

T.C.
İSTANBUL BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ

İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI

**WOMEN OF THE DARK LABYRINTH: OPPRESSED
WOMEN IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*,
SULA AND *BELOVED***

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Tezi Hazırlayan
Tunay ZİHLİ

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İstanbul, 2024

YEMİN METNİ

Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak sunduğum “**Women of the Dark Labyrinth: Oppressed Women in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye, Sula and Beloved***” başlıklı bu çalışmanın, bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere uygun şekilde tarafimdan yazıldığını, bu tezdeki bütün bilgileri akademik ve etik kurallar içinde elde ettiğimi, yararlandığım eserlerin tamamının kaynaklarda gösterildiğini ve çalışmanın içinde kullandıkları her yerde bunlara atıf yapıldığını, patent ve telif haklarını ihlal edici bir davranışımın olmadığını belirtir ve bunu onurumla doğrularım. 20.12.2024



Tunay ZİHLİ

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İSTANBUL BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ
TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS SINAV TUTANAĞI

20/12/2024

Enstitümüz *İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı* Anabilim Dalı *İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı* Programı yüksek lisans öğrencilerinden **2220028009** numaralı *Tunay ZİHLİ*'nin "İstanbul Beykent Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim – Öğretim Yönetmeliği"nin ilgili maddesine göre hazırlayarak, Enstitümüze teslim ettiği "*Women Of The Dark Labyrinth: Oppressed Women in Toni Morrison's The Bluets Eye, Sula And Beloved*" konulu tezini, Yönetim Kurulumuzun 17/12/2024 tarih ve 2024/54 sayılı toplantılarında seçilen ve Beylikdüzü Avalon yerleşkesinde toplanan biz jüri üyeleri huzurunda, Beykent Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim ve Öğretim Yönetmeliğinin 29. maddesinin 3. fıkrası gereğince 45 dakika süre ile aday tarafından savunulmuş ve sonuçta adayın tezi hakkında "**OYBİRLİĞİ**" ile "**KABUL**" kararı verilmiştir.

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Degree and Date : Master's (Thesis), 2024

Major : English Language and Literature

Keywords : Postcolonial Theory: Sex, Gender, Race, Cultural Beliefs, Sexual, Black Women Identity, Discrimination

ABSTRACT

WOMEN OF THE DARK LABYRINTH: OPPRESSED WOMEN IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE, SULA, AND BELOVED*

Postcolonialism theory is based on the problems that started with the West's exploitation of many continents with a political, economic, and moral breakdown of the exploited societies. The theory deals with the results of exploitation, like cultural differences and their outcomes related to gender and race, which directly shape the identity of the colonized people. Primarily, black and poor women are seen as the most victimized among the subalterns. Black female identity has become a complex issue due to many factors. Black women have suffered racial trauma that causes emotional and mental injuries. Postcolonial theory and oppression of black women can be apparently observed in Toni Morrison's books: *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*. Characters are malignantly being exposed to oppression because of their gender, skin color, and social status. Although their stories are different, the emotions they experience and the impacts on their identities draw them in the same ending, which is a labyrinth they cannot get out of. Even if they get out, the life will be dark like their skin. It is important to explore these issues because although slavery is a thing of the past, its traces are still present today, and black women are still experiencing discrimination in different ways. This study aims to explore the journeys of the female characters in Toni Morrison's novels: " *The Bluest Eye, Sula, and Beloved* " in search of identity and to prove that although each character's journey is different, they encounter similar fate and destiny.

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Danışmanı : Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Mehtap SARIARSLAN
Derecesi ve Tarihi : Yüksek Lisans (Tezli), 2024
Alanı : İngiliz Dil ve Edebiyatı
Anahtar Kelimeler : Postkolonyal Teori: Cinsiyet, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Irk,
Kültürel İnançlar, Cinsellik, Siyah Kadın Kimliği, Ayrımcılık

ÖZ

KARANLIK LABİRENT 'İN KADINLARI: TONI MORRISON'IN *THE BLUEST EYE, SULA VE BELOVED* KİTAPLARINDAKİ MAZLUM KADINLARI

Postkoloniyalizm teorisi, Batı'nın birçok kıtayı sömürmesiyle başlayan ve sömürülen toplumlarda siyasi, ekonomik ve ahlaki çöküşe yol açan sorunlara dayanmaktadır. Teori, sömürülen insanların kimliğini doğrudan şekillendiren kültürel farklılıklar ve bunların cinsiyet ve ırkla ilgili sonuçları gibi sömürünün sonuçlarıyla ilgilenir. Öncelikle, siyah ve yoksul kadınlar, madunlar arasında en çok mağdur edilenler olarak görülmektedir. Siyah kadın kimliği birçok faktör nedeniyle karmaşık bir konu haline gelmiştir. Siyah kadınlar, duygusal ve zihinsel yaralanmalara neden olan ırksal travmaya maruz kalmıştır. Postkoloniyal teori ve siyah kadınların ezilmesi Toni Morrison'ın *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* ve *Beloved* kitaplarında açıkça gözlemlenebilir. Karakterler cinsiyetleri, ten renkleri ve sosyal statüleri nedeniyle baskiya maruz kalmaktadır. Hikayeleri farklı olsa da yaşadıkları duygular ve kimlikleri üzerindeki etkiler onları aynı sona, içinden çıkamadıkları bir labirente çekmiştir. Bu labirentten çıkışalar bile, hayatları tenleri gibi karanlık olacaktır. Bu konuları araştırmak önem taşır, çünkü kölelik geçmişte kalmış olsa da izleri bugün hala mevcuttur ve siyah kadınlar ayrımcılığı farklı şekillerde yaşamaya devam etmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Toni Morrison'ın *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* ve *Beloved* romanlarındaki kadın karakterlerin kimlik arayışındaki yolculuklarını incelemek ve her karakterin yolculuğu farklı olsa da aynı sonu yaşama eğiliminde olduğunu kanıtlamaktır.

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GLOSSARY

Endure: To suffer something difficult, unpleasant, or painful.

Enslave: To control someone and keep them in a bad situation.

Exploit: To use someone or something unfairly for your own advantage.

Humiliation: The feeling of being ashamed or losing respect for yourself, or an occasion when you have this feeling.

Identity: The things that make one person or group of people different from others.

Trauma: A person's emotional or mental health is affected by a negative event.

INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison is the voice of black women and black society, as well as the true history of America's slavery that was untold by the American writers. She was born in 1931 and passed away in 2009. She studied at Howard University, a historically black research university in Washington, and Cornell University. She taught at Howard University and other prominent ones. She was the first black woman to work as a senior editor at Random House Publishing Company in Washington. As she was teaching at university, she wrote her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and other masterpieces followed it: *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *Beloved*, which brought her the Nobel Prize. She was the first black woman writer to win the Nobel Prize and many notable awards during her lifetime. Her novels have also echoed worldwide and were translated into many foreign languages. Throughout her life, she dealt with the problems of black people. She wrote the actual events of the history of slavery, which were not written by white writers, from the perspective of a black woman. Her family background history may be accepted as the touchstone of her writings. Her mother's parents moved from Alabama to the North to escape from racism and poverty and also provide their children with a better education. On the other hand, her father came from Georgia, where he had been deeply exposed to racial violence at a very young age. Morrison grew up with her parents' stories that contained exciting and dreadful ghost stories, black culture, myths, and cultural music (Morrison&McKay,1983, pp. 414-416). In each novel, Morrison dealt with various issues of black people, such as their suffering and their challenges with white society and deprivation of human values during the slavery times and after the abolition of slavery in America. She emphasized the challenges of black women's surviving journey to find their true identities. She depicted the big picture of being a black woman in American society and also how black women were discriminated against and abused both physically and mentally by their own people. Her characters' journeys are different and occur in different periods, but their obstacles are the same even if they happen in another period. Even though the methods of dealing with these obstacles differ, many characters have the same destinations. Symbolically, they are in a dark labyrinth of life, and all the labyrinth walls symbolize the same obstacles, such as white people's violence, discrimination

and abuse, black parents' violence, and men's abuse, etc. When they manage to come out of the dark labyrinth, more or less, the gate opens to another darkness.

Morrison's novels uncover the influence of the past on black people's present lives. She uses various historical references, which help the reader understand and analyze the story from a more realistic perspective. Morrison uses the style of magical realism as a technique to transform mundane facts. She uses this literary tool as a magic wand to combine supernatural elements that she used to listen to stories throughout her childhood and African-American history, which reveals black people's trauma and experience, creating reality. She also uses magical realism to dive deep into her characters' identities, memories, sufferings, and the impact of the past (Baym, Ed., 2003, p. 2252). Her powerful and vivid narrative strategy allows her readers to question and understand the lives of African-American people throughout history. In her novels, personal narratives shed light on slavery history and black people's physical and psychological damage and also relate to their struggles in the formation of their identities and their destinations.

This study aims to prove the journey of female characters in their search for identity in Toni Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*. Although each character's journey is different, they are condemned to the same end. These novels depict different times of African-American women's battle to survive under a dominant society and its humiliating regulations and rules. They reveal the untold reality of black people's struggle to find their way out of darkness. The female characters of these novels are subjected to racism, oppression, trauma, physical and psychological abuse, and physical complexities of their skin color and their family background, which follow and haunt them until the end of their life journey.

All of the characters are born with a very large hump on their back. They open their eyes to the world as "others" because of their skin color. While growing up, they are exposed to their parents' maltreatment, which can be physical or psychological violence towards them, causing profound wounds on their souls that cannot be easily treated. Their childhood experiences and traumas primarily affect and shape their identities. They learn not to speak and obey the authority. It causes the extra hump on their back to grow even more in the prime of their life.

In addition to living as a black woman in a white society, they also have to endure being humiliated and tormented by their own people. As they become adults, the burden on their backs increases even more. While they continue to struggle with the burdens on their back as black women, they have perpetuated their married life, raising children and working under challenging conditions at the same time. They raise their children following the truths taught growing up, which have settled in their subconscious. Reluctantly, they can only vent the resentment they have been carrying inside them for a long time on their little children, who cannot stand up to them. Sometimes, it is verbal, and sometimes it is physical. This event caused a chain reaction that continues throughout history, from the times of slavery to the emancipation of black women. Morrison's novels are the most apparent evidence of the chain reaction. These problems have not ended; they have only changed their forms. In this century, these issues can appear in the form of mobbing in workplaces, beauty standards, social norms, and social media. Just as slavery was seen as a typical situation in old times, this situation continues to exist in a different form in the society we live in today.

The stories of the female characters mentioned in these three books of Morrison and the endings of these black female characters are closely related to the problems black women have to deal with in today's world. Because this is an ongoing situation, analyzing black women's identity issues is essential. Considering that Tony Morrison is the voice of black women and she brought up the untold truths about the history of slavery as a black writer and that she received the Nobel Prize as the first black female writer in the world, it is very valuable to discuss this issue from Morison's perspective.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework explores black women's identity through the history of slavery in America and post-colonial theory, revealing the complex interplay of power and identity for black women. The legacy of slavery continues to affect black women's identity even today. For this reason, it is important to examine black women's identity through the history of slavery and post-colonial theory.

1.1. History of Slavery in America

In the 17th century, Africa, especially the western part, was a developed continent, which had highly competed with European countries, especially in education, agriculture, art, social and political systems, etc. America needed human power to work in the plantations with the development of agriculture at that time. European traders as providers started to abduct the poor black people, cooperating with African go-betweens who deceived the innocent people and kidnapped some of them. Those people had been taken in with lies by their people. For the first couple of years, African-American people worked as contractual workers, and then it turned into lasting slavery (Unger, 1994, pp. 25-26-27). Africans whose destiny was in the hands of their owners became like the property of white owners. To bind their slaves entirely to themselves, landowners imposed restrictions on every aspect of their lives. A wide variety of restrictions were set, from learning to read and write to how they could behave and where they could and could not go. Many landowners raped slave women and brutally punished those who rebelled, while those who obeyed were rewarded. Although it was not legal for enslaved people to marry, many of them did marry and had children. The enslaved people could be sold, bought, and inherited. The family unity of the enslaved people was entirely under the control of the white owner. For instance, the owner could sell the black family members to different people according to his interests. Children and women were mercilessly sold and separated from their families by owners. Most black enslaved found shelter under music, oral literature, and religion for solace to keep their hope alive (Unger, 1994, pp. 149-150).

After the American Revolution, the colonialists in the North pressured the enslaved people to abolish slavery and encouraged them to revolt. Enslaved people

were not much despised in the North, but they were vital to the large plantations in the South. Enslaved people were indispensable in producing commercial goods such as tobacco and cotton on large plantations in the South. Many slave rebellions occurred between the 1800s and in 1822, but only a few were successful.

America's Western expansion and abolition movement caused tremendous arguments in the states of the North and South. In 1819, with the Missouri Compromise, Missouri became a slave state, and Maine became a free state. As a result of the Missouri Compromise, slavery was forbidden in the North. On the other hand, slavery was allowed in the South. Thus, it brought a Northern anti-slave reaction to the top (Unger, 1994, pp. 122-123).

The resistance movement, which started in the 1780s, grew stronger until the 1830s and became a giant snowball. Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Harriet Tubman were the most prominent people who provided the way and helped to enslaved the blacks to escape from the South to the North. Also, many white people corroborated their support. The Underground Railroad was the interconnection group of white and black people. The group of white people gave places and aid to escape enslaved people. This group played a crucial role for enslaved people in their journey to emancipation. More than 100.000 enslaved people gained their freedom with the help of this organization.

