“But, she’s black”: Colonized Motherhood in *The Bluest Eye*

Each night she prayed for blue eyes without failure.

*The Bluest Eye*

We only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us.

- Jean Paul Sartre, Preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*

The most important question which arises in the context of black mothers and their maternal roles is that what makes their motherhood and mothering so unconventional. It should be answered after a critical study of the character’s psychosocial behaviour, which is not reflected in isolation, but amidst society, displaying the interplay and working of wide range of positive and negative factors. It is a common observation that an appropriate show of strengths and weaknesses in human relationships is possible only under adversely affecting circumstances. Be it the relationship of husband and wife or mother and child, each relation reveals its powers and flaws in facing hostile situations. A similar interplay of emotions and thoughts can be observed in multi-faceted relationships between the characters in *The Bluest Eye*.

The present chapter explores a new face of African-American motherhood by exposing both the empowering and dominating characteristics of motherhood. Though motherhood is considered the most sacred profession in a woman’s life, it also hints at the idea that it tries to confine and restrict a woman’s body by limiting her reproductive capacity. A control over her sexuality is another mode of dominance adopted by the patriarchal power. Ruled by her desire to get rid of such socially and culturally accepted patterns of patriarchy, a woman begins to retaliate against all forms of oppression by denying obeying and performing as per her gender expected roles. Although human psychology offers a new study at every step, and the world of
emotions offers a galaxy of strength, weakness and fear, it is largely controlled and
influenced by the social and cultural surroundings which push an individual to
vacillate between realms of acceptance and rejection of one’s own life conditions.

The two major female characters in *The Bluest Eye* present a study of various
themes like attachment, detachment, alienation and rejection, exhibited through their
maternal roles. The powers and weaknesses of motherhood are portrayed through the
characters of Pauline Breedlove and Mrs. MacTeer. The cult of motherhood, though
expressed in a different form, establishes the fact that there is a great difference
between motherhood and mothering. This distinction also occurs due to the fact that
before being a mother, each woman is a part of that large socio-cultural framework
which defines and decides her periphery of action. We can examine her character to
judge her success and failure as a woman and mother under this context. But it should
also be taken into consideration that different cultures and societies offer distinct
atmosphere to their individuals. The development and contribution of an individual to
a society depends on the surroundings in which his/her self is conditioned. The same
point should be observed while examining the position of African-American woman
in a society, in relation to her contribution by performing maternal roles.

They are born and raised in a racist society, so it is impossible for them to
adhere to the traditional and usually accepted expressions of motherhood. After being
dominated by the prevalent socio-cultural practices of white hegemonic society, they
fail to develop a meaningful understanding of their self. The trauma of slavery and
burden of racial humiliation, resulting from their black colour twists and spoils their
self-identity, leading to a rift between normal set of relationships. Their weakness
and failure to love and respect oneself makes them incapable of bestowing the same
feelings to their folks and family members. In this chapter, a distorted and shattered
picture of motherhood presented in the novel *The Bluest Eye* is explored as another
shocking analysis of the mother-daughter relationship. There is a mother who fails to
love her daughter because of her self-devised false and deceitful measures of beauty
and love that are fertilized out of her love for the cultural practices of governing
society, and contrary to this, we have the strong character of Mrs. MacTeer who
knows how to value her own stance in order to nurture the values of self-respect in
her family members, believing that her values shall teach her family members how to
survive amidst the challenging social structures. A daughter who is a victim to the
trap of false values set by her mother is juxtaposed to another girl Claudia who
educates herself from the former’s devastating physical and emotional condition and
learns to find modes of sustenance in meagre life resources. These contrasting studies
of strong, content and resilient female characters to the weak and failed characters
present an understanding of the factors shaping their, as well as their daughter’s
personality. It also puts forward an explanation to the unconventional expressions of
motherlove. To add to this, the trauma of slavery combines with their low-esteem
self-regard to worsen the display of emotional powers while interacting with the
external world.

Toni Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) won her the Nobel Prize for
Literature. The novel addresses the social forces that construct a meaningful
understanding and definition of cultural paradigms such as beauty, normalcy and
family. Through the character of a young girl Pecola, the writer has conveyed the idea
that a desire to be beautiful is caused because an individual wants to be accepted
normally in a society, which is again governed by diktats of the ruling society. The
foremost unit of social structure is family, which is deformed and moulded by the
norms of white hegemonic society. Definitions and functions of beauty, normalcy and
family change and are understood by the blacks as they are handed down by the
whites, gradually pushing them to the realm of psychological destruction. The
weakened family structure falls apart and disintegrates due to selfish concepts of love,
happiness and beauty. These issues also constitute an important theme for African-
American literature which represents the demeaned and degraded lives of blacks who
have always been excluded from the mainstream society. Through the depiction of
Pecola’s life, the story depicts those difficult situations into which an African-
American is pushed while striving to carve an identity for itself amidst hostile
situations. It also reveals the horrific impacts of the social ideas of white hegemonic
society and its dominant hierarchies. Retrieved from the backyard of 1960s, the book
is replete with the issues that address some exact circumstances and apprehensions
faced by black women under the evil shadow of slavery.

An understanding of the major themes of the novel demands an analytical
study of Pecola’s struggle to survive within those restrained and confined spaces in
which her society situates her. She is accepted neither by the white society nor by the oppressed black society. She vacillates between the two societies in this no-man’s land and finally, the innocent girl is lost. She fails to trace the roots of that firm grounding of love and care which is the primary requirement for a healthy development of an individual’s self.

Morrison has chosen a very simple theme as the plot of this heart-rending novel. The tragic aftermaths of Pecola’s desire to have the bluest eyes, a symbol of beauty and happiness for her, constitute the strength of this book. Pecola’s conflict can be read as a conflict between the two cultures- American and African-American- which has been witnessed by generations of slavery. The storyline is “about mythic, political, and cultural mutilation” (Christiana, 138). The Bluest Eye is a feminist vocalization of an inversed order of the myths of desire and beauty through the dramatization of Pecola’s inner life.

The tragedy of Pecola dramatizes the grave and devastating effects of her desire for blue eyes. It witnesses the disquieting effects of the ideas of Western beauty on a vulnerable black girl, showing a reversal of the complete cultural and social order under the silently devastating influences of the white racist society. The story of Pecola showcases the story of many Pecolas who live in America and suffer from the inherited and inculcated inferiority complex, carrying the burden of their crushed spirit and split self.

The novel begins with a statement that presents the strong views of the writer on feelings of contempt and hatred which are accepted as a commonly experienced phenomenon by people of colour. The novelist writes: “Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941” (3). The meaning of this opening sentence can be deciphered after studying individual behavioural response to the governing socio-cultural forces. Lack of ‘emotional strength and / or support from family and friends” (vii) lessens the damage done to them, and it becomes the “bleak narrative of psychological murder” (vii). It is proved in the portrayal of major characters in the Breedlove and MacTeer family, who either fail or succeed to acquire emotional strength.
Morrison’s novels deviate from the strict and normal patterns of maternal representations as they are not so often concerned with expressing maternal acts or motherhood in a traditional form. Rather, they weave a coloured fabric of stories which focus on the study of human relationships that are simple, yet intricate in their treatment, contrasted with dusky and devouring shades of human behaviour that become light under the effect of subtle hues of emotions and sensibilities. The plot of her novels is knitted with pictures and presentations of basic human relationships such as between husband and wife, mother and daughter and most important, individual and society. They are dealt in a manner in which their plainness is overshadowed by the complex display of emotional maladjustments. But their graveness is restrained with the development of some other relationships such as, between friends or community. The interlacing of these varied relationships arises from a complicated and integrally influenced structure of society, which is turn gives rise to a distorted system of cultural values and self-perceptions. The idea is further explained and illustrated through the gallery of characters that she chooses to paint in her novels.

