TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND FETISHISM IN ALICE WALKER'S "EVERYDAY USE" AND TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZET

Bu tez Afrikan Amerikan toplumu bağlamında nesiller arası aktarılan travma ve başa çıkma ve kontrol mekanizması olarak fetişizmi inceler. Birleşik Devletler'deki Afrika asıllı toplum tarihinin yüzyıllar süren kölelik, zulüm, ayrımcılık ve ırkçılıkla lekelendiği bilinen bir gerçektir. Bu uzun tarih, birbiri ardına nesillerin ağır şekilde travmatize oldukları bu insanlık dışı sistemde doğup büyümüş olduğu anlamına gelir. Bu uzun süreli zulmün vahameti günümüzdeki nesillerin bu travmatize edici olayları ilk elden yaşamamış olmalarına rağmen miras edinmiş oldukları travma belirtileri göstermelerine neden olan bir travma döngüsü yaratmıştır. Bu durum, aynı kimlik çatısı altında olan insanları kapsayan travmanın aktarımıyla açıklanabilmektedir. Miras alınan travmaların bir sonucu olarak özgüven eksikliği, ırkçı sosyalleşme ve yaygın bir öfke duygusu gibi bir takım psikososyal ve davranışsal etkiler gözlemlenebilir. Her travmada olduğu gibi nesiller arası aktarılan travmalar da başa çıkma mekanizmaları gerektirir. Kimi Afrikan Amerikan edebiyat eserlerinde gözlemlenebildiği üzere fetişçi bağlanmalar miras edinilen travmalara karşı başa çıkma mekanizması görevi görebilmektedir. Bu eserlerde karakterler rastgele nesnelere karşı fetişçi bağlanma geliştirerek ve onları araç olarak kullanarak yıkıcı travma miraslarıyla başa çıkmaya çalışırlar. Alice Walker'in "Everyday Use" hikayesi ve Toni Morrison'un *The Bluest Eye* romanı nesiller arası aktarılan travma ve sonucunda gelişen fetişizmin gözlemlenebileceği iki önemli Afrikan Amerikan edebiyat eseridir. Bu tez, Afrikan Amerikan toplumu bağlamında nesiller arası aktarılan travma ve fetişizmle ilgili detaylı bir araştırma sunarak bu iki edebiyat eserinde karakterlerin miras aldıkları travmaları sonucunda gösterdikleri fetişçi bağlanmaları inceler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Nesiller Arası Aktarılan Travma, Fetişizm, Afrikan Amerikan Edebiyatı

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to analyze transgenerational trauma in the African American context and fetishistic attachments developed as a coping mechanism to control and overcome transgenerational traumas. It is a fact that the history of people of African origin in the United States is marked by a centuries-long suffering from slavery, violent oppression, discrimination, and racism, which meant that generations after generations were born into this inhumane system in which they have been heavily traumatized. The gravity and the longitude of the situation created a cycle of trauma where current generations, without having suffered from these conditions first-hand, show signs of a traumatic legacy that can be explained by the transmission of trauma within groups of people with the same identity markers. As a result of inherited traumas, a pattern of psychosocial and behavioral effects can be observed, such as a lack of self-esteem, racist socialization, or a pervasive feeling of anger among the individuals in the community. As with any trauma, transgenerational traumas call for coping mechanisms. In certain works of African American literature, a pattern of fetishistic attachments can be observed as an effect and a coping mechanism for inherited traumas. By developing fetishistic attachments to mostly arbitrary objects and using them as props, characters try to overcome the otherwise destructive outcomes of their traumatic legacies. Two very important works of African American literature where this transgenerational trauma and the resulting fetishism can be observed are Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The thesis presents a detailed research on transgenerational trauma and fetishism and examines how the characters in the two works display fetishistic attachments as a result of their inherited traumas within an African American context.

Key words: Transgenerational Trauma, Fetishism, African American Studies

To my mother, Miyase, and my husband, Mertcan

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that the history of African Americans in the United States is one that is marked by a centuries-long resistance to slavery, racism, and segregation. The transatlantic slave trade which was followed by more than 200 years of chattel slavery, and the subsequent decades of institutionalized segregation in all parts of life amount to almost four hundred years of systematic dehumanization of African Americans. Since the first twenty Africans brought to Virginia as slaves until the modern day, this discrimination is still far from being completely over. The long period of legitimized segregation has bred a cycle of race-based discrimination, which has been deeply seated in various aspects of social life. Although the African American experience in the United States is mostly described with the concepts of segregation, racism, and oppression, when examined closer, it does not do them justice to say that the extent of their tribulations was limited to these general terms. With the indelible mark of brutal slavery, forced heavy labor, sexual abuse, inhumane medical experiments performed on slaves deemed "unfit for duty" (DeGruy, 2005, p. 336), mass racial violence, lynchings, and legitimized segregation, the experience was grave enough to amount to "a crime against humanity" (United Nations, 2002, p. 6) at the very least.

This painful history of Black Americans in the United States was so long and so full of suffering that it inflicted incurably deep wounds. Historical accounts of slavery, Jim Crow laws, legitimized segregation, exclusionary acts in various parts of social life, violence from law enforcement and white nationalist organizations provoked traumas whose effects can still be seen today. According to scholars and researchers like Dr. Joy DeGruy and Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, not only does the psychological toll of such brutal, long-term massive group experiences traumatize the firsthand experiencers of these situations, but it also affects the future generations of victims who share the same identity markers with them such as ethnic, national, or ethno-religious group identities (Brave Heart, 2011; DeGruy, 2005). In such cases, the trauma adopts a transitive nature among the successive generations of a family, community, group, nation, or practitioners of the same religion, making it a transgenerational trauma. In different works in the literature, transgenerational trauma, which can be defined as the transmission of the effects of "deep and distressing experiences within and across generations" (Barlow, 2018, p. 903), is also referred to as intergenerational,

multigenerational, cross-generational, or simply generational trauma, all referring to the transference of the social and psychological effects of a trauma of a group of people to their future generations.

Starting with early research on the children of Holocaust survivors in the 1960's (Rakoff et al., 1966), transgenerational trauma research has covered many different groups such as Native Americans, Aboriginal people (DeAngelis, 2019), war survivors (Castro-Vale et al., 2019), and refugee families (Sangalang & Vang, 2017). One standout group that falls under the transgenerational trauma research is African Americans due to their complex traumatic past in the U.S. Although the effects of transgenerational trauma in the African American community may be "less directly studied" (DeAngelis, 2019) compared to other focus groups such as Holocaust survivors' offspring, there are seminal studies focusing on transgenerational trauma and its effects on the African American people as well. The most prominent of these studies is Dr. Joy DeGruy's monumental work, *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing* (2005), which provides an important theoretical base for this thesis. In her work, DeGruy argues that centuries of slavery and the ensuing discrimination against Black people in the United States has caused transgenerational trauma, and the effects of it are visible today in the African American people. The psychological, social, and behavioral effects of this trauma that can be observed are vacant self-esteem, racist socialization, and a common feeling of anger among the African American population.

Transgenerational trauma theory and DeGruy's related study and observations on the African American community are instrumental in understanding the overrepresentation of African Americans in detention centers (Honoré-Collins, 2005), psychiatric inpatient care facilities (Snowden et al., 2009), child welfare programs (Horton & Watson, 2015) and among the lowest income and poverty groups (Economic Policy Institute, 2020). Not only a social and psychological theory, but also as an area of study in biology and epigenetics (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018), transgenerational trauma provides an important level of explanation for the disproportionate rate of African American people in these institutions. It is important in showing how long-term exposure to traumatic experiences like slavery, oppression and segregation in the past can keep adversely affecting generations after generations even though these

subsequent generations did not necessarily experience such traumatic experiences firsthand.

Trauma, whether individual or transgenerational, creates a need for coping mechanisms (Goodman, 2013, p. 386). Coping and resilience strategies may take different forms and may be passed down from generation to generation just like the trauma itself, such as sustaining one's culture despite adversities and forming closed family systems (Goodman, 2013, p. 389). Yet, coping mechanisms can vary across communities, families, or individuals. One such coping mechanism that can be observed in a selection of African American literature works, as in the focus of this thesis, is fetishism.

Although the abstract nature of fetishism has made it suitable to be interpreted in various ways, the overarching meaning behind the concept relates to the meaning attached to arbitrary objects, "endowed with qualities pertaining to human relationships" (Iacono, 2016, p. 1). A deeper exploration of the fetishism literature brings out different aspects of fetishism that expose its potential exploitation as a coping mechanism. One such study on fetishism is Anne McClintock's *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest* (1995) in which she takes a more overarching perspective on fetishism, taking race and class issues into consideration. She argues that fetish objects embody social contradictions that are also experienced at a personal level, and an attribution of power to the fetish object and its manipulation gives a person a sense of control over ambiguities (pp.184-185). In this respect, just like Freud's fetish (1927, pp. 152-153), a fetish object can act as a prop or a tool for coping with trauma and the complex emotions it brings. McClintock's (1995) interpretation of the fetish as standing "at the cross-roads of psychoanalysis and social history, inhabiting the threshold of both personal and historical memory" (p. 184), having a "repetitious, often ritualistic recurrence" and being "experienced at an intensely personal level" (p. 184) despite stemming from social contradictions is parallel to the nature of transgenerational trauma with its "timeless, repetitious, and infectious characteristics" (Balaev, 2008, p.152) and its spectral nature which make it bound to return and haunt the victim (Caruth, 1996; Wolfreys, 2015). The intended relationship between the transgenerational trauma and fetishism here is not that of a similarity, but of a cause and effect where transgenerational trauma calls for fetishistic attachments as a coping strategy.

From this vantage point, by examining Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" (1973) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), this thesis seeks to examine transgenerational trauma in the African American community and fetishistic attachments as a coping mechanism against transgenerational trauma. Focusing on the lives of socially and financially disadvantaged African American families in the 1970s and 1940s respectively, both works present uncannily similar fetishistic attachments to the reader, with obvious signs of mostly inherited, but also acquired, traumas. The characters in focus present odd and seemingly groundless attachment to mostly arbitrary objects. The meaning and value they attribute to them is not representative of the innate meaning and value of those objects, making them fetish objects. A closer look at the relationship between these fetishes and the characters reveals a deep-seated, inherited trauma in their background that incites them to seek ways of overcoming them and leaving them behind.

An important note to the reader is that by focusing on the African American population, this thesis does not intend to make any reference to the African religious and anthropological origins of the fetish. Its sole purpose for examining African American literature in relation to transgenerational trauma and fetishism is to open this "less directly studied" (DeAngelis, 2019) area to discussion and, less directly, to show solidarity with the movement to understand and work on ways to overcome cycles of trauma and disadvantage that any oppressed minority group may suffer from. It should also be noted that despite focusing on the transgenerational nature of traumas, this thesis does not imply that, for African American people, trauma is something that only originated in the past, and that traumatic experiences do not exist anymore. In fact, the thesis acknowledges the grim reality of racism and discrimination today, and the traumatizing outcomes of these social illnesses.

In order to provide an efficient reading, this thesis first presents a synoptic chapter on Black Experience in the United States and Trauma. It then explains the concepts of Historical Trauma and Collective Trauma as parts of the broader concept of Transgenerational Trauma. Following these two chapters, a brief introduction to Cultural Trauma is presented in order to explain the difference of this concept from transgenerational trauma to avoid a common confusion in the transgenerational trauma literature. The following chapter explains the overarching theory of Transgenerational Trauma and Modes of Transmission. With an effort to contextualize and make the

necessary connections between the theory and the focus group, the following chapter explains The Effects of Transgenerational Trauma on African Americans. These initial theoretical chapters are followed by the connecting theory of Fetishism, subchaptered under Transgenerational Trauma and Fetishism as a Coping Mechanism. The thesis continues with the application of the theories to the literary works, Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* respectively. It looks at how the characters display effects of transgenerational trauma related to being African American, and how the many instances of fetishistic attachments of different characters function as a coping mechanism. It ends with a conclusion chapter that summarizes and brings the discussion to an end.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Black Experience in the United States and Trauma

"In order to cope with a trauma, we symbolize."

Slavoj Žižek, 2001

Starting with the legal institution of chattel slavery in the United States, people of African origin lived and died under unimaginably difficult circumstances. Although institutionalized slavery ended with the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, the oppression and marginalization of Black Americans continued for a long time in everyday social life. Starting with the times of slavery, African American people were subjected to horrendous crimes for centuries. As shown by studies, African American people suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at much higher rates compared to the rest of the population (Wiliams et al., 2014). It is highly unlikely that the 246 years of institutionalized chattel slavery and the subsequent years of oppression and marginalization did not play a role in the African American people's predisposition to suffer from this disorder. The fact that African American people suffer from PTSD more than the general population cannot be regarded as just a mere coincidence. Years of subjection to the worst crimes imaginable during the years of slavery and the following years of oppression must have left a mark on the collective consciousness of the African American people. Although years have passed since the abolition of slavery and institutionalized discrimination, the fact that the African-American people today are predisposed to suffer from PTSD more than the general population can be explained by one thing: the initial trauma suffered firsthand by those who were born under slavery and lived through the following institutionalized discrimination has been transferred from generation to generation, causing what is called "transgenerational trauma", or in other words, generational trauma, intergenerational trauma, or multigenerational trauma. In the case of African American people, it might also be referred to as "historical trauma", a type of transgenerational trauma resulting from "traumatic experiences or events that are shared by a group of people within a society, or even by an entire community, ethnic, or national group" (Franco, 2021).

2.1.1. Historical Trauma

The most prominent research into historical trauma was conducted by associate professor Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a social worker, and a mental health expert. Brave Heart drew on the initial historical trauma research that was conducted on the Holocaust survivors in the 1960s and developed and conceptualized the theory of historical trauma. She explains her theory of historical trauma as a "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences" (Brave Heart, 2011, p. 283). Brave Heart developed the theory while she was working with the Lakota people, a Native American tribe. The theory was developed over a 20-year period through clinical practice and observations, along with initial quantitative and qualitative research on the topic. During her research, Brave Heart realized that substance abuse, violence, suicidal tendencies, and female mortality rates were higher in the native Lakota community than in the other races in the United States (Brave Heart, 2011, pp. 283-284). The study also revealed that among the Native youth, suicide and homicide death rates, and alcoholism were higher compared to youth in the general population (p. 283). Searching for answers to the comparatively higher rates of destructive tendencies among the Natives, Brave Heart observed, through testimonies, observations, and interviews with the Lakota people she focused on, a pattern of inherited grief, unresolved anger, and problems bonding with family members. She came to the conclusion that such psychological and social problems stem from the repeated traumatic losses endured by the Lakota people across generations in the past. Brave Heart suggests that aside from the loss of an estimated 300 people during the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 (Carter, 2011); war, starvation, compulsory displacement of Lakota children in the boarding schools (Tanner, 1982), and an epidemic of tuberculosis killing more than one-third of the native population (Hoxie, 1989), the Lakota people also suffered from forced assimilation through being pressured to give up their culture, language, and spirituality. This assimilation resulted in weakened family ties and social structures. (Brave Heart, 2011, p. 225) She suggests that these losses have resulted in an ongoing transgenerational trauma in the Lakota people, the effects of which are still observable in the community today.

Brave Heart's theory of historical trauma can be identified as a form of transgenerational trauma. The term "historical trauma" stresses the fact that trauma was

suffered by a collective of people in the past and the descendants of this collective are still manifesting the symptoms of that trauma within the community even though they themselves did not personally go through or witness the traumatic incidents. Here, Derrida's (2000) notion of "the unexperienced experience" (p. 89) delineates the psychological experience of the victims of historical and transgenerational trauma. On the other hand, transgenerational trauma refers to trauma that is transferred through generations, be it the trauma of a nation, a community, or even a family. Although the terms are very similar in meaning, the term "transgenerational trauma" stresses the transferability of the traumatic feelings and trauma responses through generations and in individual persons. Since this thesis will be focusing on the transgenerational nature of historical trauma, the theory will mostly be referred to as transgenerational trauma throughout the thesis.

2.1.2 Collective Trauma

A similar concept, "collective trauma", is also worth mentioning when delving into the concept of trauma and its transmissibility through generations. Collective trauma is the type of trauma affecting an entire society, not necessarily of a historical nature. The first and the most well-known mention of collective trauma is by sociologist Kai Theodor Erikson, in his 1987 book *Everything in its path: Destruction of community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. In this non-fiction book, Erikson documents what happened in the aftermath of the Buffalo Creek flood disaster in West Virginia, killing 125 people, and leaving thousands of people homeless, which was the majority of people living there at the time (Armstrong, 1976, p. 1560). In his book, Erikson describes the catastrophic events that took place in 1972; introduces the reader to Appalachian culture to better contextualize the psychological impacts of the disaster and analyzes the trauma that the survivors experienced after the incident. He suggests that although communities normally bond together after such incidents, based on his observations, this community no longer functioned after the disaster. He links this lack of communal sense and proper communal bonding to being deeply traumatized by the event to the point of losing communal ties and community identity. His observations implicate a trauma that goes beyond the individual, reaching a collective level and affecting all the members of the community. He describes the nature of collective trauma as follows:

> By individual trauma, I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively . . . By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared . . . "We" no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body (Erikson 1976, pp. 153–54).

Erikson's observations of what happened after the Buffalo Creek disaster show that an incident so big and catastrophic can traumatize a whole generation and affect the very core of a community that keeps it together. Such big damage to societal ties breaks all sense of community, potentially affecting the future generations to come.

Similar to Erikson's observations, Gilad Hirschberger also makes some important observations on the theory of collective trauma, taking different aspects of it into consideration. As he puts it, collective trauma

> does not merely reflect an historical fact, the recollection of a terrible event that happened to a group of people. It suggests that the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory it comprises not only a reproduction of the events, but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it. Collective memory of a trauma is different from individual memory because collective memory persists beyond the lives of the direct survivors of the events, and is remembered by group members that may be far removed from the traumatic events in time and space (Hirschberger, 2018, p.1).

Drawing on Hirschberger's description of collective trauma, it can be inferred that the collective suffering from a traumatic event does not have a definite beginning and ending, but that it has an ongoing nature, being "reproduced" within an "ongoing reconstruction of the trauma" in the collective memory of a group of people (Hirschberger, 2018, 1). Therefore, although the term "collective trauma" does not

seem to inherently possess a transferable nature, through the persistence of collective memory, its after-effects, or traumatic responses such as PTSD symptoms, are transmissible. From this viewpoint, it can be said that collective trauma is still transgenerational in nature. Hirschberger points to this by saying that "collective memory persists beyond the lives of the direct survivors of the events and is remembered by group members that may be far removed from the traumatic events in time and space" (p. 1). It is clear from Hirschberger's description of collective trauma that this is a type of transgenerational trauma, suffered not only by the first-hand witnesses, but also by their future generations. With the term "collective trauma", the emphasis is on the fact that it is *collectively* suffered by a group of people that might be related to one another through nationality, ethnicity, religion, etc. Prof. Vamık Volkan, whose research is focused on, but not limited to, generational transmissions of trauma, draws parallels between collective trauma and group identity. He suggests that

> when many members of a group experience a severe and collective trauma, it is not simply a matter of many individuals of that group sharing similar symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, utilizing similar defense mechanisms, or exhibiting symptoms of similar psychological problems. Such traumatic events affect all those under the ethnic or national tent, and all are subjected to societal processes, many of them unconscious, in response (Volkan, 1998, n.d.).