In the 1830s, William Lloyd Garrison, editor and leader of the antislavery movement, fought bravely and mightily for abolition in the North. As a result of these struggles against slavery, the women's rights movement was born in America. By the 1830s, starting with a few Northern women's rebellions against the authorities, followed by others, their essential cause was the abolition of slavery. Finally, Angelina and Grimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott, prominent abolitionists, launched the women's rights movement in the 1840s. As a result of their efforts and others, the Seneca Falls Convention was signed, which advocates for men's and women's equal rights and emphasizes that all people, regardless of gender, race, and religion, have equal rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness in 1848. This convention started turmoil and contradiction in society, especially in the South, with

the effects of the antislavery movement that had been seen as the most crucial cause of the pre-civil war (Unger, 1994, pp. 145-146-147).

In 1850, discussions about slavery in the areas excavated during the Mexican-American war led to the signing of the Kansas-Nebraska treaty. According to this agreement, it was decided that all regions in the new state of Kansas would be opened to slavery, and this caused great turmoil between anti-slavery and slavery communities. Until 1857, so many debates and arguments lasted between anti-slavery and slavery communities; one of the crucial ones was the Dred Scott case. He was brought to live in Wisconsin Territory (free soil under the Missouri Compromise) by his master, so he wanted to have his freedom by suing for freedom. He believed that if you live in a free territory, it makes you free. Unfortunately, the court decision disappointed him and the black society. The court decision declared that he was black and an enslaved person, he had no rights and had to obey the white man, and his staying in free territory did not mean he was free. After this decision of Congress, it was perceived that the laws had no legal basis and that everyone in all states could make decisions according to their own will (Unger, 1994, pp. 157, 158).

By the 1860s, the majority of the African American people were still living as enslaved people on the Southern plantation. The South slave states had felt threatened by Abraham Lincoln, who was elected in 1860, and seven of the states withdrew from the union before he started his role officially (Unger, 1994, pp. 182-183-184). The long-standing conflict started over the institution of slavery between the Union Army and the Confederate States of America. The war began in 1862. During the war, the Union promised the Blacks freedom, thus thousands of blacks moved to the North and joined the Union army. In 1863, after the victory of Antietam, Abraham Lincoln declared the Preliminary Emancipation, that all enslaved, including those who rebelled where they lived, would be free from now on forever and move to another country as they like. Although Preliminary Emancipation would not end slavery officially and did not change the enslaved people much, it was the most significant step in ending slavery. In 1865, the Civil War ended with the victory of the Union, and with Lincoln's leadership, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment from Congress. Slavery was declared illegal in all of the United States. In 1866, The Ku Klux Klan, a secret organization, launched an attack on blacks, killed their leaders, and burned down their

schools and homes. Unfortunately, black people got rid of slavery, but they did not get rid of the fear of humiliation from the whites. The Fourteenth Amendment approved and made the citizenship of formerly enslaved people valid and guaranteed equal protection of the laws in 1868. The Fifteenth Amendment gave black people the right to vote in 1870 (Unger, 1994, pp. 201-202).

1.2. Post-colonial Theory

Postcolonialism is a theory based on many problems that started with the West's exploitation of Eastern, Latin, and African countries and emerged with economic, political, and moral deterioration of the exploited countries and societies. The theory deals with the results of exploitation, such as cultural differences and their outcomes related to race, gender, sex, cultural beliefs, and religion, which directly affect and shape the identity of the colonized people (Spivak, 1988).

The colonized people have been labeled as others and resistant; however, the colonists have seen themselves as superior and dominant race throughout history. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Gayatri Spivak relates how power is a poisonous tool for converting, shaping, and suppressing others, called the term "subaltern" was pointed out by her. She mentions that influential colonists do not politically and economically exploit others, and they also take away important values of the society like language, religion, moral and ethical values, and identity to prevent resistance. As a result, the others turn into subalterns who cannot express themselves nor advocate for their rights, finally losing all the values of their societies and identities. Even though the colonists left the colonized countries, the damages lasted for generations in many areas of others' lives (Spivak, 1988, pp. 74-75).

Spivak grew up in a family that was exposed to colonial times. She was born in Calcutta, India, in 1942. At that time, India was still a British colony. India gained its independence in 1947. She graduated from English Language and Literature at Calcutta University. Her family and her society lived under the Western-dominant society as others from 1858 until 1947. She grew up like others and was educated under the imposed dominant British system.

In her essay, she explains the colonial social production system, which she and her family personally experienced in detail. She also argues and analyzes the Western marginalized philosopher's ideas, such as Michel Gilles Foucault and Deleuze, and questions their argument. She mentions that these writers cannot represent the subaltern, especially women, because they do not share their race and gender. Foucault advocates that the subalterns are marginalized and silenced by the knowledge system and dominant power structures. On the other hand, Deleuze advocates that the subalterns have the creativity and potential power to produce varied societal forms and resist the dominant power structures (Spivak, 1988, p. 78). Spivak explains how the West's ruthless capitalist system colonized third-world countries and the methods used by this system to make the exploited societies obedient by changing their core values. While doing this, she explains how the West achieved its colonial identity by assuming the identity of a savior. She explains that Colonizer countries use the elites of the countries they colonized to exploit their people. In addition, they impose Western values and languages on the countries they exploit. Over time, they ensure that the exploited countries lose their values, languages, and traditions and obey them unconditionally. In short, Colonizer countries not only presume the surface, underground resources, and human resources of the colonized countries but also destroy the structures of the societies they exploit. She discusses that in exploited societies, women who cannot speak are condemned to silence forever and are the individuals who suffer the most tremendous damage. Spivak is the first person to emphasize that sexual differences bring extra burden to women as subalterns:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak, 1988, pp. 82-83).

Spivak emphasizes that women are among the most victimized subalterns in societies where men continue to dominate within the colonial understanding and ideological construction of gender throughout history. In these societies, women who often lack a recorded history, are restricted in their ability to speak freely and not be heard.

By giving the example of the rituals of Indian widows, Spivak reveals that the colonial authorities pretend to be the so-called saviors of Indian women, but their intentions are explicitly different.

The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice. (The conventional transcription of the Sanskrit word for the widow would be *sati*. The early colonial British transcribed it as *suttee*.) The rite was not practiced universally and was not caste- or class-fixed. The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1988, p. 93).

It is shown how the British, as imperialism's founders of a good society, do not hesitate to interfere in India's internal affairs. The action, which was carried out purely for camouflage purpose, was supposedly to protect Indian women from the men of the society and to exert social pressure on the colony by hiding their real purpose. Women's ability to make their own free will choices has been restricted and kept under pressure. It has become a white man's ritual to protect the brown woman from the brown man, and the method of sacrifice which is one of the brown woman's ways of expressing herself has been taken away from her.

The case of *suttee* as exemplum of the women-in- imperialism would challenge and reconstruct this opposition between subject (law) and object of knowledge (repression) and mark the place of ‘disappearance with something other than silence and nonexistence, a violent aporia between subject and object status (Spivak, 1988, p. 102).

What imperialism wants to do here is to suppress the free will of women and turn them into slaves who will obey them. In the patriarchal society, she is expected to perform her duties silently and play the role of the monkey kept under control, so not to speak, except for her work.

In conclusion, Spivak defines black, colored, transgender, women, people experiencing poverty, and workers as subalterns. She argues that women are the most victimized among the subalterns. She emphasizes that women are both oppressed under the rules of patriarchal society and exposed to the oppression of colonialists. Western countries see the East as stupid and want to transform these countries as they wish and exploit their resources and workforce.

1.3. Black Women Identity

Many factors such as race, gender, class, external and internal factors, and historical, cultural, and social environment effectively shape human identity. In addition, parents and family background also play crucial roles in the formation of human identities. Children tend to choose themselves role models who are dynamic and compelling. The situation is also the same regarding groups. Research shows that children are more ambitious about joining leading and dominant ethnic and cultural groups. This information corresponds to the fact that many ethnically minor children are prone to be White. Although identity formation starts from early childhood, its effects are seen mainly in adolescence and adulthood. This formation includes both individual and group identities. A person's group identity is significantly important in cultural society and other minor ethnic groups, especially if the area a person lives in has a multicultural environment (Phinney, 2000, p. 28-29).

There are also differences in the formation of male and female identities. Throughout history, the identity formation of men and women varies depending on the periods they live in and the structure of society. In her book *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir describes the roles of men and women from various periods and nations and how their societal roles change over time, a crucially important factor in the construction of human identity (De Beauvoir, 2011, pp. 654-680).

The evolution of the feminine condition was not a continuous process. With the great invasions, all of civilization is put into question. Roman law itself is under the influence of a new ideology, Christianity, and in the centuries that follow, barbarians impose their roles. The economic, social, and political

situation is overturned, and women's situation suffers the consequences (De Beauvoir, 2011, p.107).

De Beauvoir believes that wars and the resulting new ideologies and the barbarians' imposition of their laws on the world for centuries are the factors that create the current difficult situation for women. Therefore, women are condemned to live in a male-dominated world, and this authority also determines their roles in society. This directly affects the formation process of women's identities in societies. Although this problem seems to affect the identity formation of white and black women in the same direction, there are apparent differences.

Black women have struggled with challenging problems and have a strong identity as a result, but these strong identities have been trivialized and worthless by the white race over time. Therefore, black female identity has become a complex issue due to many factors. Looking at the African-American slavery history, while black women were free, they were enslaved, humiliated, and stigmatized because of the color of their skin. Perhaps they have been exposed to many more physical and spiritual acts of violence that we do not know about, those that are not written about in history books. Black women have suffered racial trauma that causes emotional and mental injuries and additionally suffered from living in a patriarchal society (Richardson-Stovall, 2012, p. 79).

On the other hand, Black women are also discriminated against by their people. They have to live under many pressures, such as their status in society, their light or dark skin, and verbal and physical abuse by their birth parents. The identity of Black women, oppressed under the consequences of these, becomes more complex.

They also have been labeled ugly and dirty by white supremacy society. This humiliation that lasted for years caused deep wounds in the self-confidence and self-esteem of black women.

The matrix of domination is mainly concerned with how intersectional persecutions are organizationally structured and planned. It gives details about how "structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression" (Collins, 2002, p. 18). The matrix of domination is composed of changeable amalgamations and

arrangements of intersectional persecution, for example, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and sexual orientation (Ghasemi & Heidari, 2020, p. 588).

This article mentions that all Black people, especially women, are under the influence of white domination of institutions that are imposed to oppress and subjugate them. These institutions directly targeted black women's identities to keep them weak and silent. They use media images of beauty to show that the criteria of beauty standards only belong to white, but black women who are not in this category. According to researchers, many African American people have suffered psychological and social pressure from the standardization of white beauty. For instance, most black women spend lots of time and effort to make their hair straight to resemble white women. On the one hand, black women are humiliated, enslaved, and treated like animals because of the color of their skin, and on the other hand, they are humiliated because they do not comply with white beauty norms. The white dominant culture uses this as a weapon to completely suppress and silence the black female identity, which is already very emotionally fragile and wounded.

Black women had to struggle with many difficulties in social life. While they were forbidden to receive education during the times of slavery, they were always treated as second-class citizens during the periods of liberation. They could not go to the schools they wanted nor did they have the opportunity to specialize in the subjects they wanted. Those who had the opportunity to attend schools attended by whites were subjected to constant discrimination and humiliation. It took them a long time to get the opportunity to work on equal terms with whites in business life. They often worked long hours in the worst jobs, and on top of that, they were not paid for their labor and had to work for much less money than they deserved. It is observed that the identity of black women has seriously impacted and caused deformation in their psychology and social lives (Palmer, 1983, pp. 152-153).

While being born and living as a woman in this world is defined as a problematic situation in itself, succeeding in continuing her life as both a woman and a black person probably makes one think of it as one of the most challenging things to achieve in this world. It can be noticed that the violent and sudden change that black

women suddenly experienced turned into a trauma, and the traces of this trauma can be observed even today, even though many years have passed.



2. THE BLUEST EYE

The Bluest Eye is Toni Morrison's first novel, published in 1970. Through the traumatic life story of Pecola Breedlove, Morrison tells the story of the systematic racism, white beauty standards, and poverty to which black identity was subjected after the Great American economic collapse.

2.1. Literary Context and Background

The Bluest Eye takes place in Ohio between 1940 and 1941. This period describes the time just after the Great Depression in America. While Morrison draws attention to the racial inequalities of that period, she also describes economic inequality and its consequences for the black race. The novel analyses the effects of the slavery on African-American society and how black society has been reshaped by the imposed white race's values and requirements (Morrison, 2007, p. xi). She points out that the black community is divided into groups according to their skin color; one of them is colored people who are educated, neat, and obedient, and the other one is niggers who are dirty, loud, and uneducated. These two groups of people have the same racial identity and background. However, the light-colored and educated ones become the slaves of the oppressor system and relentlessly humiliate the others. Morrison underscores the presence of color discrimination within the African-American community, highlighting its detrimental impact on black individuals, especially women, alongside racism.