The mothers in her novels are women who are sold, whipped, brutalized, hanged and treated as objects in the hands of savage white society. Through the portrayal of terribly fraught mother-child relationships, she justifies the importance of the role of black mothers as a safe refuge for their children. According to the writer, the loss of this enriching and fulfilling essence of a mothers’ role leads to the personal and cultural destruction of both mothers and daughters. Although they are not ideal mothers, they express their unconditional love in an unconventional manner. Their ways of mothering explain the circumstances that distort their relationships under the forces of slavery. Thus, it becomes impossible for these slave mothers to fulfil their expected gender roles.

Hailed by Linda W. Wagner as “expertly written fiction”, *The Bluest Eye* focuses upon the impact of white beauty on the life of Breedloves in particular, and MacTeers in general. Morrison expresses her views about physical beauty in *Behind the Making of the Black Book* and writes: “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” (89). *The Bluest Eye* dramatizes the story of
two major characters- Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer- the two black girls who differ in their personality and in their own distinct ways, face the world that disrespects their existence and degrades their living standards due to their colour and poor conditions in heir own distinct ways. The girls, along with their families, experience some unhealthy perceptions during the most important time of their life-their adolescence. The narration of the story begins in a voice that tells us the secret of Pecola’s rape and her impregnation by her father. As readers, we presume that it is the adult Claudia’s voice that is looking in the past, and revisiting and reconciling with her own life by comparing it with Pecola’s tragic past. In the opening paragraphs, she explains that she and her sister Frieda think that they will be able to save Pecola’s child by planting some marigold seeds. But Pecola and her child are doomed to death because the soil, a symbol of society and culture, is infertile to hold and nurture the people of its own lineage. Thus, the child is stillborn.

The novel is divided into four sections. Each section is titled after the name of a season and begins with a Dick- and- Jane-Primer. The first section, “Autumn”, presents the details of the MacTeer family. The MacTeer sisters experience their world in the presence of their mother- Mrs. MacTeer. Pecola comes to live in their house because her father has burnt their house and the family is forced to go outdoors. At the MacTeers house, she is initiated into an important period of her physical growth and helped by the sisters and their mother during that time. The second chapter introduces us to the Breedloves family and describes their torn and substandard living conditions. They belong to a group of people who have accepted their ugliness because of their black colour and fail to locate any signs of their identity anywhere. Pecola is seen as a victim of contempt, ironically heaped on her by her own family, folks, teachers and all those people whom she encounters in her vicinity. But the three prostitutes who live in an apartment above the Breedlove house, show a very different face of humanity to the little girl Pecola. They try to respond to her simple questions and also shower some affection and love which she finds impossible to find with her family members. These whores belong to the three different countries and set an example by sharing communal love beyond cultural and social boundaries, irrespective of their social status or place in the society as fallen women.
The next section of the book, “Winter”, also begins with Claudia’s voice who describes her family’s sense of well-being and a sense of security that they feel in the presence of their father. Next, Pecola is shown traumatized by the extremely shameful incident when she is bullied by a group of boys and humiliated for her father’s nakedness. This incident is followed by the three girls’ quarrel with Maureen Peal, a light-skinned, green-eyed girl, who teases them for their demeaned status in the society. The last chapter of this section presents a contrasting study of the experiences of adolescent Pecola and the MacTeer sisters, but none of them has such devastating experiences as Pecola. In the same chapter, we are introduced to the new character Geraldine who represents the idea of assimilation and gets rid of all markers of her black identity.

The third section of the book, “Spring”, is a reversal of the traditional expectations of hope and regeneration in the season. We are told about Pauline’s job and her attachment with the white Fisher household after her detachment from her own family. The most important event takes place in the kitchen of the Fisher household, ultimately putting up the worst show of Pauline’s unacceptable and contemptible feelings for her daughter. The next three chapters tell us the stories of Pauline, Cholly and Soaphead Church. We are told about the past of all these three characters and the story of their perpetual victimization by white hegemonic society. The second last chapter ends with Cholly’s story and Pecola’s rape by Cholly. The last chapter details the story of Soaphead Church, who is a British West Indies by birth “and works more as an agent who will grant Pecola her blue eyes and will substitute as the dog in the Dick- and- Jane primer” (131).

The final section is titled as “Summer”. The narrative voice which is introduced at the beginning of the novel returns in this chapter and narrates the truth of Pecola’s tragedy. We are told about her rape, rejection and abandonment by her mother and the final psychological death wherein she turns insane after the death of her child who is born after her sexual abuse by her father. The second chapter of this section comprises an internal dialogue between Pecola and her alter ego that emerges after her rape. It reveals that she has been raped more than once and exposes her feelings of insecurity because she still thinks that she does not have those blue eyes which will help her in acquiring the desired love and honour. The story concludes
with the voice of adult Claudia who ponders and reflects on her own situation in comparison to Pecola’s pitiable conditions.

Morrison has skillfully crafted a fusion of fantasy and realism in *The Bluest Eye*, which is concerned with a quest for feminine identity in a race-driven society. The discernible effects of migration on the two families jolt their self-perception in their own eyes. The book unfolds the impact of The Great Migration on the life of Black people. The story is set against backdrop of an event that dislocates and disassociates these black people and seeds a feeling that they are leading their life as an outsider among their own people. It happens after they shift to a different city. As a result, multiple identities emerge from the self of each individual. Their separation from their own land and folks makes it difficult for them to fulfil their filial responsibilities. This transition also challenges their understanding of a family structure. Corrupt relations in the novel also force the readers to turn a critical eye to the complex family structure and a futile community that fails to embrace its own members and proves incapable of healing the psychological wounds of its people, inflicted by a racist society.

Set against the backdrop of The Great Migration, the story uncovers the displacement of a family and its resultant effects presented effectively in the picture of devoured maternal bonds. For African-Americans, community functions as a zone where those maternal bonds can be exercised which are either lost or destroyed in the darkness of slavery. Separated from their mother and community, they are left weak and incapable of extending normal expressions of traditional forms of mothering to their own family. The geographical shift made to foster a dream of success and growth ultimately turns into a nightmare. It reveals the ugly side of that reality which plunges them into feelings of resentment and lack of belongingness. They allow themselves to be governed by dominantly influential white racist society that definitely functions according to its own selfish and capitalistic concerns.

By delineating the characters in a state of psychological distortion, the novelist presents various facets of destruction and degradation suffered by black families due to social abandonment. The traditional meaning of home as a place of safety and security changes for the Breedloves. Rather, it functions like a ghetto for
the unattached. Remarkably, this sense of shallowness in filial relations and deep tormenting feelings of alienation increase with the growing influences of external surroundings. Situations get worse when even the furniture surrounding them has “no memories to be cherished” but stinks of “the joylessness…pervades everything” (34).

There is nothing more to say about furnishings. They were anything but describable…The furniture had aged without ever having become familiar….People had owned it, but never known it…No one had lost a penny or a brooch under the cushions of either sofa and remembered the time or place of the loss or the finding…No one had given birth in any of the beds…..There were no memories among those pieces. (33)

An absence of self in the Breedlove family restricts their ability to associate themselves emotionally to the real world or to lend a meaningful structure to their fragmented lives. They become passive to self-derision by internalizing all hatred created by the socio-cultural constructs of white hegemonic society which is responsible to formulate their self-perception:

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realize that it came from their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they each had accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people”. They had said “you are right”. And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (39)

The Breedloves view and construct their self through this ever-present gaze qualifying them as ‘Other’. After being constantly exposed to such hegemonic gaze (already tainted by racial prejudice), they block any opportunity to view themselves on their own. This kind of prolonged subjugation also causes a negative self-appraisal of these victims and makes them a part of this oppressive system by internalizing the hatred inflicted by the external world.

Pauline Breedlove’s character illustrates venomous control of this internalized hatred and the resulting deformed interpersonal relationships of such victims. She can be best defined as a woman who “was never able, after her education in the movies,
to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty” (122). The world of whites and its glamour sways over her ability to discern the white dominant discourse through its secret invisibility. It is very obvious that what she sees in a dark theatre is the world of white households that fascinates her imagination and dominates her self-perception. It is the world where whiteness is contrasted with the darkness of Pauline’s mind. She secludedly creates a different world for herself where, “white men take care of their women, and they all dressed up in big clean house with the bath tubs right in the same room with the toilet” (123). What she gathers is “a heap of self-contempt” (122), because the blinding illumination of the white screen dictates her mind through its elusive discernability and hush. “Then pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard” (123). But she fails to realize herself and it becomes impossible for her to comprehend the odd and lethal combination of pain and pleasure that creeps in her through the false world of movies.