Volkan's observations on the relationship between collective trauma and group identity show that people who share a common identity marker, be it religion, nation, or ethnicity, are equally affected by traumatic events inflicted upon their group. Any such traumatic event will impact their collective unconscious even though they personally are not subjected to it. When it comes to African Americans, it can be said that this group falls under an "ethnic tent," making it susceptible to the impacts of a possible collective trauma.

Returning to Hirschberger's description of collective trauma, he describes it as a recollection and reproduction of a terrible incident that has happened. Hirschberger's definition stresses the recurring and reappearing quality of a traumatic event. Here, the recollection and the so-called reproduction of the traumatic event does not only take place in individual persons, but it is collectively recalled and reproduced by a group of people who have experienced a traumatic event as a community. Hirschberger also talks

about the reconstruction of the trauma, signaling its spectral nature -always coming back to haunt its sufferers. In a similar sense, in his interpretation of the "transhistorical level" of loss and absence, Dominick LaCapra (1999) describes the spectral nature of trauma saying that "something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or revenant" (p. 700). Hirschberger's attribution of spectrality to trauma can be explained through "intergenerational trauma response", which Brave Heart (1999) describes as "a constellation of characteristics associated with massive cumulative group trauma across generations, similar to those found among Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants" (p. 1). As can be inferred from Brave Heart's description of intergenerational trauma response, experiencing the after-effects of collective trauma is not limited to the survivors of it, but it also keeps on affecting the generations to come. About the spectrality of trauma, Julian Wolfreys (2015) writes

> to read trauma is to register the sign of a secondary experience and recognition of the return of something spectral in the form of a trace or sign signifying, but not representing directly, that something, having occurred, has left its mark, an inscription of sorts on the subject's unconscious, and one which, moreover, can and does return repeatedly, though never as the experience as such (n.d.).

About the spectrality, or repetition of trauma, Cathy Caruth (1996) mentions the "inescapability of its belated impact" (p. 7). In her "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History" (1996), she writes that "the story of trauma is inescapably bound to a referential return" (p. 7). Similar to Hirschberger's description, Caruth (1996) describes trauma response as "the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (p. 2). She further describes the spectral nature of trauma by describing it as something that

> is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance— returns to haunt the survivor later on (p. 4).

To look at Caruth's description of traumatic response in the light of transgenerational trauma, the victim does not need to be the person who suffers it firsthand, but that who inherited it from their family, or in a larger sense, from their community.

Another point from Hirschberger's (2018) description of collective trauma is worth mentioning here. He suggests that the collective memory always reconstructs a

trauma “in an attempt to make sense of it” (p. 1). Traumas are puzzling and uncomforting to the human mind. Although it is never a pleasant feeling to recall a traumatic event, it is crucial for the trauma to be treated so that the individual can overcome the mental challenges it poses. Therefore, as Hirschberger puts it, human consciousness always tries to make sense of traumas. When it is a collective trauma, the healing should take place both on a collective level and on an individual level. Regarding the need for collective healing, Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004) writes in his “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma” that with collective healing,

> the aim is to restore collective psychological health by lifting societal repression and restoring memory. To achieve this, social scientists stress the importance of finding—through public acts of commemoration, cultural representation, and public political struggle—some collective means for undoing repression and allowing the pent-up emotions of loss and mourning to be expressed (p. 5).

Although the trauma is collective here, the individuals belonging to a community that has suffered from a collective traumatic event may need healing on an individual level as well. As Alexander (2004) writes in his same work, “traumatic feelings and perceptions,…come not only from the originating event but from the anxiety of keeping it repressed. Trauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self” (p. 5). Since a collective trauma is transgenerational in nature, the cascading effect of trauma causes the future generations of the sufferers to experience post-traumatic symptoms, hence the need for healing on an individual level. Both historical and collective traumas result in a loss of identity, having the potential to create negative effects on future generations.

2.1.3. Cultural Trauma

Aside from the concepts of historical trauma and collective trauma that fall under the concept of transgenerational trauma, another concept worth mentioning here is “cultural trauma.” Although the term might suggest a similar concept as collective trauma, it is essentially different. Since transgenerational trauma theory deals with and in a way encompasses historical and collective trauma concepts, it is important to make the difference between this theory and cultural trauma theory in order to avoid confusion. The most prominent scholar working on the concept of cultural trauma is Jeffrey C. Alexander, an American sociologist and social theorist. He (2004) describes

cultural trauma as a trauma occurring "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (p. 1). Although this description of cultural trauma sounds very similar to historical and collective trauma, which are both transgenerational, Alexander's further elaboration on his theory reveals that it is actually not. His theory of cultural trauma is essentially the culture and discourse that is built around an event that gives it a traumatic nature. He suggests that "trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society" (p. 2). In his work, he continuously questions if the events that we deem traumatic are inherently traumatic, or if the culture that is created around them attributes them traumatic features. In doing that, he "calls attention to social processes of articulation and representation" (Eyerman, 2021). In a sense, Alexander questions the validity of the widely accepted attribution of "traumatic". He elaborates on his cultural trauma theory to suggest that "events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution" (2004, p. 8). Although the terms cultural trauma and transgenerational trauma are used interchangeably in some literature dealing with the transmission of trauma, it is important to acknowledge that the terms represent different concepts, especially since this thesis will later make references to an important work in the field that focuses on the epigenetic inheritance of transgenerational trauma that arguably refers to the concept as "cultural trauma".

2.2. Transgenerational Trauma and Modes of Transmission

Returning to the umbrella term of transgenerational trauma, it might be important to get an idea of how the theory came into being in the first place. The theory has a relatively short history, having been investigated and studied for about 60 years now (Himmelfarb, 1992). The first investigations into the theory started with the descendants of Holocaust survivors. One of the first studies to mention the existence of transgenerational trauma is Canadian psychiatrist Vivian M. Rakoff's, J.J. Sigal's, and N.B. Epstein's (1966) seminal article, *Children and families of concentration camp survivors*. In the study, Rakoff and his colleagues investigate and document "the high rates of psychological distress among children of Holocaust survivors" (DeAngelis, 2019). Similar to historical and collective trauma descriptions, but overarching both concepts, transgenerational trauma theory suggests that

> a massive trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual living centuries later who shares a similar attribute of the historical group, such as sharing the same race, religion, nationality, or gender due to the timeless, repetitious, and infectious characteristics of traumatic experience and memory. Conversely, individual trauma can be passed to others of the same ethnic, racial, or gender group who did not experience the actual event, but because they share social or biological similarities, the traumatic experience of the individual and group become one (Balaev, 2008, p. 152).

Transgenerational trauma may begin with a traumatic incident that traumatizes an individual, or the members of a family, or a larger community such as a nation, an ethnic group, a racial group, or an ethnoreligious group such as the Jews, or any other group or community. In order to delineate what constitutes such groups that are susceptible to collective traumas, Vamık Volkan defines the "large-group identity—whether it refers to religion, nationality, or ethnicity—as the subjective experience of thousands or millions of people who are linked by "*a persistent sense of sameness"* (Volkan, 2001, p. 81). This "persistent sense of sameness" is what makes a group of people "a community" that can be classified using certain group identity markers. Being a community that is tied together by a sense of sameness means sharing the same culture within the group. This sense of sameness, or having a shared culture that is transferred through generations is what makes the generational transfer of trauma possible.

The most likely mode of transmission of trauma is transmission through culture. "Transmission of cultural memory through rituals, symbols, and practices serves to transmit learning and meaning, to allow future generations to understand the world and to respond adaptively" (Lehrner & Yehuda, 2018, p. 10). Therefore, future generations of any given community are naturally affected by their communal culture, especially if this culture is one that is not the dominant culture in any given time or place, but a minority culture that people try hard to preserve through the sustainment of traditions, language, rituals and so on. Since events that traumatize an entire generation of a community leave indelible marks on their collective consciousness, it would be impossible to think that future generations would not carry the traces of such traumas. Cultures are what shape our way of thinking, feeling, speaking, reacting, and living. It is something that is naturally transferred from the family and from the outer community

to the new generations. If any community is deeply traumatized by something in their past, it will naturally shape their culture, and in turn, will naturally be transmitted to the generations to come. Cecile Rousseau and Aline Drapeau (1985), in their chapter in the *International handbook of multigenerational legacies of trauma* quote Obeyesekere to note that "culture provides the tools for grieving" (p. 465). On that note, Rousseau and Drapeau (1998) suggest that "when it comes to trauma, culture, which is obviously involved in the reparative process, may be equally involved in determining how, and how intensely, trauma is relived." (p. 465).

One of the most important modes of transmission is through oral tradition. Especially in close-knit communities, stories told by older generations to younger generations help transmit information, tradition, and culture. Trauma can thus be transhistorically conveyed to the new generations through narration. To indicate the contagious nature of trauma, Cathy Caruth (1996) writes that trauma "is never simply one's own" (p. 24). The symptoms of the survivors are passed on to upcoming generations through language and culture. About the transmission of trauma through a common culture and language, Kai Erikson, in his "Notes on Trauma and Community" (1991), writes that trauma "governs the way members relate to one another…. the shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a common language, a kinship among those who have come to see themselves as different" (p. 461).

An interesting line of investigation into the transmission of trauma is the biological transmission. The transmission of trauma is not limited to culture and narration, but strangely enough, as shown through biological and psychiatric studies, traumas may also be transmitted through epigenetic inheritance. Epigenetics is

> the study of heritable changes in gene expression in response to behavioral and environmental factors that do not change the underlying DNA sequence. In other words, epigenetics is the study of inherited changes in phenotypical properties without a difference in the inherited genetic makeup (Franco, 2021).

Amy Lehrner and Rachel Yehuda, Ph.D., in their article, *Cultural trauma and epigenetic inheritance* (2018), describe epigenetics as "the means through which environmental influences "get under the skin," directing transcriptional activity and influencing the expression or suppression of genes" (p. 1). In other words, there is potential for the experience of trauma to affect our epigenetic make-up, which in turn, will have the potential to affect future generations biologically.

There are a number of scientific studies focused on the epigenetic inheritance of trauma. In their article, *The relevance of epigenetics to PTSD: Implications for the DSM-V* (2009), Rachel Yehuda, Ph.D. and Linda M. Bierer, MD suggest that

> Epigenetic modifications, such as DNA methylation, can occur in response to environmental influences to alter the functional expression of genes in an enduring and potentially, intergenerationally transmissible manner. As such, they may explain inter-individual variation, as well as the long-lasting effects of trauma exposure (p. 427).

In another study conducted by Rachel Yehuda and Amy Lehrner (2018), titled *Intergenerational transmission of trauma effects: Putative role of epigenetic mechanisms*, they research how the post-traumatic stress disorder following traumatic incidents such as Holocaust, slavery, and colonization is transferred through generations through some changes in the epigenetic make-up. As they report, after the first clinical studies were conducted on the offspring of Holocaust survivors, later studies were done on the children of Vietnam veterans and Yom Kippur war veterans who have a Holocaust survivor parent, who showed a "higher prevalence of PTSD, mood and anxiety disorders" (p. 244).

Although there are a number of studies working on the biological evidence of the presence of the generational transmission of trauma, one cannot disregard or diminish the role of cultural inheritance. In *Cultural trauma and epigenetic inheritance* (2018), Lehrner and Yehuda, who have worked extensively on the biological side of the debate, acknowledge the undeniable role of cultural inheritance as follows:

> The experience and transmission of trauma effects are embedded within a larger cultural context that includes narratives, beliefs, and practices. The effects of trauma are also felt and transmitted within a socio-structural context that includes access to resources, relative safety of the neighborhood, and the larger political environment (p. 7).

Even though the role of epigenetics were to be proven in the transmission of trauma, it still would not overshadow the role of culture, narrative, rituals, and familial or communal practices. Since this is a literature thesis looking at the issue from a socio-cultural and literary perspective, the thesis will not focus on the scientific studies on the issue to discuss transgenerational trauma any further on.

2.2.1. Transgenerational Trauma and African Americans

Although most literature on transgenerational trauma focuses on the Holocaust survivors' offspring, there is another group that has been through an equally, if not more, horrible traumatic process: the African Americans. The Middle Passage, a stage of the Atlantic Slave Trade that started in the early 1500s and ended in the 1860s (Rosenbaum, 2020), then 246 years of chattel slavery, and one hundred years of institutionalized oppression and discrimination equals almost 400 years of real, solid trauma for the African American community. When dealing with the concept of transgenerational trauma, it is impossible to ignore the African American community as a surviving example of it. The extremely long period of slavery and the following period of legal discrimination systematically inscribed a feeling of "otherness" on the psyche of the African American people. This community was not only discriminated against, belittled, and oppressed, but also tortured, both physically and psychologically, at the hands of the slave masters and under the racist movements encouraged by discriminatory laws following slavery.

It is not difficult to see a traumatized community of African American people today, considering the ongoing racist movements and blatant police brutality against Black Americans; however, according to Dr. Joy DeGruy, the African American population today is not only traumatized by the attacks and discrimination of today and the recent past, but they are also traumatized by something from a distant past in their history: slavery (DeGruy, 2005). DeGruy, an African American writer and academic, theorizes that the African American population today has long been suffering from a condition which she calls "Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome", or "PTSS", which she describes as similar to post-traumatic stress disorder that she claims has been transferred through generations in the African American community. In her book, "Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing" (2005), she argues that due to many years of slavery and the following period of oppression, the African American population went through years of trauma, and the effects are still seen today in this population, manifested as vacant self-esteem, internalized racism, ever-present anger, problems with self-image and identity, which, as she argues, are very similar to post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. DeGruy discusses how the African Americans came to be collectively traumatized by describing the years of suffering and trauma as follows:

> One hundred and eighty years of the Middle Passage, 246 years of slavery, rape and abuse; one hundred years of illusory freedom. Black codes, convict leasing, Jim Crow, all codified by our national institutions. Lynching, medical experimentation, redlining, disenfranchisement, grossly unequal treatment in almost every aspect of our society, brutality at the hands of those charged with protecting and serving. Being undesirable strangers in the only land we know. During the three hundred and eighty-five years since the first of our ancestors were brought here against their will, we have barely had time to catch our collective breath. That we are here at all can be seen as a testament to our willpower, spiritual strength, and resilience. However, three hundred and eighty-five years of physical, psychological, and spiritual torture have left their mark (pp. 460-461).

DeGruy also describes how easily the trauma suffered by the ancestors of African Americans is transferred through generations. Her discussion suggests that there are basically two main means of the transmission of trauma. These are through parenting, and through cultural transmission. With respect to the transmission through parenting, she argues that African Americans living under slavery adopted a survival reflex. She describes it as follows:

> The question remains, how are such effects of trauma transmitted through generations? The answer is quite straightforward. How do we learn to raise our children? Almost entirely through our own experience of being raised. Most of us raise our children based upon how we ourselves were raised. What do you think the result would be if the primary skills that mothers teach their children are those associated with adapting to a lifetime of torture? (pp. 497-498).

As DeGruy discusses, during slavery and the following years, for African Americans, bringing up children was a matter of teaching them how to survive physically and psychologically. In her book (2005), she exemplifies an imaginary, yet quite a realistic scene to show how making denigrating claims about their children was a way of protecting them for a slave mother. She imagines a scene where a slave master makes seemingly nice comments about the teenage daughter of a slave mother; and the mother, just to protect her daughter from a possible scenario of rape or being sold, talks her down by saying that her daughter is incapable, stupid and good for nothing. This

protective behavior, as DeGruy claims, became an inherent characteristic of the African American parenting style. She goes on to talk about instances where she observed it in today's African American parents. She suggests that parenting styles have been radically affected by the traumatic responses to slavery and the following period in which the African Americans were far from being safe in the United States.

As another way of transmission, DeGruy (2005) talks about transmission through culture, a claim that is similarly discussed by social theorists who work on the same topic. She suggests that the earlier generations possibly suffered from PTSD, which the following generations inherited. She says that

> In addition to the family, the legacy of trauma is also passed down through the community. During slavery, the black community was a suppressed and marginalized group. Today, the African American community is made up of individuals and families who collectively share differential anxiety and adaptive survival behaviors passed down from prior generations of African Americans, many of whom likely suffered from PTSD (p. 504).

She also mentions that the transmission of a collective trauma as such occurs very easily in a society like the African Americans. Regarding this, she points to the "African tradition of transmitting knowledge and wisdom" through "symbolic imagery" (p. 165). She alludes to the oral transmission of trauma as follows:

> If a picture is worth a thousand words, from the African perspective the lessons that can be learned from stories and analogies are worth a thousand pictures. Throughout Africa, storytellers hold an esteemed place in the community. They are the repositories of knowledge. They are the teachers. They pass down their wisdom through stories, the symbolic imagery of their life experience. This oral tradition has been passed along and is evident in African American culture today. The importance of learning through symbolic imagery cannot be stressed enough (pp. 165-166).

Based on DeGruy's account, it is not difficult to say that African American society sustains the traditions and knowledge of the past and culturally transfers it to the new generations. Looking at these observations and considering the fact that generations of African Americans spent their whole lives in slavery, it would be appropriate to say that these survival reflexes and traumatic responses must have been part of the culture and are indispensably transmitted through generations.

2.2.2. The Effects of Transgenerational Trauma on the African American Community

DeGruy (2005) carefully observes a pattern of behavior in the African American population suffering from the legacy of their ancestors' traumas, and categorizes these transgenerational effects as vacant self-esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization. She describes self-esteem as "the judgment we make concerning our own worth" (p. 518). She suggests that we determine our self-esteem through the influence of our family, our community, and society. Our families affect our self-esteem by how they raise and treat us; the community we belong to affects it through norms; and society affects it through institutions, laws, and the media. DeGruy suggests that all three of these spheres have a negative effect on the self-esteem of African Americans. She describes how the abovementioned negative parenting practices affect an African American child's developing self-esteem by inscribing a feeling of weakness, submissiveness, limitedness, and low self-worth. As for the effects of the community on the African Americans' self-esteem, she mentions the "crabs in a barrel" (p. 539) mentality as a summary of the relationships within the community. She discusses how the overseer mentality during slavery, where one of the slaves, being the overseer, joins his slave master in the oppression of the other slaves, has turned into a discouraging and negative culture that she claims to be pervasive among the African Americans. She claims that as a result of the overseer mentality in the community, a Black American might feel threatened by the success of a fellow Black American, and instead of being supportive, they might try and pull each other down. Regarding the effect of society, DeGruy exemplifies the contribution of society to the vacant self-esteem as the negative representation of African Americans in the media. She mentions how African Americans are displayed as "criminals; disadvantaged, academically deficient and sexually irresponsible. All these and more serve to influence how African Americans perceive themselves and so impact their assessment of their own worth" (p. 534). She suggests that vacant self-esteem is one of the symptoms of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, and "is transmitted from generation to generation through the family, community, and society" (p. 529).

Another persistent pattern of behavior is ever-present anger, as observed by DeGruy (2005) in the African American community. She says that a feeling of anger has been planted in their collective consciousness and that it comes from years of

violence, humiliation, degradation, blocked goals, being pushed to the margins of the society, and not having equal access to the opportunities that the country is actually able to provide. She recognizes the overrepresentation of African Americans in state prisons, and she claims that it is mostly due to the inherited anger resulting from slavery, oppression, racism, and the unequal conditions of living.

DeGruy (2005) also talks about racist socialization as a result of inherited trauma. She plays with the widely used term "racial socialization" and suggests that the adoption of the oppressor's value standards has contributed to what she calls "racist socialization" among whites and Black Americans. She says that

> At this (slave master's) value system's foundation is the belief that white, and all things associated with whiteness, are superior; and that black, and all things associated with blackness, are inferior. Through the centuries of slavery and the decades of institutionalized oppression that followed, many African Americans have, in essence, been socialized to be something akin to white racists (p. 570).