She draws attention to the fact that especially children and females who are vulnerable and fragile endure dual in black society since they have to deal with white discrimination in every field of their life, such as school, work, family life, and public areas. It shows that their journey in life is like living in a dark labyrinth, and it is impossible to find a way out. They are obliged to live and struggle to find their way out of the dark labyrinth that symbolizes their life since birth. No matter what road they choose, the labyrinth offers them several difficulties in reaching the exit. On the long way to exit, they encounter many obstacles that need self-esteem, a solid personal identity, and to cope with psychological traumas. Obtaining these features is more or less impossible for black people because their baggage is already full, such as

uprooting, being enslaved people, humiliation, violence within home or outside, being labelled with others, invisibility, discrimination, social acceptance, and a sense of beauty. For many reasons, they cannot shape a healthy and solid self-identity. Each of them chooses a different path to protect themselves from reality, which they cannot handle. The way out of the labyrinth is almost impossible for them. Even if they manage to leave the labyrinth, the exit of the labyrinth opens another darkness for them.

Morrison uses Claudia's adult narrative in which she remembers her childhood and tells her story from the first-person point of view, as well as an omniscient narrative. The first-person point of view narrative invites readers to engage with the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters. Therefore, the readers will foster a connection and understanding of their experiences. Besides, the omniscient narrative provides detailed information on the character's life, which allows the reader to understand the complexities of societal issues. The novel has four different seasonal parts, and each season reveals a different message. These messages narrow the real reasons for the events from the general to the specific, accordingly Morrison tries to force the readers to see the truth that contains the details of the reasons before it comes out in the last season. She encourages her readers to feel empathy and think critically about the novel's themes, such as race, beauty, and identity (Rainwater, 1991, p. 107). Morrison depicts a young life perished to illustrate the need for the black community to confront its shortcomings in protecting, guiding, and nurturing the souls of their children with sufficient love. She also emphasizes that childhood through adulthood is a significant period. Parents and community support are equally crucial for future generations throughout this period. Without their support, black children could lose their mental and physical health, never construct a strong identity, ostracized, and will attune the real life (Maraffey, 2004, p. 164).

2.2. Pecola Breedlove

The Bluest Eye is the story of Pecola, a young black girl who is eleven years old. She is invisible, unloved, ugly, and humiliated. Also, she is abused by society and her parents. Her life is different from that of ordinary children. She is invisible in every

field, including her social, school, and home life. She is unloved even by her mother, the most crucial figure in children's lives. Everybody labels her ugly because of her blackness, and her mother is included. White and black people humiliate her psychologically and physically. The most distracting one is that her father rapes her, and that is the final knockdown for her life. Every event Pecola experiences prevents her from forming a healthy identity. These factors have to be examined deeply to understand how her identity and her soul are ruined and leave a big black mark on her tiny heart, which cannot be erased till the end of her life.

Firstly, her skin colour is her identification and visibility. However, she is invisible inside and outside her home. That is why she wants blue eyes to be visible and heard. She believes that having the blue eyes is the only solution for being loved and visible. For instance, Pecola has been staying at Macteer's house ever since Cholly burned the house down. Pecola's mother stays with the white family where she works and adores them. Cholly goes to jail. The narrator asks a question to the reader and points out Pecola's family bond situation:

That old trifling Cholly been out of jail two whole days and ain't been here yet to see if his child was 'live or dead. She could be dead for all he know. And that mama neither. What kind of something is that (Morrison, 2007, p. 25).

This quote explicitly depicts the fragmented family portrait. It shows the reader why she feels lonely and worthless in family life. The fact that Pecola is ignored and abandoned by her family causes her to internalize a sense of worthlessness, which makes her feel lonely and unprotected. These destructive feelings destroy her self-esteem and make her invisible. She does not have strong bonds with her mother; therefore, she cannot powerfully shape her identity. Shaping female identity requires strong bonds between the mother and daughter (Gardiner, 1981, p. 350).

Another example is Pecola calling her mother, Mrs. Breedlove. "Now she was whispering, "Don't, Mrs. Breedlove. Don't." Pecola, like Sammy and Cholly, always called her mother Mrs. Breedlove" (Morrison, 2007, p. 43). Calling her mother Mrs. Breedlove, not being able to say 'mummy' as any normal child does, is not only emotionally damaging for Pecola but also contributes to her feeling insecure in all aspects of her life. In addition, when Pecola goes to her mother's workplace to get a

laundry bag, she comes across the white girl her mother takes care of, whom the white girl calls Mrs. Breedlove Polly; her little heart is irreparably injured one more time. While waiting for her mother with friends in the kitchen, she accidentally drops a hot juice pan onto the floor, and her legs burn. Mrs. Breedlove comes to the kitchen, when she sees the mess, slaps her angrily and says: "Crazy fool...my floor, mess...look what you..work...get on out...now that...crazy...my floor, my floor...my floor" (Morrison, 2007, p. 109). The white girl starts crying because her dress is dirty, and Polly tries to calm down the white girl and says: "Hush, baby, hush...Don't cry no more. Polly will change it". Mrs. Breedlove says to Pecola, take the laundry bag and leave. When Pecola and her friends are leaving, they hear the question of the white girl to Mrs. Breedlove: " Who were they, Polly? / Hush. Don't worry none" (Morrison, 2007, p. 109). This incident reveals how Pecola is humiliated and abused physically and verbally by her mother in front of her friends and the white girl. The mother explicitly declares that Pecola is inconspicuous. Only a white little girl is precious to her. To face this reality is burdensome, and it puts heaviness she cannot bear and deeply open, permanently non-erasable scars on her soul. Pecola and her mother's relationship can be defined as a tragedy. Also, both of them live in a racist country, where they are seen as secondary citizens, and a patriarchal society, where they are humiliated physically and psychologically by whites and blacks. No individual living under these conditions can shape his/her identity subjectively and positively (Mahaffey, 2004, pp. 161-162).

Her father does not have a stable job and has a drinking problem. Cholly is an irresponsible and unloving father figure. Analyzing his past helps the reader understand why he treats his family harshly. He is an orphan abandoned by his mother when he was four. He grows up with his aunt, Jimmy. When she dies, he feels abandoned again, and his traumas double. His father rejects Cholly when he finds him. He is humiliated by white men who force Cholly to have intercourse with his girlfriend, a simulation of rape. Many traumatic events cause him to lose his direction and prevent him from healthy boundaries with his family (Portales, 1986, pp. 501-502). Cholly does not know how to raise children because he did not have parents to raise him. Like his relationship with his father and mother, Cholly's relationship with Pecola is tragic. At the beginning of the novel, Cholly burns home and puts his family

on the edge of death, because his mother leaves him to die on a junk heap by the railroad. When he exits the jail, he does not search where she is as his father is not interested in his presence. He finds out where his father is and meets him, but his father does not show any emotion toward him; on the contrary, he insults him. Cholly's traumatic past experiences destroy his perception of life and create self-hatred and a sense of powerlessness as a result of self-distraction; he cannot handle his emotions, which, without realizing this, leads him to make irreversible mistakes. One of them is sexually abusing her daughter. Cholly rapes her, and this action is the last strike on her soul. This caused Pecola to cut off all contact with real life and drift towards an irreversible end.

After this incident, Pecola gets pregnant and tells her mum what Cholly did. Mrs. Breedlove beats her badly. She is taken from school by social pressure. No one in the society tries to help Pecola except Claudia and Frieda. Women in the neighborhood say:

Well, they ought to take her out of school./ Ought to. She carry some of blame./ Yeah. But you never know. How come she didn't fight him? / Well, it probably won't live. They say the way her mama beat her she lucky to be alive herself./ She be lucky if it don't live. Bound to be ugliest thing walking./ Can't help but be. Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground (Morrison, 2007, pp. 189-190).

The black community's perspective on the incident and brutal criticism again emphasizes social realities. No one is interested in Pecola's life, health, or baby; they only criticize with their prejudices. Adult's deprecatory manners on race and gender affect the adolescent mind and life (Mahaffey, 2004, p. 164). In this case, society's contribution to Pecola's end is significant. If society had taken positive steps for Pecola and stood by her, Pecola's end could have been different. Morrison points out that society's words and actions are significantly effective in changing the identity formation and direction of people's lives, especially those of children who move from childhood to adolescence.

At school, Pecola is subjected to discrimination by her teacher and both verbal and physical bullying by the students. Her white teacher does not allow her to sit in

the front row because of her dark black skin, even though it is her right to sit in front according to her surname letters. While everyone else is sitting with two people, she is sitting alone. This reflects a shameless and humiliating situation for a child in front of her classmates. Not being able to raise her voice against this injustice against her and not being able to defend her rights causes her already wounded soul to be further torn apart.

The most painful thing for Pecola is the discrimination and humiliation she experiences from black people rather than what she experiences from white people. They all have black skin, but the only difference is in their skin tone, or their economic status is different. Claudia tells the reader about the situation in which Pecola finds herself:

A group of boys was circling and holding at bay a victim, Pecola Breedlove.....; thrilled by the easy power of a majority, they gaily harassed her.“Black e mo.Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo yad add sleeps necked. Black e mo...” They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: That they were black, or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant.....Pecola edged around the circle, crying. She had dropped her notebook, and covered her eyes with her hands (Morison, 2007, p. 65).

This passage shows that Pecola is a victim of the black society. It can be clearly said that the consequences of the racial, gender, and class discrimination internalized by families in the black community are reflected in the endurance of their children (Mahaffey, 2004, pp. 158-162). At every opportunity, Morrison emphasizes that society does not set a good enough example for its children and does not give them the care they need to grow up emotionally and as good individuals. On the contrary, she says, they set a bad example for children and unknowingly encouraged their souls to remain enslaved people until death. The fact that the children, who are black themselves, make fun of Pecola's blackness and surround, crowd, and intimidate her can be seen as a clear reflection of their hatred of their own skin. These black children are other victims of prejudices coded into their subconscious by their families and society.

Pecola covering her eyes with her hands is a reflection of why she wants to have blue eyes. Her black skin and black eyes can be seen as a reflection of her self-hatred, as she sees her black skin and black eyes as the reason why she is unloved, despised, and ostracized. In addition, the fact that Pecola has been labeled as ugly since the day she was born, primarily by her mother and society, proves that society has internalized the belief that blacks are ugly and worthless, while whites are beautiful and valuable. It also proves that Pecola can no longer cope with this reality in her innocent world.

Pecola's second incident of humiliation by a colored boy sheds light on how postcolonialism shaped and converted blacks' identities with systemic oppression. Although officially emancipated in 1868, by the 1940s, blacks were still categorized by whites as "others". The economic strength of the whites also gave them the privilege of being the dominant culture. Thus, as the dominant culture, they continue to exploit blacks and impose their values on them, distancing them from their values (Mahaffey, 2004, pp. 162-163). The narrative explains to the reader how middle-class colored girls to go to college and learn how to work like white people, economics for food, and teach children to be obedient and treat their husbands like whites. They straighten their hair and are careful about make-up and appearance. The narrative summarises: "In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions" (Morrison, 2007, p.83). It is clear that American white standards of beauty and their moral values deeply affect black women and reshape their identities. The influence of the media convinces black women that it is necessary to change both their physical appearance and their behavior in order to be accepted by white culture. As a result, these standards and values detach black women from their roots and core values. A hybrid personality emerges, unable to deny its roots and skin colour, and at the same time unable to fully assimilate to the imposed white culture and values, as Homi K. Bhabha discusses in *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 114-115). The common characteristics that can be observed in the characters in *The Bluest Eye* are self-hatred, feelings of not belonging anywhere, feeling unloved, excluded, and inferior, using violence for a sense of approval, and consequently imitating life. These common characteristics show us how the identities of African American community members are forced to change through

internal and external psychological pressures and how they are transformed into free slaves.

Geraldine, who belongs to the middle class and is Junior's mother, is a perfect example of a hybrid identity. Junior is a lonely, colored boy who is taught the differences between colored and nigger by his mother and is not allowed to play with dark black-skinned children. His parents do not love him and only raise him according to white cultural norms and standards. For instance: "Geraldine did not allow her baby, Junior, to cry. As long as his needs were physical, she could meet them-comfort and satiety. He was always brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod. Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him" (Morrison, 2007, p. 86). It is evident that Geraldine internalizes white values and standards and raises Junior in isolation, loneliness, lovelessness, and thoughts of discrimination and superiority. He is forbidden to play with black children by his mother, emphasizing that they are dirty and worthless. Being raised with hatred, without paternal care and love, he internalizes racism whenever he catches a chance, and he turns it into physical action like bullying. When Pecola passes from the schoolyard, Junior calls Pecola and says: "Nobody can come through this yard 'less I say so" (Morrison, 2007, p. 88). He sees himself as superior to the others. He deceives Pecola by telling her that he wants to show the kitten at home and that she can have one of them. When they arrive home, Pecola adores his beautiful house, which symbolizes white standardization. He pulls her to the other room, says your kitten is here and suddenly throws a big black cat on her face. She is shocked by his sudden action, and scratches hurt her face. She tries to escape, but he stops her and says: "You can't get out. You're my prisoner" (Morrison, 2007, p. 90). Junior's words, seeing Pecola as the other, symbolically as his slave, show that he internalizes racism and sees himself as superior and free to do whatever he wants. He locks Pecola in the room. Pecola and the cat's eyes meet. Pecola identifies the cat with herself and shows affection for him. Like Pecola, it is being tortured physically and psychologically by Junior. He notices that no voice comes from the room and enters the room. When he enters the room, Pecola is petting the cat, which reminds him that his mother loves the cat more than him. He mercilessly grabs the cat that is already injured, throws it against the window, and pushes Pecola, who tries to rescue the cat. Geraldine arrives and asks who this girl is. Junior blames Pecola and says: "She killed our cat" (Morrison, 2007,

p.91). Geraldine looks at Pecola, who reminds her of her past life. She says, “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (Morrison, 2007, p. 92). One more time, she is being insulted by her community. Her black skin and her poverty punish her vulnerable and fragile, innocent soul. When Geraldine sees Pecola, her childhood memories, which she ignores, are visualized and remind her of her roots; therefore, this rejection turns into verbal abuse. Frantz Fanon says:

What I call middle class society is any society that becomes rigidified in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolution, all gains, all progress, all discovery. I call middle-class a closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt.... I have ceaselessly striven to show the Negro that in a sense he makes himself abnormal; to show the white man that he is at once the perpetrator and the victim of a delusion (Fanon, 1986, pp. 224-225).