Pauline is also captivated by the aura of white characters. Sitting alone with her hair done in Jean Harlow’s style, she nurtures her love for the whites and subsequently develops a disdain for her black world. Pauline’s fascination for the white world is displayed on screens because she is lost in the pleasure of viewing the glamour of beauty and wealth in the world of movies. The richness, splendour, love and settled life of the screened characters sow the seed of revulsion in her own life, which is full of poverty, humiliation, negligence, disorder, disappointments, and struggle for survival, coupled with and worsened by her loneliness and discordant ties. The same set of values and feelings is subtly transmitted into Pecola and the proof is given in her desire for the bluest eyes. It is a desire that seals her fate with final destruction of her dead psyche. As readers, we catch Pauline sitting in theatres and seeking relief in the world of movies. In a similar manner, Pecola is seen seeking satisfaction and peace by eating Mary Jane candies and drinking milk from Shirley Temple’s cup. Her illusionary self-perception begins the journey of her mental imbalance and psychological disorder, coupled with a chaotic racial individuality. When she leaves the theatre, her front tooth also falls out. She is filled with frustration and indignation because it is a second blow to her deformed personality. Metaphorically, it suggests the crushing of the last hope of merging with her world.
and its illusions: “Look like I just didn’t care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly” (123).

The disdain and contempt which is inflicted by the community on Pauline, offers her a false mirroring of her self, and pushes her towards the white Fisher family. They provide her with what she lacks— a nickname, “Polly” and a tag of “ideal servant. All the meaningfulness of her life was in her work” (126). Her identity is wedged between the Fisher household and the dingy storefront of her own house. She works as an ideal servant to deflect the rage and self-detestation that springs from her unfulfilled narcissistic desires. She punishes everyone who seems to intrude into her newly found world of order and maintenance, even if it is her daughter Pecola.

The film critic Vicky Lebeau writes that cinema is “the royal road to cultural unconsciousness” (6). By moving to cinema to escape from the world of reality, Pauline unconsciously starts living in a new cultural world to forget her black and ugly world which labels her as an ‘Other’. Cinema teaches her how to manage and bear with many troubling and atrocious realities of her life. She is constantly seen as the ‘Other’, despite her attempts to change her looks and manners according to the society in which she lives. Thus, movies provide her a glamorous world to escape from the bleak reality of life.

In one way, Pauline’s quest for identity and self-worth is at the sacrifice of love which she should have reserved for and showered on her family. She directs all her energy in and releases her emotions towards attaining perfection in her work. Her struggle to name and structure her life justifies that race, class and gender intersect as determiners to help a person perceive his/her inner and hidden yearnings against the backdrop of racial and hegemonic constructs. Her narcissistic desire is reflected in her devotion and loyalty with which she takes care of other’s household. It is specifically characteristic of accepting and living with defined gender roles. She seeks full satisfaction in her role as a domestic servant in a white household which designates her as a “black mammy”². It is in their house that she feels important as a woman in relation to her gender expected roles.
Pauline looks at herself as a “martyr” in her family and takes refuge in Christian theology to rationalize her negligent attitude towards her husband Cholly and her children Sammy and Pecola. She discharges all her anger and frustration of her life towards her family, upsurged in her violent brawls with her husband Cholly. She tries to induce guilt in him to give a meaning to her sacrifices and, “Holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns, and her children like a cross” (126-7). She structures her compensatory self-meaning to keep herself intact and integrated: “She needed Cholly’s sin desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became. In the name of Jesus”(42).

The deformed and fragmented relationship of her parents leaves scars on Pecola in her vulnerable state, which also result in her distorted psychic state. She is left alone in the end, instable and irrational, after the traumatic sexual violence by her father, followed by a final rejection by her mother. Pecola wishes to fill her emotional and psychological void with a sense of being. She endures all violence and contempt hurled upon her by blaming herself for her parents’ abhorrence for her. She blames herself for the gulfed relationship of Cholly and Pauline. Her shame-prone personality exacerbates the detrimental effects of the traumatizing life experiences and consolidates her victimized state. Whenever she sees her parents fighting, which is like a ritual in her family, she starts praying to God and wishes to disappear from the scene. She tries to fade away by tightly closing her eyes and sucking her breath or tightening her stomach. Her confinement into her own world is an attempt to hide in a safe place, which is surrounded by an environment that contracts and terrorizes her with menacing forces. She grows up in a socio-cultural scenario which does not nurture her and proves to be unprotective for her. Feelings of nurturance, preservance and protection seem unattainable in the world that is permeated by a heartless mother and a baffled and depraved father.

Morrison relates Pecola’s predicament with her fear that is ingrained in her by her mother who is so very determined for her daughter to be conscious of her colour and appearance that decides her position in the society so that she is, “bent to respectability”(58). It is the “fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life” (Spence, 458). In the end, Pecola is raped by her father and becomes insane. It can be
witnessed in her act of disappearance. Her shame-prone behaviour annihilates her mental state, thus overpowering and turning her into a case of post-traumatic stress disorder. She is thrown into an eternal darkness after dissociating herself from the traumatic event. She is lost in a world that mirrors her non-entity and finally the girl loses her identity after her abuse. Such incidents have a debilitating influence on her mental and emotional state. They are not retained as a whole, but leave deep marks on her memory in the form of bits and spots. Pecola’s personality is also constituted of such experiences that form a cluster of dingy shadows in her mind.

Pauline’s dislike for her daughter is a result of that negligence and dislike with which she spends her own childhood days. As a child, she grows up by spending her time in her own world, fulfilling her own desires, and displaying her love for beauty and order in simple tasks such as, arranging colourful pots and objects in her small cluttered house. She longs for moments which she can recollect and value as precious time of her life that she has spent with her mother and siblings.

As she is forced to live in a society which despises and dislikes its own people, she collects within her feelings of unrelatedness and disassociation for her family. She cannot locate her identity amidst that sinister world that fails to give some significance to her black body. Her longing to connect with the white world fills the void of her life and knots its incomplete structures to weave the fabric of her story.

It has been observed that victims of trauma can find moral and emotional support in the presence of an empathetic person. The absence of such support system in Pauline’s life after her marriage also becomes one of the major causes of her frustrated and agitated mental condition. Her failure to live a successful married life in a foreign land combines with her inferiority complex and she beings isolating herself from the other females of that society. Her shameful experiences in the hospital during Pecola’s birth worsen her situations and aggravate her aversion for her black daughter. She connects these experiences of humiliation with her mother’s feelings of shame and disgust, which her mother must have felt at the time of her daughter Pauline’s birth due their own colour. We can witness it in Pauline’s lonely childhood and in her attempts to compensate for feelings of desolation in those small errands of arranging things in a beautiful, yet not perfect order. Love for orderliness
and display of colours is cherished throughout her life; love which she discovered in her younger days to function as harbour of her lonesomeness. To compensate for this loss, she has also found an infrastructure in that white household where she works happily as a maid and unconsciously fulfils her desire to be a significant part of her impossible to attain dream-world.

Pauline cannot express or share her pangs of loneliness and seclusion with anyone around her. She has no emotional or moral support, neither from her parents, nor from Cholly with whom she hopes to share her unspeakable pain that she experiences in an alien land. The cumulative effect of all those insults which are heaped on her explodes in her revulsion for her life in a dingy storehouse with her people.