She observes how African Americans came to adopt the white standards for many things, such as beauty and material success, and that it has shifted the African American perception of the world to one that is predominantly white. She claims that this adoption of white standards of evaluation has contributed to an illusory feeling of inferiority in the African American population and that it has been going on for generations.

Essentially, DeGruy's (2005) observations point to problems with the African American identity under the influence of transgenerational trauma. Similar to DeGruy's, there are some other studies focusing on Black identity-related issues that have emerged as a result of transgenerational trauma. Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004), coiner of the term "cultural trauma" says that "trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity" (p. 10). Alexander's views on collective trauma generally focus on the question of the reality of trauma; yet although he questions if events themselves are traumatic or not, he acknowledges the effects of trauma through its impact on a society's identity. His description of cultural trauma also focuses on the impact of a trauma on the group consciousness of a community, "marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (2004, p. 1). In many cultures, the transmitted memory of a community's past experiences, beliefs, and traditions helps transmit a sense of identity to future generations. In this case, it would be impossible to think that an experience so traumatic

and taking centuries would not be a part of a community's identity. In a similar sense, Vamık Volkan (2001) also suggests that such traumas become part of the culture of a community, almost like a "story the community tells about the world, about itself, and about its survival" (p. 88). William E. Cross, Jr. (1998), theorist and scholar working on ethnic identity development with a focus on Black identity development, similarly suggests that Black identity is decidedly very much affected by the legacy of the trauma of slavery. In his *Black psychological functioning and the legacy of slavery* (1998), he describes the shaping of the African American identity under the influence of slavery and its traumatic impacts as follows:

> Nevertheless, if the Africans, in a plural sense, entered slavery as Africans, they left slavery with frames of reference that were decidedly not African. Taking a sledge-hammer approach, one can conclude that slavery stripped Africans of their true heritage and forced them to become a shallow imitation of white people. From this vantage point, one stresses the fact that the slave owners designed the slavery system to deracinate the Africans and make them pliable. They forced the slaves to see themselves as the slave owner wanted them to be seen: inferior Sambos suffering from self-loathing and a sense of cultural inferiority, divided by a skin-color hierarchy, and driven by an intense desire to find acceptance by the majority group, on terms dictated by the majority group (p. 394).

Cross Jr.'s remarks and observations are similar to DeGruy's at this point. Being from within the community, DeGruy's remarks reflect a first-hand experience, an experienced reality. Putting the Black American community under the scope, Cross Jr. arrives at a similar observation from a scholarly approach. Both stress the effects of the transferred trauma of slavery on the identity of African Americans today.

2.3. Transgenerational Trauma and Fetishism as an Effect and a Coping Mechanism

2.3.1. Fetishism

Adopted by multiple thinkers in various studies and disciplines, the concept of fetishism has been used for centuries to describe the relationship between people and objects. Since the term dates back to as early as the 16th century, it has assumed different meanings in different fields over time, yet still retaining similar characteristics in

meaning. The most well-known and extensive study on the concept of fetishism was conducted by William Pietz, a historian and an academic whose works focus on the concept. In his trilogy, *The problem of the fetish, I* (1985), *The problem of the fetish, II: The origin of the fetish* (1987), and *The problem of the fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the enlightenment theory of fetishism* (1988), he traces the term back to its African origins and discusses when and how it came to be, and how it was used in different disciplines over time. Although the term originated on the West coast of Africa (Pietz, 1987, p. 23) to describe the animistic African religions, later, in an effort to describe "the problematic of the social value of material objects" (Pietz, 1985, p. 7) during the cross-cultural encounters of different social groups and their systems, the term became much broader in meaning in time and came to stand for different problematic concepts. In part 4.1 of this thesis, a definition and history of the term will be presented along with Pietz's monumental findings and ideas on the concept; then the literature on the concept will be briefly reviewed with a focus on the most prominent usages of the term, and it will be followed with a more recent interpretation of the idea of fetishism that will provide the basis for the fetishism related discussions of the thesis.

In his extensive study on fetishism, William Pietz (1985) takes a historical approach to the term to explain how it came to be and what it stood for during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the period in which the term is believed to have originated. He suggests that the term came into being in a colonial context when much of the interaction between the European colonials and African locals was taking place on the West coast of Africa. These distinct parties had different value systems and standards; therefore, there was an ongoing clash in the trading relations in this culturally diverse mercantile space, so much so that these entirely distinct cultures were "mutually incomprehensible" (1987, p. 24) to one another. The term "fetish" appeared in this context to describe the different social values of objects, especially those that are believed to have religious, commercial, sexual, and aesthetic values other than their innate values as mere objects.

Drawing on Wyatt MacGaffey's 1977 study *Fetishism revisited: Kongo "Nkisi" in sociological perspective*, Pietz suggests that the term originated from the Portuguese word *feitiço*, which MacGaffey vaguely defines as "charm" (1977, p. 172); then it evolved into the sixteenth-century pidgin word *fetisso*, and then to the more recent European versions, such as Charles De Brosses's *fétichisme*, which he coined in 1760 (Leonard, 2016, p. 107). In his ethno-historical study on the idea of the fetish, Pietz

(1987) discusses the four recurrent characteristics of the term in its different usages in different disciplines. The first characteristic that he identifies is the "irreducible materiality" of the fetish object. He describes the fetish as a matter or a material object that is "viewed as the locus of religious activity or psychic investment" (p. 23). At this point, he also distinguishes it from an idol, which brings a similar concept to mind. Unlike an idol, however, a fetish is irreducibly material, whereas an idol represents and is visually similar to an entity that is supposedly residing in some other place. His second characteristic is the singularity and repetition of the fetish. He says that elements that are essentially heterogeneous, and not necessarily material things but narrative structures, beliefs, and desires also, are brought together and forged into a novel identity in the fetish. This description of the fetish suggests that through fetishization, an object is stripped of its original material quality as it is, and it is given a novel identity. As its third characteristic, Pietz says that the fetish is either borne of the differences in the social value of things or that it has an utterly personal attribution of value. As the title of his trilogy, "*The problem of the fetish*" indicates, he mentions "the problem of the nonuniversality and constructedness of social value" (1985, p. 9) presented by the fetish that became apparent when the two different cultures and value systems mingled during the colonial voyages to Africa. To point out the nonuniversal and the constructed social value of material objects that make them fetishes, he mentions how differently gold was estimated by Europeans and Africans during colonial times. Whereas gold possessed a very high value as a material for Europeans and within the European system of financial valuation, it was an object of ornamentation among the Africans and did not possess any more or any different value than being an ornament. Pietz's final characteristic of the fetish focuses on the relation between an individual's body and the fetish object. Like a voodoo doll, a fetish object possesses power over an individual, over their health, actions, desires, choices, and identity, representing "a subversion of the ideal of the autonomously determined self" (1987, p. 23). In this way, a fetish has power over an individual's life, a power to hex the owner or user of it.

Apart from the origin, earliest usages, and characteristics of the term, Pietz (1985) also reviews the European literature on fetishism in different disciplines. He argues that the term's "conceptual doubtfulness and referential uncertainty" (p. 5) has allowed different fields in the humanities and social sciences to use the term to define relatively different, but essentially similar concepts. Although the term was originally used to describe objects that are used for spiritual purposes, the meaning attributed to

the word “fetish” transcended the religious context and evolved into ‘the idea of the fetish’ and was adopted by many of the most influential thinkers, the most well-known of which are Alfred Binet, Jean Baudrillard, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Homi Bhabha. Psychologist Alfred Binet, the famous co-creator of the precursor of the modern IQ test, used the term to describe the widely known sexual fetishes (Bass, 2015, p. 19; Binet, 1988, p. 3; Pietz, 1985, p. 9). He describes the fetish as a sexual perversion that involves an adoration for inanimate objects (Binet, 1988, p. 3). Apart from Binet’s well-known attribution of the notion of sexual “perversion” to the term, the interpretations of Baudrillard, Marx, Freud, and Bhabha take up an important place in fetishism literature, too. In Marxism, fetishism takes a philosophical turn, and becomes “commodity fetishism”. In his monumental 1867 work, “Capital: The Critique of Political Economy”, Marx describes commodity fetishism as a false attribution of labor power and inherent value to objects, which transcend their real use-value as materials. Marx argues that as long as an object possesses a use-value, it is simply an object that serves a purpose. However, when it is perceived as a commodity, it assumes a monetary value that transcends its use value, and it is inscribed with a value that neither matches its actual material value, nor the labor invested into creating it. “People in a capitalist society thus begin to treat commodities as if value inhered in the objects themselves, rather than in the amount of real labor expended to produce the object” (Felluga, 2011). Thus, commodity fetishism fosters a capitalistic system where the producers of commodities and their labor into creating those commodities are almost invisible.

In his *For a critique of the political economy of the sign* (1981), drawing mainly on Marx’s ideas of commodity fetishism, Baudrillard “explores the creation of value in objects through the social exchange of sign values” (Dant, 1996, p. 2). He suggests that fetishized objects have a social value that functions as a representative of the social status of their owners, being images “either invested with an alienated aura or with this investment withdrawn” (Gane, 2011, p. 374) through the social construction of value attached to fetishized commodities. This way, a fetish object plays a part in the cultural identity formation of the consumer. Baudrillard’s take on fetishism intersects with Marx’s in that they both represent an altered state of power dynamics in the relations between humans and objects since the fetish possesses power over people instead of vice versa. “In capitalism, men and women produce an ever-expanding array of wealth, but ironically, they experience the very things they create as having power over them. Consequently, they bow down and worship the fetish (capital)” (Donham, 2018, p. 29).

Similar to this description of Marx's commodity fetishism, Baudrillard, too, regarding the fetish, mentions its "strange ability to hex the user" (Apter, 1991, p. 2), an ability that it possesses by means of people's attribution of power and value to them.

Another prominent take on fetishism is Freud's fetishism, which is one of the most well-known of all references and adaptations of the term. In his 1927 essay "Fetishism", Freud gives the term a psychoanalytical identity. He defines fetishism as the avowal and disavowal of a male child's incredulity at his mother's lack of a penis (Freud, 1927, pp. 152-153). Upon realizing that the mother does not have a penis as he does, the child experiences castration anxiety and disavows his mother's difference. Deep down, the boy still knows that his mother does not have a penis, but he is too scared to fully accept the fact since it gives way to his castration anxiety. In this way, "women's difference is disavowed and misconstrued as lack" (McClintock, 1995, p. 190). Through the feelings of disavowal, and substitution of a fetish object as a surrogate penis, the boy perceives the fetish object as a substitute "for the thing thought to be missing. The substitute also functions as a mask, covering over and disavowing the traumatic sight of nothing…" (Mulvey, 1993, p. 11). Thus, the fetish in Freudian psychoanalysis is a "compromise object" (McClintock, 1995, p. 201). The title of Octave Mannoni's 1969 article, "*Je Sais Bien, Mais Quand Meme* [I know very well, but still]" (pp. 9-33) summarizes the psychological state of the male child's avowal, disavowal, and substitution through fetishization.

Another use of the term *fetish* appears in Homi Bhabha's essay *The Other question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism*, in his "Location of Culture" (1983). In his essay, he mainly discusses how the colonizer strategically posits and introduces the colonized as being inferior, connoting "disorder, degeneracy and daemonic" (p. 18) characteristics. He argues that colonial discourse is "an apparatus of power" (p. 23) and that "the other" is something artificially produced within this power politics to retain the discursive power within the hold of the colonizer. The colonizer's perception of the colonized as inferior is based on "fixity", a concept that suggests that by default, these qualities are present in the colonized, which justifies the act of colonizing. He suggests that by creating stereotypes that are supposedly descriptive of the colonized, the colonizer tries to maintain its political power. Stereotyping is repeated continuously and excessively in order to avert a possible empirical analysis that would reveal that they are groundless. At this point, he argues that stereotypes in a colonial context are essentially ambivalent because although the

colonized is described by the colonizer as having a fixed set of negative qualities, stereotypes are anxiously repeated to ensure the continuation of these attributions. The ambivalence is that if the inferiority, disorder, degeneracy, and evil nature of the colonized are fixed, then why would the colonizer need to repeat these stereotypes? Bhabha draws on Freud's idea of the fetish to "expose the ambivalences and discontinuities of colonial discourse, the locations in which control over the discourse slips away from the colonizer, opening up gaps and fissures in which resistance to colonial power can be produced" (Ginsburg, 2009, p. 232). In order to maintain the status-quo, the colonizer both avows and disavows certain qualities and attributions of the colonized. The colonizer experiences a certain anxiety over the possible revelation of its ungrounded and incoherent stereotyping; and a certain pleasure over maintaining and repeating the stereotypes that give it a strategic power over the colonized. In this respect, Bhabha's fetish is parallel to Freud's fetish in terms of its focus on ambivalence.

Apart from all the prominent interpretations and adaptations of the term fetishism, Zimbabwean-South African intellectual, scholar, and writer Anne McClintock, who publishes mostly on race, gender, nationality, imperialism, sexuality, and cultural theory, has a more overarching theory on fetishism, which provides the basis for the fetishism related discussions in this thesis. In her 1995 book, "Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest", McClintock investigates the shaping forces of British imperialism through race, class, gender, sexuality, and commodities. She sets out to show how "race, gender, and class are not just separate structures, . . . but articulated categories, conflictual and complicit" (Jolly, 1997, p. 445). In her study, she defines fetishism in a way that both transcends and overarches the existing fetishism definitions and discussions and takes an interdisciplinary approach to the term by looking at it from a more inclusive perspective. Setting aside Charles de Brosses's coinage of the term for primitive religions (de Brosses, 1760), Marx's commodity fetishism, Freud's transfer of the term to the psychoanalytical realm to define a substitution, and Bhabha's focus on ambivalence, Anne McClintock (1995) "call(s) for a renewed investigation that would open fetishism to a more complex and variable history in which racial and class hierarchies would play as formative a role as sexuality" (p. 184). She suggests that what she does is "a mutually transforming investigation into the disavowed relations between psychoanalysis and social history" (p. 184) by removing the barriers between history and psychoanalysis to open up

fetishism to a discussion of ambiguity. Her main definition and discussion of fetishism is as follows:

> Far from being merely phallic substitutes, fetishes can be seen as the displacement onto an object (or person) of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level. These contradictions may originate as social contradictions but are lived with profound intensity in the imagination and the flesh. The fetish thus stands at the cross-roads of psychoanalysis and social history, inhabiting the threshold of both personal and historical memory. The fetish marks a crisis in social meaning as the embodiment of an impossible irresolution. The contradiction is displaced onto and embodied in the fetish object, which is thus destined to recur with compulsive repetition. Hence the apparent power of the fetish to enchant the fetishist. By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities. For this reason, the fetish can be called an impassioned object (p. 184).

The fact that the fetish is essentially a contradiction and that it resides in personal and historical memory suggests the idea that it is borne of a distressing situation in social history and that it affects not only the society as a whole but also the individual at a personal level. This definition of the fetish immediately brings to mind a collective trauma, the profound effects of which are not only visible on the society as a collective, but also on the individual. The compulsively repetitive nature of the fetish also reminds one of a crisis in memory, just like a trauma that is destined to revisit the individual, or as in the collective trauma, the society. The discussion here is by no means to compare the fetish to trauma or collective trauma, but to suggest, as in McClintock's description also, that there is a cause-and-effect relationship that is more visible with a deeper exploration of fetishism and trauma. McClintock's argument that "by displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities" (p. 184) suggests an impasse whose resolution calls for a sort of substitution as in Freud's description of the fetish. However, Freud suggests that the fetish's function is that of a mask, whereas McClintock suggests a displacement of power, a mysterious attribution of value that makes the object a tool that functions as an aide for overcoming the complexities of the traumatized mind. In this respect, the fetish emerges as an object that is imbued with

meaning and value that helps the individual overcome certain contradictions and complexities.[1]

McClintock (1995) elaborates her description of the fetish with the following quotation below:

> Fetishes may take myriad guises and erupt from a variety of social contradictions. They do not resolve conflicts in value but rather embody in one object the failure of resolution. Fetishes are thus haunted by both personal and historical memory and may be seen to be structured by recurring, though not necessarily universal, features: a social contradiction experienced at an intensely personal level; the displacement of the contradiction onto an object or person, which becomes the embodiment of the crisis in value; the investment of intense passion (erotic or otherwise) in the fetish object; and the repetitious, often ritualistic recurrence of the fetish object in the scene of personal or historical memory. As composite symbolic objects, fetishes thus embody the traumatic coincidence not only of individual but also of historical memories held in contradiction (pp. 184-185).

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[1] In a similar vein, 19th-century German philologist and orientalist F. Max Müller removes fetishism from its religious and sexual confinements and views it as a mere human condition (1878). Comparative literature and history professor Tomoko Masuwaza summarizes Max Müller's views on fetishism as

> a mere tendency, a certain inferior disposition or weakness to which anyone at any place or any time is, in principle, susceptible. We humans have a proclivity for developing a fetishistic attachment to what Muller calls "casual objects," clutching whatever is thrown upon our path by happenstance, because flesh is weak, because our intellectual conceptions often require a tangible reminder or a material abode which can provide the intangible idea with solace and safe haven. A fetish is that which even our most sublime spiritual ideas seek, and from time to time find, to lean on: In effect, it's a prop. As such, this secondary object has no essential place in the origin and development of religion. It is always incidental, always dispensable (Masuwaza, 2000, p. 245).

Aside from releasing the origins of fetishism from the confinements of religious discourse, Müller's description of the fetish has parallels with McClintock's description in that they both acknowledge the fetish's substitutive, propping quality. The fetishistic attachment emerges when people feel their "inferior disposition or weakness", to which it provides a "safe haven" or appears to be something "to lean on" (Masuwaza, 2000, p. 245).

McClintock's (1995) description pictures the fetish as an object that emerges from a socio-historical conflict, but there is an unignorably individual aspect to it as well. As she suggests, such socio-historical disturbances are inescapably "experienced at an intensely personal level" (p. 185) and have a "repetitious, often ritualistic recurrence" (p. 185) in personal and historical memory. The repetitive and spectral nature of fetishes exhibits parallels with the nature of past traumas. Similarly, a personal or collective trauma, the former affecting the individual and the latter affecting a whole society yet experienced at a personal level as well, has a spectral nature, always bound to revisit the societal and the individual memory. Since a fetish object is attributed with a questionable and mysterious power and value that is used as a means to overcome such conflicts, it reveals to us a different quality of the fetish: a coping mechanism. With the displacement of power on the fetish and its manipulation, an individual achieves a sense of control over the uncontrollable (p. 184). It becomes a token of a traumatized past and is the result of the efforts of making sense of traumatized feelings. In this sense, a fetish might emerge from a personal, collective, or transgenerational trauma. As "symbolic objects", they are invested with an "intense passion" or meaning that they might not naturally possess (p. 185). This investment of passion or meaning into an object that is usually controllable and can be possessed can give an individual a feeling of practicing control and containment of the trauma these fetish objects might symbolize.