Frantz Fanon points out why the middle class has been created as another form of slavery in this capitalist world. He mentions that in the old times, enslaved black people resisted their owners to gain their freedom. He says that “middle class” has been created so that free blacks could be transformed into modern slaves and made to submit to the system without rebelling. As a result, people are actually unable to think, speak, and have gone numb. In short, Fanon expresses that the system has only changed the categorization, and black people are still exploited and continue to be victims of the whites.

As a result, Pecola is in the transition period from childhood to adolescence and experiences issues that are hard to manage and cope with without being psychologically unharmed. It is also a critical period for identity formation. Pecola's invisibility and her demand for blue eyes to be visible are proof of the plan to transform African-American people into new slaves of the capitalist system representing the white race in the postcolonial period. As Edward W. Said points out, many factors and external forces construct identities, such as culture, history, economic situation, gender and race, and especially relationships with others. Identity is unstable; it changes as other factors intervene (Said, 2003, p. 332). Pecola's experiences and the fact that she eventually loses her sanity, or instead that she seeks refuge with the other Pecola, who

has blue eyes, to be visible in the family and society and to be loved, to be able to struggle with difficulties, is a proof of how accurate Edward Said was. Blue eyes, which identify other factors, represent the beauty standards of the white race, and Pecola believes that if she does not comply with these standards, she will not be loved and accepted. Pecola's family background, economic condition, and being black and female all negatively affect her identity construction. Consequently, the path Pecola navigates through the dark labyrinth to cope with the events of her youth ultimately leads her to a different darkness upon exiting the labyrinth.

2.3. Claudia MacTeer

Claudia is the narrator of the novel. She is a nine-year-old African-American girl. She has a sister called Frieda, who is ten years old, and her best friend. Her family is poor, but they love their children and try to protect them from danger on their ways. Claudia is a perfect observer and analyst of the society and the people around her. Unlike Pecola, she does not accept the standards of beauty imposed on her by white society and resists them, and she is aware of the discrimination against blacks. She reveals the destructive and irreversible effects of discrimination in the black community, especially on children. While analyzing black society's social and moral values, she conveys the reflections of these values reflections to readers with details in the background by exemplifying the events she has experienced. At the same time, she emphasizes that individuals who are raised without being loved and valued in the family may feel worthless. When racism is added to the situation, the problem of social and individual identity faces even more severe consequences in the future.

Claudia is self-confident, able to stand up against injustice, empathetic, and does not accept the norms and standards imposed by white society. One reason for her being like this seems to be that her mother raises her as if she were a soldier preparing for war. For instance, when Claudia falls ill and is confined to bed, her mother tells Claudia: "What did you puke on the bedclothes for? Don't you have sense enough to hold your head out the bed?" (Morrison, 2007, p. 11). At first, she cries and feels broken. However, she says:

I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness take hold. By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. But for now, I am crying. I know I am making more snot, but I can't stop (Morrison, 2007, pp. 11-12).

Her words can be seen as evidence that her mother wants to raise her daughters as individuals who can stand up and resist the oppressive and racist society they live in. In the face of difficulties, she wants Claudia to struggle and resist, even if she is young, even if it is a disease.

One day Claudia receives a Christmas present from her parents: a baby doll with big blue eyes. She destroys the doll until it loses its voice cords. After she destroys the doll, she thinks: "I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas" (Morrison, 2007, p. 21). This thought of Claudia reflects society's claim about blue-eyed and blonde-haired girls being unconditionally beautiful, and every girl would like to have a blonde-haired, and blue-eyed doll. This situation also reflects that the white beauty standards are being imposed on the black society by producing the same beauty standard dolls which are all white. While Claudia destroys the doll, she says:

Ahhhhh take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the brass bed rail, it would bleat still. The gauze back would split, and I could see the disk with six holes, the secret of the sound. A mere metal roundness (Morrison, 2007, p. 21).

Metal, plastic, and sawdust are used to create an imitation doll. The creation of this imitation doll symbolizes not only the race but also the identity, class, and gender roles of a female. By destroying this doll and letting out her emotions, Claudia realized the effect of these symbolized terms on both her and all of the black women's lives. This emotional breakdown can be considered as a wakening process of her (Mahaffey, 2004, p. 164).

Claudia has a friend, Maureen, who is rich, light-skinned, and extroverted, while Claudia is darker-skinned, less affluent, and more introverted. They have a complicated relationship because of their inequalities. Maureen is a symbol of society's fascination with lighter-skinned black people and feeds Claudia's feelings of inequality

and lack of confidence. Also, Claudia constantly observes Maureen's privileges and how she enjoys her life. Maureen is the favourite student in the eyes of the teachers. Also, other students are excited to communicate with her at school. Their relationship reflects the inner aspects of beauty standards, race, and social norms. Claudia does not like Maureen at the beginning of their relationship, but an incident happens later. Maureen saves Pecola from the assault of three black boys who are humiliating Pecola on her way. Starting from that incident, Claudia changes her attitude towards Maureen and starts to have positive thoughts about her. But after a short time, these positive thoughts turn into negative because Maureen insults Pecola about being black. She yells: "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" (Morrison, 2007, p. 73). This sentence reflects the accuracy of how being ugly and black is correlated in the eyes of the society. "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, 2007, p. 74). Black skinned girls who are living inside this domineering atmosphere either have to experience the emotional oppression or accept not being equal with the white girls (Putnam, 2011, pp. 30-31).

Although Claudia and Frieda fight against the racism they experience, Frieda cannot escape from the abuse of their tenant, Mr. Henry. One day, Frieda is alone in the kitchen; her parents are in the garden for the wedding. Mr. Henry says how pretty she is, and then he suddenly grabs her arm and touches her breasts. Frieda immediately runs out of the kitchen and goes to the garden; she tells her mother what happened. Her mother tells her father what happened. Her mother hits Mr. Henry with the broom, and her father chases him and wants to shoot him with a gun, but luckily, he escapes. Unlike Pecola, Frieda is protected by her mother and dad. Her mother believes her, and unlike Pecola's mother, she does not whip her daughter; instead, she whips Mr. Henry. Their neighbour, Miss Dunion, tells her mother that she should take Frieda to the doctor to check whether she lost her virginity or not. Her mother shouts at Miss Dunion and protects her daughter against the effects of social pressure on her daughter's life. Frieda's incident illustrates that the widespread circulation of sexual images has a negative impact on people's attitudes and behaviour toward others (Kuenz, 1993, pp. 421-422). Both genders are differently affected by sexual images, but females are the ones who are affected as victims physically and psychologically.

And now when I see her searching the garbage-for what? The thing we assassinated? I talk about how I did not plant the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late (Morrison, 2007, p. 206).

Claudia urges the reader to think about the destruction, blame, and harsh realities marginalized people face in the novel's final paragraph. The metaphor of the marigolds symbolizes innocence, beauty, and hope, which are tragically destroyed due to external factors beyond the individuals' control, like Pecola and so many others. Claudia uses the marigolds for children and teenagers, the future of society, and in this context to refer to wider societal issues such as oppression and the failure to feed and protect vulnerable individuals. The discrimination and the resulting inferiority complex and prejudice to which the black community is subjected, as well as the harsh criticism and destructive attitudes of the community towards its people, play an important role in the further degeneration and degradation of society. Being surrendered to victimization and accepting fate indicates a sense of powerlessness and inevitability in the face of societal injustice. All in all, Claudia argues that every member of the society is to blame for Pecola's transformation into a living dead. In addition to the oppression and marginalization of the black race, society's prejudices and actions make it impossible to raise morally healthy individuals of any race.

2.4. Mrs. Pauline Breedlove

Pauline's lifelong dreams do not come true, and she is forced to accept living as the other and alone. When she is only two years old, a rusty nail stick to her foot, and she becomes partially unable to walk. She blames what happens to her foot for being different and worthless because she can not walk properly. She is the only one in her community who does not have a nickname but other children have nicknames but not her. That is why she feels that she does not belong anywhere, and for not being

able to exist in the normal flow of life. At the beginning of the World War I, her family moves to Kentucky. Pauline has to take over all the household chores as her mother takes up cleaning and cooking. She discovers that she enjoys it although she feels lonelier than before. After meeting her husband, Cholly, she discovers for the first time in her life that there is something valuable about her foot. Cholly is sensitive and cares about her foot. They move to the North, where Pauline begins to feel lonely and vulnerable again. In the North, she is subjected to racism by white people and her black skin is ostracised by society, which condemns her to a completely isolated life. She expresses her emotions, as it follows: "That was the lonesomest time of my life. I member looking out them front windows just waiting for Cholly to come home at three o'clock. I didn't even have a cat to talk to" (Morrison, 2007, p. 117). This situation once again reinforces the feeling of worthlessness she has internalized since childhood, which she thinks she has already forgotten.

Living her life in a lie based on the traditional beauty standards of the white race seems to her like salvation rather than a confrontation with reality. However, her demand for money from Cholly in order to obtain these standards is the cause of a fight between them. In fact, she does not care about clothes or makeup materials; she only wants to be accepted by society: "Money become the focus of all their discussions, hers for clothes, his for drink" (Morrison, 2007, p. 118). As a result of the economic difficulties, the pressure imposed by the white race, and the effects of their past experiences both Mrs. Pauline and Cholly find a different path and move away from reality. The Industrial Revolution in the United States negatively affected African-American families, especially in the North, regardless of economic standards, and social values. It is difficult for them to break away from their roots in the South and adapt to life and culture in the North. These people, like Pauline, are isolated from their past and alienated from their present situation (Kuenz, 1993, p. 424).

Pauline's identity reflects the complexity of race, gender, and social status. The standard of beauty, race, and class that she longs for in herself makes her hate herself even more. Pauline's getting a job at the Fishers' house and consoling herself with films demonstrate that she satisfies her sense of belonging and her need for acceptance. In the Fishers' house, Pauline finds everything that symbolizes the order, cleanliness, and beauty she longs for. She hears: "We'll never let her go. We could never find anybody

like Polly...Really, she is the ideal servant" (Morrison, 2007, p. 128). Although she is called an ideal servant, she does not care about this; what is important to her is the guarantee of acceptance and that she will not be rejected. The Fisher's daughter even gives her a nickname that she has always wanted to have, which is also the satisfaction of the deprivations of her childhood. The Fishers' daughter calls her "Polly." The films save her from her disappointments with Cholly and drag her into a completely different world of imagination. When she goes to the cinema, she forgets her disappointments, humiliations, physical defects, and the fact that she is black, temporarily experiencing false happiness during the time she spends there. She goes back and forth between two different lives, which causes her to become more detached from her family day by day. She sees her family as an obstacle in her life. This feeling of hatred that accumulates inside her eventually reflects outwardly as violence. She says: "Sometimes I'd catch myself hollering at them and beating them, and I'd feel sorry for them, but I couldn't seem to stop" (Morrison, 2007, p. 124). Pauline's self-loathing and the conflicting feelings she experiences are like searching for a way out of a dark labyrinth. The Fishers' house is the path she chooses for herself, where she prefers to work as a modern slave. All these experiences affect her view and attitude towards her own daughter. When she gives birth to Pecola, she begins to see her daughter as ugly. It can be clearly seen at this point that she internalizes the understanding of beauty established in society and transfers it to her daughter. In addition, when she hears that her husband raped her daughter, she does not believe what her daughter says and shows violence to her daughter, which can be considered as an indicator that she internalized and accepted the patriarchal social order as well as the society's understanding of beauty and transferred it to her daughter. Taking her daughter out of school because of the judgment of society completely isolates Pecola and makes her invisible. Following the traumas she has experienced, Pecola becomes more distant and withdrawn with her expulsion from school, which leads to her inability to develop skills to cope with difficulties and society. With no space to develop coping skills, Pecola could not acquire the skills to find her way through the labyrinth. Her mother overshadows her daughter's path out of the labyrinth day by day. The white beauty standard has irreversible negative effects on black identity. Systematic oppression complicates the identities of Black women (Richardson-Stovall, 2012, p. 76).

3. *SULA*

Sula is Toni Morrison's second novel, published in 1973. In this work, Morrison examines the friendship between Sula Peace and Nel Wright, delving into the evolving identity of Black women while addressing traditional themes of race and gender in society.

3.1. Literary Context and Background

Sula takes place in the valley town Medallion, Ohio between 1919 and 1965. During these years, important and destiny-changing events took place in America. In the 1920s, there were economic and sociocultural innovations; the Jazz Age, a cornerstone of African American culture, led to the rise of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1929, the country faced a stock market crash, which was called the Great Depression and is known by this name. As a result, unemployment and economic inadequacy came to the forefront. Till the end of the 1930s, America struggled through this difficult period. Then, in 1941, World War II began, and this war revitalised the economic situation, and in addition to this revival, America moved forward in gender roles and technology. Between 1950 and 1960, a movement emerged to abolish discrimination, which was important for the black race. In addition to these dates, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed. Morrison analyses the impact of the change and transformation of society on the characters' search for identity and the events that change the direction of their lives. Morrison particularly emphasizes and values the impact of this period as it was a critical period for the black community to obtain their human rights and a time when black people began to make their voices heard.

