. Jadine presents the bitter fruits and negative effects of learning. Learning incorporated an ignorance of black history, an alienated and alienating sense of individualism and the collapse of the sense of responsibility in Jadine. Hence, education sometimes may not allow the policy of return or homecoming to the people. Instead, it produces a cultured isolation from the working class.

Jadine's lone trajectory of success is frustrating. However, if it is analyzed from the perspective of the governing ideology of individualism, Jadine's story seems creditable and appropriate. She stays away from the "ghetto mentality." She accomplishes positively in making a better life for herself and she is brilliant enough to make choices that ensure her freedom as a woman. However, Morrison's assessment of this black daughter is distinctive. Jadine's education principally serves her to close her debts to her family and culture by taking her out of their path. Lerone Bennett Jr., addresses the same issue plainly. According to him, "betrayal is the historic role of the middle class; grown out of the very pores of oppression, it also by its very position abdicates responsibility to an ongoing struggle" (19). Frantz Fanon's view about the

educated middle class of the postcolonial nations is also very similar. Fanon stresses the fact that such an educated class, encouraged by the colonial tools of power and subjection, is fated to become the tool of capitalism. According to Fanon, revolutionary teaching lies in the middle class “betray[ing] the calling fate has marked out for it, and put[ting] itself at school with the people.” However, he is disappointed that such a revolutionary path is seldom seen: “rather, [the middle class] disappears with its soul set at peace into the shocking ways... of a traditional bourgeoisie, of a bourgeoisie which is stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois” (120).

Morrison’s novels are concerned extensively with the erosion of African culture, its history and its consciousness. This fact is shown clearly in her novels *Sula* and *Tar Baby*. The awareness of African culture in *Tar Baby* is offered and argued fervently by the character Son. *Tar Baby* is further conscious of black heterosexual relations. In her interview with McKay, in 1983, just a year after *Tar Baby*, was published, she said, “There is a serious question about black male and black female relationships in the twentieth century. I just think that the argument has always turned on something it should not turn on: gender. I think that the conflict of genders is a cultural illness” (McKay 422).

Spiritual death is the consequence of the denial of a culture and a community. The resultant cultural alienation is also the result of the influence and dominance exerted by the white race on the black race, which ends up losing self-confidence and believing themselves as inferior as their white fellow human beings proclaim. Therefore, they try to adopt white values to the impairment of their own cultural heritage. A similar situation is found in the case of Jadine. Marilyn Mobley (284) has defined Jadine of *Tar Baby* as a “cultural orphan.” Rubenstein gives the name

“emotional orphan” to Sula (132). Both Jadine and Sula undergo and experience a spiritual death, but in a diverse manner. Jadine disengages herself from her black community and culture to engross in the white world. Jadine is everything that integration and assimilation produce. According to Jean Strouse, Jadine is, “fully assimilated into white American culture, she should be wonderful; instead, she is tragic, because she has lost the original and ancient characteristics of her tribe” (53). Sula moves away from her community just to discover into herself and to be absolutely free from the traditional ties imposed on women, namely marriage, childbearing and a deep respect due to the community and the ancestors. Jadine fights for her assimilation to the white culture, whereas Sula struggles for her independence without claiming racial assimilation. According to Carolyn Denard, “Jadine and Sula are Morrison’s objectors” (173). Hence, Sula and Jadine frankly express their voice against the oppression and criticize black women who serve these roles. Morrison gives them full opportunity to voice their protests to what they view as the limited life of black women.

Morrison and Alice Walker disapprove and hate the educated black woman who likes to fasten her metropolitan look on the culture from which she came and to which she originally belonged. *Everyday Use*, a short story by Alice Walker is an elegant depiction of the ideological abyss created by a displacement of class and culture as a result of education. A young woman named Dee is the black woman protagonist in the story. She is from a poor family background. Her family and community support her and she goes to a college to get education. However, she becomes the “cultured” one, set apart from both her “backward” sister and her mother. The mother and sister start feeling Dee has them, “sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice.” Throughout the story, Dee goes back and forth on being and discarding her heritage and culture. Dee starts to incorporate within herself a sense of being white. Her perception is shaped

by her close association with the dominant class. She takes snapshots of her family's picturesque poverty to show her college friends. The eye (lens) of her camera is akin to Jadine's eyes. Both of them freeze people in its alienating frame. According to Alice, the frame does the function of alienating people. The educated mind of Dee makes people disturbed and still. Such kind of a gaze arises from one of their own people is a very disturbing fact to the right mind. This gaze is an outrage to Walker and Morrison. They get annoyed and frustrated. It is a danger endemic and is the immediate result of the very process of education. However, it may not be right to blame education directly as such. There is lack of awareness among blacks, which has resulted in paucity of black literature in the syllabus and books of children. There is also omission and neglect of black literature that emphasizes black heritage and culture. This has resulted in such a grave problem to the black children and community.