Since it is revealed in this discussion that trauma and fetishism meet at a crossroads, this phenomenon can be observed in certain works of literature where the time, place, and characters reveal a certain trauma, or as in the focus of this thesis, a certain transgenerational trauma, and along with and because of it, fetishistic attachments. Of different bodies of literature, contemporary African American literature is one area where this merger can be observed. Yet it should be noted that, putting African American literature under its scope, this thesis in no way intends to trace fetishism back to its African religious or anthropologic origins. Having come from a deeply traumatic past due to slavery and the ensuing oppression, African American society has been victimized and traumatized for years, being inescapably affected generation after generation. In certain works of literature, the effects of this traumatized past, in other words, this transgenerational trauma, and fetishistic attachments that appear as coping mechanisms can be observed. In that respect, this thesis will investigate and detect where fetishistic attachments occur and when they are the result of transgenerational trauma in certain contemporary works of African American

literature. The examples that will be discussed in this thesis are Alice Walker's 1973 short story "Everyday Use" and Toni Morrison's 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*.

3. TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND FETISHISM IN ALICE WALKER'S "EVERYDAY USE"

Alice Walker's 1973 story "Everyday Use" is an epitome of African American identity and cultural heritage issues. The story takes place in the American South around the time it was written. It is about an African American family of three: the mother, who is also the narrator, the older daughter Dee, and the younger daughter Maggie. The story is about the visit of the older daughter from the city to her mother and sister who live a humble life in the countryside. It opens up one day when the mother, Mrs. Johnson, or "mama" as referred to by the girls, is waiting for the arrival of Dee, during which time she has several flashbacks of the past when Dee used to live with them. She remembers how confident, self-involved, and self-assured Dee is, especially compared to the younger Maggie, who is very shy and unconfident, partly due to her burn scars. Dee is described as having a distaste and disdain for the way her mother and sister are and for how they live. As she grows older, she gets more and more estranged from the family, eventually leaving them for good and starting a life elsewhere. In the middle of the mother's flashbacks and dreams about reuniting with Dee not only on a physical but also on an emotional level where she is finally appreciated by her, Dee arrives. She is with Hakeem-a-barber, who greets the mother with the Muslim salutation, as-salamu alaykum. Dee is dressed in an exaggerated style that is clearly designed to show off. Upon being greeted by the mother, she informs her that she has a new name now, Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo. The family eats together, and Dee notices some things on the table and in the kitchen area that have belonged to her family for years. She shows an unreasonable interest in them and asks for them from her mother, clearly not out of a need, but for display purposes. She continues scavenging for family heirlooms around the house and when she finally finds the old, hand-stitched, family heirloom quilts, she demands they be given to her. When the mother says she is keeping the quilts to be used by the younger daughter Maggie when she gets married, Dee objects to this by saying that she will put them on display and treat them like pieces of art, whereas Maggie will simply put them to everyday use. The mother gets angry at Dee's insistence on having the quilts, her artificial and pretentious way of embracing her culture, and her disrespect for their humble lifestyle, so she refuses to give the quilts to her. Unaccustomed to not getting whatever she wants, Dee

leaves the house enraged. The mother and Maggie continue the day as if it was one of the ordinary days of their everyday lives.

Although “Everyday Use” is mostly regarded as a classical town mouse and country mouse narrative, it has many different underlying levels of meaning, themes, and symbolism. The story can be read from different thematic perspectives such as generational conflict, the Black Power Movement, and racial pride. However, looking at the story from a different perspective other than these obvious themes, identity issues and fetishistic attachments resulting from transgenerational trauma emerge as pervasive themes on another level in the story.

Regarding the identity issues resulting from transgenerational trauma, Dee appears to be the most prominent character in the story and is thus definitely worth putting under the microscope. As different interpretations of the story would suggest, she is a very complex character. Her past, her relationship with her family and the way she presents herself reveals and reflects issues faced by the post-slavery African American society. Among these, as in many different interpretations and approaches to the text, identity is the first and foremost issue regarding the character Dee and what she represents. Her issue with her African American identity first becomes obvious from the following exchange between Dee and her mother when she arrives home.

> “Well,” I say. “Dee.”
>
> “No, Mama,” she says. “Not ‘Dee,’ Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!”
>
> “What happened to ‘Dee’?” I wanted to know.
>
> “She’s dead,” Wangero said. “I couldn’t bear it any longer being named after the people who oppress me.”
>
> “You know as well as me you was named after your aunt, Dicie,” I said. Dicie is my sister, She named Dee. We called her “Big Dee” after Dee was born.
>
> “But who was she named after?” asked Wangero.
>
> “I guess after Grandma Dee,” I said.
>
> “And who was she named after?” asked Wangero.
>
> “Her mother,” I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. “That’s about as far back as I can trace it,” I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches (Walker, 1973, p. 54).

Dee changes her name to an African name that the mother, despite being African American herself, has not even heard of in her life. She does not even know how to pronounce it. Dee’s decision to change her name is based on her refusal to accept a

name that was supposedly given to her by her oppressors. In various literary analyses of the story, the most common interpretations of this scene involve a positive appraisal of Dee for educating herself enough to know that her name is given to her by the people who oppressed her folks, and for refusing to use it; whereas other common interpretations focus on her inability to genuinely embrace her true familial origins and where she comes from. However, going a level deeper into this particular exchange, there is something that becomes more visible about Dee. She is in the middle of an identity crisis that results from a trauma. An immediate attempt to trace the origins of a trauma in Dee's life would most likely result in the superficial assumption of Dee having a troubled family and childhood, hence the trauma. However, despite coming from a poor family where the father is absent and the mother is uneducated, Dee's trauma seems deeper than a familial trauma that she might have experienced in her lifetime. Her obvious identity confusion comes from an older, inherited, deep-rooted trauma, a transgenerational trauma resulting from being an African American whose ancestors suffered under slavery and a regime of oppression. Dee's revolt against being named after White oppressors and choosing herself an African name reveals that she is somewhat aware of her inherited trauma and trying to force herself out of it by making an informed decision about who she chooses to be, and this way, isolating herself from her society's past and its traumas.

Her mother's account of Dee portrays her as a restless character from the beginning. She does not talk or interact with her family much, and when she does, she only lets out unpleasant opinions and ideas. She has an untold and seemingly ungrounded anger and restlessness. She wants to get away from her family and from her community, which she does in the end. Although, on the surface, Dee's discontentedness and her efforts to isolate herself from her family and her immediate circle might seem to have resulted from a spoiled upbringing and personality makeup, the story makes it obvious that this is not the case with Dee.

The reasons for her inborn anger towards her family and her desire to distance herself both physically and emotionally are rooted deep inside her culture and origins, which would be invisible without a deeper exploration. Looking beyond what appears on the surface regarding the character Dee, it becomes clear that she wants to get away from this traumatic legacy in her life by severing her ties with everything that connects her to this inherited submissiveness and trauma. Unlike her mother and sister, she is apparently very much concerned with the history of oppression of African Americans

since she is an educated character. It seems that not only has she inherited the trauma from her family and her socio-cultural environment, but she also became aware of it through the formal education she received given her background. The story tells us that aside from her formal education, she has always been in pursuit of self-education as well, always reading even if it was to impose ideas on her mother and sister. As a young African American girl who is interested in investigating and questioning her people's past and digging up only to find misery and submission, it is inevitable for an inquisitive and critical character like Dee to be faced with this ongoing trauma and to question her African American identity, trying to find her true place in the spectrum of identities. This quest for identity and coming up with a protest persona is her way of facing and wriggling out of this inherited trauma.

Although the mother and Maggie shared the same background with Dee until some point in their lives, we cannot observe the same inquisitiveness and protest attitude in these characters because they are at a lower stage of facing their inherited traumas. They experience it rather silently, being unable to realize it and face it. Compared to Dee, the mother and Maggie are meeker characters who cannot dare to dig up their history to face the traumas it has brought to them. The mother's attitude toward things paints a clear example of dysfunctional behaviors adapted following traumas. In a monologue regarding her education, the mother mentions that she never studied past the second grade because the school she went to closed. Neither her family nor the community could do anything to reverse it because as she says, "in 1927, colored asked fewer questions than do now." (Walker, 1973, p. 50). Apparently, she was brought up in an environment in which Black people could neither raise their voices against things nor could make their voices heard. In a way, she has inherited her family's and her community's way of reacting to things that they have inherited from their ancestors living under oppression. As stated by Joy DeGruy in her "Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing" (2005), the reflexes and behaviors that are passed down to the younger generations of African Americans by their parents are heavily associated with survival instincts due to being subjected to a fear of death all the time (2005). She says that "those traumatized adapted their attitudes and behaviors to simply survive, and these adaptations continue to manifest today" (p. 72), as can be exemplified by the mother in this story. She sustains this learned attitude in her life, finding it too difficult, almost impossible to overcome her reservedness. Unlike her daughter Dee, Mrs. Johnson is a character who

cannot challenge things. In another monologue, with regards to how different she and Dee are, she says:

> Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature (Walker, 1973, p. 49).

Maggie, too, is like the mother when it comes to facing things and raising her voice. In fact, she almost has no voice in the story. She shies away when her sister arrives with Hakeem-a-barber and does not utter more than a couple of sentences all throughout the story. Dee, on the other hand, is at the other end of the spectrum. She has inborn qualities that allow her to raise her voice, question, and challenge the world and herself. Therefore, it seems only natural that Dee is the only one who is able to take a step forward into discovering who she really is and where she comes from. The ensuing identity confusion and the efforts to create a new "her" would be an expected result in Dee's case.

William E. Cross Jr.'s 1998 chapter *Black psychological functioning and the legacy of slavery: Myths and realities* published in "The International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma" (Danieli, 1998) provides valuable insights into understanding Dee's identity confusion resulting from her inherited trauma. Cross Jr. suggests that slavery has stripped Africans of their original identities and left them with frames of reference that are a far cry from their true African heritage. He argues that the slave owners set up a system that aimed to make Africans perceive themselves as inferior in every respect. However, their exit identity was not one fixed self-loathing identity as the white oppressors wanted them to assume, but a number of identities with one common trait: lack of true Africanism. He suggests that although a touch of their original African identity is still there, a spectrum of identities appeared following slavery, and these identities reflect different levels of post-slavery adjustment. Drawing on a number of Black identity studies, he observes a pattern that is concurrent in these different post-slavery African American identities. His synthesis involves the following post-slavery identity types:

> Some of the more important identities that seem to continuously appear across black history are assimilationist, ambivalent, militant, self-hating, and internalizing or synthesizing. Persons with the assimilationist frame tend to play

> down the importance of race in their everyday conception of themselves, and they stress, instead, their sense of connection to the larger, dominant society. Ambivalent blacks seem openly perplexed about whether to stress their blackness or their Americanness in everyday life. Militants display a blind-faith commitment to all things black and a strong aversion to all things white. The self-hating types experience intense self-loathing, which they trace to being black. The internalizers or synthesizers operate with a multidimensional mindset about blackness that allows them to be functional, proactive, and productive (Cross, 1998, pp. 394-395).

Looking at the different types of exit identities, one can easily spot which one Dee falls under. Her protest attitude towards White beauty standards, her clothing, her sudden appreciation of and over-attachment to her family's African-style artifacts when she sees them after years, and her new name, Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo, places her within the militant identity. Dee seems to show a strong commitment to her African origins by embracing what she believes to be truly African and brazenly showing them off. She answers, "She is dead" (Walker, 1973, p. 53) when her mother asks what happened to Dee. In a symbolic way, she kills a part of her past that is related to her negative experiences as a Black person within the post-slavery White American society. Her aversion to things that are associated with White society and its standards is so excessive that she does not recognize that her name is actually what ties her to her family's past.

Regarding these common identity types, Cross Jr. also argues that they show stages of change. He suggests that a post-slavery African American carrying the transgenerational legacy of their ancestor's trauma enters the quest for an identity with the assimilationist type. This also fits with DeGruy's claim that African Americans had to develop a survivalist mode that make them refrain from drawing attention, and her claim that a sense of self-inefficacy and self-hatred has been ingrained in the African American collective psyche. The following stage is the ambivalent identity, in which the person is in between embracing Blackness and staying indifferent to it. This stage is followed by the militant identity, which shows an uncanny resemblance to Dee. With regard to stepping into the militant stage, Cross Jr. (1998) says:

> All the fireworks of identity metamorphosis are contained in this militancy stage, for within its boundaries, the old and emerging identity do battle. For the person who undergoes a particularly intense conversion, it is a period of extreme

> highs and lows, reflecting the perturbation that comes from first feeling "I think I'm getting this right," to the next moment, when one falls flat on his or her face, mired in confusion. It is a period of high energy, risk taking, racial chauvinism, hatred, joy, and extreme certitude, interspersed with moments of profound self-doubt. This high energy literally compels the person to seek self-expression, leading to poetry, art, or in more vulgar expressions, fantasies about the defeat and destruction of one's enemy (i.e., white people and white society) (p. 395).

As stated in Cross Jr.'s description, Dee's metamorphosis is at a stage where she experiences and reflects extremes. She has an intense self-assuredness, a know-it-all attitude, and Black favoritism to the point of White racism. Her clothing and style; her artistic attempts such as taking the pictures of the Mother and Maggie in front of their very humble house to show to her friends; asking for the old objects that are still used by her mother and sister to display them as remnants from an imagined, traditional African life, and even her partner choice shown by Hakeem-a-barber are ways to express her newfound identity. She is in search of outlets to release the excitement of finding her "true self." Changing her name, or as she puts it, "killing" Dee, shows her transition from the previous ambivalent stage to the militancy stage of identity. Refusing to use a name that is supposedly borrowed from the oppressors is in a way, a fantasy "about the defeat and destruction of (her) enemy" (Cross Jr., 1998, p. 395).

Setting aside the uncanny similarity of the depiction of Dee's characteristics to Cross Jr.'s writing about transgenerational trauma and the ensuing identity types, one is faced with another theme that catches the eye in Dee's character and mannerisms in the story. Not only does Dee reflect her inherited trauma with her identity quest, but she also displays fetishistic attachments as a way of overcoming this inherited trauma. Changing her name is one example of many instances of Dee's fetishistic attachments. Although fetishism typically involves objects, the meanings Dee attaches to her original name and her new name show an attribution of meaning to things that are actually independent of those meanings. Her new name symbolizes a new "Dee" to Dee, even though she is still the same person. Adopting a new name does not make her a different person in reality, nor in the eyes of her family, yet Dee believes that she assumes a different personality through the meaning she attaches to her chosen name. Similarly, the meaning she attaches to her original name does not necessarily symbolize submissiveness to oppression. In a way, Dee fetishizes a name that she believes will

give her qualities that she does not necessarily have, making her a brand-new person in her own eyes and in the eyes of society.

Fetishistic attachments are not limited to Dee's choice of name in the story. In fact, the story has many instances where the characters, especially Dee, show symptoms of fetishistic attachments to tangible objects. The first instance where this surfaces is when Dee first arrives home. Her mother describes the first couple of seconds of seeing her in awe and a bit of exaggeration with the following lines:

> A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the Sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings, too, gold and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhnnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears (Walker, 1973, p. 52).

Clearly, Dee's style is a statement she is trying to make. Even though she is only visiting her family who knows her in every way she has ever been, she is obviously not a bit plainer than she is when she is in her usual social environment. For Dee, her clothes, accessories, and hair are ways of showing the world who she is now, her new identity, Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo. Wangero is not Dee herself, but this young woman who dresses, behaves, and speaks in a certain way. Just like changing her name, changing her style does not actually make her a different person, but it is the meaning she attaches to those things that gives her this confidence and puts her in this new persona. As in Baudrillard's description of fetishism (1981), the social value Dee attaches to these objects helps her build her social status and aids her in the shaping of her cultural identity. Dee is a character who would not be able to be so blatant with her ideas without these things that she fetishizes that give her this confidence. Even though her dress is just a piece of clothing, her accessories are just ornaments and her hair is just natural kinky hair, for her militant identity, these are like what a uniform is for a soldier. They are almost integral parts of this new identity she has created, through the meaning that is attributed to them.

The style and the new name are the first things that struck the eye in the story about Dee's identity issues and fetishization of things, yet the most striking instances

of Dee's fetishism appear when she starts noticing some objects in the house. When they sit down to eat, the mother describes how Dee begins her sudden over-appreciation of things around her:

> Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs."
>
> "Oh Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn stood, the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.
>
> "This churn top is what I need," she said. "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?"
>
> "Yes," I said.
>
> "Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too (Walker, 1973, p. 55).

Dee acts as if she saw these objects for the first time. However, it is obvious that they have been around for many years and that Dee grew up with those things around her. Dee's sudden appreciation of the simple benches, the butter dish, the churn top, and the dasher is juxtaposed with who she was before. In the prologue where the mother has flashbacks, it can be inferred from the mother's description that Dee used to be a type of person who would not normally appreciate these things and would think little of them. However, she appears to give these things an extraordinary value now. Her unusual appreciation and excitement over these things seem even theatrical. Yet, it would not be fair to say that Dee's sudden appreciation of these things is not a genuine one. As a new person with a new mindset, these objects mean more than what they actually are to Dee, or Wangero, now. As suggested by McClintock (1995), these fetishized things are "impassioned objects" (p. 184) for Dee. Her attribution of meaning and value to these objects, or her fetishization of them, helps her move past her inherited trauma in a certain way. As remnants from the past, these things symbolize a life she has left behind. These are things that will constantly remind her that she has moved onto a different stage in her life, almost like memoirs that show her how successful she has become in overcoming the cycle of trauma in her family and her society.

What is more interesting about Dee wanting these objects is her reason for doing so. Having already decided that they are hers without even properly asking for them from her mother, she says, “I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table,” . . . sliding a plate over the churn, “and I’ll think of something artistic to do with the dasher” (Walker, 1973, p. 56). As is obvious from the story, these objects that Dee wants for herself are still used by the mother and the sister. The mother takes the dasher into her hands one last time after Dee wraps it up and sees where her hands made a mark on the wood from the years of pushing it up and down to make butter. When Dee decides to take the churn top that was serving its intended purpose, she puts a plate in its stead, and the butter dish she takes is apparently still being used since it is on the table, serving butter. Yet Dee does not take the objects because she will use them, but she sees in them something other than what they are used for. As Cross Jr. (1998) describes in his militancy stage of identity, people at this stage may feel a compulsion for self-expression through art, and Dee is a textbook example of this stage in that regard (p. 395). Dee fetishizes these objects by means of attaching to them an imagined, almost kitschy artistic value, totally disregarding their use-value for her family. For her, the objects are tokens of her people’s way of living which she would proudly be exhibiting in her home. It is an outlet for the repressed energy of her newfound identity. Yet Dee’s fetishization of these objects is not limited to her search for an artistic self-expression that came with her new identity. There is another reason why she chooses these objects to exhibit in a museum-like manner. For Dee, these objects come from a past that reminds her of being a poor African American girl coming from a troubled history of years of submission, inherited trauma, and dysfunctional behavioral patterns adapted following traumas. Her ambition to turn these objects into exhibitions is an effort to imbue them with meaning that strips them of their true origin and gives them a new meaning as pieces of art. Dee is aware of the trauma she inherited from being a Black American whose ancestors suffered the unimaginable, and she is trying to leave it behind by assuming a new identity and attaching a new meaning to the remnants of that past life and trauma she is trying to save herself from. Keeping these objects still in use is not ideal when one is trying to leave the meaning associated with them behind. Setting aside her thoughtlessness when she decides they are hers even while her family still needs and uses them, Dee feels they should no longer be used so that they would evolve into things of the past that represent her confrontation and overcoming of her inherited trauma, which she tries so hard to leave behind.