Morrison uses the term "Bottom" to show how white supremacy continues to oppress and exploit the black race socio-economically. The fact that white people live in "Valley land" while the black people live in "Bottom" is a clear evidence of this. (Thompson, 2003, p. 141). Morrison tells the story of the Bottom in part one of *Sula*. She describes how white farmers deceive black slaves with promises of welfare and land, forcing them to work superhuman hours, only to eventually give them a piece of unproductive land (Morrison, 2004, p. 5). Morrison shows the reader how the white

race exploits the labour of the black race and never gives them what they deserve. In addition, the white race sees itself as a super race and looks down on the black people.

Morrison uses an omniscient narrator in her novel *Sula*, where she describes each character in detail without prejudice to the reader. The words she uses here have double meanings. She does this to avoid dominant moral judgments. Thus, the message she conveys to the reader is not to judge the characters' actions, but to remind them that we all can make mistakes for different reasons (Rainwater, 1991, pp. 102-103).

Morrison points out in the novel that girls follow the example of their mothers or grandmothers on the issue of violence. She also underlines that these mothers and grandmothers were either slaves in their time or were subjected to racism or were subjected to oppression and violence within the family. In short, girls learn to be violent from their parents, who have somehow succumbed to the oppression of the white race. It is also conceivable that some black mothers teach their daughters violence in order to defend themselves in the future against the oppressive white (Putman, 2011, p. 26).

Morrison deals with the psychological problems of black soldiers returning home after the World War I. She reveals the inability of the character Shadrack to integrate into society as a result of war trauma, the depth of the wounds in his soul, and his struggle to cope with them, and Plum uses drugs to cope with the trauma of the events of the war and this addiction turns him into a living dead. It shows society how the black race, which has been suppressed and enslaved by the white race for a long time, is used ruthlessly in war for the interests of the white race.

Sula is the novel's main character and represents the new black woman (Thompson, 2003, p. 142). In her novel, Morrison exhibits what the black generation in American history has been subjected to over time and how it has changed and transformed in the meantime. She explains in detail the effects of factors such as family, society, historical events, and racism on the evolution of black women's identity over the years, especially on Sula and Nel's journey from childhood to adulthood.

3.2. Sula Peace

Sula is Hannah's daughter and Eva's granddaughter. She is born with a birthmark on her face that extends from the eyelid to the eyebrow. When she is about three years old, her father dies, and she moves to her grandmother's house with her mother in Bottom. Eva has an extremely strong identity stemming from her past losses, suffering, and struggles. Her house is a very crowded place where Sula grows up. Eva has many male friends with whom she only plays checkers, converses, and laughs. She doesn't have sexual intercourse with them. She prefers to behave like a man. Sula's mother, Hannah, gets married when she is fourteen years old. After her husband dies, she has many lovers who are the husbands of her friends and neighbors. Sula's uncle, Ralph, is killed by her grandmother because of drug addiction. She witnesses his uncle's tragic death. In short, it is seen that family members, traumatic events she experienced in childhood, people at the bottom, and racism have an important contribution to the formation of Sula's identity. Sula refuses to conform to the moral norms of the society and resists them, oscillates between callousness and emotionality, and behaves very differently from the other traditional black women.

The death of Sula's father at the age of three makes her feel abandoned by her father. The fact that she moves with her mother to her grandmother's house and that this house is different from a normal house affects her whole life. Eva's tenants, strays, three children, a white man, as well as the coming and going of her friends, are like a puzzle to be solved by a little child. In addition to this, in terms of the physical conditions of the house, it can be seen that everyone lives in close proximity to each other.

Sula's mother, Hannah's interest in men, and the women at the Bottom talking about her are also difficult events to deal with, especially for a girl who has lost her father: "Hannah simply refused to live without the attentions of a man, and after Rekus' death had a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbors" (Morrison, 2004, p. 42). Sula's sexual intercourse with the husband of her best friend can be interpreted as mimicking her mother. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry is clearly observed in Sula's behaviour. Bhabha states that marginalized individuals mimic dominant cultures or individuals in order to make themselves

accepted or survive (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 89-90). Many other incidents throughout Sula's life can be cited as examples of Bhabha's concept of mimicry. Another example of mimicry is when Sula does not react, stands and watches while her mother is on fire. Eva burns her son Plum, who has returned from the World War I, by pouring gasoline on him because his drug addiction is unsolvable. Sula witnesses this event live when she is eleven years old: "...she knew that as she lay on the ground trying to drag herself through the sweet peas and clover to get to Hannah, she has seen Sula standing on the back porch just looking" (Morrison, 2004, p. 78). She has a reactionary personality in the face of danger. Sula sees her mother burning alive but does not react. At the same time, her grandmother's efforts to help Hannah mean nothing to her. She does nothing but stare. This situation exactly coincides with Eva's story of burning Plum. Her grandmother is also a dominant figure in Sula's life, and her imitation of her actions in traumatic situations can be attributed to the same situations as her reactions to dominant white people.

Another example is Sula and Nel challenging the Irish teenagers on their way home. Nel is intimidated by these teenagers on the way home, so she takes a longer way home. One day in November, Sula offers Nel a shortcut to home. They see the Irish teenagers again lined up, blocking the road. Seeing this, Sula puts down all her belongings and takes out Evan's knife from her pocket. Without hesitation, Sula cuts the tip of her finger. The Irish children are shocked; Sula looks at them and says: "If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?" (Morrison, 2004, pp. 54-55). Sula's brazen and unhesitating cutting of her finger is exactly the same as Eva's murder of Plum because she has given up hope. Instead of changing her path and living in daily fear of encountering Irish teenagers, Sula solves the problem by imitating Eva. Just as Eva chooses to kill her son rather than watch him slowly die every day, Sula refuses to live in fear every day and ends the harassment of the white teenagers at the risk of harming herself.

Sula's relationship with her mother is quite complicated, just like her own personality. One day, Sula comes home from school and sees her mother in bed having sexual intercourse with a man: "Seeing her step to easily into the pantry and emerge looking precisely as she did when she entered, only happier, taught Sula that sex was pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable" (Morrison, 2004, p. 44). It gives

the reader the feeling that Sula is introduced to sex at a very early age and that she is again emotionless towards this event. She thinks that sex should be done often, that it gives pleasure, but also that sex is a trivial thing. This idea she acquires at a young age shapes her life in the future. Examining Sula's relationships with men, it is observed that she does not accept the role that society assigns to women and behaves in the opposite way. It would not be wrong to say that she imitates her mother in this regard.

After Nel and Jude get married, Sula leaves from the Bottom. Just as Eva leaves her children with Mrs. Suggs and returns to Bottom eighteen months later, Sula returns ten years later. Just as Eva returns after finding the solution to her financial problems on this journey, Sula returns after finding the answers that will liberate and develop her on her journey away from the society in Bottom, where she has always been different. When she returns, her conversation with Eva reveals how Sula's free spirit, which has always been within her, has developed and taken shape. When Eva tells Sula to get married and have children, Sula says: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (Morrison, 2004, p. 92). When Eva says that a woman cannot do anything without a man, Sula says that Eva and her mother did it. The dialogue between Eva and Sula is another proof that her mother and grandmother played a dominant role in forming Sula's personality. Sula's desire to continue her life as a free and down-to-earth person and to turn a deaf ear to social pressure is a clear evidence that the new black female identity made its presence felt in 1937:

She was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone would ever see. A black crepe dress splashed with pink and yellow zinnias, foxtails, a black felt hat with the veil of net lowered over one eye. In her right hand was a black purse with a beaded clasp and in her left a red leather traveling case, so small, so charming-no one had seen anything like it ever before, including the mayor's wife and the music teacher, both of whom had been to Rome (Morrison, 2004, p. 90).

This passage suggests Sula's appearance when she returns to the Bottom and gives the reader information about Sula's character. The fox tail Sula wears symbolizes trickery and cleverness; the black hat on her head and the black veil covering one eye give us clues that some truths may be hidden, and the small red suitcase she carries may

indicate that Sula has a passionate and lusty personality. Sula implicitly hints to Eva that one day she might burn her by pouring gasoline on her. Sula's locking Eva in a nursing home shows us that she is trickery and ruthless; perhaps it can also be interpreted as taking revenge on Eva for her uncle. Nobody knows what Sula has been doing in the last ten years. However, when it is taken into account that the clothes she wears are costly and fashionable, that she is making good money, and that it is not easy to do that as a black person in a white society, we can conclude that Sula is smart and intelligent. Her dress style can be seen as a message to the bottom of society that she is a free, independent woman who does not care about societal norms and people's thoughts about her.

By 1939, society ostracizes Sula for her behavior and does not accept a woman like her, who is free and has values that are the opposite of theirs. The men of the town accuse her of having sexual relations with white men:

Their conviction of Sula's evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had left to protect and love one another. They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and band together against the devil in their midst (Morrison, 2004, pp. 117-118).

It shows the impact of Sula's personality on society. Ironically, through Sula, whom society sees as a threat to them, they perhaps remember the values they have forgotten. In fact, society has lost its values because it has not been able to stand up against the oppression, humiliation, inferiority complex, and economic difficulties they have been experiencing for years. Because they cannot admit it to themselves, they blame their shortcomings on Sula, who is the person they really want to be, with fake evidence. Sula falls ill and is alone. When Nel hears this, she visits her. Sula says to Nel:

I know what every colored woman in this country is doing ... Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I'm sure did live in this world (Morrison, 2004, p. 143).

This sentence shows her perspective on the concept of death. Sula compares her death to the redwood tree, known for its longevity, wisdom, and goodness. This analogy shows her faith in the life she has lived. She sees herself as having left a mark in life

and as an important legacy that must be discussed. Unlike others who die without leaving a mark, she recognizes that she is special. It can also show how important it is for her to have lived her life embracing herself and ignoring social norms. Sula says that black women end their lives, succumbing to the norms and pressures of society. “When Nel closed the door, Sula reached for more medicine” (Morrison, 2004, p. 147). This sentence shows us that Sula ended her life by taking medicine. Despite the racism, isolation, and economic difficulties Sula has experienced in her community, she has a personality that has remained free. At the point where she comes up with her own solutions to all the difficulties her life brings her, she ends her life in order to remain free. Sula has the courage to end her own life.

In short, Throughout her life, Sula does not follow the path taken by other black women, and this is what makes her different from the others. Life for her is to experience what no one else has dared to try. She will not give up until the end of her life, no matter how severe the consequences are. Sula's life can be seen as a firm step on the way out of a dark labyrinth, but when she reaches the exit, death awaits her. Sula prefers death, where she will be free again, rather than living in the dark labyrinth.

3.3. Nel Wright

Nel is Sula's close friend, and they grow up together. Nel's identity is in stark contrast to Sula's. One of the main reasons is that their families are very different. Nel lives a quiet life with her mother and conforms to the norms of society. Nel's father works as a cook on a ship and is usually not at home. When Nel is young, she and her mother go to visit her mother's grandmother when she is sick, and Nel witnesses white racism on the train. After they accidentally enter the white carriage and then move to the black carriage, the conductor talks to Helene. The white conductor says: “We don't low no mistakes on this train. Now git your butt on in there” (Morrison, 2004, p. 21). When a young child witnesses his mother being humiliated by a white conductor, and her mother fails to react appropriately, the idea that this is accepted as normal becomes entrenched in her consciousness. Nel's reaction to being humiliated and intimidated by white Irish children is evidence that she has internalized white racism against blacks. After this incident, Nel chooses to take the longer route home from school to avoid

encountering white children. Later, when Sula repels the threats of the white children, a different perspective emerges in Nel's inner world. In addition to her mother's humiliation, Nel realizes on this journey that her mother's mother was a prostitute and her mother was ashamed of this. At the end of this journey, Nel promises herself that she will not become a person who would fall into these situations.

Nel's mother, Helene, is obsessively neat and clean. Helene wants to mold her life and her daughter according to white beauty standards. "When Mrs. Wright reminded Nel to pull her nose, she would do it enthusiastically but without the least hope in the world" (Morrison, 2004, p. 55). Helene desires to change Nel's nose according to white beauty standards. Although Nel tells her mother that the "head and pull" burns her, Helene insists on it and imposes white beauty standards on her own daughter. Helene says: "Don't you want a nice nose when you grow up?" (Morrison, 2004, p. 55). Another example is that every Saturday, Helene straightens Nel's hair. In doing so, she inflicts psychological violence on Nel. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon explains: "In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person" (Fanon, 2008, p. 90). As Fanon emphasizes, it can be concluded that Nel's mother's pressure to make her daughter resemble the white people is the result of an inferiority complex that emerges as a result of her being discriminated against by the whites. Nel's mother directly imposes a negative physical image on Nel and subconsciously implants an inferiority complex on Nel at a young age.

Nel's marriage and devotion to her husband and children lead her to become another version of her mother. In many parts of her life, one can see that Nel has adopted her mother's teachings of being a good wife and devoted herself to her children, submitting to all kinds of oppression and not standing up to it in her own life. Nel's life is actually lived according to the norms and teachings of the black community in the town called Medallion or Bottom. She lives a large part of her life with the inferiority complex of the family she grew up in, especially her mother, and the awareness that she must live a life within the dimensions of society and that she must not go outside of it. That is to say, she must be a slave of the society in this case.