Pauline’s character also exemplifies the character of a woman who fails to achieve the expected standards of her roles. She proves weak as a woman, a wife and a mother in her family. Patterns of motherhood complicate and collapse under the pressures of race, gender, and the standards of white beauty. The results are devastating for her and her daughter Pecola because for Pauline Breedlove, even motherhood does not offer any scope of empowerment. Rather, it becomes a source of oppression. The aftermaths of such unusual and complicated mother-daughter relationship are shown in the loss which is manifested throughout the novel with the help of various images that successfully convey the failed relationship and painful experiences due to a fractured mother-daughter relationship. What chiefly concerns and interests the writer is the idea to present motherhood as a site of disempowerment for Pauline, embodied through her failure in loving her biological daughter Pecola. As a result of this, the innocent girl yearns for the most beautiful eyes- an embodiment of beauty that may bring appreciation for her in the eyes of others. She thinks that it is her ugliness that has created a wall between her and her mother. In its true essence, it is a story which dramatizes the death of love, both maternal and self in various forms, and is replicated throughout the novel in different relationships which are simple, yet complicated and tangled in a web of inferiority complex.

Pauline’s unnatural behaviour can be examined in the light of her relentless acceptance of the harsh truth of her blackness, which is understood and associated
with the idea of ugliness thrust by the external world. She fails to resist an identity which is given to her by the dominant racist culture. Her colonized ‘self’ compels her to believe that she is ugly because she is black, and she fails to de-colonize her “self”.

It is proved when she learns how to preserve her cultural ethnicity and respect her image as a complete woman who feels her continuity and rootedness with her ancestral past amidst the dominant and supremacist racial society. The Breedlove family covers itself in a cocoon of its own thoughts and this influences the behaviour of each and every member in its own manner. The worst effects are reflected in Pauline who views herself as a martyr and lives with an identity which is formulated with the bitter experiences of fragments of her memories and experiences of her childhood, her dreams, love, attention and affection for which she has always yearned, all which should have been provided by her family, her husband and folks, to support her married life. Above all, she lives with an impossible dream of living in a neatly arranged world where everything has its own place and importance. She is disillusioned, struggling with deep frustrations, and living with marks of weak psychological state after recognizing her physical deformity, coupled with her blackness as a symbol of her “martyrdom- the role she frequently imagined she was playing” (37). She wears a cloak of ugliness and uses it as a prop to explain her character, her behaviour, and to offer an explanation to unresolvable dilemmas of her life. As a black woman, she looks upon herself as a flawed, disordered, unworthy, inferior, insignificant and marginalized person in all spheres of life, be it at home or in the society.

Several critics and thinkers have contributed to the study of mother-child relationship. They have also dealt with the topic of motherhood from historical, social and feminist perspectives. According to Bernard Thurer, mothers are viewed as primary agents in their children’s development, as well as their primary obstacles. Thus, mothers are under considerable pressure to be “good” mothers by forgetting their own needs and taking care of their child’s every basic need.

As a mother, Pauline does not forego her personal needs to build a safe and secure home for her two children- Sammy and Pecola. Her constant association with her childhood memories (of unworthiness and ignorance) does not allow her to raise and nurture her children in a positive and expected manner, failing which, she cannot
foster and nurture a normal and healthy relationship with her children also. The clash of their martial relationships is often heard by their children in the noisy bickering of Cholly and Pauline. These raucous and “violent routines that were themselves routine” (39), give her a reason to express her real “self” through violence and anger, as they are the only ways through which she can assert her own existence.

Pecola can never fight or fly from this environment. She only wishes to disappear with hands on her eyes, but nothing works. Her eyes are like a mirror that contains flashes of all those memories which she always wishes to erase consciously. “They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures. All of those faces” (43). She tries to learn how to relate with these so-called ugly people, knowing that she is not accepted in her school or among the folks in streets. She is despised alike by her teachers and classmates also.

It had occurred to Pecola that if her eyes were beautiful, those eyes that held those pictures, and knew the sights- if those eyes of hers were different, beautiful,........maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they’d say, "Why look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes. (44)

Restrained by her sex and bound by her age, she is compelled to search supportive ways to endure the daily fights and dirt of her life. She has no chance like Sammy to run away or to meet new people by running outdoors in the hope to find a new world outside home. She is confined in the vicious circle of her blackness and lost in the maze of her self-perception and understanding.

The little girl Pecola prays each night for pretty blue eyes. Her innocence is corrupted and tainted with a desire to be physically beautiful so as to be loved. Pecola’s desire can be seen analogous to her mother’s shift into her private world of movies, where the seeds of similar desire are sown in the mother’s heart. Like her mother Pauline, she becomes a prey to the racially dominated norms of white culture. Her self-perception is formulated under the constructed patterns of beauty which are framed and set by the white society. It is further hardened by the display of this falsity on the shining screen. Expressions of abhorrence and revulsion in the eyes of others for her change her perception about herself and give birth to a desire to assimilate into
the white world. She experiences that everything in the world surrounding her is in a state of change and flux. It is only her blackness that exists and fills the venom of disdain in the eyes of others.

In her essay “Difficult Survival: Mothers and Daughters in The Bluest Eye”, Joyce Pettis argues that Pauline fails to nurture her daughter because she herself has lived as an unnurtured child. To quote Andrienne Rich in Of Woman Born, Pettis writes: “The nurture of daughters in a patriarchy calls for a strong sense of self-nurture in the mother” (27). “It is not simply”, to quote Rich, “that…. mothers feel both responsible and powerless. It is they who carry their own guilt and self-hatred over to their daughter’s experiences” (224).

Psychoanalysts also agree on the same clinical conception that good mothering is very crucial for healthy development of an infant. ‘Good mothering’ is therefore essential for both mother and child so that the mother can initially provide the ‘total environmental provision’ for her infant (Chodorow, 83). According to some theorists, mother-infant relationship is a source of gratification for both mother and infant. It is possible only when a child is experienced as one by the mother, and when she sees her child as an extension of her own self rather than as a separate being. This kind of bonding demands selfless love from the mother even in a situation where interests of both are same and its lack may lead to disorders and weaknesses in the child’s personality. But, Pauline’s childhood is completely deprived of such intense bonding or care with her mother.

Pauline’s motherhood can also be studied under the context of the above mentioned theories. She is the ninth child among eleven children in her family. She is left with a flopping foot due to a wound in her leg, and this deformity explains many reasons for otherwise “incomprehensible things” (108). Pauline’s physical disfigurement becomes a metaphor for the evident psychological abnormality in her personality, later visible as dark and horrible effects showing their influences in her marital relations and motherhood.

As a child, she has no nick name and no reminiscences of moments of joy and sorrow with her family members, nor any funny talks and childish acts to cherish, but
only recollected and relived feelings of otherness and incompetence which gives birth to a sense of isolation. Although she is isolated in her own world, amid the pleasures of her self-devised world where everything seems to be arranged in an orderly beauty for her, she always misses the beautiful shades of her life. She has reveries of unknown and unfelt sensations of love and touch which divert her mind from the routine and dull household work. She is left alone with her melancholy to yearn for a relation that can provide her some space to share this pricking pain and weariness of her life with someone who can actually fill her mind and heart with the rainbow colours of life and, most importantly, accept her with the truth that she is physically deformed.

Pauline is unable to distance herself from the memories of her life in Alabama. Her first meeting with Cholly takes her on a journey to the old days and she recalls:

My whole dress was messed with purple, and it never did wash out. Not the dress nor me. I could feel that purple deep inside me. And that lemonade that mama used to make when pap came in out the fields. It be cool and yellowish..... and that streak of green them June bugs made on the trees.

After her marriage with Cholly, she finds “everything changed” (115). She dearly misses her own people and finds it baffling to acquaint herself with the folks in her new locality. The presence of coloured folks in North makes her presence insignificant and unnoticed. They are mean and “no better than whites” in their humiliating and negligent attitude to the Breedloves. Pauline turns to her husband in these moments of loneliness for reassurance, but manages with his kindness and not with love because Cholly resists her absolute reliance upon him. The early days of her married life are devoid of that intimacy and attachment which is normally expected from a husband, and soon their married life is torn with serious disputes.