Yet another and possibly the most symbolic of all examples of fetishistic attachments occurs when Dee finally finds the old, hand-stitched quilts stored away in her mother's bedroom. The quilts are made by the grandmother, the aunt, and the mother herself years ago, from the pieces of their old, torn-out clothes that they had been wearing for years. There is even a piece in one of them from their great-grandfather's uniform from the Civil War. The quilts were obviously made out of a need when they were not able to afford anything that would serve their purpose. It can be inferred from the story that the situation is not really much different now in terms of the family's financial opportunities. Just as she does with the other objects, Dee totally disregards the fact that her family might still need them, and superficially asks to have them, but her behavior makes it obvious that they already belong to her. Having promised the quilts to Maggie for when she gets married, the mother is reluctant to give them to Dee. She offers other quilts that she has, and an exchange between them reveals why Dee specifically asks for these ones instead.

> "No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."
>
> "That's make them last better," I said.
>
> "That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them. . .
>
> "The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."
>
> She gasped like a bee had stung her.
>
> "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."
>
> "I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" (Walker, 1973, p. 57).

Just like the other objects she puts her hands on, Dee wants the quilts not to use them, but to display them. In her context, the social value of these quilts far transcends their use-value. As in Pietz's (1985) third common characteristic of the fetish, an object becomes a fetish when it has different social values or an utterly personal value that it does not necessarily have as an object (p. 9). In this regard, a close look at how differently Dee and Maggie perceive these quilts reveals how materials are valued and fetishized by two different mindsets in the story. When the mother insists that the quilts

are Maggie's, Dee does not want to let go of the quilts to be used by Maggie, furiously saying that they are priceless and would end up in rags in a couple of years should Maggie put them to everyday use. The mother says Maggie could always make new quilts since she had learned how to quilt from her grandmother. Maggie's following intervention and what she says about the quilts reveal a different personal and social value attached to the objects. She says that Dee could have the quilts because she would be able to remember her grandmother without them. Although she agrees to let Dee have the quilts saying she does not need a material reminder of her elders, it is obvious that the use-value of the quilts is not the only value and meaning she attaches to them, which is indicated by her passive-aggressive reaction of slamming the kitchen door when she hears that Dee is asking for them. There are other, newer quilts that she could have if the quilts had only held use-value for Maggie. This shows that Maggie herself fetishizes the quilts to some extent, but her fetishization is not more than imbuing them with personal value as reminders from her grandmother. This exchange indicates that Maggie's and Dee's perceptions of the quilts and the meaning they attach to them are quite different in many aspects. Whereas the quilts hold personal value for Maggie as family heirlooms and use value as bedding, they hold a different type of value for Dee. First of all, for Dee, the quilts do not have any use-value, which is also revealed by the mother when she remembers how Dee did not want them before saying they are out of style and old-fashioned when the mother offered them to her when Dee was leaving for college; but they have social value as traditional artifacts to be displayed. Similarly, the quilts do not have much personal value either since she does not really see them as souvenirs from her grandmother or her family elders specifically, but they are representatives of her ethnic origins in general. As in Marx's idea of fetishism (1867), Dee attributes an inherent value to these quilts that does not match their true use-value, and by wishing to display them, she commodifies the quilts and imbues them with an imagined nostalgia. As Marx's fetishism suggests, the social relationships between people are replaced by the relationship between people and commodities in capitalist societies. From this perspective, the social relationship between Dee and her family is replaced by the relationship between her and the quilts in this story. The original, organic ties that connect the new generation represented by Dee to her elders are weakened by time, mostly by Dee's own efforts to distance herself from her traumatic legacy both physically and psychologically; and new, imagined, and inorganic ties are built instead, as represented by the quilts.

Here, though, making a distinction between Dee and her new identity, Wangero, would be appropriate. For Dee, these quilts held neither social value, nor use value, nor even personal value when she used to live with her family. However, for Wangero, the quilts have an important social value. She fetishizes these objects as if they are museum exhibits that have high artistic values. For Wangero's militant identity, these quilts are like banners she will be displaying in her house to show the world who she is, a soldier for her cause. As for the personal value of the quilts to Wangero, they hold the same meaning as the other objects she collected in the house. As in McClintock's (1995) description of the fetish, her attribution of meaning to these objects and the subsequent manipulation of them gives her a symbolic control over things that are otherwise difficult to overcome (p. 184). Therefore, proudly displaying these objects gives Wangero a sense of control over her inherited trauma. Contrary to using them in her everyday life, which would indicate the continuation of her familial tradition with all the cultural inheritance along with its traumas, removing their use-value from them and imbuing them with a social and personal value that is different from her family's, she symbolically tries to express that she has overcome and left behind her inherited trauma. Through fetishization, Wangero strips these quilts of their original material quality and their meaning for the family, and she gives them a new identity and new meaning.

A common interpretation of the relationships between Dee, Maggie, and the quilts usually entail an appreciation of Maggie for giving up the quilts since she does not need a tangible reminder to remember her family. Unlike Dee, Maggie learns how to quilt from her grandmother, and can always make the same type of quilts herself. Therefore, we see that by inheriting a familial, or ethnic, tradition through personal efforts and enthusiasm, Maggie will be able to sustain her cultural heritage without any fetishized objects. From this perspective, it is only fair that Maggie is appreciated and seen as the true protector and sustainer of her cultural heritage. However, it should be noted that Maggie and Dee are at completely different stages of their post-slavery adjustment, as theorized by Cross Jr. (1998). In this sense, Maggie and the mother are the same. As represented by the mother's inability to function around White people, especially White men, and Maggie's ever timid and hangdog attitude, they are still within the vicious cycle of transgenerational trauma, experiencing a post-slavery dysfunctional behavioral pattern. However, Dee appears as a character who was able to sense this dysfunctionality within her family, and she willingly separated herself from them since she was trying to separate herself from their inherited trauma. Looking at

Dee's and Maggie's perception of the quilts from this angle, it can be seen that for Dee's militant identity in Cross Jr.'s terms, it is only normal that the quilts hold such value for her.

Overall, Walker's story presents a perfect example of identity issues and fetishistic attachments resulting from the transgenerational trauma of slavery and the history of oppression within African American society. Regarding the focus of this thesis, despite being a short story, it is packed with symbolism that reveals the characters' battle with an inherited dysfunctionality, their post-traumatic slave syndrome (DeGruy, 2005), and the coping mechanisms they devised to be able to survive and function in the new world. This is not the story of this particular family only, but also the story of the society that these characters represent. It can easily be regarded as a multilayered story that reveals issues about Black American society, as exemplified in this thesis. The many layers of meaning, symbolism, and themes in the story can allow for an extensive and in-depth analysis of post-slavery African American society from many different perspectives.

4. TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND FETISHISM IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

Published in 1970, Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* is one of her most popular and most touching works. The novel opens with the characters Claudia and Frieda MacTeer, nine and ten-year-old sisters who live with their parents and their tenant Henry Washington in Lorain, Ohio in the 1940s. Pecola Breedlove, an eleven-year-old girl, is another character in the household who is temporarily living with the MacTeers as a foster child. Pecola's father Cholly Breedlove is an abusive, alcoholic, and violent man who burned the house down, putting the family "outdoors" (p. 14), hence Pecola's temporary placement in the MacTeer house. Sometime later Pecola goes back to living with her family, but life does not get any better for her after that point. She has to witness the constant violent fights and insults between her parents. Her unhappy and loveless family life and the crippling poverty add to her feelings of inferiority and helplessness that she already possesses for being constantly reminded by society of how "ugly" she is. Because of the society's white supremacist standards, she starts to believe that she is not loved properly and has an unfortunate life only because she is "ugly". She becomes convinced that if she had blue eyes, a token of being "pretty", she would be worthy of the love of her family and of the society, and eventually her life would be better.

The novel presents many flashbacks to shed light on Pecola's parents Cholly and Pauline's earlier lives. It is revealed that they both come from really troubled pasts as African American people who struggle to survive in a society that is dominated by white supremacist culture. In an episode where Cholly comes home drunk with memories from his past and with complex emotions, he rapes Pecola. In the following episode, Pecola goes to a local conman named Soaphead Church who poses as having supernatural abilities. She wishes for blue eyes, which the conman grants her. The news that Pecola is raped and is pregnant with her father's baby is spread quickly. Although many people think it is best that the baby dies, the sisters Frieda and Claudia desperately hope that the baby lives no matter what. With hopes of helping to keep the baby alive, they give up their money saved up for a bicycle and plant marigold seeds as a ritualistic sacrifice. They believe that if the marigolds bloom, it is a sign that the baby will live. Like a foreshadowing to what will happen, the marigolds do not bloom, and the baby dies after being born prematurely. Pecola and her mother move out of town. Pecola

loses her sanity and believes she now has blue eyes, the bluest in the world. She is seen to be roaming up and down the street with a mirror in her hand, talking to herself and making strange movements with her body and arms as if she was about to fly up in the air. As the novel comes to an end, Claudia sadly acknowledges how Pecola was seen by society: a scapegoat who made all the others feel better about themselves compared to her. It is as if Pecola carried the burden of all the sins, disappointments, anger, unhappiness, and self-loathing of the society as this one little "ugly" black female child. As Claudia realizes years later that society did nothing but victimize Pecola, she also realizes that "it's much, much, much too late" (Morrison, 1970, p. 141) now for her.

The utterly sad and intense storyline provides a striking narrative, almost to the point of shifting the attention from the historical and social realities that provide the background for this story. Yet when the perspective is deepened, these realities reveal themselves, opening the story to a deeper discussion of traumatic legacies and coping mechanisms in the form of fetishistic attachments. Perhaps Joy DeGruy's observations as to the effects of the inherited trauma in the lives of African Americans would provide the most suitable perspective to analyze the underlying layers in the story. As she describes in detail in her "Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing" (2005)," DeGruy observes three main behavioral patterns that she sees as a testament to the African American population's inheritance of their ancestors' trauma. Her observations include vacant self-esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization, which can also be clearly observed in *The Bluest Eye*.

The first one of these behavioral patterns, vacant self-esteem, holds an important place in the story, so much so that it is as if the whole story is centralized on the main character Pecola's vacant self-esteem. DeGruy (2005) describes vacant self-esteem as the "judgment we make concerning our own worth" (p. 518). She says that it is concerned with one's belief about one's value; one's value to their family, to their friends, to the community and to the outer world. The belief of having little to no self-worth, which DeGruy is concerned about regarding African Americans, is inscribed on a person by other people through feelings of inferiority. As to the emergence of vacant self-esteem in a person, DeGruy suggests that there are mainly three sources of influence: our family, our community, and society, all three of which are equally responsible for Pecola's vacant self-esteem in the novel.

Being the most immediate of the three factors that affect Pecola's self-esteem, family holds an important place in the story just as in Pecola's life. The story reveals

from the beginning that Pecola has a very dysfunctional family. Right after the prologue that mentions that Pecola has been raped and is pregnant with her father's baby, which is a flashforward to the near end of the story, the novel follows a linear timeline for the next few chapters, starting with Pecola's family house being burned down by the father and Pecola's temporary placement in the MacTeer house. Compared to the MacTeer sisters, Pecola is much shier and much more reserved. Although they do not differ much in terms of the opportunities that life has provided them with, we do hear the MacTeer sisters' voice whereas Pecola is absolutely voiceless. The reason for this is made obvious by the difference in the girls' family support, or the lack of it as in Pecola's situation. Although the MacTeer girls suffer from the same communal and societal pressures and disdain, then, they can and do raise their voice and are able to act against outside threats with a certain level of confidence and sturdiness.

This lies mostly in their family support since there is not much else that differentiates them from Pecola when their social status is considered. Although the girls are scolded by their mother on a regular basis and do not really interact much with their father, they still feel the family love and support behind them. When Claudia gets sick from collecting coals out in the cold, her mother gets very angry with her, but still actually takes good care of her so she can get better. Frieda sings to her to make her feel good. Despite feeling helpless for being sick and being scolded by her mother for her sickness, in retrospect, Claudia remembers the hint of love and support from her family with this incident. Similarly, when Frieda is abused by their tenant Mr. Henry, her parents attack him, and her father even shoots him, only to miss. Although this horrible experience is apparently not followed up by any effort from the parents side to repair the psychological damage on Frieda -as she sits crying in her room alone when Claudia finds her shortly after the incident while their parents seem to be minding their everyday business with almost no after-effect of the incident troubling them-, the fact that they did try to protect their daughter as parents by doing the bare minimum they could still gives the girls a sense of family love, support, and protection, which is most certainly missing from Pecola's life.

For Pecola, things are exactly the opposite when it comes to being loved, valued, and protected by one's family. In fact, they are the ones that strike Pecola the hardest in life. Her parents constantly fight, which usually turns violent. Her brother repeatedly runs away from home since he cannot psychologically handle what is happening at home. For Pecola, being a young girl, running away is not an option. Therefore, she has

to stay and witness everything taking place at home. Till the father's ultimate violation of Pecola's rights as a human being, a woman, a child, and a daughter, Pecola goes through many other instances where she is made to believe that she has no value in the eyes of her family. In one episode, the MacTeer sisters go to the house of the family that Pauline, Pecola's mother, works for. Although Pecola is just a little child, she helps her mother with the housework like one of the workers of the house. Claudia and Frieda arrive, and they hear the little white girl of the house call for "Polly," a warm, loving name for "Pauline." Even Claudia gets offended by the fact that while this girl is close enough to call Pauline "Polly", Pecola has to call her mom "Mrs. Breedlove".

However, while Claudia obviously understands how odd and sad this is, it is mentioned nowhere that it seems to bother Pecola in any way. It seems like she takes it very naturally that she has to call her mother Mrs. Breedlove while this girl can just call her "Polly". While it might not seem ideal to make assumptions that Pecola is not bothered or saddened by it, or that she does not even question it, it is in fact possible and easy to infer that it is actually the case with Pecola. Pecola seems to have already been made to believe that she is of little to no value to her family. She does not even begin to question why she has to call her mom Mrs. Breedlove whereas this other girl whose family her mother works for can easily level with her. Just to reinforce what already is obvious, a dramatic scene takes place in this episode where Pecola drops a hot pan of cobbler on the floor. It splatters everywhere, including on Pecola who shrieks in pain trying to stop the burning on her legs. Pauline gets really angry and beats Pecola right at that instant, not caring about her burns. Just seconds later, she turns to the little girl to comfort her since she got scared of the incident and of the "stranger" girls and got also upset because the cobbler is gone now. Pauline speaks as if she was a different, much nicer and kinder person when she is talking to her. Claudia describes Pauline's voice as "rotten pieces of apple" when talking to Pecola, and like "honey" when talking to the little White girl of the house (Morrison, 1970, p.74). Even this little incident is enough to show Pecola and others how she is not valued over strangers, or even over a pan of cobbler, by her mother.

It is clear that from a young age, Pecola is implicitly and explicitly made to believe by her family that she has very little value as a daughter. Therefore, it can be said that the closest circle surrounding a person, the family, fails to break the cycle of dysfunctional behavior in Pecola's case. The family becomes the first unit to inscribe the feeling of worthlessness in Pecola. This dysfunctional parenting, however, is very

unlikely to have begun with Pecola's parents. In fact, as the novel itself shows in the following chapters, it can be traced back to Pecola's parents' earlier lives, showing how such dysfunctional behaviors have been inherited over generations. Here, DeGruy's observation as to dysfunctional parenting playing a significant role in the transmission of trauma gains importance. She suggests that such families raise children in a way that influences them to develop a limited and disparaged identity that these children feel confined to, and they develop vacant self-esteem as a result of it (DeGruy, 2005, p. 530). With African American families, DeGruy traces these negative parenting practices and the resulting vacant self-esteem far back in their past. She says that vacant self-esteem is a symptom of post-traumatic slave syndrome and is

> transmitted from generation to generation through the family, community and society. When the parents in a family believe themselves to have little or no value, it reflects itself in behaviors that can instill a similar belief in their children. This belief is passed down through generations in the form of unexamined, and often long-established, child rearing practices. Some of the extreme ways we have worked to make our children submissive and docile provide examples of established parenting practices that can contribute to vacant esteem (p. 529).

The dysfunctional and even destructive parenting practices employed by Pecola's parents make Pecola a submissive and diffident character lacking necessary self-esteem, proving DeGruy's point regarding the transmission of trauma through negative parenting practices.

It is, in fact, easy to trace the source of Pecola's low self-worth to her parents and their families that came before them. The dedicated chapters in the novel give us access to Pauline's and Cholly's earlier lives. Pauline's earlier life provides clues regarding singular traumas affecting a person's entire life, or rather, facilitating the revelation of inherited traumas through generation. When she is very little, she has an accident involving her foot, and she has to walk with a very slight limp after that. She is said to attribute her "general feeling of separateness and unworthiness" (Morrison, 1970, p. 75) to this barely noticeable limp even though she grows up in a family where she already feels isolated and edged out which can naturally cause these feelings to occur. She gets traumatized by this incident that barely affects her life, and she organizes stuff at home all the time as if she tries to put her life in an order this way.

When she turns fifteen, she enters into a melancholic state all of a sudden. As if melancholia and depression are silently sleeping somewhere inside her, they wake up and surface once she becomes old enough to understand the world around her a little bit more. This seemingly groundless traumatized state and melancholia reminds one of a disposition to these emotional states due to an inherited inclination, which, as DeGruy suggests, is an inherited trauma in the African American population. In the years to follow, Pauline experiences another incident which she attributes her downfall to: the falling out of one of her front teeth. She takes it so hard that her life becomes a downward spiral after that. These two incidents are described as being so traumatic for Pauline that one cannot help but think that such posttraumatic feelings were already lying dormant in her, and that these two unpleasant incidents were just the catalysts that made them surface. She stops trying after that, feeling that she is in a state where she is already doomed with no chance of putting things back to normal in her life. Yet, although she does not care much about her own life and family, which is also reflected by the state of her own house, she works meticulously in the house where she is employed and shows the utmost care to everything in it. To her, her own family and house become "afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely" (Morrison, 1970, p. 86). It seems that her own family is much less worthy of her care, love and attention compared to her white employers. She is described as enjoying doing chores in the house, caring for the little girl, combing her blonde, soft hair, and the feeling of it in her hands, as opposed to having to care for Pecola's black, tangled, rough hair. Just by looking at Pauline and her parenting, it is understandable how Pecola got to develop vacant self-esteem as a little girl. The negative parenting practices that DeGruy mentions with a focus on self-esteem development are evident in the mother-daughter relationship between Pauline and Pecola. Pecola is thus partly the result of Pauline's inherited parenting practices that shape new generations with no self-worth.

As for Cholly, Pecola's father, looking at his earlier life also presents clues regarding what is responsible for making him who he is. His life also carries hints of traumas affecting the entirety of a person's life, just like in Pauline's case. Similarly, as in DeGruy's (2005) theory that vacant self-esteem is a symptom of African American people's generationally transferred trauma, Cholly is another example where the effects of this can be observed on him and on his daughter Pecola through his dysfunctional

and destructive fatherhood. Cholly's mother, who is said to be a mad woman, abandons him upon his birth, and he is raised by his great aunt. His father whom he finds years later does not accept him and even curses him. Even when looking at these two generations (Cholly's biological parents and Cholly himself), the contagiousness of destructive and dysfunctional parenting practices becomes obvious.