Her friendship with Sula also affects her identity formation. Sula acts as a guide, showing Nel that the black race can assert itself in white society, that discrimination can be challenged, and that it is not necessary to adhere to the norms of black culture. Although Nel tries to accept these things as a child, she is unable to break the chains imposed on her subconscious by her mother and society. In 1939, after Sula comes back to the Bottom, the narrator says: "Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways" (Morrison, 2004, p. 120). The narrator's words clearly prove Nel's situation in life. After her husband abandons her, Nel enters a new era of her life. Nel's abandonment by her husband causes her to recall her experiences with Sula as a child. Raising her children alone and holding on to life at the same time is difficult for Nel, but it reminds her of some of the freedom values she has forgotten or repressed. The change in Nel's personality begins to take shape again through this process.

When Nel hears that Sula is sick and visits her after a long time, she tells Sula: "You own the world and the rest of us is renting. You ride the pony and we shovel the shit" (Morrison, 2004, p. 144). These words are an indication of the change and transformation in Nel's own identity. Between 1921 and 1965, as life changes at the Bottom, so does Nel's life. By 1950, whites were living in the Bottom, and blacks could not afford to live here even if they wanted to because of the high cost of living. In fact, they were once again exiled by the whites from the place they called home. Nel's life changes just like the black people in the Bottom. She goes from being a devoted wife who thinks she is happy, to a hotel maid and a single woman taking care of her children. She realizes that obeying the rules of society and succumbing to all kinds of oppression lead her to the life of a black slave.

Nel's confession to herself at the end of the novel is very striking. She realizes that for years, she has been crying not for Jude but for herself and Sula. The narrator says: "It was a fine cry-loud and long -but it had no bottom and no top, just circles and circles of sorrow" (Morrison, 2004, p. 174). The narrator implies that black women live in a dark labyrinth where the white race continues to exploit, and at the same time, the black race is trapped in certain norms. She emphasizes that both Sula, who steps out of this labyrinth, and Nel, who does not dare to step out, end up in the same vicious circle of unending suffering for years.

All in all, her friendship with Sula contributes significantly to Nel's identity formation. In addition to social norms and maternal pressure, Nel's friendship with the free-spirited Sula develops a questioning mechanism within herself. Throughout the novel, it can be observed that Nel's identity changes over time. After Sula dies, Nel becomes a more grounded woman.

3.4. Eva Peace

Eva can be described as Sula's grandmother and the head of the family. Eva protects and cares for her, her mother, and others who need a shelter. Eva's life has never been easy, and throughout her life, she has struggled against the oppressive and exploitative attitude of both the white race and the black race. Protecting and keeping her children alive, resisting the humiliation and discrimination against blacks, and at the same time gaining a place in her society against prejudices can be seen as a significant victory for a black woman. Whites are desperate to change and transform the black race and use it for their interests. Eva can find her unique solutions even when she is helpless during this process, this situation implies a lot about her personality.

Eva marries a black man named Boy Boy and has three children. After five years of marriage, Boy Boy abandons her, leaving her 1.65 dollar, five eggs, and three beets and she does not know what to do. Eva gets by for a while with food from her neighbors. After Plum falls ill on a cold December night and Eva spends a night out to comfort him, she realizes that this can't go on like this and she must find a solution. After that night, Eva leaves her children with her neighbor to take care of them until she returns and she leaves Bottom. Returning eighteen months later, she is missing one leg but has enough money to buy her house. No one knows what happened to her; Eva doesn't tell anyone.

The secret of Eva's one leg will to go to the grave with Eva alone; some say she is trapped under the train for the insurance money, others say she sells it for 10.000 dollars. Eva's self-sacrifice in saving her children shows how selfless she is. After returning to the Bottom, she brings other people into the world she has created for her family. The house she builds on Carpenter's Road is different from other ordinary

houses. It is as if Eva has built a labyrinth for her and her children's safety. When we look at the tenants and the house's design, it is observed that everyone lives in it safely and protects each other, and Eva, as the head of this system, controls and directs everything (Rand, 2001, p. 343).

Evan's identity is as complex as the house she builds. It is observed that she suppresses her emotions and acts with straight logic while making the right decisions in difficult times. The best example of this is pouring kerosene on her son Plum, whom she loves dearly. Plum is addicted to drugs, after returning from World War I he is melting in front of Eva's eyes day by day. Eva kills her son with her own hands and ends both her and his suffering. In this incident, Eva rebels against the white race's use of the black race for its own interests and the permanent psychological damage it inflicts on the black race. Her killing of Plum can also be seen as a rebellion against the white race's exploitation of blacks. When Sula cuts her own hand with Eva's knife to scare the white children and when Eva kills her own son, which means self-harm, it is in a way a rebellion and defense mechanism against the white race's humiliation and exploitation of blacks. In a way, Eva's killing of her son can be defined as liberating him forever. Another example is when Eva risks her own life to save her daughter Hannah while she is burning:

She lifted her heavy frame up on her good leg and smashed the windowpane with fists and arms. Using her stump as a support on the window sill and her good leg as a lever, she threw herself out of the window. Cut and bleeding, she clawed the air trying to aim her body toward the flaming, dancing figurine (Morrison, 2004, pp. 75-76).

As it can be understood from this paragraph, Eva has a personality that will do whatever it takes to save her children. Eva has a personality that solves all kinds of difficulties and problems with a logic that knows no boundaries.

When Sula returns home after 10 years, Eva tells Sula that she should get married and have children. Upon Sula's objection, Eva tells Sula: "Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around without no man" (Morrison, 2004, p. 92). This sentence shows us that Eva has accepted and internalized that women cannot exist alone in a male-dominated society. Although Eva's victory as a black woman in a white and male-

dominated environment is unbelievable, it can be observed that she still cannot break away from the norms of society (Thompson, 2003, p. 158). Another reason could be that she wants to protect her granddaughter from the cruel and oppressive life she lives in. Eva, like Sula, leaves the Bottom for ten years and comes back; therefore, she can more or less guess what Sula has been through in that time.

Sula and Eva are both very strong characters. They know each other's secrets and the dark side of their souls, and they are afraid of each other. Sula is afraid that Eva might kill her, just like she killed Plum, while Eva thinks that Sula might hurt her because she witnessed Sula watching in cold blood as her mother burned. Sula appoints herself as Eva's guardian and sends her to a nursing home. A completely different and lonely life begins for Eva, who is forced to live outside the sheltered labyrinth she has built for herself and her family. The narrator says: "The lobby was luxurious-modern-but the rooms she peeped into were sterile green cages" (Morrison, 2004, p. 167). After she struggles for freedom during her life, Eva spends the last days of her life in a cage-like room. This luxurious room where she lives the last days of her life is not so different from the dark labyrinth.

4. *BELOVED*

Beloved is Morrison's most-awarded book and was published in 1987. Morrison wrote this novel inspired by the life story of Margaret Garner, an African American woman who was a slave. In her novel, Morrison explores how the past shapes identity and shows the lasting impact of trauma on individuals and their communities.

4.1. Literary Context and Background

Beloved is Toni Morrison's precious novel, which brought her the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. In this novel, Morrison sheds light on the history of slavery and shows once again how the enslavement of black people had a profound psychological impact on them. As a result of these psychological impacts, Morrison presents the reader with examples of how black people experience identity fragmentation and isolation through the characters of the novel. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon describes the fragmented identities and isolation of colonized and enslaved people, as well as the inferiority complex in these people. Fanon also talks about how their defense mechanisms can react to attacks on their identity and how their measures can have extreme consequences (Fanon, 2008, p. 2). The characters in *Beloved* confirm Fanon's findings in this work.

The novel has two settings: one part takes place in Ohio, Cincinnati, in 1873, and the other, which shows the slavery times, takes place in Sweet Home, Kentucky, approximately in 1855. The majority of black people were living as slaves in plantations in the South of America in 1855 (Unger, 1994, p. 149). The novel reflects the experiences of enslaved people who are wounded physically and mentally. The consequences of the damage never disappear from their minds and souls. These people are forced to carry on the burden of humiliation, which causes isolation, identity fragmentation, an inferiority complex, and more throughout their lives. In 1865, with the end of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln passed the Thirteenth Amendment in Congress, legalizing and granting freedom to all slaves (Unger, 1994, p. 220). Equal Justice Initiative report says: "How many Black men and women were beaten, flogged, mutilated, and murdered in the first year of emancipation will never be known"

(Stevenson, 2018, p. 10). The fact that the outlawing of slavery did not change much in the lives of slaves is observed in the novel's Ohio section and through flashbacks. *Beloved* can be seen as proof to its readers that the supposedly abolished system of slavery is, in fact, indelibly imprinted in the souls and lives of black people. Morrison emphasizes that freedom from slavery does not mean freedom for black people and that the extent of the deformation and destruction of black people's identities caused by slavery is passed down from generation to generation, as a historical trauma.

Morrison wants to reveal historical facts through *Beloved* by adapting the real-life story of a black slave woman, Margaret Garner. Margaret's story reveals what African-American slave women went through in the past, how they fought for their freedom and beloved ones against the slavery system and racism, what they were willing to sacrifice along the way to obtain their freedom, and how their identity and psychology were affected (Ghasemi & Heidari, 2020, p. 587).

She uses magical realism to relate how slavery has left scars that are almost inevitable to get rid of, such as traumas, memories, and struggles. She blends reality and supernatural elements to convey how black people fight to create their identity after the abolishment of slavery and how their past burdens still haunt their present. Her way of using magical realism also reflects the African American cultural heritage and spiritual sides of them (Ghasemi & Heidari, 2020, p. 591).

Beloved is narrated by an anonymous narrator and various characters in the novel. The narrators tell many stories with different time frames, but they do not do so sequentially; they constantly switch back and forth between the past and the present. The purpose of this is for the reader to understand the characters' fragmented identities and the unrevealed history of slavery. Another point is that the past is too complex, painful, and filled with horrific events to be easily described. It reveals that the traces of the past are almost impossible to erase, that they constantly remind themselves, and that it is inevitable for them to reappear at any moment, regardless of how much they are avoided (Rainwater, 1991, p. 106).

Beloved contains many striking symbols and metaphors to depict the big picture of the reality of slavery and its destructive impact on African American people. Morrison uses Beloved character to illustrate how horrific past slavery traumas are still

haunting and unforgettable for the African American community and playing a crucial role in shaping their identities (Hinson, 2001, p. 148). Beloved becomes the voice of the black community who has suffered and lost their loved ones during slavery and its aftermaths. 124 Bluestone Road is the house that is a metaphor for burdens, loss, signs of torture, and emotionally struggling memories of slavery. It also symbolizes the violence of the African American community. African American people have suffered physically and emotionally and lived under the oppression of white dominant supremacy for so many years; as a result, being oppressed causes anger and violence inside the African American community. They can not direct their anger and revenge on whites, so they transfer their violence to their community directly. In *Beloved*, it can be observed that the community around 124 Bluestone Road is an excellent example of this. Morrison conveys that they must confront the pains of past traumas to bring healing and peace to their lives (Hinson, 2001, pp. 154-155).

Morrison uses different colors to symbolize essential points in the novel, such as violence, suffering, traumas, and characters' emotions and identities. The most important one is red because red symbolizes and summarizes African American people's emotions, blood, grief, historical trauma, and suffering, which are stuck in their hearts and minds and not easy to get rid of and follow them till their death.

In conclusion, Morrison's *Beloved* goes for a walk through the history of slavery, reveals the unspeakable truths that are unbearable to endure as a human being, and depicts the result of slavery on the African American community and individuals, which shapes the identity of people and community's values and rules. Beloved also can be seen as a message to African American people to confront the past of slavery and create a peaceful and healthy future.

4.2. Sethe Suggs

Sethe is the main character and one of the narrators in the novel. She is a former slave in Sweet Home and the mother of Howard, Buglar, Denver, and Beloved. She is the wife of Halle, who is a slave. When Sethe is a child, her mom is hanged. She does not know who her father is. Sethe experiences life as a slave under the oppression of the white race and the violence against slaves from a very early age. Her mother is

hanged, her father is absent, and she is raised without love and care by other slave women. The difficulties she experiences at an early age turn her into a resilient individual at thirteen. When she is thirteen, she is sold to Sweet Home. The narrator says: "Sethe was thirteen when she came to Sweet Home and already iron-eyed" (Morrison, 2004, p. 12). Describing Sethe as "iron-eyed" indicates a clue about her identity that she has been through a lot and has developed a resistant and tough personality. The proof of these characteristics of Sethe can be seen as a confirmation that she makes all kinds of difficult decisions and struggles against difficult conditions on her own and her children's journey to freedom. Her decision to kill her daughter on the road to freedom is seen as a proof that she has witnessed the torture of whites against blacks. Sethe frees her daughter's soul so that her daughter does not continue her life as a slave and is not subjected to these tortures. No matter how much Sethe wants to leave these traumatic events behind, it is impossible to get rid of the traumas of the past. Sethe's past traumas can be described as unspeakable or voicelessness. The memories and pain of past events are so deep and significant that she can neither describe nor talk about them (Bast, 2011, p. 1072). Although Sethe has a strong personality, her past traumas and memories do not leave her alone for the rest of her life. Sethe represents how slavery left indelible marks on the personality of black women and how, even if one day they were free, they could not free themselves from the dark labyrinth of the past.