Both Sula and Jadine are seen not only to neglect their heritage and values, but also their family members. Jadine neglects her aunt and uncle. Sula puts her grandmother Eva in an old age home. These women forget to give the due respect and value for their ancestors and caretakers. They forget the way in which they are brought up by these people. Education has shown them an easy way to adhere to white values and forget their own heritage. However, the same education should have made them strong and preserve their heritage. Morrison stresses the importance of identifying the negative effects of education in the lives of black women and she wants them to explore the same to prevent them.

Alice Walker and Morrison would support Son's criticism of Jadine's education. Son says to Jadine,

The truth is 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? ... 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* 264-265).

Jadine believes that she is obliged and indebted to Valerian for giving her education. However, Son reminds her that her aunt and uncle have protected her rights with their lifetime's labor. They get her "everything. Europe. The future. The world" (*TB* 29). Sydney and Ondine certainly, have not bartered or quarreled for her isolation from them. Jadine does not apprehend the needs of her aunt and the extent of her blankness is made apparent in the way she opts to buy a Christmas present for her. She buys her, "a stunning black chiffon dress... shoes with zircons studding the heels" (*TB* 90). She has completely no idea about the problem in her aunt's feet due to the hard work she has done all her life. She does not know that her aunt's feet are swollen and engorged with pain because of a lifetime of standing too long in the kitchen. Again, it is also profoundly ironic that Sydney does not claim any kinship with Jadine while he serves her at the table. The laws of class etiquette come out to be stronger than the ties of kinship. Morrison says, Sydney "was perfect at those dinners when his niece sat down with his employers, as perfect as he was when he served Mr. Street's friends" (*TB* 74). "He kept his eyes on the platter, or the table setting, or his feet, or the hands of those he was serving, and never made eye contact with any of them, including his niece" (*TB* 62). Even when the subject of conversation is Sydney, Morrison says, "Jadine smiled

but did not look at her uncle” (*TB* 75). This pretense soon becomes the reality. Jadine refuses to acknowledge any responsibility towards Sydney and Ondine. She leaves them as she leaves Son for upper-class Parisian society. Morrison warns against the dangers of losing touch with racial and ancestral commemorations, by way of a symbolic fight between a black man in tune with nature, family, and history, and a modern, cosmopolitan and rather shallow woman, who refuses to concede the value to any of these.

Both Sula and Jadine are emancipated. However, they have a partially fulfilled quest for identity. They are not fully content in their lives. The identity search is disturbed by absorption of the values of the dominant culture. “Black Sisterhood” and “Motherhood” have to be flawless to create an identity worth for a black woman and thereby to empower her. It is failed sisterhood in *Sula* and a fruitless motherhood in *Tar Baby* that fails to empower both Jadine and Sula in these novels. It is the ignorance and neglect of the ancestral roots coupled with internalization of white values that has resulted in the failed quest of empowerment in spite of emancipation.

The support of a good mother, who feels responsible for her children’s well-being, is essential for the kid to reach the state of an empowered adult. Morrison’s traded women are the mothers of Morrison’s victims. Morrison’s victims are the mothers of Morrison’s emancipated women. The emancipated women are neither empowered nor ready to accept the African culture in the white dominant society. Morrison longs for the acceptance and preservation of this African culture to be able to build up an empowered Black American community.

It is the duty of the mothers of the previous generation to educate the children about the values of African heritage and it is the duty of the mothers to save the black

children from the adverse white dominant environment. Some of Morrison's mothers such as Eva, Sethe and Minha mae have good intentions, whereas some of Morrison's mothers such as Pauline of *The Bluest Eye* and Sweetness of her last novel *God Help the Child* have no good intention to support their black children.