What is more striking regarding Cholly's life in the story is his first sexual encounter. He meets a girl at his aunt's funeral, and they go to a secluded orchard and start having sex. Then two white men appear, who insult and threaten Cholly with their guns to finish having sex while they watch. When the men leave, Cholly remains filled with hatred. However, his hatred is not directed towards the men as expected, but he hates his partner Darlene instead. After this incident and the following rejection from his biological father, Cholly becomes irreversibly traumatized, and just like Pauline's, his life also takes a very dramatically destructive turn from then on. He cannot feel love or relate to people around him in a healthy way. However, just like Pauline again, these seemingly petty incidents look like they strike a major blow to Cholly, more than they possibly should, suggesting an inherited trauma coming to the surface due to these catalyzing incidents.

Both people experience adversities in life that prevent them from functioning effectively as individuals and parents. The fact that they were devoid of appropriate parental care and love that would allow them to build a healthy self-esteem has created a vicious cycle where they are unable to provide their children with healthy parenting that would in turn help them to develop appropriate self-esteem. In line with DeGruy's (2005) theory that dysfunctional parenting practices are transferred through generations having resulted in a common self-esteem vacancy in the African American population as a symptom of transgenerational trauma, Pecola's upbringing proves no different in that she adopts the same unhealthy view of herself that contributes to her downfall.

Family is not the only catalyst of the inherited trauma symptoms. DeGruy lists community -as in communities that we belong to- and society as other catalysts of the vacant self-esteem in the case of African American people. While our families influence us and affect our self-esteem and wellbeing through how they raise us, DeGruy contends that (2005) the communities we belong to affect us through norms and the encouragement towards conformism to the community standards, while societies affect us through mass media and its institutions.

Regarding the effect of communities, DeGruy (2005) says that at this level, “groups of people establish agreed-upon beliefs about their members’ worth, beliefs that are reflected in the community’s standards and values…” (pp. 530-531). In The Bluest Eye, Morrison successfully paints a picture of members of a community contributing to each other’s and the community’s shared self-esteem problems. One example of this from the novel is when Pecola is bullied by a group of boys her age. The boys themselves are black, yet they still harass Pecola using racial slurs. Claudia witnesses the harassment and despite being a little girl, even younger than Pecola, realizes that it is the boys’ own “contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth.” (Morrison, 1970, p. 46). Just as in DeGruy’s (2017) description of the “overseer mentality” (p. 680), these children learn the ways of the community even from a very young age and conform to it by victimizing one of their own, eventually contributing to creating individuals lacking proper self-esteem. A similar instance takes place between Pecola and Geraldine, an upper-class black woman who obviously grew up learning to hate her own blackness and everything associated with it. When her own son kills her cat and blames Pecola for it, Geraldine gets angry and calls Pecola a “nasty little black bitch.” (Morrison, 1970, p. 65). Pauline goes through a similar experience when she is looked down upon by fellow black women up in Ohio after moving there from Alabama. They make fun of the way she dresses, looks, and speaks, and this affects her self-esteem to such a great extent that she compulsively shops for new clothes, does her hair, and puts on make-up just like they do in order to get their approval.

The influence of the community on individuals’ self-esteem is not limited to Pecola’s and Pauline’s experiences who may be considered to be the major victims in the story. Other African American characters also suffer from the same pressures, one example of it being Claudia. Although she definitely has higher self-esteem compared to these two characters, she also secretly knows that it is “true” when she, Frieda and Pecola were verbally attacked by Maureen Peal, a much wealthier African American girl who is described as having a lighter skin tone, when she says “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos.” (Morrison, 1970, p. 52). When ruminating over this incident, Claudia thinks to herself that she “could not comprehend this unworthiness” that she has (Morrison, 1970, p. 53). These instances in the story paint a picture of an African American community feeding and sustaining the destructive ideals and beliefs that contribute to pulling each other’s self-esteem down to dangerous levels.

It is not only family and community, but it is also the society that influences the African American individuals' self-esteem. At this point, the society's effect through cultural norms and mass media can be linked to what DeGruy calls "racist socialization" (DeGruy, 2005, p. 566), which provides a solid basis for the majority of the events that transpire in the story. DeGruy changes the widely known "racial socialization" term, which refers to "the process by which race-related messages about the meaning of race and racism are transmitted by parents intergenerationally" (Neblett et al., 2016, p. 47), to "racist socialization" to emphasize the negativity in the process of socialization. She contends that one of the most prevalent symptoms of the generationally transmitted trauma in African Americans is their adoption of the value system of the white oppressors, which is based on the perception that things that are associated with whiteness are good and superior; and things that are associated with blackness are bad and inferior (DeGruy, 2005). She suggests that this adoption of white standards has brought a twisted socialization with it, which she calls racist socialization since this process has shaped African Americans to bear the prejudices of whites against them and made them look at themselves through white spectacles. Racist socialization holds a very important place in the story since it appears as the most pervasive symptom of transgenerational trauma in many characters, especially in Pecola, which sets the stage for her and for others' eventual downfall.

In line with DeGruy's theory regarding the symptoms of transgenerational trauma in African Americans, racist socialization takes up an important place in *The Bluest Eye*. It mostly shows itself through the concept of beauty in the novel. Along with the adoption of white standards for many things, DeGruy suggests this adoption most notably took place with the notion of beauty over the years (DeGruy, 2005). The adoption of white beauty standards is regarded as transgenerational in nature since, according to DeGruy, we can trace its origins back to the times of slavery. Through a set of qualities that separated whites from blacks that were obvious during the times of slavery due to the drastically different living conditions of the two separate groups, the association of whiteness to superiority and blackness to inferiority became inevitable. DeGruy explains how the different living conditions made a huge difference in how these two groups compared:

> From the time of their capture or birth, slaves saw whites as strong, rich, well-fed, secure and healthy. In relation to themselves, whites were perceived to be

> powerful and dominant. Slaves, of course, had the opposite qualities. Relative to whites, they were weak, poor, impoverished, insecure and unhealthy (p. 574).

Along with the physical and health-related qualities of white people that cause these associations, the social status of half-black children born of white masters and black mistresses was another reason for the association of whiteness to superiority. These children who had relatively lighter skin tone and straighter hair would work and were even sometimes allowed to live in the house of the white parent, whereas others would be forced to do heavier labor like working in the fields. Thus, the comparison of whiteness and blackness led to an inevitable association with the notions of superiority and inferiority. This narrative openly suggests that white standards of physical beauty have been inescapably internalized by African American people for years during slavery and in its aftermath and have assumed a transgenerational nature that caused the following generations to internalize the same associations (DeGruy, 2005).

Setting aside the generationally transmitted internalized perceptions of beauty, the contribution of the mass media to white ideals of beauty, which has not changed much for centuries, cannot be disregarded and can easily be observed in *The Bluest Eye*. The Euro-centric beauty ideals that have been force-fed by the mass media have shaped cultural norms for beauty for years and have become the predominant standard for beauty. Fair skin, fair hair and colored eyes have been regarded for some to be the prerequisite for attractiveness. The narrow selection of actresses and beauty figures who conform to these standards have contributed to the idea that whiteness, fairness, and colored eyes are the only means of being physically attractive.

When the mass media is almost reserved to these types of figures, it is only natural that the general preference and liking of the society coincides with it since the society is heavily influenced by it. The distorted beauty standards create a longing in people for similar qualities, which inevitably creates a binary opposition of whiteness, and everything related to it being favorable versus blackness and everything related to it being unwanted. As anticipated, this sort of social preference and favoritism towards whiteness strikes the biggest blow to the binary opposite of whiteness, which is represented by blackness, and indirectly by black people. This situation creates a feeling of inferiority associated with being black, which inscribes a feeling of worthlessness in black people for what they are (Walther, 1990, p. 779). In an effort of leaving every association to blackness behind in order to be accepted by the society, black people are made to feel that they have no choice but conform to the standards set by the mass

media and enforced by the society. This inevitably causes an internalization of white supremacist ideas to the point where “one's own beliefs, attitudes and values are based on the general social judgment and stereotypes,” (Zebialowicz and Palasinski, 2010, p. 226) which is represented by a preference towards whiteness, fairness, and colored eyes. The society’s and the media’s influence on the characters’ internalization of white beauty ideals are evident in the novel, yet when examined more deeply, it can be seen that this influence, or racist socialization, is not only a superficial or short-term change of perceptions due to the influence of mass media, but it is also a more deeply ingrained and inherited system of belief and colorism that can be observed in the characters.

Pauline is one of the characters that come to the forefront within the racist socialization discussion in the novel. As mentioned before, Pauline moves from Alabama to Ohio at a young age upon marrying Cholly, and she is scorned by the women there because of the way her unstraightened hair looks, and the way she dresses and talks. She feels unwelcome even by the few black women there, saying how the “northern colored folk” was “no better than whites for meanness” (Morrison, 1970, p. 80). She feels excluded, therefore, in an effort to conform and be accepted, she does her hair like them, puts on makeup just like they do, and she constantly buys new clothes. She goes through a racist socialization just like the women there just to be accepted by them, trying to “conform to the idealized uniform image of white beauty” (Zebialowicz & Palasinski 2010, p. 221) that are adopted by the black women themselves. She still feels utterly lonely, so she starts going to the movies where she is constantly exposed to the idea that loving somebody and being loved in return is dependent on physical beauty, on white beauty in particular, which is described by the narrator as “the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought” (Morrison, 1970, p. 83). She likes Jean Harlow who is famous for her platinum blonde hair, and she styles her hair just like her. When, one day, her front tooth suddenly falls off, she gives up everything as if there was no point in living unless she could be “beautiful” in the same way as the women she sees in the movies and around her. The idea of beauty proves to be destructive for Pauline because her life takes a much different turn from then on. Her relationship with Cholly becomes even worse and she is left with no friends, so she always talks to her first child Sammy and her unborn baby Pecola, as if she were friends with them to ease off her pent-up emotions and thoughts. She enters a stage in her life where she enjoys practically nothing. No matter what, she builds up hopes about her unborn baby Pecola, about how she is going to love her no matter how she looked.

However, when Pecola is born, she cannot help but think how ugly she is. Even though Pecola represents her only hope in life as her baby whom she vowed to love no matter what, this shows that her internalized racism is such strongly rooted in her that she cannot overcome the white lens that she looks at her life through, even for her baby. Even as a mother, she cannot help but evaluate her baby according to the superficial societal standards and see her own baby as "ugly" because of her racist socialization that she herself was born into.

Another character that shows the extent of racist socialization in the society is Claudia. Although she is a relatively strong character in standing up to the societal pressures, there are times when she is forced to give in to feelings of inferiority. A very important scene in the story takes place when Claudia is gifted with a white, blue-eyed doll for Christmas. She finds it offensive that the adults in her family expect her to be overjoyed at it whereas she finds the doll revolting and even scary. Claudia thinks that the adults believe a big white baby doll with its "round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair" was her "fondest wish" (Morrison, 1970, p. 16). Despite the adults' expectations, Claudia does not really understand this gift. She does not know what to do with it and does not understand why everyone else, not only the adults in her family but also her community and the whole society think it is such a big, great, beautiful thing. As the narrator, Claudia thinks to herself that apparently, she is expected to "rock it, fabricate storied situations around it, even sleep with it" since picture books show girls doing all these things with such dolls (Morrison, 1970, p. 16). The doll is a visualized representation of the society's internalized white supremacist beauty ideals. It is something that little girls crave and beg to have, or rather, they are taught by the society that they should do so even though it is debatable that these dolls (as Claudia mentions, mostly Raggedy Ann dolls (Morrison, 1970, p. 16)) actually look pleasant or create warm, loving emotions. The society presents these white, blue-eyed, blonde baby dolls as something that a girl like Claudia may attain only when they are "worthy" (Morrison, 1970, p. 16). In an effort to understand where this secret beauty of the doll lies that which she cannot see, she incises the doll, only to find sawdust and a round metal that makes sounds. She is heavily scolded by the adults for not knowing how to take care of things and not deserving or being "worthy" of the doll. The fact that her family gives her a white, blonde, blue-eyed baby doll believing that it would make a perfect gift that any girl would wish for is a testament to the black society's distorted socialization. However, it does not do justice to say that black society is to blame for

their racist socialization. In every respect, racist socialization is the result of the inherited trauma response of the African American population as a result of the centuries long ostracism, scorn, and outright racism by the white society.

Although she is very young, Claudia is aware that something is not right with the way she is seen by the society compared to white girls, and even compared to white baby dolls. Just nine years old, she has seen enough to make her question why society favors them against her and the likes of her. Narrating the incident with the baby doll that she dismembered, in a difficult state of confrontation with her feelings, she rhetorically questions the attitude of the society with the following remarks:

> I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls. The indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say, "Awwwww," but not for me? The eye slide of black women as they approached them on the street, and the possessive gentleness of their touch as they handled them (Morrison, 1970, p. 18).

Her inner thoughts reveal that Claudia is very well aware of the double standard that she gets from society. As a girl of her age, instead of rejoicing over her little gift of a doll, she questions why anyone would give her that. Through her observant nature and inquisitiveness, she is able to catch these little details that should be obvious to adults but petty to girls of her age, but her strength proves little against the explicit and implicit pressures from the society to conform. As she reveals later, her hatred of what whiteness represents would, by force, take the form of a fake love, a change which she describes as an "adjustment without improvement" (Morrison, 1970, p. 18). In her own words, Claudia learns to love whiteness, white dolls, and white people.

An instance heavy with symbolism involving Pecola and her adoration of Shirley Temple, a popular child actress who suits the Euro-centric beauty ideals of the time, presents another example of Claudia's initial inquisition of the white beauty ideals and her eventual and inevitable submission to them. When placed at the MacTeer house, Pecola compulsively drinks milk out of a cup with Shirley Temple's face on it. She does not drink milk out of greed as Claudia's mother reckons, but she drinks it only because she wants to see the sweet face of Shirley every time she handles the cup. Setting aside the discussion of the symbolic nature of Pecola's milk drinking (the intake

of a "white" drink by Pecola), Claudia's reaction to the incident and the ensuing inner monologue reveals her initial hate and the following forced acceptance of the white beauty ideals, a submission to racist socialization.

> She was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face. Frieda and she had a loving conversation about how cute Shirley Temple was. I couldn't join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels (Morrison, 1970, p. 16).

It firstly seems like Claudia's hate is partly due to the jealousy she feels towards Shirley Temple who seems to have a fun time with "Bojangles", the nickname adopted by Bill Robinson, an African American actor of the time who plays "Walker" in "The Little Colonel" with Shirley Temple ("The Little Colonel," n.d.). Rather than jealousy, however, for a girl like Claudia who is obviously mentally above her age limitations, the reason for her hatred seems more likely to stem from feelings of being cheated of what is rightfully hers. Due to the society's, especially white society's adoration of figures like Shirley Temple, she believes that she at least deserves the love and attention of black people. Yet, Bojangles, who represents any black American adult Claudia has in her life, dances with this little white girl to entertain her. She feels overlooked and victimized even by her own people due to the community's racist socialization. She later reveals how this racial socialization is sadly inescapable for her, too, through her remarks about how she feels about Shirley Temple. In response to Pecola's and Frieda's adoration of Shirley Temple, she says "Younger than both Frieda and Pecola, I had not yet arrived at the turning point in the development of my psyche which would allow me to love her" (Morrison, 1970, p. 16). Her inner remarks suggest that "loving Shirley Temple," or rather, what she represents involves a development, a gradual change, in one's psyche that one cannot help but accept. It even seems natural that a black American girl grows up to develop likings that are in line with the standards of the dominant culture. As if being engulfed in a whirlpool, Claudia knows she will end up succumbing to the racist socialization just like many others in the community and will eventually learn to love the Shirley Temples of the world. Her remarks at the end of the episode regarding the ugly white baby doll and white girls like Shirley Temple shows

her helplessness in standing up to the constant pressure towards racist socialization. Regarding this inevitable change, she says that her feelings towards white baby dolls and the white girls they represent had changed from "pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love. It was a small step to Shirley Temple. I learned much later to worship her, …" (Morrison, 1970, p. 18).

The incident with Maureen Peal, another black girl at the same school with Claudia, Frieda and Pecola, who was abovementioned regarding DeGruy's theory (2005) of vacant self-esteem in African American people, gains importance once again within the racist socialization discussions. Although she herself is black, Maureen insults the trio by alluding to their blackness. Although, at first, the girls go wild at Maureen with their own insults alluding to her two sixth fingers removed from both of her hands, her dog tooth, and her name which they mockingly change to "Meringue Pie", their insults cannot go near Maureen's in their gravity, hurtfulness, and symbolism. Knowing that it would be the girls' soft spot, Maureen shoots to kill. She knows the ultimate way to hurt the girls because despite coming from a much higher social status in terms of her financial capacities, Maureen is another victim of racist socialization. Claudia describes her to be held equal to the white girls at the school, and she clearly has a much better family support that would naturally be expected to keep her relatively safe from the societal pressures and overt racism. However, as DeGruy's theory also suggests, due to years and years of oppression and racism, racist socialization is so deeply rooted in the black society's collective psyche that no one is safe from it, even young, privileged girls like Maureen. It is not reserved for the underprivileged young black girls who sit at the bottom of social status ladder, but it affects everyone under its tent. Even as a young girl, Maureen learns the ways of the society, goes through racist socialization herself, and victimizes others whom she thinks are below her. Looking at it from another perspective, it can also be interpreted that by victimizing and discriminating against them based on their blackness, she tries to isolate herself from the racism and discrimination that she herself goes through as a half-black person, no matter how much lighter her skin is. What is more striking than Maureen's words is Claudia's sad realization that what Maureen said was actually "accurate." Following the hurtful incident, Claudia describes her feelings in a traumatic tone as follows:

> We were sinking under the wisdom, accuracy, and relevance of Maureen's last words. If she was cute—and if anything could be believed, she was—then we

> were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness. Jealousy we understood and thought natural – a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling for us. And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The Thing to fear was the Thing that made her beautiful, and not us (Morrison, 1970, p. 53).

Perhaps because she is a much stronger character in terms of her resistance to society's molding power, Claudia was able to keep herself from the racial socialization her peers have already gone through. However, being an utterly clever girl with a skill for careful observation, she sadly realizes that there is no escape from it. Although she cannot quite put her finger on it, she identifies the "enemy;" but she also realizes that it is much, much bigger than what she can cope with. It is an enemy which she says she "learned much later to worship" (Morrison, p. 16).

Claudia is important in showing how young black girls are influenced by the society's and community's ideals and how easily their backs get broken by pressure they are subjected to by their families, peers, and adults to conform. Being the narrator whose feelings and thoughts we can hear, Claudia shows how vulnerable the members of the black community could be due to the years of racism and oppression that forced them to develop survivalist methods of holding on in a predominantly white society. Despite being tougher than all the characters in the novel, Claudia gives signals that she has no choice but to conform. By the same token, when Pecola is put under the microscope, it is not difficult to say that what society has done to Claudia, it will do it tenfold to Pecola who clearly has a much more sensitive and more vulnerable personality than her.

Pecola is the central character and the focus of generationally inherited trauma responses and the consequent destructive fetishism in *The Bluest Eye*. As aforementioned regarding self-esteem problems, Pecola is also the most brutally

terrorized victim of racist socialization. Lacking the necessary family support strips Pecola of proper self-esteem, which in turn makes her more vulnerable to the harsh effects of racist socialization. Even though she is a very young girl, she experiences racist socialization so profoundly that she cannot help but develop a serious degree of self-hatred and self-pity because of it. Yet, it would be unjust to say that Pecola is responsible for her own self-hatred and self-pity. It is obviously the society with its white-centric idealization, especially regarding beauty, that teaches her that she should indeed hate herself. Setting aside the aforementioned effects of Pecola's family on her vacant self-esteem, Pecola is pitilessly scorned by her peers and other adults. For Pecola, racism and humiliation are everywhere. No place is safe for her including her family home, and maybe especially her family home.