The scars left by slavery on black women's bodies, as well as their souls, make it complicated for black women to heal spiritually and not forget the memories until they die. Sethe has a scar on her back, which symbolizes the physically and psychologically brutal side of slavery. Sethe tells Paul D that the wound on her back resembles a 'Chokecherry' tree. Paul D asks who told him that; Sethe says:

Whitegirl. That's what she called it. I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know (Morrison, 2004, p. 18).

Sethe's words tell us that the wounds inflicted on her soul by the years of slavery had branched out like a tree. Although eighteen years have passed, she says that the traces

of the past still haunt her soul like the branches of a tree. Just as it is not easy to uproot a tree, she says, it is impossible to erase the traces of slavery, the root of her identity. She says that no matter how hard she tries, it is impossible to eliminate the traces of memories and experiences, just like the scar on her back.

Another meaning of the wound on Sethe's back is based on why she is beaten. An incident occurs in which two white men attack Sethe while she is pregnant with Denver; they attack her for her milk and mercilessly whip her when they hear that they have been reported to Mrs. Denver. Sethe is not raised by her mother and witnesses her mother's hanging. Sethe is a mother who fights to prevent her children from going through what she goes through. Sethe says: "Nobody knew that but me and anybody had her milk but me" (Morrison, 2014, p. 19). Sethe emphasizes the ruthlessness of the white race's destructive decision-making mechanism in the most natural mother-child relationships of black people. She emphasizes that even an event as natural as a mother breastfeeding her child is taken away from them. As black women, they do not have any rights; whites see them as animals. The owners of slaves consider themselves entitled to everything; they can rape them, buy and sell them as their commodities, separate children from their families no matter how old they are, mercilessly torture them, and even kill them when they feel like it. On the plantation, especially black women have no place to feel safe and comfortable.

There is only one solution for Sethe: to run away from the plantation to set herself and her children free, even though there are incredibly challenging obstacles on the way to freedom. However, she thinks that it is better to die on the way to freedom instead of living this life as a slave. Sethe sends Howard and Burglar before leaving the plantation. She also fears that her children will be taken away from her, and after the cruel persecution, she has no other choice. Although she has been pregnant in Denver for nine months, which makes her journey more challenging, she bravely takes her children and starts the dangerous journey to the North. Fanon says: "Like every aspect of human behavior, behavior toward authority is something to be learned. And it is learned within a family" (Fanon, 2008, p. 122). Sethe's foolhardy escape is a behavior against authority, and the fact that Sethe witnessed her mother's attempt to escape by risking being hanged when she was young matches exactly Fanon's words.

Sethe kills Beloved to prevent her from being captured and returned to the plantation. She does not want her daughter to live and suffer as an enslaved person. Although it is not easy to make an instant decision as a mother to kill her Beloved, Sethe bravely sacrifices her for her freedom. Her helplessness and past traumas can also play a crucial role in her decisions because she was abandoned by her mother when she was just thirteen, so she knows how hard life is, it can be unbearable and torturous without a mother in the white world. If they catch her and her daughter, they will punish or directly kill Sethe, and Beloved may suffer more than she does. The narrator says: “The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing- the part of her that clean” (Morrison, 2004, p. 296). This quote can be seen as evidence of how big Sethe’s love for her children is. No one, under any circumstances, can unchain this bond between them. Sethe’s action can be accepted as an evidence of this bond. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault says:

And as a result, one was both more innocent and more guilty. More innocent, because one was swept by the total irritation of the nervous system into an unconsciousness great in proportion to one's disease. But more guilty, much more guilty, because everything to which one was attached in the world, the life one had led, the affections one had had, the passions and the imaginations one had cultivated too complacently (Foucault, 2006, p. 157).

This quote reflects the dilemma of guilt and innocence arising from the experience of pain and the influence of the self by the environment. Individuals may fail to see the consequences of their actions when they are disturbed by existing conditions. As a result of unconsciousness, one may see oneself as innocent because one is controlled by forces beyond one's control. Despite this unconsciousness, individuals cannot break away from their relationships, their past and their desires. The past and relationships become sources of guilt as moral compulsions become intertwined. This situation between guilt and innocence represents the battle between individuals' past experiences and identities. This battle can be seen in Sethe's desperate decision to protect her children from slavery. From Sethe's point of view, her intentions are innocent, but she is guilty according to the consequences of her actions.

After Sethe kills Beloved, Sethe gives birth to Denver on the way to North. One white woman helps her to deliver the baby. After surviving the arduous journey, Sethe and Denver reach Cincinnati, where they will live free. When Sethe and Denver reach Babby Suggs's home and are reunited with Howard and Burglar, they are relieved and enjoy their freedom. Nevertheless, it does not take long; their suffering, grief, trauma, memory, and guilty consciousness have already arrived at 124 Bluestone Road. Their body is free, but their soul is under attack of their unbearable slavery years. Babby Suggs dies eight years later after Sethe and her children move in with her. During eight years, they deal with the past traumas, Beloved's apparition, and the communities' disapproval. Society sees Sethe's murder of her daughter as a threat to the black community's collective identity and values of the black race. Baby Suggs and Sethe are targeted and isolated by the community. The ostracization of people who do not conform to community values can also be seen as proof that the legacy of slavery still has an impact on society (Hinson, 2002, p. 154).

Howard and Burglar leave home after Baby Sugs dies. Denver feels more lonely because Sethe works during the daytime. Sethe lives between the real world and with haunted memories. She does not give more attention to Denver, which is essential for every child's upbringing to be healthy. Even though Denver has not experienced slavery, she lives with people who have a history of slavery. Therefore, racism and slavery affect and shape Denver's soul and identity as well. She feels desperately isolated and needs someone to survive in life. Denver and Sethe need Beloved to keep going because she is part of their past life and plays a crucial role in shaping their future. Beloved drives Paul D. away with her presence. With Paul D. out of the house, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved's relationship strengthens. In this relationship triangle, each confronts their past traumas and tries to find solutions to their emotional wounds.

Sethe needs Beloved's presence to confront her years of slavery, filled with gnawing guilt and unspeakable pain. Because Beloved symbolizes the victim on the difficult path between slavery and freedom, Sethe cannot erase this fact from her heart or soul. Beloved is a hope to hold on to life and the most important person that Sethe must face for healing and redefining her identity (Krumholz, 1992, p. 399). When Sethe and Denver have a conversation, Sethe says:

If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place-the picture of it-stays, and not just in my memory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened (Morrison, 2004, p. 43).

The passage indicates that whatever happens in the past will never be forgotten; the memories stick to your soul, and you must learn how to live with them. Running away from them or ignoring them is not the solution to rid of them. Remembering and confronting them is the only solution to the healing process (Krumholz, 1992, p. 395). The question is whether it is possible for her to recover and become a psychologically healthy person again or not:

Dressed in Sethe's dresses, she stroked her skin with the palm of her hand. She imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to the walk, the way Sethe moved her hands, sighed through her nose, held her head. Sometimes coming upon them making men and women cookies or tacking scraps of cloth on Babby Suggs' old quilt, it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who (Morrison, 2004, p. 283).

In this quote, the narrator's words illustrate how Sethe and Denver's identities are distorted by slavery and past traumas. Both live in different dimensions, and they seek refuge to heal. It can be thought that Sethe has hallucinations and sometimes behaves like herself and sometimes like the girl she killed and comes to terms with herself. Her mother's slavery past affects Denver's identity as well, and it penetrates her identity formation even though she has never experienced slavery. According to the narrator's words, it can be analyzed that Sethe gradually loses her mental health, and Denver is in a place between real life and the hallucination world. They completely isolate their selves from the world; they live in their own world with the past agonies.

After a while, Denver realizes that her mother does not eat, behaves strangely, and is gradually dying; she decides to protect her mother from Beloved. She leaves and asks for help from the community. It can be seen as a turning point for Denver. The prospect of losing Denver's beloved mother brings her back to real life. Although she has never experienced the horrific face of slavery, she is forced to face it indirectly.

The community women come together and arrange a ritual belonging to the African American culture, and together, they stand in the doorway of Sethe and perform their songs: "Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then, Denver, running too" (Morrison, 2004, p. 309). The narrator reveals that Sethe's situation is deeply intertwined with themes of isolation, trauma, and the struggle for creating an identity. Sethe's running to people can be seen as the first step of purifying her traumatic past and memories. The narrator implies that Sethe feels lonely and isolated in society and her inner world. For so many years, she has been on her own while trying to cope with so much agony she has been through.

After the ritual, the house (number 124) is silent now, but Sethe is exhausted and does not want to do anything. Denver works and Paul D. comes to look after her. Paul D. says: "You don't smell right" (Morrison, 2004, p. 321). It shows us that Sethe's psychology is not good, and she is in a condition where she cannot take care of herself. She wants to sleep in Baby Suggs's bed and rest. Paul D. says: "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow... You your best thing, Seth. You are" (Morrison, 2004, p. 322). Sethe answers, "Me? Me?". At the end of the novel, Sethe's situation remains ambiguous.

It is clear that Sethe is one of the victims of slavery and racism. Sethe is an individual who has been exposed to all kinds of negative sides of racism and slavery since she was young. Nevertheless, she resists and finds ways to protect her children with the solutions she finds in her own way. She tries to be strong in the face of all kinds of events. When she obtains her freedom, her past haunts her. The complexity of her personality and the healing process are difficult. There are many events in her life that she has to face in order to find herself again. Even though getting rid of Beloved seems to take Sethe out of the dark labyrinth she lives in, she never manages to get out of it.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir argues that women are often seen as "the other," which resonates with Sethe's struggle to assert her own identity beyond the trauma of slavery and motherhood (De Beauvoir, 2011, pp. 91-92). Her traumatic experiences of racism and slavery shape Sethe's identity and her need to guard her

children from racism and slavery. De Beauvoir argues that women are often confined to roles and identities defined by others rather than being able to represent themselves independently. Sethe's identity is shaped by her refusal to accept the role imposed on her by society and slavery since she was a little girl and the struggle she fights. For this reason, she could neither be completely free nor a slave.

In short, Sethe is a black woman with a slave background, making it almost impossible for her to find her true identity and live free. Morrison leaves Sethe's situation open-ended at the novel's conclusion, indicating that she will never truly be free.

4.3. Baby Suggs

Baby Suggs is a former slave and the mother of Halle. Her son, Halle, buys her freedom after more than sixty years of slavery. After obtaining her freedom, she comes to Ohio and settles there. She creates a community and tries to guide them to have a free spirit and heart. She tries to purify her soul and the community's soul from the profound scars of the slavery past, which constantly haunt the people (Krumholz, 1992, p. 397). Her identity has been shaped by slavery, and her understanding of the trauma and resilience of the community helps her to guide the community. During her slavery years, she struggles with many issues, such as losing her children and her loved ones, torture, and many unspeakable issues. She seems to have a strong and resilient personality but she is also so fragile. Halle, her only son's presence, who is still alive, probably keeps her alive. After Sette arrives, she loses the hope of seeing him again, and soon, she dies. She resists the community to protect Sette and her grandchildren against the community bias, showing that she advocates for herself and the loved ones of Halle and his family. When she loses her hope of seeing her beloved Halle, she stops her resilience against life and dies.

When Sethe and Babby Suggs are talking about the ghost, Babby Suggs says: "You lucky. You got three left... I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased" (Morrison, 2004, p. 6). It is unbearable for a mother to lose all eight of her children to slavery. The fact that Babby Suggs continues service to white people for years, despite the deep wounds in her soul and her silence in the face

of this pain, is truly unimaginable. Once Baby Suggs is free, she speaks more than she ever has in her life through sermons to the people. She devotes herself to society and endeavors to purify herself and the community around her from this past captivity, which profoundly penetrates their souls and hearts.

The narrator says: “Anybody Babby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized” (Morrison, 2004, p. 28). Babby Suggs here expresses how enslaved people are seen as property, how their lives are played with at the will of the owner, like animals without feelings. She explains the reasons of the scars and traumas left by slavery on black people.

Another example of how white people identify black people can be seen in Sethe’s Freed Day. Sethe thinks why Mr. Garner calls her Jenny, and she asks him this question when she leaves the plantation. Mr. Garner answers: “Cause that what’s on your sales ticket, gal. Ain’t that your name? What you call yourself?” (Morrison, 2004, p. 167). And her answer to him: “Nothing,” she said. “I don’t call myself nothing” (Morrison, 2004, p. 167). The dialogue between Mr. Garner and Babby Suggs indicates how enslaved individuals are seen as commodities and humiliated by white owners. This situation leads to traumatized people. Mr. Garner calls Sette according to the name on her sales ticket instead of knowing her as a human being. Baby Suggs rejects the identity imposed on her. Instead, she says: “Call me nothing” (Morrison, 2004, p. 167). Her answer can be seen as a silent protest of slavery and a struggle for existence. It can be seen clearly how the legacy of slavery and its scars shape black people's identities. Despite everything, Babby Suggs can not lose her heart and human values. The narrator says: “Who decided that, because slave life had busted, her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue, she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart- which she put to work at once” (Morrison, 2004, p. 102). This quote reflects that she has a resilient personality; slavery causes physical and emotional destruction to her body and soul. She almost loses everything she needs to survive in this world for a living. Despite this, she manages to keep her heart alive. She uses her heart to heal herself and the community who share the same destiny with her to heal herself.