It is clearly evident that physical dislocation and resultant estrangement from one’s own culture and tradition is the basic reason for Pauline’s emotional split. Her disconnectedness with her cherished past and culture further creates a cleft between her present and past. She can neither preserve, nor cultivate the essence of motherhood of her foremothers. The results are signified metaphorically in Pauline’s
inability to shower proper maternal love and care to her daughter, soon after her birth. Her character is a study of destructive effects of the imposed Western concepts of physical beauty and romantic love on a black woman. A close study of her character may shift the focus from black to white social structure, which causes these folks to fight for their survival and existence. Her character study is a fine example of an answer to the question that what can be the serious ramifications if an African-American is trapped and tangled in a socio-cultural structure that makes it tough for him to survive and exist in an environment which fails to provide them sufficient life-supporting and nurturing resources. It also unfolds the tragedy of the absence of that support system which is often rooted in a strong community network that might allow these people to find a meaningful existence in their society. Pauline is also a victim of this world where derision for her own colour gives stimuli to her self-cultivated and internalized self-hatred.

They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollow of their minds-cooled-and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. (18)

Pauline and Pecola fit into the above-mentioned paradigm and image a weak mother-daughter relation which actually reflects Pauline’s unhealthy childhood and self-judgment as an incompetent and ugly person with a deformity, a sense which is heightened by the topographical dislocation and resultant isolation. Above all, they are coupled with the unhealthy labour experiences during Pecola’s birth that trigger her contempt for her black daughter. As readers, we can infer that her first pregnancy is a second beginning of the reunion of Pauline and Cholly’s marital relation which has cracked under the socio-cultural and economic pressures. A hope to revive their relation also pushes Pauline to the old world of dreams and she starts going to movies-signifying a world of illusions where she was introduced to a never-to-be-achieved notion of “romantic love” and “physical beauty” (120). It is like a spring of colours, images and imagination for her, from which she derives the most damagingly influential emotions. Her idea of beauty becomes a threat. She develops a measuring scale of beauty and assigns that measure of beauty, which she has derived from the
world of her movies, to each and every face she meets. For Pauline: “It was really a simple pleasure, but she learned all there was to love and all there was to hate” (119).

Pauline cannot resist these ideas of happiness and perceives her house and Cholly as falling short of these measures. But she promises to love her second child and talks to her when it is in her womb. She also says that, “she felt good about the baby. Like good friends we was” (122). The early image portrayed by the writer is of a caring mother who shares a close prenatal attachment with her child. But ironically, in contrast to this, on her birth the child is described as a “big old healthy thing” (123). Pauline watches her and imagines her own mother at the time of her birth. She is “smart”, yet “ugly” (124). The new-born child is unlike the unborn child of her thoughts. Much of the time of her pregnancy is spent in watching movies. It is from them that she conjures the ideas and images of beauty so that her mind’s eye view of her dream child is as per the acceptable standards of a white society.

Pauline’s labour experiences in the hospital with the white doctors around her further aggravate her humiliating experiences. She decides to give birth to her second child in a hospital because she wants to be at ease to seek all that care and attention which is given to a woman during child-birth. And ironically, but not surprisingly, the experience is devoid of all ease, care and attention that she expects. Like every poor and black woman, she faces contempt and ignorance, coupled with and heightened by the humiliating remarks of attending doctors. The medical staff and other doctors present at that moment merely share some indecent talks and avoid her to kill any eye contact with her. She tries to minimize the impact of such insulting comments and falsely attempts to show that for a black woman also, giving birth to a child is as painful as for white women who are “hooping and hollering before” (123). She is dehumanized during her delivery when one of the doctors remarks that black women like her give birth effortlessly and with no pains “just like horses” (123). When her daughter is born, she sees her as an ugly black thing.

This argument can be supported by Chodorow’s idea that girls naturally identify with their mothers as they grow up and this identification helps them to transform into good mothers. Their mothering experiences and expectations are informed (for the most part unconsciously) by their own childhood history and
current and past relationships, both external and internal to their own natal family (Chodorow, 89). Thus, it is the most complicated and complex object-world which is responsible in shaping the strongest innate world of a mother-child relationship.

Her dislike for black colour lengthens the rift in her relation with her daughter. She gradually moves away from her family and children and feels drawn towards the illumined white world. Rather than finding comfort and peace in her house, she finds a refuge in the Fisher family’s kitchen. She is pushed into this domain because it offers her a concrete form of the world of her imagination where she can touch, see, feel and live the unlived and unfelt moments of her day-dreams. “She looked at their houses, smelled their linen, touched their silk draperies, and loved all of it” (125). This job of a servant gives her all available possibilities to fulfil her desires. Her real world with her own people comes like an afterthought in the darkness of late evenings and night, the only time that she spends in her dingy ‘storefront’. Though she serves as a servant, she lives with a sense of power and ownership and is appreciated for her good work after getting an important and significant position in the Fisher household. “We’ll never let her go. We would never find anybody like Polly” (126). Through her tasks, she creates a new meaning from her life and gets a chance to realize her own worth which sensitizes her towards a more purposeful existence in this world. For Pauline, her kitchen in the White household is like a throne on which she sits and views the insensitive reality of her world of darkness with disgust and hatred. Feeling replenished with a sense of accomplishment and achievement, she retains the unshared and secretly felt fondness for this arrangement and order which quietly lurks in her heart. It certainly gets its outlet in her angry and frustrated outbursts on Pecola and noisy brawls with Cholly. She discovers a new world of order and meaning and realizes that the hope of her dream world is coming true, which will shelter her from the world of poverty and decay. The strikingly painful and symbolic scene in the kitchen of the Fisher household occurs when Pecola accidently spills the hot berry cobbler juice on the floor. In return, she has to encounter the physical and psychological rejection of her mother Pauline when she embraces the white baby doll and abuses and knocks down her own daughter because, for the mother, emotions like happiness, contentment and success revolve around the deceptively illumining white middle-class suburbia.
Unconsciously, she passes on all these values to her children and fails in her attempts to keep them away from the sins of their father. In her son Sammy, she fills a desire to run away from this world which will deprive him of any opportunity to live on his own terms, and contrastingly, in her daughter, she fosters a fear of people, a fear of survival, and a fear of life; a life which she herself lives in two ways- in her black world and in the world of the Fisher household. Her son Sammy has run away no less than twenty-seven times by the time he is fourteen. He wields his ugliness as a weapon against those people who are either fascinated by it, or he uses it as a tool to express his anger towards weak people. But as stated earlier also, being a girl, Pecola is restrained by her age and sex and reacts to her parents’ battles by closing her eyes and “experimenting with methods of endurance” (41).

It is actually the dominance of white racist values on black women which creates a tension between African male and female. The impressions of such shattered relationships have clear implications on Pauline’s maternal role and the results are devastating on her daughter’s psyche also. Despite all her efforts, her disassociation from her ancestral wisdom creates a psychological barrier in maintaining a healthy and natural relationship with any and every person around her.

As per Karen Horney’s theory on anxiety, Pecola’s damaged personality is a result of anxiety which grows from disturbances between children and parents (Even, 176). Anxiety is the primary concept for Horney and he defines it as:

…the feeling of a child of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world. A wide range of adverse factors in the environment can produce this insecurity in a child: direct or indirect domination, indifference, erratic behavior, lack of respect for the child’s individual needs, lack of real guidance, disparaging attitudes, too much admiration or the lack of it, lack of reliable warmth, ……… injustice, discrimination…..and so on.(176-7)

Pecola is a victim of these conflicting situations in which an insecure and anxious child likes to get its space either by being aggressive or submissive. In this case, she subjects her own identity to the deceitful measures of beauty devised by her mother. Pushed by these factors, she tries to chase an unrealistic ideal of beauty. Her yearning finds its articulation in her tragic aspiration to have blue eyes. More than
any other emotionally or psychologically damaging effect, the most intense and tragic scene which finally stamps and witnesses the debilitating impact of these false cultural standards is seen in Pecola’s association of “the pain between her legs and her mother’s face”, when she looms over her while she “was lying down on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt” (161), after being raped by her father. Cholly destroys Pecola’s innocence, an act which can be seen as his behavioural response to explain his derision for his wife. When he watches the girl who is rubbing her calf with her toe, he is reminded of his first meeting with Pauline and the buried hatred finds its outlet on Pecola, resulting in her rape.