Pecola's family home is described as being a wreck of a place. It is a makeshift home made from an old and abandoned storefront with very little furniture, and it is always very cold. Pecola's parents do not take care of the place. Cholly, the father, is either always drunk or absent. Even when home, he refrains from contributing to the care of the house. The mother Pauline, on the other hand, cleans, cooks and takes care of children for a living, but does not care for her own children or house. What is worse, Pecola helps her mother in the house of Pauline's white employers, therefore, she witnesses how meticulously Pauline takes care of that house and the people living in there, especially the little white girl Pauline takes perfect care of, physically and emotionally. The fact that her mother withholds the same care and affection from Pecola reinforces the feelings of worthlessness in her. Lacking the inquisitiveness, criticism, and the self-confidence that her peer Claudia has, she cannot challenge this reality consciously and does not see the injustice that she is subjected to. Instead, she accepts the conditions very naïvely, and she subconsciously correlates her unfortunate conditions to her blackness, and the little girl's elevated conditions to her whiteness. At this point, it does not do justice to attribute this correlation to Pecola's child mind and naivete. In fact, it is stated in the story that Pauline does actually find her own house beyond help, and thus, unworthy of her attention. Sadly, these feelings are also reflected on Pecola, whom she similarly finds beyond help and unworthy of her care, such as with her hair of "tangled black puffs of rough wool to comb" (Morrison, 1970, p. 86) that will not yield to her efforts. In this case, it is only natural for a girl like Pecola to be convinced that her unworthiness must be because of her blackness since it is, along with everything else that enforce this belief, the only difference she can readily observe

between herself and the little white girl of the employers. Unable to realize this injustice and question it, she only blames herself for the situation she is in. This inevitably contributes to the racist socialization of Pecola since she is made to believe that whiteness, represented by the little white, blonde, blue eyes girl is something to be attained that would make her pretty, hence worthy of motherly care and affection.

A symbolic instance that comes to the foreground regarding the racist socialization process of Pecola is when she goes to a small store to buy some candies. On the way, she wonders why people call dandelions weeds and pluck them off their gardens as if they were ugly and unwanted. She, on the other hand, finds them simply beautiful. Yet, her following experience at the store takes away all the positivity and beauty in her beholding, pulling her back to the dark waters of self-doubt and self-hatred. She encounters the shop owner, Mr. Yacobowski, a Polish immigrant to the United States. Mr. Yacobowski is disinterested in Pecola's arrival and does not even bother to look at her with his "blear-dropped" blue eyes (Morrison, 1970, p. 36). The following part describes how Pecola is forced out of her fantasies in which dandelions, symbolizing herself, are actually beautiful no matter what people seem to think:

> He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, see a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary. "Yeah?" She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes (Morrison, 1970, p. 36).

The instance feels like a slap in her face. Walking to the store, Pecola is able to find beauty and happiness in life for an instant. Almost in an act of rebellion, she thinks that dandelions are pretty even though society does not seem to like them. It is as if she sees

herself in dandelions. Constantly juggling her idea of herself and how she is seen through the eyes of society in her mind, she is able to find silver linings in a very narrow window of time where she is able to focus on her idea of herself, symbolized by a pretty flower. However, the reality of society strikes her the moment she gets in contact with it. Just as she is attempting to form a healthy view of herself irrespective of what society seems to think about her, she is discouraged by the act of the shopkeeper. White, adult, and male, Mr. Yacobowski is a representation of everything in the world that victimizes her. Considering their social statuses, just as the narrator puts it, how can somebody like Mr. Yacobowski "see a black little girl" like Pecola? (Morrison, 1970, p. 36).

Pecola leaves the store feeling ashamed. She sees dandelions again, but her frustration and shame cause her to look at them from a different set of eyes. This time she thinks they are ugly. For a moment there, she feels anger rising up in her, but it quickly gives the ground to shame again. She cannot dare to feel a healthy, rightful anger towards Mr. Yacobowski since she is coded to feel apologetic about who she is. To prevent herself from crying, she turns to the Mary Jane candies she has bought from the store. Looking at the wrappers, once again, she is reminded the right way to be for a girl like her and why she should indeed be ashamed of herself:

> Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane (Morrison, 1970, p. 37).

The idealized beauty images of the white supremacist society show up everywhere, even on candy wrappers. Pecola, like all the other children, is surrounded by reminders that this is the way to be for a little girl, namely white, blue eyed, and blonde. Her "failure" to be so inevitably causes a feeling of guilt and shame. Her age, upbringing, and most importantly, her inherited traumas prevent her from questioning this, and she only blames herself for her predicament. Just like we see from Claudia when she describes how she initially found nothing to love about Shirley Temple, but she later had to learn to love her, Pecola learns to love the Mary Janes of the world.

Another instance that is symbolically important in terms of Pecola's racist socialization is her encounter with Geraldine and their ensuing interaction. Geraldine is described to be a light-brown-skinned African American woman who learned "how to

get rid of the funkiness" (Morrison, 1970, p. 58). What is meant here is that Geraldine learned how to break ties from her African American origin that would potentially define who she is. When she puts on lipstick, she is careful not to cover her lips fully since it would suggest she has thick lips. She is described to worry too much about her hair edges, a feature that would suggest her hair is typical of African American women that will not easily yield to efforts to "make them submit" (Martin et al., 2018, p. 84). She has her son's hair cut as shortly as possible to prevent the texture from being visible. In these respects, Geraldine herself is also presented as a character who has been a victim of racist socialization. Just like a testament to Geraldine's character, Peach (2000) writes that:

> the authentic black self is buried so deep in some of the characters that their perception of themselves amounts to self-hatred. This self-loathing is strongest in those characters who are farthest from their communities; for what they hate most is being different since difference brings abuse and cruelty. The self hatred is often focused on the body as the most obvious indicator of race; hair and color... (p. 36).

Paradoxically, almost in an effort to pass for white, she tries hard not to bear any visible cues that would reveal she is African American. She lets her son play with only white kids and makes sure he knows the "difference" between "colored people" who are "neat and quiet", and "niggers" who are "dirty and loud" (Morrison, 1970, p. 61). She comes from a relatively advantageous background compared to the African American population that is in the focus of the novel. She takes great pride in taking perfect care of herself, her house, her family, and her cat. Yet, it is described that Geraldine is devoid of any real feelings, any ups and downs emotionally, and she feels genuine love only for her cat.

Pecola's interaction with Geraldine is a very unfortunate one for Pecola. Junior takes her to their apartment promising to show her kittens, but then throws his mother's cat at her face. Pecola is scared, scratched on her face and chest, and starts crying. However, when the cat rubs itself to Pecola, she feels warm and safe. That is when she realizes the cat is beautiful with its deep black fur and blue-green eyes. She cannot help but be captivated by them, by "the blue eyes in the black face" (Morrison, 1970, p. 63). Junior snaps at Pecola's affection of the cat which he already hates due to his mother's love of it, so he kills it by throwing him against the window. When Geraldine walks in, Junior tells her that Pecola killed the cat. Geraldine gets angry and calls Pecola "a nasty

little black bitch" (Morrison, 1970, p. 65) and tells her to get out of her house. Pecola does not dare to say she did not do anything. She basically accepts that she is guilty and leaves the house. She cannot say anything to Geraldine for the same reason as she feels ashamed after her interaction with Mr. Yacobowski. She takes it very naturally that she is to blame for the way she is treated, even though she does nothing that would justify the treatment she gets. Looking at herself, she thinks the only possible reason for the way she gets treated is her blackness and "ugliness", for which she is cursed by this "pretty milk-brown lady" (Morrison, 1970, p. 65).

The incident is sad and unfortunate for Pecola for many reasons, but it is important to place particular focus on Geraldine here, too. The incident is significant for showing how Geraldine herself has been subjected to a similar kind of racism in her life so that she was socialized in the same way and had to develop an identity that is far removed from her African American origins. Here, William E. Cross Jr.'s (1998) research on African American identity types in his *Black psychological functioning and the legacy of slavery: Myths and realities* provides a meaningful point of reference. As mentioned in the previous section regarding the character Dee in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use", Cross Jr. suggests that slavery caused African Americans to lose much of their connection to their original African identities and led them to develop identities that hardly bare the traces of their origins. The result was a number of different identities that became pervasive among African Americans that could be categorized under certain identity markers. Cross Jr. lists the most prominent ones as "assimilationist, ambivalent, militant, self-hating, and internalizing or synthesizing" (Cross, 1998, pp. 394-395). He describes assimilationist as disregarding the role of race in daily life and developing connections to the dominant society and culture; ambivalent as in a perplexed state, in between embracing their blackness or Americanness; militant as having a blindfolded dedication to everything black and rejection of everything white; self-hating as in a state of deep self-loathing due to being black; and internalizing or synthesizing as having a multifaceted mindset about blackness that encourages them to be functional, productive and proactive (Cross, 1998, pp. 394-395).

Although Geraldine might initially come across as the assimilationist type since she, almost in an effort to pass for white, tries to emphasize her connection to the dominant group rather than to her ethnic group, this incident proves that under closer inspection, she is actually the self-hating type. Just as in the case with the African American boys teasing Pecola by calling her "black e mo" (Morrison, 2017, p. 46) and

Claudia's ensuing realization that their hatred of Pecola and her blackness actually stems from self-loathing towards their own blackness, Geraldine's racial slurs and hatred towards Pecola arises from her self-hatred. Her ethnic identity confusion is "linked to a decrease in self-esteem, adaptiveness and well-being" (Zebialowicz & Palasinski, 2010, p. 221). However, it should not mean that Geraldine is to "blame" for her self-hatred and her self-loathing identity type. In fact, much as Pecola, Geraldine is a victim of the racist socialization cycle within the African American society. Yet again, African American community is also not to blame for this vicious cycle of racist socialization. The wider, predominantly white society is at the beginning of the racist socialization chain, and its hegemony over this enslaved and tortured minority is where racist socialization starts. Racist socialization has evolved and has been inherited generation after generation, and Geraldine is just another victim of it, and an unconscious victimizer who ensures the continuation of this vicious cycle. Just like Maureen Peal who tries to attack the girls based on their blackness, and this way, unconsciously trying to isolate herself from the same discrimination she also suffers from, Geraldine does the same by calling Pecola "a nasty little black bitch" (Morrison, 1970, p. 65). This fateful incident proves to be another major blow to young Pecola who becomes more and more certain that she deserves all the hatred she gets for being the way she is, and that if she was different, blue-eyed like that black cat or the daughter of her mother's employers, things would have been much different for her.

Pecola's learned self-hatred is not only reinforced by strangers who give her hateful looks or utter racial slurs, but it is also reinforced by her closest circles, which are her friends and family. In a home with continuous altercations between the parents that usually turn violent, Pecola feels vulnerable and worthless. She has no option but witness whatever is taking place at home on a regular basis, without any chance to intervene or remove herself from the situation. She gets so helpless that during such instances, she just wants to disappear. When nothing works to stop the violence or make her disappear, she blames herself. She thinks that "as long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people" (Morrison, 1970, p. 34). She cannot realize that she or how she looks has nothing to do with what is taking place between her parents, but much like any other child, she looks for the blame in herself. When she turns to herself for the answers, she cannot find any reason, so she believes it must be the way she looks. Or else, why would not other people, like the pretty Maureen Peal, go through the same things as Pecola does? She thinks that "if

she looked 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" (p. 34).

Pecola's circle of friends is another close group that enforce feelings of self-hatred and self-blame on her. She feels ignored and despised not only by her classmates, none of whom share her desk, but also by her teachers who always look away from her and address her only when they have to. She is the focus of mockery when a class member wants to insult another one by saying he loves Pecola Breedlove. It never fails to get a laugh from those around, or a pretend anger from the addressee of the mockery. Among all these people with their mockery, disdain, empty gazes that seem to see past her in complete ignorance, openly racist insults coming from people who even share the same ethnic origins with her, and all kinds of violence and anger, Pecola is alone, vulnerable, and hopeless. Without any clue to what the real reason for her predicament is, her learned self-hatred, racist socialization and vacant self-esteem that result from the long years of inherited trauma, she has one thing to hold onto, a hope. Her conviction that she goes through all these things because she does not look pretty enough makes her believe that "if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of her were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison, 1970, p. 34). With this realization, Pecola starts to obsessively wish and pray for blue eyes, which opens up the discussion to fetishistic attachments as coping mechanisms in the novel.

Before delving into Pecola's fetishistic attachments as a coping mechanism for her inherited and acquired traumas, a brief look into why Pecola develops an obsession for blue eyes instead of white skin would be useful to cover a potential gap in this discussion. During her parents' violent fight where she wants to disappear, Pecola becomes so numb that her imagination of slowly fading away feels almost real, possibly because she gets increasingly tense during the altercations. She feels her limbs become invisible one by one, with only her eyes left. As the narrator explains,

> they were always left. Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures, all of those faces. She had long ago given up the idea of running away to see new pictures, new faces, as Sammy had so often done. He never took her and he never thought about his going ahead of time, so it was never planned. It wouldn't have worked anyway (Morrison, 1970, p. 34).

Her eyes are like windows opening to the outside world. She feels that the memory of all the hatred, contempt, and painfully empty gazes that ignore her presence are stored in her eyes. She believes she can change all the pictures by changing her eyes, making them just like those of the people that see through her. This way, she can somehow erase all the memories of when she was trampled under the gaze of others. However, another interpretation may emerge regarding the reason for Pecola's obsession with blue eyes. It is that Pecola desires blue eyes also because she wants to change how other people see her. In the story, Pecola is described to be "thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people" (Morrison, 1970, p. 35). It can be interpreted from this description that far from developing a functioning, healthy self-image, Pecola is unhealthily preoccupied with her image in the eyes of the others. She is unable to perceive herself from within and involuntarily coded to see herself from the outer gaze (Zebialowicz & Palasinski, 2010, p. 223). Her self-image is "an ill reflection of the image generated by the perception of the reciprocal other" (Cirakli, 2017, p. 56). Therefore, she only has a negative perception of herself, which is the reflection of what she feels that others have of her. Frantz Fanon mentions a similar feeling that reminds one of Pecola's feelings in his "Black Skin, White Masks," where he says,

> I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance. I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed (Fanon, 1967, p. 116).

Fanon's description of being fixed is parallel to Bhabha's fetishism and the concept of fixity (1983). It refers to an identity that consists of a set of fixed perceptions, stereotypes and assumptions, without any say or autonomy from the object of attribution. When we look at Pecola in light of these concepts, it paints a similar picture where her identity is created by the Other for her: a collection of all the prejudices and stereotypes of white supremacy. By wanting to change her eyes, she wants to change her image of herself in the eyes of the others through which she sees herself since she "cannot reflect upon her own image, rather envisions a false image as to how she appears" (Cirakli, 2017, p. 56).

Fetishism in The Bluest Eye has the same function as fetishism in "Everyday Use": a coping mechanism for the characters to overcome their traumatic legacies.

McClintock's renewed definition of fetishism that considers race and class as well as sexuality as formative factors provides a relevant theoretical base for the presence and function of fetishism in *The Bluest Eye* (McClintock, 1995, p. 184). McClintock's description of fetish, its origin and its function correspond to the development of trauma, its generational transition and coping mechanisms of individuals' that can be observed in the novel. She describes fetish as originating from a social contradiction living in both historical and personal memory, and working as a prop which the contradiction is displayed onto. Then, by attributing powers onto such fetish objects and by manipulating them, a person symbolically takes the control of things in their hands. Looking at the story from this perspective, the connection between the traumatic legacy of the African American society and how some characters deal with these inherited traumas through fetishistic attachments which occur many times in the novel surface with a closer inspection of the characters, their backgrounds, and their relationships with the objects around them.

Before bringing the central character Pecola under scrutiny to discuss how the inherited traumas of the African American society create a need for coping mechanisms, hence fetishistic attachments, a brief look at how the other characters display fetishistic attachments as part of their coping strategies will solidify the argument made in this thesis. Just like Pecola, Claudia is an important character who displays the effects of the trauma she inherited from her community. Although she is very different from Pecola in that she has a much more protesting personality and a less-than-ideal family support which Pecola lacks completely, she still needs a tangible prop, a tool that she can manipulate to get a sense of control over her traumas. The most prominent example of this, as discussed above, is when she receives a white baby doll for Christmas. The fact that she does not understand the doll whereas all the adults in her family believe it is everything a girl her age can wish for reveals its fetish quality. To the parents, it is such a special and valuable thing that they will only get it for their daughter on a special day like Christmas on the condition that she behaves herself and prove to be worthy of it. To Claudia, this white, blue-eyed baby doll means nothing. Just like Pietz's original description of fetish, its value is "mutually incomprehensible" to the parents and Claudia (Pietz, 1987, p. 24). The only meaning Claudia can attach to it is hatred, because to her, the doll is like a representation of white girls. She does not see the beauty other girls and adults see in these dolls which she is "physically revolted by and secretly frightened of " (Morrison, 1970, p.16). The only thing she wants to do

with them is dismember them. The description of her dismemberment of the doll is a vivid one, including the breaking of the fingers, bending of the feet, twisting of the head around, removing of the eyeballs, cracking of the back, all of which she does not know why she does. The fact that the dolls do not have the same meaning to Claudia as they do to other people is a clear sign of the fetish nature of these dolls for her, and also for the adults and other little girls, revealing "the problematic of the social value" of these objects (Pietz, 1985, p. 7). However, what is more striking is her sadistic mutilation of them as if she was doing all these to a white girl. With all its brutality, the scene brings a voodoo doll to mind, which itself is a fetish object. Using or "manipulating" these white, blue eyed baby dolls as voodoos, Claudia "gains symbolic control" of her inherited and acquired traumas for being a black child in a white supremacist society (McClintock, 1995, p. 184). Using the doll like a voodoo doll creates an altered state of power where she becomes the oppressor and victimizer as opposed to being the victim. She exercises authority and power over the things that have traumatized her for years, and copes with her anger through what she does to the baby doll.

Another compelling instance where fetishism is used as a means to overcome traumatized feelings is when Claudia and Frieda plant marigold seeds. Although the sisters' reason for doing this is traumatic in and of itself and not necessarily of inherited nature (Pecola's pregnancy), it is still important for showing how attaching meaning to mere objects and manipulating them give people a sense of control over their traumas. The MacTeer sisters plant the seeds and say "the right words over them" (Morrison, 1970, p. 8) as a sacrifice for Pecola's baby to survive, and they believe that if the seeds sprout up, the baby will live. Unlike the adults in the community, Claudia and Frieda want Pecola's baby to live, but since they cannot do anything about it, putting all their hopes in the seeds is their way of feeling a sense of power and control over the situation. The clear resemblance between a seed buried in the soil and a human zygote inside the womb reinforces the meaning the girls attach to them, the seeds being a proxy for the baby. The symbolic act is also justified by Claudia with her realization of the aforementioned resemblance: "We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt." (Morrison, 1970, p. 8). In this respect, the seeds function just like a voodoo doll would for the baby, connected by an invisible string that ties up their fates together. By exercising power over the seeds by planting them, watering them, and saying the

"magic" words over them, they imagine having power over the unborn baby's fate, which they want to be born and grow up like a planted flower.