Denver says: “Grandma Baby said people look down on her because she had eight children with different men. Colored people and white people both look down on her for that” (Morrison, 2004, pp. 246-247). Denver says, Baby Suggs is repeatedly raped by white men in front of her children. She fears that her children will witness it. She says that her children who witnessed it went crazy. These words of Baby Suggs prove that women suffered the most during the years of slavery. The fact that blacks, as if ignoring the fact that women are raped, and on top of that blaming them, doubles the pain and trauma experienced by the black women.

On her last day, Babby Suggs tells the lesson that she has learned during her sixty slavery years and ten years of free life: “There was no bad luck in the world but white people. They don’t know when to stop” (Morrison, 2014, pp. 122-123). Baby Suggs’s words express how white people exploit and ruthlessly use black people through slavery and how they corrupt the values of the black community as a result of the damage they cause to their identity and values. This is why she becomes a spiritual leader of the community and guides people to overcome their traumas and become truly free people. She implies that the attitude of whites towards black people has not changed in the ten years she has lived as a free person. She indicates that whites will never stop attacking the values, identity, and culture of black people. In short, Baby Suggs’s identity is complex, like that of the novel’s other characters. She is resilient, traumatized, and a spiritual healer. After sixty years of captivity, Baby Suggs struggles to find her identity. Baby Suggs eventually dies as a result of the suffering and emotional exhaustion caused by the legacy of slavery.

4.4. Beloved

Beloved is the novel's name and an innocent victim of slavery. Her mother kills her to protect her from the tyranny of slavery. In the novel, she comes to life as a ghost. Morrison uses Beloved as an iconic symbol of all black people who are dehumanized and brutally slaughtered by whites during the slavery years. She conveys the reality of slavery through black people's silent screams and their results, which cause deep scars that will last for generations. Morrison also emphasizes the traumas of the enslaved black race and the psychological state of these people, which can bring them to the

point of killing even their children. The character Beloved acts as a bridge for the other characters to confront their past traumas, which is necessary for the healing process of the victims of slavery (Bast, 2011, p. 1069). The following paragraph is evidence of why Morrison uses the character Beloved as an iconic symbol once again. The narrator says:

Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other fire was a whole other thing (Morrison, 2004, p. 212).

This paragraph proves once again how the whites tortured the black race after the abolition of slavery. The lynching of eighty-seven blacks in Kentucky alone in one year reveals the magnitude of the genocide committed by whites. The fact that children are beaten like adults and adults like children shows how the psychology of the black race is played with and how significant the trauma is. The rapes of black women are another proof that whites still see blacks as property. In short, this quote demonstrates the ongoing heritage of racism and brutality in American history. It shows reflection on the trauma that continues to re-echo within Black communities.

Another mission of Beloved is to heal her family and the black society. The characters and the society confront past traumas, through Beloved. They must face their past traumas to enter the healing process. Sethe and Denver are especially pleased to spend time with her. On the other hand, society stays away from Sethe and others and breaks off communication with them. Their behaviours show that they are unwilling to confront their past. A healthy black African American identity is obtained as a result of the reckoning with the past not only by individuals but also by the whole society that has been exposed to trauma directly or indirectly. After a while, Sethe loses her mind, and Denver asks for help from them. The women in the community help Sethe get rid of Beloved by organizing rituals. While Sethe confronts the past sorrows, the black community's support shows the reader that strength and resilience are born

from unity (Ghasemi&Heidari, 2022, p. 594). The black community, in unity and solidarity, is more resilient and resistant to slavery, racism, and humiliation.

Beloved signs the last chapter of the book. The meaning of this signature is that it is difficult to forget the pain, loss, and suffering of African American people over the years. It also reveals the complex nature of the identity of individuals in the Black community. It also emphasizes the need for the Black community to confront the past and purify its soul to heal for the future of the black generation. As the narrative concludes: "This is not a story to pass on" (Morrison, 2004, p. 324) marks the tension between the eagerness to forget and the need to remember. Beloved's name emphasizes that the past must be embraced to understand and heal, even when it is painful and disturbing (Ghasemi&Heidari, 2022, p. 594).

In conclusion, Beloved is an innocent victim of the dark labyrinth in which black people are forced to live. She wants to show them how to get out of the darkness. She plays a crucial role in the novel, conveying Morrison's message to the reader. Morrison reminds readers of the history. She emphasizes that remembering the past and confronting past traumas plays an important role in the healing of individuals and society, and the past is also an important factor that affects the identity of individuals in society and their relationships with others.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the journeys of the female characters in Toni Morrison's three novels, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved* in terms of their identity while also addressing the issues of oppression and racism they encounter along the way, through the lens of postcolonial theory. The study aims to prove that although each character's journey is different, they all have similar experiences.

In the first chapter, the theoretical framework has been examined in order to create a deeper understanding of the books of Toni Morrison, including the history of slavery, postcolonial theory, and black women's identity. In former centuries, America was desperately in need of human labor for agriculture. At that time, Africa was highly developed in agriculture. Poor black people were brought to America through deception. They became property, and their destiny was in the hands of their owners. After very long years, slavery was abolished, but its effects were felt for many years. Slavery may have ended legally, but even today we see discrimination and racism against black people all over the world. In this context, the examination of black slavery is significantly essential. Postcolonial theory is also crucial in order to construct a more profound theoretical point of view about black women's slavery and oppression. Postcolonial theory aims to explain the base of the problems about the West's exploitation of other continents, especially Africa. Skin color, gender, and religion play a significant role in determining the identity of colonized people. The theory also explores these cultural differences as an outcome of the exploitation, in addition with economic and moral devastation of the victimized societies. As it has been mentioned before, black women have been the most significantly affected group from the institution of slavery, and they are still going through challenges. The oppression affected them individually and as a group as well. Family background and the society in which they grow up play an important role in the formation of women's identity. For black women, both their history of slavery and living in a patriarchal society are the most important obstacles to having a strong identity. In addition, being humiliated and labeled as ugly just because of their skin color also causes an inferiority complex. Considering all these reasons, it can be observed that black women's identities are shaped by psychological and social pressures.

In the second chapter, Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, which draws attention to the economic inequality faced by the black race and the devastating effects of white beauty standards on black people, is analyzed by considering its literary context and character backgrounds. Morrison also draws attention to a complex situation; there is discrimination within the black society itself. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Morrison also emphasizes the importance of the childhood period. She also conveys the message that parental and community support is crucial for black children to grow up psychologically healthy and construct a strong identity. Pecola is the main character, who has never had any social or parental support. She is oppressed physically and psychologically both by her social environment and her own mother. In addition to these circumstances, having an abusive father makes it impossible for her to have a normal life. Not having any bond with her mother also restricts her from constructing a female identity. As the story progresses, it can be observed that besides having parental or social support, the most crucial moments that determine the identity of Pecola are the ones that include humiliation because of the darker tone of her skin and her economic status.

Claudia is another female character who is the opposite of Pecola in some ways. She also has a poor family like Pecola, but the significant difference is the parental support. Claudia has supportive parents, and she has a mother that she embraces as a role model for being confident and raising her voice about racial inequalities. This personality difference between Pecola and Claudia brings out the importance of parental approaches to shaping black women's identities. The episode in which Claudia tears the blue-eyed doll to pieces can be seen as a protest against the notion of beauty that white society imposes on black people. Claudia's protest is not only against white society but also against black society. Unfortunately, these beauty standards will continue to be accepted by the majority of society, even by her parents.

Another character is Mrs Pauline Breedlove; after being partially unable to walk, she blames her skin color and social status, which makes her worthless. After meeting her husband, she starts to think that despite all of the oppression, she might be worthy to be loved like others. Unfortunately, this feeling does not have a chance to develop any longer because she moves right at the center of racial discrimination. It can be observed that when she believes she gets out of the dark labyrinth, she enters

another. All in all, when all of the characters are taken into consideration, it can be said that all of the characters have different identities shaped by their parents and experiences. Also, sometimes, they seem to find a way out of their current situations. However, in the end, they find themselves in another endless labyrinth constructed by racism, the patriarchal society, and their settled norms.

In the third chapter, *Sula* is examined; Morrison chooses a period of upheaval, a time of significant changes in America. These changes include civil rights and voting rights for black people. The author describes the characters' journey to find their identities under the influence of these new rights and movements. Until this enlightenment period, the writer also highlights how white farmers manipulated black slaves with promises of freedom and land, made them work long hours, and gave them worthless land at the end of their labor. The book reveals what black women in American history have experienced over time and how they have changed and transformed due to these situations until they have gained their human rights. Sula is the main character. Family members, traumatic events, and racism play a significant role in the construction of Sula's personality. Sula refuses to live according to the moral norms of society and behaves very differently than ordinary black women at that time. She tries hard to exist in the white world, but her hopes are lost when she realizes that her efforts are ineffective. She feels that she has made a mark and is special because she is different from the people in her community. Sula has reached a moment when she feels special when most black women do not. The hope of getting out of this dark labyrinth begins to blossom. Nevertheless, it is still not enough to live on. Nel is another character who is the opposite of Sula at the beginning, but she develops her personality over time. The day Nel witnesses her mother being humiliated by the train worker, her mother's lack of reaction and inability to defend herself causes Nel to normalize the situation. She learns and embraces this discrimination as normal and not to be reacted to. However, after meeting Sula, as time passes, she realizes that this discrimination is unfair and that she has to defend herself. Over time, she learns to defend herself. All this shows the importance of the term parenting mentioned earlier but also shows that submission and lack of self-defense is a learned state. It can be observed in this story that slavery and the system of exploitation emerge from observing the behavior of the family and the environment. On the other hand, Eva is

the oldest character, which means she is the one who stands against the oppression the longest. Despite this emotional and economic oppression against black people, Eva is a character who stands firm and looks for ways to fight back. She refuses to accept the life that is offered to her and goes away to change her destiny, leaving her children behind. She works and earns enough money to change her life, returns to her children, and buys a house. This is something that is impossible for a black woman to do at that time. Despite the oppression of white society, she achieves great success and accomplishes the unexpected. Her success gives her a sense of being out of bounds, but white persecution comes at her from a direction she never expects. Her son, who fights as a soldier for the whites, returns home addicted to drugs. By killing her son, she ends both her and her son's suffering. This incident demonstrates the white race's use of the black race for its own benefit and the damage it causes. Eva, despite her great success, is devastated in another way.

In the last chapter, *Beloved* is examined. The previous books have dealt with situations created by the effects of slavery. However, unlike the others, this book focuses on the period when slavery actually existed and describes it was like to be a slave for black women. Morrison describes how the characters undergo a fragmentation of identity and develop an inferiority complex as a result of the psychological scars of being a slave. Another critical point in this book is to emphasize that being free from slavery does not mean freedom for blacks and that the destruction the slavery causes to black identities is passed on to next generations. The main character of the book is Sethe. She experiences slavery, the oppression of the white race, from a very early age. She knows that the only escape from slave life is to escape and disappear. Her decision to kill her daughter on her way to escape proves the scars and fear of slavery. She kills her daughter so that she would not continue her life as a slave and be subjected to these tortures. Sethe is very close to the way out of the dark labyrinth she has lived in all her life, but because of her daughter's death, even if she physically gets out of the labyrinth, her soul would never be able to leave it. Baby Suggs is another character who has been a slave for almost her entire life and lost many of her children. She only has one child left, her son Halle. He buys her mother's freedom for her and aims to set her free. Her long years as a slave have taken a huge toll on her body and soul. Although she comes out of the darkness, she loses everything

she needs to survive during her time as a slave. She is no longer a slave, but she lacks the mood, purpose, and motivation to live as a free woman. Despite this, she manages to keep her heart alive. She uses her heart to heal herself and the people who have the same destiny as a slave. After sixty years of captivity, Baby Suggs struggles to find her identity due to the effects of trauma. She passes away with the unhealed effects and pain. She is no longer anyone's slave, but she is still the slave of her pain. The character Beloved is Sethe's murdered daughter and is the one who pays the heaviest price for the destruction caused by slavery. She represents the suffering of all black people. Beloved also serves as a bridge for other characters to confront their past traumas. In addition to confronting the effects of past traumas, this confrontation helps the characters to heal.

In conclusion, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved* are Toni Morrison's novels that examine the oppression of black women and the consequences of the scars of slavery. The characters share similarities in their identities, which revolve around themes of trauma, resistance, and the struggle for identity within the frameworks of racism and gender repression. Nel and Baby Suggs demonstrate the importance of community in overcoming trauma. Baby Suggs stands out as a spiritual guide who inspires the community to embrace their identity and let go of their past. Nel and Sula's companionship shows the complexity of women's relationships and how women navigate their identities in a patriarchal community. The search for identity is the core of these characters. Pecola and Claudia struggle with their identity in a world that dehumanizes Blackness. Sethe's actions are motivated by a longing to protect her children from the terrors of being black and a slave. Eva's sacrifices and Sula's defiance of societal norms further emphasize their struggle to define their own identities in the face of oppressive forces. Many of these characters are severely traumatized by slavery. Sethe's traumatic past as a slave and Beloved's haunting presence symbolize the inevitable legacy of slavery and its psychological impact on characters. Furthermore, Pecola's desire for blue eyes reflects internalized racism and trauma resulting from racist beauty standards. To sum up, the female characters portrayed by Morrison are condemned to live in a labyrinth as black as their skin. They struggle to escape the darkness they are condemned to by following the paths they find to escape the labyrinth. Even if some of them find their way out of this darkness, the new path,

which seems to promise light and hope, eventually leads them into another dark labyrinth.



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