We are also informed that Pauline’s detestation reaches its zenith when she refuses to accept her daughter’s account of this incident. Pecola is seen lying on the floor, crushed and defeated, and left unsupported by her father and mother. Her trauma does not end here, rather the series begins with this event. She is raped twice and is left insane and in the end, observed talking to her split self by the people of her community. Her soul is dead and she is like a moving carcass that is trapped in a moving mold of flesh. The final nail in the coffin is put by her community. No one in the community wants her baby to live, and they together remark it as the “ugliest thing walking” (234). The baby is born premature and dies. After being damaged in the most horrendous manner, Pecola is socially ostracized. The old people of her community turn away their eyes in revulsion and disgust. Children laugh at her insane acts or they push away from her in fright. The community laughs at mad Pecola who is seen moving her hands in an attempt to fly as if she has achieved the freedom of those blue unlimited skies- the dream of beauty- which always lies in acquiring the bluest eyes. The use of superlative degree by the author- “bluest”- signifies the intensity of her desire to acquire not only the beautiful, but the most beautiful eyes, and not only to be loved by her people, but also to feel that love, admiration, and a sense of importance and belongingness in the eyes of her own family members. She wants to be Pauline’s dream- child who will fill all the vacuum of Pauline’s own childhood which she would have never felt if she would have been beautiful and perfect. Her neurotic behaviour at the end also reflects her failed struggle to please her parents and live up to the expectations of others.
Pauline’s contempt and dislike is developed by her own false standards of beauty and transform her into a “bad mother”, causing the formation of Pecola’s “bad self”. If she is the victim and participant in her own tragedy (to an extent as her plight is the result of self-hatred), it is actually caused by her weak family structure which is unsupportive to their own child. The main responsibility lies with the mother who fails to strike a balance between her daughter and the image of girl-child of her dream that she desires to have.

Terry Eagleton also notes that “emancipation thus involves the most difficult forms of liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves” (Grewal, 21). The problem lies in Pauline’s failure to liberate herself from her imagined self and decolonize her mind from the accepted standards of beauty. This develops greater irony and pathos in her character when she makes failed, yet desperate attempts to adapt herself to the estimated standards of white beauty, which remain accomplished due to the gap created by boundaries of race, class and gender. It is her self-projection or her self-gaze that changes her perception and she sees herself as an unseen and unnoticed person. What is incomprehensible and unique is the conviction of the Breedloves that they are ugly. But it is a political construct (and not the truth) that has always supported slavery in the past also, and continues its powerful control till today.

According to Raynor and Butler, Morrison takes a step ahead in deconstructing images of black females by making them “comfortable with their body and sexuality” (180). In *The Bluest Eye*, the three whores who use their body for their income are given the status of low women. Actually, they are the most confident women in comparison to the other female characters- Pauline, Mrs MacTeer, and Geraldine- who are really weak in their own personality as they are easily swayed by the qualms of poverty, white ideology or any other incompetence in their own life. All these three women affect Pecola’s development of self and trigger her desire to be beautiful because she is also disliked by these three weak women who fail to love themselves.

Pecola suffers from the two major negative influences in her life- her mother and the three whores. At the most crucial period of her life, her transition from girlhood to womanhood (when she is introduced in the novel), she misses the
presence of her biological mother and the two sisters, Claudia and Freida, provide her the required moral support. She becomes aware of the noticeable and valuable changes in her body and comes to know by the MacTeer girls that even she can be a mother now, condition being, that she is loved by someone. But, love, content and happiness are words that are beyond the realm of these young girls’ understanding. Their knowledge of relationships is limited and they only know that it is necessary to be loved before getting involved in a physical relationship. A desire to love and be loved, gives rise to a need for intimacy, to be one and to be with and for each other. It is necessary to fulfil both the conditions of love to have a baby. But Pecola is confused with, and unaware of any expressions of love. Is the relation between her parents a result of love? Or, is love something which is defined in the tales woven and told by the three whores? Is beauty a condition to love and to be loved? After Pauline’s influences, it is the second negative feminine influence in Pecola’s life which alters her understanding of the concept of love. These so-called fallen women of the society attempt to answer her innocent, yet always unanswered questions.

Despised by her mother and unheard and unseen by her parents, Pecola searches for somebody who will accept and love her. The three prostitutes live in a room above the storefront of the Breedlove family. If her own parents show her a troubled face of relationships, these three ladies show her another ugly face of sexuality. Love for them is sex without emotions. It unfolds another chapter of her life that molds a different perspective of love in terms of bodily relations. When she questions Miss Marie that how so many men can love her, she is told that love is a means to possess money with the help of good looks. These requisites of love leave negative influences on a young girl’s mind who is trying to search meanings of the most basic emotion in anybody’s and everybody’s life. Definition of love shifts its focus from intimacy, trust, loyalty and oneness to lust, sex, bodily pleasure and becomes a medium to make money.

The three prostitutes, Miss Marie, China and Poland, also picturise self-possessed women in the novel. They are not oppressed or weak because, “these women hated men, all men, without shame, apology or discrimination”(54). It is not the racial, but gender dislike.
Black men, white men, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jews, Poles, whatever all were weak and inadequate; all came under their jaundiced eyes and were the recipients of their disinterested wrath. They took delight in cheating them……………. They were whores in whore’s clothing, or whores regretting their loss of innocence. (54-5)

If Pauline proves to be a bad mother, Aunt Jimmy’s is a stereotypical figure of those Black grandmothers who have seen the world and have lived with all its experiences ‘through with lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror”; they are “in fact, and at last, free” (137-8). If, as a mother Pauline defines her own daughter by her blackness, then Aunt Jimmy comes as a savoir who saves young Cholly when he is left to die as an unowned child, thrown away by his biological mother. He cannot come out of this motherly influence of his Aunt. It is evident in his later life also when he proves incapable of appreciating or approving any woman in her life- be it Pauline or Pecola, the deformed wife or the young and innocent daughter, who is immature enough to apprehend any explanations of her father’s anger and bestial behaviour. Pecola and Pauline, both suffer due to a severe damage in their personality, heightened by their internal conflict and coupled with ruthless and tough antagonistic external factors. It is their physical and psychic distortion which can be seen as a self-destructive activity that they inflict upon themselves.

*The Bluest Eye* depicts the feebleness of black females in their struggle against sexual and racial objectification. But my argument is not related only to the subservient condition of female characters. I am also interested in examining the real cause of such shocking climax of this novel, where a girl child is driven into madness and enters an illusionary creation of love and security by staking her sanity. Pecola’s imbalanced condition in the end confirms the final bereavement of a girl who has always lives dejected and unloved in her own world. In this pitiful state, her final retreat is within herself. Such continuous and prolonged neglect of a child in the family shatters her into pieces. The behaviour of an agitated father and a complicit mother’s presence restrict her to love herself with her blackness.

In “I Come /from a/ long line /of Uppity/ Irate Black Woman”, O’ Reilley argues that motherhood empowers African- American women by allowing daughters
to become self-actualized through “maternal identification”(147). Pauline fails to empower Pecola or teach her the process of self-development and thus, neither of them succeeds in relating to any maternal identification. She is unsuccessful in creating a safe space for her daughter, where she can shield herself from the effects of white hegemony, and distance from the ravaging effects of a racist world in order to find a dependable environment for a healthy development of self-esteem.