One other clear reference to how fetishism plays a role in the African American people's lives is Claudia's description of being outdoors, and African Americans' related desire for ownership. From her description, it is clear that the horror of being outdoors, or being left without a place to live, creeps about in the community as the worst state or condition a person can find themselves in. She mentions how this fear of being outdoors has made her community place too much importance on materials and ownership. The link between African Americanness and the desire for material ownership in Claudia's narrative hints at the effects of transgenerational trauma and the ensuing fetishistic attachments as coping mechanisms:

> Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment. Our peripheral existence, however, was something we had learned to deal with – probably because it was abstract. But the concreteness of being outdoors was another matter – like the difference between the concept of death and being, in fact, dead. Dead doesn't change, and outdoors is here to stay. Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership. The firm possession of a yard, a porch, a grape arbor. Propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their nests. Like frenzied, desperate birds, they overdecorated everything; fussed and fidgeted over their hard-won homes; canned, jellied, and preserved all summer to fill the cupboards and shelves; they painted, picked, and poked at every corner of their houses (Morrison, 1970, p. 15).

Claudia's observation is important for showing that the years African Americans spent under slavery and the threat of being left without a place to live or of not being able to feed themselves properly might have left a mark on their culture so that they display an excessive amount of attachment to the objects and properties they possess. Just like in Pauline's situation, being surrounded by their objects and property seems to give them a sense of safety and seclusion from outside threats. In this respect, the meaning and value they place on these materials exceed their innate value and meaning and become fetish objects for people. Just like with the other fetish objects that appear in the novel, an attachment to these objects is a coping mechanism to overcome an inherited trauma. Although the African American people of the time in the novel do not seem to be under

a real threat of being left outdoors or of starvation, the fact that the presence of materials give them a sense of safety is a testament to an inherited fear, an inherited trauma of these situations.

Another character that shows an unnatural attachment to objects is Pauline. She shows a great deal of care and attention to everything in the Fisher house where she is employed. She takes great pleasure in touching their silk draperies, smelling their linen, handling their fluffy towels and white pillow slips. In contrast, she is described as being an intolerant, depressed, loveless and careless person when she is in her own house. However, because she finds comfort and security among these objects, she becomes a completely different person when she is working at the Fisher house, "an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs" (Morrison, 1970, p. 86). The need that is to be filled by her role in her employers' house is her need to distance herself from her life as Pauline, a traumatized and discriminated woman, as opposed to being "Polly", a praised member of the Fisher household. Service people and shopkeepers who would normally intimidate her instead get intimidated by her and respect her when she shops on behalf of the Fishers, since "power, praise, and luxury were hers in this household" (p. 87). Everything in her own house, all the cheap things she can afford that do not last and end up rotting away are a reminder of where she came from, what troubles she has been through and where she is now, which is not far from her past in terms of her social status and living conditions. When she is in the Fisher house, everything that is related to her life as Pauline, as the mother of Pecola and Sammy and the wife of Cholly seem like the "afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day" (p. 86). She obsessively arranges, cleans and lines up things in the Fisher house where she can find "beauty, order cleanliness, and praise" (p. 87). There clearly is an unnatural relationship between Pauline and all these objects she finds comfort in. She takes pride in looking at her work at the end of the day and takes comfort in the abundance and quality of things. The only positive feelings Pauline gets in her life is when she is in the Fisher house and in contact with their objects, which is her way of detaching herself from her trauma-filled life and legacy. Spending her day in this house filled with such beautiful objects all of which she is allowed to touch, order and clean feels like therapy for Pauline. Although they are just random household objects, they provide a safe haven for her among which she can feel good.

The feelings of safety and peace Pauline gets from the abundance, quality, and cleanliness of the materials in her employer's house reminds one of a previously mentioned character, Geraldine. She displays similar characteristics to Pauline in that she is also obsessed with cleanliness, order, and the abundance of the objects in her heavily decorated home. The previous account of Geraldine helps us to understand why she develops such a fetishistic attachment to materials. Although she comes from a more privileged background compared to Pauline, Geraldine herself is a victim of the generational trauma cycle, so much so that she develops a self-loathing identity as described by William Cross Jr. (1998), as mentioned before regarding her personality. Geraldine's efforts to "get rid of the funkiness" (p. 58), to wipe away any sort of clue that will cause her to be identified as African American is her way of detaching herself from her inherited trauma. In that respect, she is very similar to the character Dee in "Everyday Use", who tries to leave behind her legacy of trauma through the coping mechanism of fetishizing everyday household objects. She hides behind her heavily decorated house, starched blouses, ironed shirts, boiled white sheets, and potted bleeding hearts that make her feel secure and safe from any danger since she feels she has to be careful at all times to not be identified as a "nigger" (p. 61), which entails a traumatic legacy. Her meticulous self-care and excessively decorated house function both as distractors for others so they would not notice she is Black, and a safety guard that gives her a feeling of detachment from her traumatic legacy by showing how she is different from the other blacks she looks down upon. In fact, Major et al.'s 2002 study on "discrimination in intergroup contexts" shows that some members of a disadvantaged minority may be inclined to appear like they are from the privileged majority, and look down on their group members to isolate themselves from their original stigmatized groups (p. 269). In that respect, Geraldine's efforts to pass as white is an effort to save herself from being identified as African American, and this way, releasing herself from the troubles and traumas that come with it.

A very peculiar character who draws attention to the meaning and value attached to mere objects is Soaphead Church, who grants Pecola her blue eyes. He is a misanthrope who has not been able to keep a steady course in life, and in the end, found himself in Lorain, Ohio, working as a "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams" (p. 113). He comes from a family who is proud of the "white strain" in their family blood and is convicted of their relative superiority. Although this situation provides somewhat elevated conditions for the family members, they are still not safe from the racist and

discriminatory order in the society. They still marry white people for the purpose of "lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features" (p. 155). They are very hardworking and orderly in order to prove that it is innate to them thanks to their part-white lineage. An eccentric member of the family, Soaphead Church takes a few odd jobs, the only ones that are available to him as a black person in spite of his "noble bloodline" (p. 117). Even though he comes from a family who strived to erase their blackness and elevated themselves to a level that makes them feel and seen superior, he is not free from the trauma cycle in the black community. The decided efforts of the family to pass as white only adds up to the transgenerational trauma, giving its young members the idea that they are inferior the way they are, and they should always be seeking to resemble whites. Therefore, Soaphead Church's extreme fondness of objects does not seem groundless since he bears a well-established transgenerational trauma that he inherited from his family and community. He is described as being a lover of things, heavily fond of mere, inanimate, worn objects, living peacefully among them. He keeps some of the most precious objects he has in a box under his bed, full of random things that he values very much. Although his fondness of the objects seems arbitrary at first glance, it can be inferred that each object, although valueless for any other person, holds an important value for Soaphead Church since each come from a different time and different person in his life. He finds such peace and joy in his objects that even when he is in an angry and agitated state, he gets distracted by them and forgets everything. His unusual fetishistic attachment to these objects is Soaphead Church's way of distancing himself from his traumatized state of mind and finding a safe haven in simplicity and pleasant memories that his objects represent for him.

With the central character Pecola, fetishistic attachment does not occur with specific objects, but it basically takes place through her extreme obsession with blue eyes. In order to better understand this, it is crucial to discuss why blue eyes are fetishized in the story. It is also important to revise the fetishism literature to understand the leap from actual materials as fetish in the story like a baby doll, seeds, household goods, random useless objects to blue eyes. Looking at the fetishism literature, it becomes clear how an obsessive attachment like Pecola's is indeed a fetishistic attachment that makes a set of blue eyes a fetish. As one of the earliest accounts in the related literature, Pietz (1987) describes the fetish as a matter that is at the locus of psychic investment (p. 23). Similarly, McClintock (1995) also mentions "the

investment of intense passion (erotic or otherwise) in the fetish object" (pp. 184-185). Just like in Alfred Binet's definition which is also the most widely used definition of fetish today, it is not out of the ordinary that a body part is invested with an unusual meaning and value, and fetishized this way, arousing feelings that may not be the same for everybody, though not necessarily of a perverted nature as Binet puts it (1988, p. 3). Assigning a body part an unconventional meaning and value that it does not necessarily have, and that may differ from any meaning and value that is assigned to it by others is fetishism by definition. Although the investment of such value to a body part is of an erotic nature in Binet's definition, the idea of fetishism had a wider scope before Binet and was widened and deepened by the scholars and theorists after him. In that respect, Pecola's obsession with having blue eyes is still a fetishization of a body part based on the meaning she assigns to it, irrespective of any sexual connotation. For Pecola, blue eyes can have the power to turn everything good in her life, like magic. Because of her learned self-loathing due to her inherited and acquired traumas, the key to making everything right in her life is making herself pretty, thus worthy, which is only possible by having blue eyes. However, although it would seem to make more sense if Pecola had believed that she would acquire beauty through becoming white, which seems to be the most readily visible difference she would be able to spot between herself and characters that have much better standards because they are pretty (like Shirley Temple or the little girl of Pauline's employers), there is a reason why she develops a fetishistic attachment to blue eyes instead. As mentioned before, for Pecola, eyes do not only see, but they also hold memories. They are the locus of the memory of all the bad experiences that teach her that she is not worthy of love or attention because she is not pretty enough. This unnatural meaning Pecola attaches to blue eyes is only reinforced by the society, which itself has a fetish for blue eyes, proving the "constructedness of social value" of fetishes (Pietz, 1985, p. 9). All the movie artists mentioned in the novel as beauty figures people admire, like Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, Hedy Lamarr, Ginger Rogers, Betty Grable, have blue eyes in common. Society's own fetish of euro-centric beauty ideals is reflected in Pecola's fetish for blue eyes.

Baudrillard's and MacGaffey's (1977) intersecting definitions of fetishism as a "charm" (p. 172) and something that hexes an individual (Apter, 1991, p. 2) are also instrumental in understanding Pecola's situation. Pecola is fascinated by blue eyes. The fascination is most obvious when she sees Geraldine's cat's eyes for the first time. Although it is deep black, it has popping blue eyes, which impresses Pecola and takes

away her fear and arouses feelings of affection for the cat. The fact that the cat gets much more love and affection from its owner than Pecola gets as a human being even from her mother is a striking detail. A naïve self-persuasion occurs as Pecola equates blue eyes to being worthy of love, as evidenced by the cat whose blackness does not make a difference to how much it is loved since it has blue eyes that make it pretty, hence worthy of love.

Pecola's fascination with and the eventual fetishization of blue eyes is also reinforced by her inevitable adoption of Eurocentric beauty ideals since they are advertised everywhere. The fact that she is surrounded by girls her age who seem to be free from all the trouble she is exposed to, like the girls in her classroom her teachers adore, or the daughter of Pauline's employers, makes her believe that seeing through blue eyes is like seeing life through a protective filter that makes everything seem better. Their eyes do not hold bad memories like Pecola's eyes do. It seems like she is charmed by the power of blue eyes since she believes they will protect her and make everything right. In this respect, Pecola's fetishization of blue eyes and her obsessive desire to have them is a coping mechanism that she has adopted with a wish to protect herself.

Although Pecola fetishizes blue eyes due to her belief that they will give her a new identity, a reason to be loved and a protective shield from the outside as a coping mechanism, her eventual attainment of blue eyes only occurs through the loss of her sanity. Pecola invests all her hopes into an impossible fetish as a coping mechanism. Some time after getting raped by Cholly and beaten down by Pauline following the rape, Pecola goes to Soaphead Church to ask him to give her blue eyes. Although Soaphead Church does a little trick to make Pecola believe she got blue eyes, Pecola's persuasion that her wish has come true actually stems from her hopelessness since she has nothing else to be able to cope with her life. She is drawn to a point where she either gets blue eyes, or cannot live anymore. McClintock's, Baudrillard's and Pietz's definitions of the fetish as something that has "a strange ability to hex the user" (Apter, 1991, p. 2), a power "to enchant the fetishist" (McClintock, 1995, p. 184), and power over a person that subverts "the ideal of the autonomously determined self" (Pietz, 1987, p. 23) are reflected in Pecola's loss of sanity that make her actually believe that she has got blue eyes. In Pecola's case, unlike the others, the difficulties she suffers from get to such an unbearable point that she can only cope by losing her mind.

In conclusion, *The Bluest Eye* is a novel that successfully portrays the transgenerational traumas in the African American community and the fetishistic

attachments that characters develop to cope with their traumatic legacies. However, it should be noted that taking place in the 1940s United States when racism and discrimination were still heavily exercised against black people (Zebialowicz & Palasinski 2010, p. 221), trauma was not only inherited, but it was also a contemporary issue that still plagued African American people. Yet, the role of the origins of the systematic discrimination and racism against African Americans which date back to when Africans were brought to the country cannot be ignored in the development of the traumatizingly discriminatory ideals and practices in the society, in the mass media and in the dominant white supremacist culture. Racial trauma is transgenerational, as much as racism, oppression and discrimination are transgenerational. Therefore, even the contemporary exercising of discrimination and racism has its roots established way back in history. The black American characters in The Bluest Eye are all victims of this cycle of racism and the inevitable trauma following it. Even the characters that are supposed have come from more privileged backgrounds like Maureen Peal, Geraldine, or Soaphead Church cannot remain unaffected by the transgenerational trauma in the black American society. As a coping mechanism for their traumas, the characters develop fetishistic attachments either to random objects that give them a sense of security, or as in Pecola's case, to a set of blue eyes that will help her change from an ugly duckling to a pretty girl who, like her white peers, is worthy of love. The only difference between Pecola and the other characters is that although they are able to get a sense of control over their traumatized feelings through fetishism functioning as a coping mechanism, Pecola can only do it by losing her sanity due to the gravity of her situation and the impossibility of her coping system to actually come to life. In Morrison's own words, the consequence of Pecola's color fetish, unfortunately, turns severely destructive for her (Morrison, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, this thesis has aimed to present how transgenerational trauma theory can be applied to the African American community, its main effects that can be observed in the community and how and why fetishism functions as a coping mechanism. The thesis aims to accomplish this through the analyses of Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, both important works of African American literature that provide a window to look at generational tensions and conflict, identity, self-definition, and cultural heritage issues in the community. Both works present the reader with solid examples of the effects of transgenerational trauma as studied in Dr. Joy DeGruy's *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing* (2005) which provides an important part of the theoretical base for the transgenerational trauma discussion in the thesis, as well as how fetishistic attachments function as a coping mechanism, as interpreted from Anne McClintock's (1995) definition of fetishism, on which the fetishism related arguments in this thesis are mostly based.

As reviewed in the first part of the thesis, understanding transgenerational trauma theory and the related literature on the topic is important for a deeper analysis of the works of literature which are the focus of this study. Transgenerational trauma theory suggests that whether sudden, short term natural disasters, or long-term, human-caused barbarous experiences like slavery and segregation, severely traumatic experiences that affect entire communities or societies continue to affect the descendants of the people who experience these traumas firsthand. This legacy of trauma that can be observed with the later generations of many traumatized and disadvantaged communities like the Holocaust survivors (Dashorst et al., 2019), Lakota Indians (Brave Heart, 2011), or Holodomor survivors (Bezo & Maggi, 2015, p. 77) can also be observed with African Americans whose earlier generations were oppressed, dehumanized, and killed under the regime of slavery. The trauma of such strong, systematic, and unimaginably brutal exploitation and oppression of any group of people will indisputably find its place in their collective memory, and it will keep on being reconstructed in an effort to make sense of it (Hirschberger, 2018, p. 1). African American society, in that respect, is an example of a group of people who carry not only the painful memory of trauma, but are also subjected to the reconstruction of these traumas in their collective memory. However, as opposed to the other communities

mentioned above, the African American community was subjected to an incomparably longer period of suffering, bringing much deeper ingrained traumas, the effects of which can still be observed in the community today (DeGruy, 2005). Literature, being a mirror in which we, as people, can see ourselves in, reflects this reality of trauma and its unfortunate inheritance in the works of such writers as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, whose work is centered on African American society.

With inherited traumas comes the need to overcome them. Just as with traumas, overcoming practices can also be transmitted and can vary across communities, families, and individuals. Although an extensive research and study may reveal different coping practices in other works of literature, Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* both present uncannily similar fetishistic attachments which, through a close reading in light of transgenerational trauma theory and fetishism, reveal the function of fetishism as a coping strategy for overcoming transgenerational trauma.

In "Everyday Use", fetishism as a coping mechanism for inherited traumas is mostly observable in the character Dee. Her exaggerated excitement over the everyday objects in the house, like some benches her father made when they could not afford to buy chairs, a simple dasher or a churn top her mother still uses for its intended purpose makes the reader question the reasons why Dee attaches such an unnatural value attached to these objects. Her theatrical excitement and questionable attachment are most obvious in the case of her mother's old quilts. Although the reasons may not be obvious to the reader at first, a closer reading reveals that the value Dee attaches to these objects is related to their function in her unconscious efforts to overcome her inherited traumas related to being African American. By stripping the objects of their use value, or *everyday* values, and by giving them a new value as artifacts, Dee tries to dissociate from her past which she connects with these objects. Taking them out of their *everyday use* and giving them a new nature is Dee's way of overcoming the trauma she inherited from and associated with her past, and which is represented by these objects that remind her of her family's and her community's tribulations.

In *The Bluest Eye*, not only the central character Pecola, but also many other characters have an unusual relationship with the objects around them. Claudia's peculiar hatred for dolls while all the adults and all the other kids adore them, her mutilation of dolls as if they were white girls, her and Frieda's *magical* seeds and their ritualistic sacrifice of them for Pecola's unborn baby, African American people's

overattachment to their houses and to the materials they own as described in the novel, Pauline's feelings of safety and peace among the objects in her employer's house, Geraldine's excessively overdecorated house that she hides behind, Soaphead Church's weird collection of random objects that make him forget about his problems and finally, Pecola's destructively intense desire for blue eyes and the meaning she attaches to them are all examples of fetishistic attachments from the novel that function as coping mechanisms for the characters' inherited traumas that are at the same time consolidated with the racism and discrimination of the day related to being African American. The novel pictures the effects of transgenerational trauma as described by Joy DeGruy in her *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (2005), a different aspect in each character, in the 1940's African American population. The Black American characters from different backgrounds suffering from the same societal pressures show how the inheritance of race-based transgenerational trauma is inescapable and is irrespective of one's social status.

By focusing on the African American community, this thesis intends to contribute to the literary transgenerational trauma studies on minorities who have had a long-term traumatic experience as a community in the past and draws attention to the fact that such traumatizing experiences are very likely to keep on negatively affecting their future generations in various ways. Much as this thesis tries to cover transgenerational trauma in the context of the African American population in depth, a much deeper analysis can be conducted on various other African American literary works by a range of writers from different periods of time. Transgenerational trauma theory can also apply to short-term traumatizing experiences as well as to much smaller communities or even families. In that respect, further research can be carried out on the effects of transgenerational trauma, or transgenerational trauma combined with fetishism, in different ethnic, racial, ethno-religious, or national groups and how they compare to the African American community depending on the nature of their traumatic experiences and ways of overcoming them.

A much deeper and overarching analysis can be made by focusing more on the psychological, psychiatric, and sociological aspects of transgenerational trauma and the underlying reasons for seemingly arbitrary fetishistic attachments, combining these areas of study with African American literature. However, although psychology, sociology and even biology (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018) may provide a more evidence-centered base for the arguments related to transgenerational trauma and the resulting

fetishism in African American society, literature arguably brings all the cultural, social, and historical realities together to reflect a *real* picture of this legacy of trauma and its inheritors' struggles to cope with it. After all,

> certain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, or rights, or the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination (Morrison, 2019, p. 2).

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