Pauline is never privy to familial or communal values of her tradition and proves incapable of passing them to her daughter. She is alienated because she proves weak to visualize herself as an individual or recognize herself as an African – American woman. As a consequence, Pecola also moves in search of other mothers or community mothers to discover a bond of love, which is expected to be fostered by her biological mother. Pauline’s mother does not fortify her socially, and it is evident in the daughter also, reflected in her social maladjustments. The vicious cycle of this failed mothering travels from Pauline’s mother and climaxes in the final demise of Pecola’s personality. Although we are not given any details about Pauline’s mother and her maternal role, the given information helps to decipher the consequent unhealthy relationship in her neatly delineated character traits and her falsely cultivated love for order and beauty which is adopted in her childhood days. As a marginalized and cornered child due to a leg injury at the age of two, Pauline grows within her own boundary, where she becomes emotionally weak, lame and disconnected. She becomes an outsider in her own family:

Slight as it was, this deformity explained for many things that would have been otherwise incomprehensible: why she alone of all the children had no nickname; why no one ever remarked on her food preferences…..why she never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged any place. Her general feelings of separateness and unworthiness she placed on her foot. (86)

Pauline and her mother, both are incapable of viewing their own as well as their daughters’ connections with the community. Both mothers are emotionally, physically, socially and psychologically ill-equipped to meet their daughter’s needs for a healthy development. Such an abusive and faulty maternal line can cultivate
only isolation, vulnerability and ignorance in the most beautiful and sacred relation of mother and daughter.

It is the absence of the network of mothering that necessitates the inclusion of other mothers and community mothers in the novel. It spoils the frail condition of Pecola in the absence of any positive bond of relationship. The women of her community ostracize her from the beginning to the end. The potential other-mothers flout a traditional African-American communal network of feminine support and cooperation (Hill, 135). Both the female characters crave for an acceptance within such communal bonds, but a feeble sisterhood between women of their community proves a weak potential of their community.

Morrison also presents a rupture of matriarchal powers in instances of Pauline’s weak standpoint in control of her sexuality. She is completely shaped by the rules of social objectification, which distort an individual’s ability to comprehend her own ‘self’ as a complete and meaningful entity, reflecting her social, economic and political helplessness. Patricia Hill Collins notes:

Black women’s sexualities can become an important source of resistance. Just as harnessing the power of erotic is important for domination, reclaiming and self-defining that same eroticism may constitute one path of Black woman towards her empowerment. (128)

Her sexuality is also governed by Cholly. He initiates every sexual activity and she suppresses her orgasm so that he may reach first. As a submissive woman who allows herself to be fully governed by patriarchy, she proscribes her life and demarcates all possibilities and potentials. As a result of a series of tormenting experiences, in the end, she fails to bless Pecola with a safe haven where the daughter can understand her own worth. Pauline finds an alternate zone to display and exert her powers. She accepts the job of a maid and tries to structure her life into a meaningful and comprehensive identity. During all this process in which she conceives such wrong notions of power, she starts accepting her place as a mythical “Amazon”, who has the “ability to endure” hardships no lady was supposedly capable of enduring” (hooks 81-82).
Throughout her life, Pauluine cannot cultivate those maternal bonds which are necessary for the nourishment of her relation with Pecola. Chodorow theorizes that women are responsible for mothering and because of this reason, daughters and sons are treated differently. The daughter who shares, “a core female identity with her mother was encouraged to imitate her, while the son was expected to be separate and autonomous” (Chodorow, 151). Pauline’s son Sammy is like other males in the society. He has learnt how to escape and abandon his house at the young age of fourteen. But, the worst effect of this weak maternal bond can be witnessed in, and justified by Pecola’s personality in whom Pauline has transferred all those feelings of self-hatred which finally incapacitate her emotional and mental strength.

Although motherhood has been defined as the most honest, basic and sacred mission and profession of a woman’s life, and an inseparable part of her nature, Pauline’s contempt for her daughter cannot be inferred only as her dislike for her colour or, as reflections of her own secluded childhood. It also expresses her despise for her own blackness due to which she feels low and ashamed among her own people. A daughter is her mother’s shadow, and if this be true, Pecola’s insanity rightly shadows Pauline’s inability to balance her mental status and maintain the equilibrium between her dream and reality.

Maternal role is highly respected and stands fundamental to black culture. According to O’Reilly’, black community and the greater black population considers motherhood as the prime source of women’s welfare and empowerment. The heart of black motherhood, “in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect and more generally empower black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete” (O’ Reilley, 4). Pauline’s children fail to see themselves as healthy beings. Neither Pauline, nor Pecola can decipher the healthy graphics of a mother-child relationship. For both of them mother figure is an ideal to be followed, but the demise of their own personality show negatively exceeding influences of their mothers. Both Pauline and her mother are incapable to bequeath adequate resisting practices or survival strategies to their daughters who are finally crushed under the cultural and social forces.
Mothers are also endowed with an important responsibility of passing the traditional values of African-American culture to their next generation. This formulates their plan to transform their children into efficacious people who are capable of subverting the present racist circumstances by clinging to the inspirational stories and motivating ancestral truths of the past. This is achieved through their art of story-telling, dance performances, song or other practices. As Alice Walker states in *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*: “So many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother’s stories….I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories-----like her life must be recorded”(179). Black mothers narrate these stories to the next generations that help to authenticate their women and children. Morrison claims that the tradition of story-telling is the oldest tradition for the expression of black culture, which further proves mother-child relationship as a successful tie in Black community. A tribute is paid to the ancestors by respecting one’s cultural strength and making it a mode of empowerment for black women. In general also, story-telling is a process through which a person can share one’s own experiences. This tradition relieves the psychological burden when people share their painful and buried memories. Mother-child relationship, especially the mother-daughter relationship, gains its specificity through a firm bonding. It works as a process through which children can be educated morally by teaching them specific ways to overcome their fears and pains. The growing generations of black female is truly inspired by these stories through which they instill the power to survive, resist and endure.

Pauline falls short of the expectations in her roles as a mother, wife and a black woman. She is neither a complete woman, nor a devoted mother and a loving wife. Due to her isolation and disassociations, her African-American cultural values are finally skewed. Among few interactions between the mother and daughter, the kitchen scene in the Fisher house highly symbolizes their fragmented relation. When Pecola accidentally drops the freshly made “berry cobbler” (106) that Polly has made for the Fishers, Pauline is crashed with anger and rage as if Pecola has tried to intrude her self-constructed world of beauty and order. Claudia MacTeer narrates:

In one gallop [Mrs Breedlove] was on Pecola, and with back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under
her. Mrs Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly, and me and Frieda by implication. (109)

Ironically, in contrast to this, she says to the Fisher girl, “Hush, Baby, Hush. Don’t cry. Look at your dress. Polly will change it” (109). Here, Pauline has associated herself with the Fisher girl’s childhood by addressing herself as Polly. Her identity is changed from ‘I’ to ‘Polly’. It is a name that is given to her by her master’s family, signifying the beginning of her new association with the white world in her real life after a disappointing end of her escape into the illusionary world of cinema. The abyss created by the unattained love and affection as a daughter remains fresh in her memory, and she relives those moments when she tries to fill the void with new, but destructive forms of love and association by consoling the Fisher girl.

In *The Bluest Eye*, mothers and daughters do not have any revered association to any ancestral properties. Pauline and her mother’s incapability to share some inspiring and educative stories of their past with their children weakens them and leaves them disrooted and disassociated from their traditional roots. Neither Pauline, nor Mrs. MacTeer can exhibit their resilient qualities to inspire their children. They are blocked in the tight compartment of their perception as a dehumanized black woman. Their inability to liberate themselves from the clutches of white society leads to inferiority complex, challenging their capacity to view oneself as a human being.

Mrs. MacTeer, Claudia’s mother is a stereotyped black mother. Injured and wounded by her own state of helplessness and despair, she is burdened by poverty and lives in a state that extracts all emotions like love, respect and harmony from her. Her condition is pitiable as the limited resources of her life mock at her helplessness. Her real concern for her daughter is also expressed in usual outbursts of anger. When Claudia is ill, Mrs. MacTeer is frustrated to discover that the substandard life-resources do not permit her to fulfil her children’s basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. As usual, she is trying to make legitimate whatever is available to them in a confined environment. Her weakness is articulated in her frustrating remarks on her daughter’s physically ill and feeble condition. It is not only the submission of Claudia’s weak body to the harshness of external environment, but metaphorically, it
is her weak body which falls into the clutches of racist society. Mrs. MacTeer’s stance as a black woman and a mother does not allow her to bear this truth that her daughter will not be able to resist the brutal forces of nature and artificially created socio-cultural environment. Her words humiliate Claudia and her mother’s anger “bruise her cheeks” (9). She knows her mother’s pain due to her powerlessness to help her daughter in her illness. Claudia narrates:

My mother’s voice drones on, she is not talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name: Claudia. She wipes it up as best as she can and puts a scratchy towel over the large wet place. I lie down again. The rags have fallen from the window crack, and the air is cold. I dare not call her back and am reluctant to leave my warmth. My mother’s anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness “take holt”. By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. But for now I am crying. I know I am making more snot, but I can’t stop. (13-4)

Mrs. MacTeer is a major character in the story. She makes serious and honest attempts to retain and preserve her “ancient properties”, and follows the teachings to pursue traditions of mothering that are respected in her community. She is not only a strong support to her daughters, but also an “othermother” to Pecola. She extends her maternal space by liberating herself from the corners of her own space. Claudia narrates in a passage: “If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn’t so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody- done- gone- and-left- me times. But her voice was so sweet and singing voice so melty I found myself longing for those hard times….“(25). Her songs are like a string of colourful beads. Each bead is a time of her life, and when all these beads are taken together and woven, they become a string to be gifted to her daughters- a beautiful gift that ultimately sows the seeds of a desire in her daughters to relive those days which have rendered such cherished memories to their mother that she has tried to preserve and sing for them today. Her harmonious, rhythmic and melancholic sounds stir varied emotions of respect, love and admiration in Claudia by cultivating a desire to be like one’s own mother. Claudia also extends her loving hand to Pecola which proves that she has inherited values of communal help and sisterhood from her mother. It is the quality of
resilience which is passed from Mrs. MacTeer to her daughters. It can be appropriately seen by the end of the story that Claudia attempts to seek solace, peace and beauty in her life amidst poverty and deprivation, after observing and comparing her content to Pecola’s insanity, which results from Pecola’s discontent from her own life.

Claudia can perceive colours in her mother’s song. This exemplifies the practice of preserving and transmitting African-American culture through the tradition of singing songs and narrating folktales: “Misery coloured by the greens and blues in my mother’s voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet”(26). Her observations confirm the belief that story-telling is a process which heals individuals by enabling them to share and lessen their pain. O’Reilley also observes that she teaches her daughters “how to survive and endure” (125). Claudia is sometimes fascinated with her body’s “graphically nauseating materiality” (Kuenz, 423). Although Heinz Keunz interprets this as her pre-sexualized state, this is the effect of her mother’s confident personality that also teaches her how to honour her blackness, or to say, respect and embrace the uninhibited influences of her culture. This kind of relationship is shown quintessential to mother-daughter relationship. Her mother sets an example of authenticity and authority by valuing her maternal powers as a site of cultural empowerment.

Claudia’s confident childhood rejects the ideology of white culture. She is poor but happy, as her childhood is filled with her mother’s love which assures the MacTeer sisters that their mother wants them to be resilient enough to withstand all external forces and pressures. She is a sharp contrast to Pecola whose mother has never extended her supporting hand for any moral or emotional strength to her daughter. But Claudia remembers her mother’s hand in the darkness of night, a hand that teaches her to be aware and alive. Her mother does not like when Pecola finishes three quarts of milk as she is concerned for her family and its needs. Her frustration and anger is against her own incapacity to feed and take care of all her family needs.

Claudia has learnt to be generous, helping and welcoming to extend her love and support to an unknown black girl in their family. It becomes possible because she
has witnessed her mother when she participates in her community and teaches her daughters that their strength lies in self-respect and value enhancement. As a narrator, she says:

This conversation is like a gently wicked dance: sound meets sound, curtsies, shimmies and retires….all of it punctured with warm-pulsed laughter---like the throb of a heart made jelly….we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timber. (15)

Morrison has beautifully shown a conversation between Claudia and her mother, sharing memories and building reminiscences around their sounds, dance and body movements. This female community is enriched with its cultural and traditional values “in its emphasis on the sensual, signifying the funk” (O’Reilley, 125). According to O’ Reilley:

Mrs. MacTeer speaks her grievances, she is not silenced by them, as is Mrs Breedlove. Frieda and Claudia learn from their mother’s songs, soliloquies, and conversations that women have a voice and that through the speaking, singing and sharing of experiences women can claim and can take control of their lives. (126)

A very significant incident in the novel occurs when Claudia rejects the traditional role of a woman by denying being the mother to her toy doll. She shows her interest in purchasing two white dolls as a Christmas gift, but her interest does not lie in those common games which are identified with a girl-child. Her desire to pretend a mother to the dolls reveals that she is aware of the maternal instinct which is natural in a woman, but her open disapproval to be a mother in her real life also indicates her dislike for the profession of mothering in a woman’s life. Her life is full of “productive and fructifying pain” (10). The dolls which she wishes to possess, truly symbolize the notion of white beauty. They also suggest that her pretense to be their mother actually gives her an object on which she can pour her anger, which is a response to the frequent insults heaped on her by the external world due to her blackness. She has understood that to be angry means to be assertive. Now, she is also able to decipher comprehensive meanings of her mother’s usual outbursts of anger and displays the same kind of behaviour.
In her book *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow states that “women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and with the desire to mother”(7). This capacity and desire springs from the maternal care which a daughter receives from her mother. Mother-daughter relationship is crucial in framing and nurturing this bond. But in the life of Claudia and Freida, conventional and natural expressions of love and care are missing because their mother cannot afford to enjoy the luxury of motherhood with their poverty and scarce resources. It is racial contempt and hatred for the colour white which is manifested in their mother’s frustrated behaviour, along with a display of the girl’s disinterestedness in revering traditional maternal roles.

Thus, Claudia and Freida inherit the necessary tools for their survival such as communal involvement, self-expression, self-actualization and a secure future by liberating themselves from any liking for maternal roles. Morrison explores these African-American maternal models by delineating the characters of mothers like Pauline and Mrs. MacTeer, Sethe and Eva in *Beloved*, and Hannah and Eva in *Sula*, who exhibit their unusual strength and resilience. They are so over-determined to protect their daughters that they slit their throats to gain victory over the slave masters or, sacrifice their lives for the sustenance of their children. In all, they come together to present a wide and diverse portrayal of slave mothers who can shock and startle the readers with their unpredictable behaviour and incomprehensible emotions. In doing so, Morrison has presented a maternal model that is entirely distinct from the white maternal model and still operates on its own, though governed by the norms of white patriarchy.

In this chapter, I have tried to study and examine the characters of Pauline and Mrs. MacTeer who have educated their children unknowingly and justify the theory that it is a mother who transmits her qualities and shadows them most revealingly in her daughter’s personality. If *The Bluest Eye* presents the story of a distorted maternal figure, Sethe and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* serve as role models for those mothers who stand as a threat to the dominating practices of white masters by articulating the unconventional ideals of motherhood that can challenge oppressive practices which are subverting the role of a female. Their character portrayals also help to construct their image as mothers who are actually responsible to foster bonds of love and
affection in their children in order to erect a family structure as the first unit of resistance to confront and oppose the operating forces of white hegemonic society.
End Notes:

1. Stanlie James defines othermothering “as acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal” (45). In contrast community mothers, “take care of the community. These women are typically past their child bearing years” (Wane, 112).

2. In her article “Controlling Images and Black Women’s Oppression”, Patricia Hill Collins writes:

    the first controlling image applied to black woman is of a ‘mammy’- the faithful, obedient, domestic servant. By loving, nurturing and caring for her white children and “family” better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perception of the ideal Black family relationship to elite white male power. Even though she may be well loved and may wield considerable authority in her white “family”, the mammy still knows her place as “obedient servant”. (266-7)
Works Cited:


