

**Kasdi Merbah University –Ouargla-**  
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Prepared by: MESSAOUDI Walid

NEFNOUF Ahmed Seif Eddine

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**Identity in Toni Morrison's**

***Tar Baby***

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Before the jury:

Mrs. SAYEH LEMBAREK Samira

President (KMUO)

Mr. BOURAHLA Djelloul

Supervisor (KMUO)

Mrs. SAADOUNE Farida

Examiner (KMUO)

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# *Dedication*

I dedicate this work to all the people who assisted me

To my Mum, may God protect her

To my Dad, may God bless his soul

To my Uncle: Abdelbasset, Mohammed

To my brothers: Ali, Taha, and Achraf

And to my sisters: Fatima, Hanane, Ouarda, Ikram, for their encouragement

Without forgetting my sister-in-law Maroua

And to my brothers-in-law and their kids: Saad, Abdekhalek, Azzeddine,

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**Ahmed Seif Eddine**

# ***Dedication***

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**General**

**Introduction**



## General introduction

Identity is a very recurrent theme in African American novels; because the search for identity is natural for every human being. From the very beginning of their presence in America, the black were subjected to slavery, their basic human rights have been often violated and they suffered from all forms of humiliation. Thus, the search of identity is pictured in the literary works. Writers such as Richard Wright in his novel *Native Son* dealt with the issues of identity and racism; Alice Walker in her novel *Colored Purple* is about women double discrimination and their identity troubles.

Toni Morrison is a prominent Afro-American writer; her well known novel *Tar Baby* represents the dilemma of identity. This issue shows its power as one of the main thematic concerns of African American literature. Her novels are deeply concerned with the issues of gender, race, slavery and identity. She has often been known as a voice of African American culture, and she addressed the position of African American person and specifically women in the contemporary world.

In *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, identity is explained as “the characteristics, feelings and beliefs that distinguish people from other “. For African American characters the answer to the dilemma “’who am I “”? It refers to the self-concept, which also composed of two edges; personal identity and racial identity. Thus, represent the self of black African person in America (Suls, 2009).

### The Research Problem

This research deals with the problem of racism in USA and its effect towards blacks in particular black woman, as known the situation of black female in disadvantaged position from two side ; we want to investigate the extent to which African American women suffered from being black in racist society and being female in patriarchy society.

### The Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this study is to show the position and reaction of Blacks towards oppression and both racial segregation and social discrimination to gain their identity in a White and racist society. Also, our aim is to show the effort of Toni Morrison to create a good position or image for black women in an oppressive white society.

### **Critical School / Approach / Theory:**

This dissertation will adopt the postcolonial theory to analyze the dominance of white over black minority. In addition to that we can integrate the black feminism theory to understand the nature of gender inequality, and examining women's social roles, experience and interests.

### **The Research Question**

To achieve the goals of this study, the following research questions are raised:

- How does Toni Morrison deal with identity in her novel *Tar Baby*?
- What is the reason behind the characters' problem of identity?
- How do the major characters in Toni Morrison novel experience identity confusion?

The present study is fourfold: the first chapter gives a historical, social and personal background about African American, the second chapter about Toni Morrison and African American literature and literary background, the third the third and fourth chapter based on a deep analysis of actions and behavior of the major characters to quest their race and gender identity.

This study is based on a deep analysis of action, thoughts and behavior of the major characters in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* in their quest for their identity. Hence, we will adopt the descriptive and analytical methods of research to deal with the study since both are adequate and appropriate for the subject under study.

This was a brief introduction to what we intend to do in this dissertation step by step including the aim of the study object, the research questions and structure of dissertation.

# Chapter One

## **Chapter One: Historical, Social and Biographical Background**

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## **Introduction**

The word black in USA is synonymous inferiority as well as neglect. African American awfully suffered from racism and racial segregation, so that, they were deprived from certain rights. Consequently, a group of elitists decided to rebel against this oppression; to gain their rights and equality. Hence, the civil rights movement passed by different periods, leaders and philosophies.

This chapter deals with the civil rights movement from the 1950's until the 1970's. During these years the Civil Rights Movement witnessed different strategies as well as different leaders. Martin Luther King's strategy of nonviolence succeeds to gain desegregation in public school, desegregation in buses and voting right for African American.

### **1. The Beginning of Civil Rights Movement**

The Civil Rights act nearly started from the 1950's, there was a fight adopted by African American to gain equality in different fields. Also, the Civil Rights were a tool for blacks to reach their rights and horizons.(ibid)

#### **1.1 The Brown decision**

Generally, the name of the Brown Case gathered many detached cases. These cases were heard by the US Supreme Court and the main concern was about segregation in public schools. In fact, these cases (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Briggs v. Elliot, Davis v. Board of Education of Prince Edward County, Boiling v. Sharpe, and Gebhart v. Ethel) were different but the heart of each was the same. Hence, the holders of these cases were Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. Marshall appealed to the court that schools were unequal and these inequalities is opposing to the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Furthermore; relying on Marshall's strategy, the NAACP formed many experts from different fields: history, economics, political science, and psychology .Thus; the psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark after their research they deduced that African Americans children were affected mentally and physically as well as feeling inferior to their counterparts so that the system should not be legal (History - Brown v. Board of Education Re-enactment, nd)

The Supreme Court did not declare that case unconstitutional due to many reasons. By December 1953 and during the reign of Chief Justice Gov. Earl Warren the case was reviewed

and unanimously declared that segregation in public schools unconstitutional. On May 1954 he stated that:

*We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal...*

(History - Brown v. Board of Education Re-enactment, nd)

Thus, the process of desegregated school system was not immediately but in a thoughtful way (ibid)

## **2. During the Civil Rights Movement**

The Civil Rights activists started performing protests and marches against racial segregation especially in the southern states. The oppression of whites towards blacks have made the second fight for many rights such as the right to vote. (ibid)

### **2.1 Montgomery Bus Boycott**

The American city Montgomery witnessed the most important and decisive event in the history of African American, which led to modern civil rights movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King. Therefore; Blacks were racially segregated inside the buses though they were allowed to ride the same buses in Montgomery, Alabama. Whites were to seat at the front of the bus whereas blacks at the back. On 1, December, 1955, Rosa Park rejected to give up her seat on a city bus to white man and immediately was arrested. Thus; the formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association by the angry blacks as a consequence of Rosa Park arrest and decided to boycott riding buses. Moreover; the young man of 26 years old and the new pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church Martin Luther King led this boycott; relying on the nonviolence strategy as a tool to end racial segregation. King announced to the MIA:

We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice

(Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 2005, p36)

After the process of breaking away bus system, Blacks used to walk or riding horses to reach the place they wanted .Hence; what led the city to fall in a sensitive position

economically as a consequence of their segregationist vision. Finally, the Montgomery bus system has been successful not only by the leadership of Martin Luther King and the mother of civil right Rosa Park, but with the help of NNCP and boycotters. Hence; in November 1956, the court declared the end of segregation in Montgomery buses (ibid).

## **2.2 Sit in Movement**

The Montgomery bus boycott was successful relying on non-violence strategy. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organization formed by King and many activists such as Reverends Ralph Abernathy, Jemison, Joseph Lowery, Fred Shuttles worth, and C.K. Steele, to fight racial segregation (ibid).

The new tactic of King started In February 1960, in Greensboro. When four black students sat in a place that were forbidden for them at a local Woolworth department store lunch counter and asked for a coffee drink, but the servant refused their demand. Although the refusal of the service they sat persistently. Therefore; the students were never fight back whatever harm they took (The Sit-In Movement, nd ). King urged the young people to continue using nonviolent means. And as a result “sit-ins” had succeeded in ending segregation at lunch counters in 27 southern cities, depending on report issued by the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta state, what motivated delegates at the SCLC meeting resolved to focus nonviolent campaigns against all segregated public transportation, waiting rooms, and schools. With emphasis on increase voter registration and would use economic boycotts to gain fair employment and other benefits for African Americans (Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 2005).

## **2.3 From the Albany Movement to the Arrest in Birmingham**

The philosophy of non-violence struggle continued achieving success. In November 1961,the leader William G. Anderson held a protest act in Albany to desegregate the city, with the help of protestors including students of non-violence coordinating committee and boycotters .By the mid of December a hug number of protestors had been jailed due to the growing wave of protestation.( Formwalt, 2016)

Therefore; William asked the help of Martin Luther King and his colleague Reverend Ralph Abernathy, in order to give the movement a public prestige. Although, the participation of King adopts of non-violence strategy, the Chief Laurie Pritchett was aware of King's philosophy that rely on the news media. Chief Laurie Pritchett had informed his soldiers not

to behave harmfully to protestors; King and Abernathy was arrested by the Chief Laurie Pritchett, King realized that his presence will be no longer effective for the movement because protestors forgot about the non-violence strategy after King's arrest by using arms, bottles and rocks attacked a group of Albany policemen (Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 2005).

Moreover; in Birmingham, Alabama, the chief Bull Connors was completely different to the Chief Laurie Pritchett in his strategy of holding protestors. The Albany movement revealed for King that the focus on one goal was more effective than general goals. In the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1963, a group of African American started to boycott businesses in the city. In fact; this boycott was calculated by King to make the chief Bull Connors threaten the owners of shops by depriving them from their business licenses. Thus ; on 10th April, a court injunction was applied to prohibit King and 34 other leaders from engaging in boycotts, the court warned of any kind of violation would cause the jail, and it was so King, Abernathy, and about 60 others, were jailed after the protest march toward downtown Birmingham.(ibid)

#### **2.4 The March on Washington**

During his period in jail Martin Luther King delivered "I have a dream letter", to tell the world that freedom for African American necessarily would prevail. By 28<sup>th</sup>, August, 1963, A. Philip Randolph and, Bayard Rustin planned a new march for jobs and freedom during the presidency of Kennedy. Though, the rivalry between The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference the main concern was mutual. The march was a combination of blacks and whites groups across the country reciting harsh speeches planned by John Lewis of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, however, these speeches did not remain along and it had been canceled because it was harshly criticizing Kennedy administration.

Lastly, the march succeeds and more than 200,000 black and white Americans enjoyed the slogans, speeches and songs. Besides, the march on Washington of 1963 proceeded by years of disillusion and racial struggle. Importantly was that blacks and whites worked together for racial equality (March on Washington, 2009)



## 2.5 Bloody Sunday in Selma

Blacks had been suffering for a long time; they were deprived from voting rights. Voting registration campaign were led by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). During that campaign Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot and killed by a policeman in February 1965 (Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 2005).

Therefore, Martin Luther King called for another march on Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of March. However, King was urged to stop leading the march by the federal judge, King found himself in a sensitive position whether to lead or not, but at the end he decided to risk losing his place as the leader of this movement, he and Abernathy led some 3,000 peaceful protestors again. (ibid)

Moreover, Americans decided to lead a third march on March 21<sup>th</sup>, marcher agreed to walk for long distance estimated nearly 87 kilometer route, through the span of five days and four evenings, with marchers resting under stars. By 25<sup>th</sup> March, the protestors and in front of them King entered Montgomery, stepped forward to the state house to request the rights to which had long been entitled, and long been denied (ibid).

We have come not only five days and 50 miles [80 kilometers], but we have come from three centuries of suffering and hardship. We have come to you, the Governor of Alabama, to declare that we must have our freedom NOW. We must have the right to vote; we must have equal protection of the law, and an end to police brutality.

(Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 2005, p60)

## 3. The Impact of the March

As a result of the march the Fifteenth Amendment ratified and prohibited racial discrimination in voting rights. In fact, the voting right was an act but after five months from the march on Selma it signed into law. During the process of signing the act into law Johnson told the state (Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 2005)

The central fact of American civilization ... is that freedom and justice and the dignity of man are not just words to us. We believe in them. Under all the growth, and the tumult, and abundance, we believe. And so, as long as some among us are oppressed and we are part of that oppression, it must blunt our faith and sap the strength of our high purpose. Thus this is a victory for the freedom of the American Negro, but it is also a victory for the freedom of the

American nation. And every family across this great entire searching land will live stronger in liberty, will live more splendid in expectation, and will be prouder to be American because of the act that you have passed that I will sign today.

(Friedman, Clack, Neely, & Yao, 2005, p61)

Therefore; the voting right for African American barred only in some states. Election officials deliberately led African American to wrong polling places in wrong time .The majority of blacks were illiterates due to the oppression imposed on them ,thus; the rate of illiteracy was high .Johnson claimed that blacks particularly in southern states were told to recite the entire constitution in order to paralyze and keep them far away from vote. African American voters gained legal means to fight for their turn out .In Mississippi, the number increased from 6 to 59 between 1964 and1969 . Thus, non-English speaking American Citizens acquired the protection of voting right (Voting Rights Act, 2009).

#### **4. Toni Morrison Biography and Works**

Toni Morrison was born in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, she is the second from four children, and from her early life she was interested in literature, especially African American literature folklore. She gets her bachelor from Howard University in English, and her master from Comell. Before return to Howard University to Teach; Morrison taught English in Texas southern university for two years after her education (Gillespie, 2008).

Morrison met Holard Morrison during her teaching career. She married him in 1958 and had Harold and Slade, they divorced in 1964. After they divorced, she moved to Syracuse in New York and work there in random house publishing company as an editor (ibid).

While Morrison a member of Howard University group of writers she began work on her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970).She has published nine novels to present, her most attractive novel was *Beloved*(1987),and win Pulitzer Prize in 1988.She became the first African American woman won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993 (ibid).

Morrison known that she is treating black American experience especially female characters, and black community. Most of her novels dealt with the issues of identity, struggle classes, race, unjust in gender and so on (ibid).

Toni Morrison's works are about African American history and situation, her early works like *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which is about black African American girl that wishes her eyes

were blue and appeared in good image of beauty in terms of fitness. *Sula* (1974), was her second novel, it was filtrated for a National Book Award; it is about two women from Bottom "Poor African American community". Morrison won an American Academy of Arts and Letter and a National Book Critics Circle award because of her third novel *Song of Solomon* (1977). This novel would focus on strong male character (ibid).

By 1981, Morrison published her fourth novel, *Tar Baby*; it explored the interaction between black and white societies. After this novel, she wrote the play "Dreaming Emmett", it was a real story about black character (ibid).

Morrison published her fifth novel *Beloved* (1987), in won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988, it was about life after slavery, also it adopted as a film in 1998. In 1992, Morrison published the sixth novel *Jazz*; it was about life in 1920s. Also, *Paradise* in (1999), *Love* (2003), and *A Mercy* (2008) (ibid).

In addition to that, Morrison published some non-fiction works such as:

- *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination* (1992)
- *Racism and Fascism, from the Journal of Negro Education* (1995)
- *Remember: The Journey of school integration* (2004)
- *What moves at the margin: selected nonfiction* (2008)

## **Conclusion**

Blacks suffered for a long time to gain some rights but each time they faced some obstacles. The civil rights movement and its activist leaders come to guarantee for blacks some rights. Hence, many leaders using different strategies were engaged in such political concern.

The nonviolence strategies adopted by king succeed to guarantee these rights. It gained many rights for African American such as the equality in public schools, desegregation in riding buses and the voting rights.

# Chapter Two

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## **Introduction**

The second chapter is about African American Literature and Toni Morrison. As a first step, this chapter gives a short background to African American literature. Then, it moves to the development of African American literature from the 1950's to 1970's. Also, it attempts to give the different literary movements of that period; Civil Rights Movement, and Black Arts Movement and some writers during that period. After that it attempts to speak about African American woman literature and its writers. At the end, it shades light on the themes and style of African American writers and Toni Morrison.

### **1- Background to an African American Literature:**

When understand those root from claiming African American literature, it will be significant with recognize the principle issues of that period such as race and tensions, which pushed them to write and establish their right position in that community. The issues of segregation was rebounded by British (English), because the complexities of colonial race relations are developed by time and becoming understood increasingly. Also the ideas of an African distinctive and inferiority developed by English to create an image and preconception origin in terms of blackness and the differences between two people physically and behavioral appearance (Bruce 2001).

In 17<sup>th</sup> century, a few blacks become permeable colonial systems and multiway of ejection in British colonial society, thus caused the emergence of segregation and discrimination. Some English adventures offered a negative portrayal of African and their way of life by describing them as brutal and ugly people (ibid).

Early in the eighteenth century, laws come in contradiction with African American by excluding them for testimony in courts. Free blacks were suffered punitive taxation. Black African lost their right to vote (ibid).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was radical change of African American in terms of political and legal status, they began to enjoy their rights as citizens by getting freed from slavery. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, African American grow up economically by cotton agriculture, also their literature was developed by time and gets its important universally to get their freedom and identity (Thomas, nd).

In African American literature, most of works tackle the issues of race and identity, because they are treated as slave, inferior people and their physical appearance of being black, so they were called “African American”, “Black”, “Colored people” and “Negro” ( Bilal, 2011).

## **2-Civil Right Movement Literature**

Civil rights movement was against racial segregation and discrimination during 50s in southern United States. This movement was made to finish the oppression against African American like slavery, racial oppression, inequality, right to vote and many others rights (Civil Rights Movement, nd).

By the late of 50s some black writers responding to civil rights struggles. Gwendolyn Brooks published a book of poetry *Annie Allen* (1949) and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1950 as the first African American, Robert Hayden, Sterling Brown, and Margaret Danner using poetry to convey and address their rejection of white society (Gwendolyn Brooks, nd)

There are other black writers express themselves in plays, novels, short stories and essays; like Ralph Ellison and his novel *Invisible Man* (1953) ( Armstrong & Schmidt 2009), Paule Marshall published her first novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959). Also the play of Lorraine Hansberry *Raisin in the sun* in (1959) was the first African American woman play; it can be considered a turning point in American art because it addresses so many issues important during the 1950s in the United States. It comes after Rosa Parks ignites 381-day bus boycott organized by Martin Luther King, Jr, because; the play conveyed themes of identity, gender and race (Andrews 2001).

In 1960 civil rights activists protects voting registration in North Carolina, four African black youths initiate the SNCC (The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), in the same year Harper Lee publishes *To Kill a Mockingbird* , Lee uses memorable characters to explore civil rights and racism in the segregated Southern United State (Armstrong 2015). After that Martin Luther king writes *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in 1963; to defend direct action, and delivered the speech “I have Dream” for the current generation to eliminate racism to create a better society for future.

Also African American used poetry as political weapon like Sonia Sanchez, Baraka, Alice Walker and Mudhubuti; their poems addressed to spear the voice of African American as a universal themes.in the same period Black Arts Movement and Black Power have their effect on activists (novelist, short story teller and poet); in their works like Earnest Gaines Catherine

Cormier 1964, Ishmael Reed *The Free-lance Pallbearers* 1967, also they express the movement in short stories (Sickels 2010).

Because of the conflicted relation between black and white during the civil rights movement, playwright Baraka Amiri produces *The Dutchman* 1964; it was political allegory about white and black relation. In addition to that Baraka and Neal think to make the product of blacks as union, they publish *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American writing*, which were a collection of essays, poetry, fiction and drama by many black writers to spread their rights of life as human in universal way. Thus, African American arts and production was an instrument to end discrimination, race, inequality and many missed rights (Page 2011).

### **3-Black Arts Movement Literature**

The term movement was Black Power that would grow out of the civil right movement. It was generally referred to the assassination of Malcolm X in 21 February 1965(Walters 2007).

In 50s, during the McCarthy era, there were African American activists in leftist politics for instant; Paul Robeson when he produced his leftist journal, *Freedom*, this journal published many writers such as W.E.B Du Bois and John O (Page 2011).

The purpose of Black Arts Movement is to change the way of presenting and portraying African Americans in literature, because they were presented as slaves criminal in media. Larry Neal was one of the leaders of that movement described that the movement was established to create an art spoke to black American's needs and aspiration as its goal (Mays & Burton, 2003).

Also Booker T. Washington says in his article "The Black Arts Movement":

The goal of the black artist was to destroy the white way of looking at the world, eliminating white ideas from black art

(Mays & Burton, 2003, p338).

The artists of Black Arts Movement have many forms of writing to deal with the problem of blacks. Like James Alan in his short stories by addressing of pride through fiction, John A William in *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1969), also Baraka presents the struggle and dilemma of African Americans and a model for them in his play *Dutchman* (1964) (Page 2011).

Poetry was seeing by many members of the movement as the appropriate tool to convey the messages and needs of black people; because it's succinct form, for example; in Nikki



Giovanni's poem "For Sandra" poet can connect disparities between blacks and whites life situations. *Black Magic* (1969) by Baraka in his volume poetry considered as the first publication of the movement. The poets in that period used some speech from sermons, everyday conversations, jazz and blues to convey their messages (ibid).

In addition; Black Arts Movement by 1964 gave an importance to magazine *Liberator*, because it presents the movement's ideas, beliefs and ideologies. This magazine published essays and poetries by Harold Cruse, Ishmael Reed and Askia Touré. There were other important magazines; *Black Dialogue*, *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Negro Digest* (later renamed *Black World*), this journal gave opportunities to black writers to spread their messages. "A poem for black hearts" about Malcolm X was the first published work in *Negro Digest* (1965) (ibid).

The issues of woman were one of the principles, although the misogyny presented in the works. Audre Lorde was known in the Black Arts Movement by her first book of poetry *THE First Cities* (1968) who speaks about the issue of sexuality in her works. She and other women proved in the movement artistically and politically objectives; by their involvement to second women's writers conference at Fisk in 1967 (ibid).

Also June Jordan dealt with the issues of identity and race in her poetry collection *Who Look at Me* (1969). Toni Morrison was a novelist that focus on such issues like ethnic identity, race, gender and slavery in her works specifically searching for identity, like Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Sola Peace in *Sula* (1974) and Jadine in *Tar Baby* (1981) (ibid).

#### **4-African American Writers**

African American literature achieved great celebrity during the twentieth century among other literatures of minorities. What makes a such achievement are the writers themselves and their choice of topics. Writers such as:

##### **4.1 W. E. B. Du Bois**

W. E. B. Du Bois was born in Massachusetts 1963. He was an American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, author and editor. After graduating from Harvard, he became the first African American to earn a doctorate; he became a professor of history, sociology and economics at Atlanta University. In 1909 Du Bois was one of the founders of the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People "NAACP". In addition, Du Bois made a group of African American activist called Niagara Movement; he was the leader of this group, which wanted equal rights for Blacks. Du Bois opposed the Atlanta Compromise, which made by Booker T. Washington, who stated that blacks must work hard and submit to white political rule. Du Bois believed that African Americans needed the chances for advanced education to develop their life conditions. Strongly, Du Bois protested against lynching, Jim Crow Law, discrimination in education and employment. He helped in organizing several Pan-African congresses to fight for independence of African Americans (Seed, 2010).

#### **4.2 Richard Wright**

Richard Wright, the grandson of slaves was born in Natchez Mississippi on September 1908. His family was extremely poor. After his education, he was looking to find work and to support his poor mother. He had a difficult childhood in which all portrayed in his autobiography Novel, *Black Boy*. Wright wanted to continue his education by using the local library but Jim Crow laws prevented this. Richard Wright solved this by pretending he was collecting a book for a white man (ibid)

By 1940 the publisher accepted Wright's novel, *Native Son*. The book of the month club selected the novel as its March selection, therefore, ensuring large sales and publicity. Wright next book *Twelve million Black Voices* (1941) was a sociological study of black migration from the rural south to the urban north. By 1944, Wright left the American Communist Party and published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* titled *The God that Failed*, his short novel, *The Man Who Lived Underground* appeared in 1944. All of his literary work sought to expose psychological oppression and also abolish racism and oppression (ibid).

#### **4.3 Booker T. Washington**

Booker T. Washington was born a slave in Franklin County, Virginia; he was the son of a house slave and an unknown White father. His character extended beyond the field of education. He became one of the most significant educators in American history. Washington was social critic and reformer of international reputation. He devoted his energy to improve Black' life conditions (ibid).

Washington declared that African Americans must concentrate on self-education, learning useful trades, and investing in their own businesses, his speech at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta (1895), he accepted the reality of segregation. However, he insisted that African

Americans must be included in the economic progress of the South. Washington said to an all-white audience, "In all things social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Booker.T. Washington went on to express his confidence that no race has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree castaway (ibid).

## **5. African American Women Literature and Its Writers**

African American women writers during the twentieth century have a big role to enhance black position, because of their contribution in literature. Many women writers spread their ideas and works to win their rights and create a good impact on African American such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Zora Neal and many other writers; their works contributes in enhancing the position of African American women, also American literature. Those writers wrote about African American women and about their selves (Walters, 2007).

African American women writers have produced their literature in multiform of writing such as fiction, formal informal, non-fiction, autobiographies, essays, poems and so on. Their themes were very powerful like race, gender identity and classes. However, they faced some violence by black men and white society because of their gender and color of skin (ibid).

During the 50s, there were some known writers like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, this period called protest, but there were few African American women writers like Paule Marshall, Ann Petry, Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker who created some great works. She is one of the famous black women writers during 50s, she was novelist and poet, her famous poem is "For My People" and historical novels Jubilee1966. Her message in her works to readers is to change their life for good (ibid).

In addition to that, African American women writers in 60s and 70s era was known by exploring many issues have relation with women like violence against them, abuse, racism and gender. This period known by the emergence of many women writers like Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker and Toni Morrison and other writers (ibid).

In the 70s, the important event was Black Arts Movement, it started by the writer Amiri Baraka. African American women writer and activists play an important role in that period. Writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker wrote about the issues of self, race, classes and women issues (ibid).

Alice Walker is one of over productive African American women writers, Walker had been involved in the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and she also became a leading member of the women's movement in the 1970. She wrote short stories, novels, essays, poems and many forms of literature. She is known by her emotional novels such as *Meridian* 1976, *The Colored Purple* 1982. Walker proposed the term "womanist" instead of feminist (ibid).

Toni Morrison is another African American women writer in the 70s, she wrote many novels such as *The Bluest Eye* 1970, *Sula* 1974, *Tar Baby* 1981 and many other novels. Her short stories are in connection with readers, so she named by "gifted story teller" (ibid).

So, African American women writers in the 50s, 60s and 70s era were have significant contribution in enhancing the position of African Americans and black women writers to win their missed rights as human and female. Thus, appeared in her works by symbolizing by the themes of identity, race, gender, class and many other issues that are in relation to what they want to present (ibid).

## **6-Themes and Style of African American Literature**

There are no limited themes and style concerning African American literature, because; each period has its own themes and style. In addition to that, themes depend on writers' life, tradition, and period. From colonial period to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century African Americans delivered important themes in their literary works about freedom, slavery, past and present, oral and writing tradition throughout poetry, sermons, slave narrative and essays. Like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs in their works, they express many themes that have relation with African American needs (Bruce, 2001).

Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* (1940) was very realistic in terms of class conflict and discrimination which reflects African American urban life. This novel creates a new style of writing which was less decadent and more realistic than the literature before. This novel smooth the way to other African American writers like Hansberry in here Broadway play "A Raisin in the Sun" 1959 (Page, 2011)

During the civil rights, Black Arts movement and Women movement activists produced many type of literature to make the change to blacks in white society. Their works were about the issues of racism, equality, social and economic classes. They brought another style of writing which was rich of political expression to change their status in term of challenging the side. Poetry was the dominant peace of literature in this period; mostly by Black Arts

Movement activists like Gwendolyn Brook, she wrote her poems in organized and simple language in order to attract people. Also, Baraka creates new form of writing by making mixture between homage to imaginative African homeland with element of African American vernacular (ibid).

In the 70s African American literature focused on the relation between African Americans as a community. Women's writing in this period has a great important in literature; like Toni Morrison which was the first African American woman who wins the Nobel Prize. Her novels *Tar Baby*, *Bluest Eye*, *Song of Salmon* and *Jazz* were depicting the issues of identity, race, gender, identity, classes and violence. Also, Alice Walker in here novel *Colored Purple* (1982) speaks about women issues as unequal women in racist and patriarchy society, she brought the word "womanism" instead of feminism (ibid).

## **7. Toni Morrison's Themes and Style**

Morrison in her works adopt many themes that can enhance the position of African American, she uses some literary techniques and style to make her novels understandable to readers.

### **7.1 Themes**

Morrison used many themes in her novels to create deep message to send through plots. Her themes shared the same needs of black African American such as: racial tension, gender and identity. One of the important themes that Morrison used is racial tension between African American and white society by presenting their characters in positions of race "[sometimes] I want to get out of my skin be only the person inside –not American- not black – Just me"(TB, ch2, p42). Jadine wants to be racially neutral (Theme, 2009).

Another theme which is gender, it is very common in contemporary African American literature. Morrison presents to the reader the stand and opinion of society toward the differences between man and women like: "Some men just dogs" (*The Bluest Eye*). The females see that inverse sex with an alternate notoriety. Furthermore, Morrison used the theme of identity which is a major need for African Americans to get their rights in racist and patriarchy society which is appeared in her novel *Tar Baby* "The woman had made her feel , lonely in a way. Lonely and inauthentic" (*Tar Baby*). In this point Jadine feels that she neglected her origin. Messages of Morrison expressed by using strong themes which make

reader learn and get the deep message of it. Thus, make her works so strong in literature (ibid).

## 7.2 Styles

Author's style defines his work. So, Toni Morrison used a simple language which make him unique and easily to differentiate from other works. This simple language makes the novels easy to read. Also, her style of writing is differing because she used some techniques like: shifting the voice of narration within her story, descriptive analogies, historical references and multi-structural sentences (ibid).

Morrison and her usual comparisons put the reader in the exact context, by the use of similes such as "The girls face was as tight and mean as broccoli" (Tar Baby). Also used historical references to provide information about the period and time, in which the story happened in, like "Did Jack have to register at the Freedmen's Bureau before he felt the state? "Everybody did, everyone who had been slaves, that is"" (Song of Solomon). This lead reader to know about Macon dead's past and puts them in the period and place of the story Freedmen's Bureau. In addition to that, Morrison's sentences structure was very important element in her works. She used different type of sentences such as balanced sentences "He thought it was funny, sweet, and a little sad" (Song of Solomon). Also, she used lengthy and wording sentences to express her tone and messages like "One man, one defenseless girl, Death" (Jazz) (ibid).

So, type and style of writing are very important for authors to be familiar with readers; like Toni Morrison and her use of language and techniques, thus make her very prominent in a literary world (ibid).

## Conclusion

African American literature is well-known all over the world. During its development from 1950s to 1970s it discussed by many movements and writers including black women literature in different literary works. This literary works helped them to show their suffering. The African American conflicts for improving their existence and identity created by many figures as: Martin Luther King , W.E.B.Du Bois, Malcolm X, Booker T Washington, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and other.

African American women writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and others have great impact to create and shape blacks' identity; by using some themes indicate their goals to get their identity as female and as black in appropriate style.

# **Chapter Three**



## **Chapter Four: Race Identity**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter aims at analyzing Toni Morrison's work *Tar Baby*. We are going to apply the post-colonial theory to deal with the issues of race identity. Also, we are going to focus on the binary opposition as one of the main concern of post-colonialism to analyze the relation between blacks and whites. This analysis is based on the actions, thoughts and behaviors of the major characters to deal with the problem of racism and identity.

### **1. Race Identity**

In a broad sense, post colonialism studies how European culture influences colonies in most fields. Also, it studies how these colonies react and resist the colonizer. Thus, the oppression imposed on them in different fields such as sociology, psychology and culture make them feel inferior. This inferiority makes them aware of being colonized and leads them to struggle for ethnic and self-governing. Moreover, the main focus of post-colonial theory is the binary opposition, which means the relation between colonized and colonizer, white and black, rich and poor.

#### **1. The Binary Opposition**

This term can be defined as the relationship of one to another and how they operate within a large society. Its problem is that it creates boundaries between them and leads to discrimination, each side seems like opposite to the other (Jakobsen, 1998).

In literature, binary opposition means exploring differences between groups of individuals like black and whites, male and female, high and low and so on (ibid).

Luckily there was a night, three years ago, after he'd first settled into tropic life, when he woke up with a toothache so brutal it lifted him out of bed and knocked him to his knees. He knelt on the floor clutching the Billy Blass sheets and thinking, This must be a stroke. No tooth could do this to me. Directly above the waves of pain his left eye was crying while his right went dry with rage. He crawled to the night table and pressed the button that called Sydney.

(TB, ch1, p13)

Blacks were inferior to whites; thus, in the novel Valerian Street is the patron and Sydney was the butler. The binary opposition is shown through the act of Valerian street towards Sydney " pressed the button that called Sydney"(TB, ch1, p13), that shows him in a high position and at the same time shows Sydney in low position. The expression "press the

button" Valerian uses to call Sydney like he is calling a machine and not a human being. Class differences are shown through the racist act of Valerian towards the black character Sydney.

"Mrs. Street awake?"  
"I believe so. Anything else special you going to want for the holidays?"  
"No. Just the geese. I won't be able to eat a bit of it, but I want to see it on the table anyway. And some more thalomid." "You want Yardman to bring you thalomid? He can't even pronounce it."  
"Write a note. Tell him to give it to Dr. Michelin."  
"All right."

(TB, ch1, p16)

The idea of illiteracy is shown here so that yardman who is a black cannot read or even pronounce a word properly. As known that blacks were brought as slaves, only for work particularly in agriculture. Hence, this extract from the novel shows the ideology of Imperialism which means that the colonizer is shown as more educated, more civilized and superior. Blacks were considered uncivilized, narrow minded and harsh in both the way of thinking and behaving in comparison to whites:

Sydney returned with a bowl of crushed ice in which a mango stood. The peeling had been pulled back from the shiny fruit in perfect curls. The slits along the pulp were barely visible. Valerian yawned behind his fist, then said, "Sydney, can I or can I not order a cup of coffee and get it?" "Yes, sir. 'Course you can." He put down the mango and filled Valerian's cup

(TB, ch1, p22)

In this quote Valerian ordered Sydney and uses the expression (can I or can I not order) to serve him and that shows him in a position of power, but not the way that harm or minimize from Sydney's dignity. Here, Valerian is the person who has the power over the black character Sydney, means that there are boundaries that oblige black person to act obediently because of the harsh reaction of white one in terms of race and discrimination.

Sydney (unbidden but right on time) removed the glass and placed a fresh white napkin over the wine spot. Then he collected the salad plates, replacing them with warm white china with a single band of gold around the edges.

(TB, ch3, p57)

This quote as well shows Sydney as inferior and as worker, because of his blackness; he does not interfere in their issues. The expression " unbidden but right on time" prove the differences; Sydney in this case is not waiting the orders whether to do or not, it becomes as a

habit for him as a black servant which create the sense of differences between groups and individuals.

Margaret Lenore stared into the spaces and thought desperately of coffee, but she did not want to ring up Sydney or Ondine, for that would begin the day she was not sure she wanted to participate in. She had had no sleep to speak of, and now, drained of panic, wavering between anger and sorrow, she lay in bed. Things were not getting better. She was not getting better. She could feel it and right smack in the middle of it, with Michael on his way, this had to happen: literally, literally a nigger in the woodpile.

(TB, ch4, p66)

Margaret is still shocked about the boy who was in her closet. She thinks about how things are not better, about how literally a “nigger” was in her closet. She calls him as "nigger"; this word shows her racist behavior mentality. She starts to think racially, considering the closet as a unclean place. She thinks about how she would better have to throw everything and buy new things. She thinks of the closet now as a toilet where something rotten had been and still was and thinks about how she would better have to throw everything and buy new things. Thus, Margaret's way of thinking proves the differences between the two binaries; blacks are less life position than whites.

“Well, then he can swim back. Now. Today. I’m not going to sleep with him in this house. If I had known that I would have had a heart attack. All night I waited for that bastard Valerian to come up here and tell me what the hell was going on. He never showed.”  
“And Sydney was patrolling the halls with a gun. I thought he would have killed him by now.”  
“What does he think?”  
“He’s angry. Ondine’s scared, I think.”  
“I’m going to have it out with Valerian. He’s doing this just to ruin Christmas for me. Michael’s coming and he knows I want everything right for him, and look what he does to get me upset. Instead of throwing that...that...”  
“Nigger.”  
“Right, nigger, instead of throwing him right out of here.”  
“Maybe we’re making something out of nothing.”

(TB, ch5, p97)

In this quote Jadine and Margaret are talking about the strange man. They discuss the black man and what to do about the whole situation. Margaret is mad at Valerian for letting the man stay. At one point she hesitates to call him “nigger” in front of Jadine, but Jadine volunteers to finish the sentence for her with “nigger” and then in another description she compares the man in her closet to a gorilla which makes Jadine uncomfortable and she tells Margaret that they are all scared and that they would have been equally scared if the man was

white. Consequently, the white woman Margaret compares the black character to an animal because of his physical appearance and his unclean clothes and body which shows the concept of race and discrimination.

Yardman's face was nothing to enjoy, but his teeth were a treat. Stone-white and organized like a drug store sample of what teeth ought to be.

(TB, ch1, p39)

Race is shown here via the description of physical and biological traits. The narrator describes the Yardman's teeth as good looking and his face as ugly. This description of his face goes in parallel with his occupation as well his blackness. So, the power of white racists leads blacks to be disabled to take care of their selves. The expression "nothing to enjoy" because of his blackness, which means that there is "something to enjoy" in the other race and here the binary opposition is completely shown between the two races.

The agency would laugh her out of the lobby, so why was she and everybody else in the store transfixed? The height? The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress? The woman walked down the aisle as though her many-colored sandals were pressing gold tracks on the floor. Two upside-down V's were scored into each of her cheeks, her hair was wrapped in a gelée as yellow as her dress.

(TB, ch2, p41)

Again, there is another description of physical characteristics that shows the differences between races. The word "Tar" denotes the color of skin which is very dark. Here, Jadine finds her very attractive and follows her; she considers that this woman represents everything which embodies real blackness from her beauty to her clothes and marks in her face. Though her classy appearance, white race looks down upon her; this action shows the racism of white against black.

## 1.2 Ambivalence

Ambivalence refers to two racial groups that regard one another in a strange way. The white look to black as inferior and non-civilized, while black regard white as enviable and superior (Burton, 2004)

"And I am not a cook and I never have been. I don't want to see the kitchen. I don't like kitchens."  
"Why work yourself up this way every year? You know he'll disappoint you."

(TB, ch1, p23)

This quote shows the differences between races; Margaret completely opposes the idea of cooking or working in the kitchen. So, the feelings of being different or being other is

shown here. In this quotation above, the author indicates that the white race never do black's works, and he will never be. Thus, Margaret totally opposed the idea of working in the kitchen, because she considers it like something not of her status and her race.

They tell us what to eat. Who's working for who?"  
"Whom. If you give Ondine menus for the whole week—that is exactly what she will prepare."  
"Really? You've been doing that for thirty years and you can't even get her to fix you a cup of coffee. She makes you drink Pustom. "

(TB, ch1, p21)

Again, there is another quote that shows the differences between the two oppositions, Ondine who is black and work for Margaret. There is a permanent clash between the two since a long time. Here, the behavior of Ondine proves the resistance of inferior blacks towards whites because of the oppression imposed on them. The black character Ondine feels the inferiority, so that, she is behaving in an ambiguous way. Here, the concept of racism is shown through an act of ambivalence:

He went to the sideboard and lifted them onto plates. He laid stems of parsley on the right rim and two tomato slices to the left of each plate. He whisked away the fruit bowls, careful not to spill the water from the ice, and then leaned forward with the hot dish. Margaret frowned at the dish and waved it away. Sydney returned to the sideboard, put the rejected dish down and picked up the other.

(TB, ch1, p23)

Margaret here rejects the dish that Sydney brings to her in a harsh way. Although the mistreating of Margaret towards Sydney he keeps serving them. This rejection of the dish shows the power of the other (colonizer). This quote shows ambivalence of behavior between the high state of whites and the low state of black character; the black character here is under power of white. Thus, the superiority of whites is the main reason for blacks' behavior.

Sydney (unbidden but right on time) circled the table with steps as felt as blackboard erasers. He kept his eyes on the platter, or the table setting, or his feet, or the hands of those he was serving, and never made eye contact with any of them, including his niece.

(TB, ch3, p50)

Here Sydney behaves in an ambiguous way when he serves them without looking in their faces; this shows the ambivalence of two races. Thus, each one of the races is using his own way of resistance. Here, Sydney who is black behaving in a way that shows his complete rejection to what he is doing; means that he is not happy with such state of being a servant and

at the same time he is resisting his desire. The black character and the white character show the racist view through the ambivalence of behavior.

Jadine sighed. She wanted to leave the table, but didn't know how. Does he want me to stay or doesn't he? she wondered. Does he want me to talk or doesn't he? All I can do is ask polite questions and urge him to talk if he feels like it. Maybe I should go to Margaret, or change the subject, or have my head examined for coming here. "No one asks you to be," she said softly.

(TB, ch3, p58)

Here Jadine is careful in her discussion with Valerian; this caution emerges through her position in comparison to him. Thus, this carefulness shows Valerian as other and superior to her. The ambivalence of the two races is shown here, blacks who are inferior to their counterpart whites. This behavior of Jadine shows the differences between classes, though Jadine is considering herself one of them but her color of skin makes her inferior whether she behaves like them or not.

"It's all right, Ondine. Lucky you had one."  
"I'll say. Even the colored people down here don't eat mangoes."  
"Sure they do." Sydney slipped a napkin from its ring. The pale blue linen complemented his mahogany hands.

(TB, ch1, p32)

This dialogue between Ondine, Sydney and Yardman shows the signs of being marginalized and being a minority, so that, they are not allowed to eat such kind of fruits. The concept of discrimination is shown here, blacks and whites are not alike. This marginalization creates a sort of resistance between the two races. Whites who are the oppressors and blacks who are the victims, they are deprived from such kind of fruits through a racist act.

### **1.3 Hybridity and Identity:**

Hybridity refers to the state of when the colonizer gets out from the country, then, the colonized man affected a lot by the colonizer's past behavior, conviction or what is so called neo-colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995).

Jadine loosened the straps of her halter and fanned her neck. "Well, let me tell you your face is prettier than your kitchens." Ondine smiled.  
"Look who's talking. The girl who modeled for Karen."  
"Caron, Nanadine. Not Karen."  
"Whatever. My face wasn't in every magazine in Paris. Yours was. Prettiest thing I ever saw. Made those white girls disappear. Just disappear right off the page."

(TB, ch1, p37)

This quote shows the traits of hybridity, means that "colonized" is behaving the same way as the "colonizer". When Ondine praises Jadine because she appears in the first pages of magazines in Paris, which means that a black poor girl that originate from slave ancestors in a European white society honored with this honor of being a model. Thus, through her praising for Jadine she is defining herself and proud of her belief among others (whites). The black character (who is the oppressed one) is behaving the same way that white character( who is the oppressor) do, so that, blacks are imitating whites' behaviors as a consequence of the oppression and the effect of racism imposed on them.

Identity on the other hand relates to the way individuals define themselves. Also, it relates to the person's self-concept (McCarthy, 2013).

It was. Actually it was good he made me think about myself that way, at that place. He might have convinced me if we'd had that talk on Morgan Street. But in Orange County on a hundred and twenty acres of green velvet?" She laughed softly. "Can you believe it? He wanted us to go back to Morgan Street and be thrilling." "Us? He was going with you?" "Just to get us started. He meant us Blacks: Sydney, Ondine and me."

(TB, ch3, p60)

The pronoun "us" shows that they are proud of being blacks. They define their self-concepts and their identity, though Jadine is considering herself not one of them. Jadine was living in Europe but she does not forget her origin of being black. The black protagonist Jadine finds herself helpless to deny her identity, changing the place or the homeland does not mean to exchange or replace your identity. Identity is something that cannot be separate from one's mind. Also, identity is not something to be affected by racism or discrimination.

The woman appeared simply at a time when she had a major decision to make: of the three raucous men, the one she most wanted to marry and who was desperate to marry her was exciting and smart and fun and sexy...so? I guess the person I want to marry is him, but I wonder if the person he wants to marry is me or a black girl? And if it isn't me he wants, but any black girl who looks like me, talks and acts like me, what will happen when he finds out that I hate ear hoops, that I don't have to straighten my hair, that Mingus puts me to sleep, that sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me?

(TB, ch2, p42)

In this quote, Jadine who is one of the major characters is confused about her identity whether she is black or white, African or American. She is thinking about the right man that



she wants to be with him. She is concerned however that he wants to marry her only because she is black while in truth she rejects all forms of blackness and black culture and that she sometimes even wishes she could get out of her skin so as not to be black or American but just herself. She ran away to the island after that because Ryk is white and the woman in yellow dress made her think about her identity so she decided to go to her aunt and uncle to take their opinion. In fact, she is defining her identity as being black although she is living inside a white European society. She is not sure about her position, so that she is still considered as black minority. The black protagonist Jadine has doubts about her relationship with the white boy as a result of the racism imposed on her.

Within the question of identity we can discuss ethnicity which is incorporation of traits like values, belief, behavior, memories, experience and loyalties belong to a specific group of community.

“Mango all right?” she asked without turning her head.

“She ate a mouthful,” said Sydney.

“Contrary,” murmured his wife. She poured the eggs into a shallow buttered pan, and stirred them slowly with a wooden spoon.

“It’s all right, Ondine. Lucky you had one.”

“I’ll say. Even the colored people down here don’t eat mangoes.”

“Sure they do.” Sydney slipped a napkin from its ring. The pale blue linen complemented his mahogany hands.

“Yardmen,” said Ondine. “And beggars.”

(TB, ch1, p32)

In this quote when Ondine ate from the mangoes fruits in front of Yardman, forgetting that those workers are deprived or not allowed to eat mangoes. Ondine at that moment remembers her belief and her origin though she is the butler's wife, so that can do whatever she wants. Thus, being in high position does not mean to forget your ethnic identity. Consequently, blacks are a minority and within this minority there is a classification of peoples like the case of the black Ondine who is the butler's wife and the black yardman. Blacks are aware of the racism behaviors towards them, but they never forget about their racial and ethnic origin.

Identity and ethnicity are much related to diaspora. This term refers to the people who enforced to migrate from their nature homeland. In literature diaspora has a relation which the question if people save let their identity culture, religion, language while they are in another country or culture (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995)

"Ondine dreaming of sliding into water, frightened that her heavy legs and swollen ankles will sink her. But still asleep she turns over and touches her husband's back—the dream dissolves and with it the anxiety. He is in Baltimore was usual and because it was always a red city in his mind—red brick, red sun, red neck and cardinals—his dream of it now was rust-colored. Wagons, fruit stands, all rust-colored. He had left that city to go to Philadelphia and there he became one of those industrious Philadelphia Negroes—the proudest people in the race"

(TB, ch2, p49)

Sydney here is dreaming about his homeland and he feels diasporic. Diaspora is one element of post colonialism which means enforcing individuals to migrate from their homeland. This feeling of Sydney is a quest for identity as well; he feels that he does not belong to this country though he is living in it since long time. Here, the black character Sydney feels nostalgic to the place who belongs, where the place of all black, so that, there is no kind of racism, oppression or discrimination.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have focused on a deep analysis of the novel on hand. We have extracted many quotes that fulfill our concern. We have deduced that race identity is strongly shown through the author's depiction of the main characters. A collection of characters who are completely different from each other in terms of skin color on the first place. Thus, this difference creates a sort of binaries and ambivalences under the name of racism.

# **Chapter Four**

## **Chapter Four: Gender Identity**

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## **Introduction**

In this chapter, we are going to conduct a feminist reading of *Tar Baby* by using feminist theory. We are going to look at the issues of gender identity according to feminist's ideologies and principles in term of oppression against black in general and black women specifically. In addition to that, we are going to use one of the main principles of feminism, which is the patriarchy system between gender and origin. This analysis based on the actions, thoughts and behaviors of the major characters in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* to gain their identity, also to understand the nature of gender inequality and examining women's social roles, experience and interests.

### **1. Gender Identity**

Gender identity in generally defined as a personal conception of one self as male or female

#### **1.1 Oppression**

The word feminism is generally defined as the movement to end women's oppression (Hooks, 2000). Most of feminists see the word "woman" as a gender; which depends on social, economic, psychological, and cultural factors such as social position. Their criticism have a relation with "...the ways in which literature (and other cultural production) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson, 2015).

##### **1.1.1 Social/Cultural**

Social norms, roles, rituals, language, music, and art that reflect and reinforce the belief that one social group is superior to another (Hardiman, Jackson & Griffin, 2010).

For Jadine, she is a black beautiful girl and one of the novel's protagonists. She works as a model. Valerian Street paid for her studying of arts and history in Paris .She was helped by Ondine and Sydney in her life to give her the sense of family, vis-à-vis, she did not care for them. She interested in arts, urban life, fashion and culture. She used to be confused about her feelings and thoughts because she was free person. She fell in love with Son while she met him in the island.

So in *Tar Bar* the gender is a recurring theme, because Jadine gets afraid about her position as black woman, but the fact that she is a woman is more significant than the fact that she is black. Jadine felt as she sacrificing herself when she decided to live with Son's hometown of

Eloe, because she will be home mum without any chance to get her personal and individual ambitions. So, she decided to go to the white world, because; she thinks that this world provides her the opportunity to be a real woman.

They stood around the room jostling each other gently, gently-there wasn't much room- revealing one breast and then two and Jadine was shocked

(TB, ch9, p191)

Jadine visited son's hometown of Eloe, when she is staying there, she shocked when a black woman start pulling out their breasts in front of him; this action meant to Jadine that this is the way these woman wants to be (to make him as traditional gender), and will be just mum. Thus, was in contradiction to what Jadine wants to be. According to her position as civilized girl who studied in Paris and well educated in fashion and arts, also she consideres herself as model girl and she has many ambitions to reach not like other Gender ; which they have to obey other male roles and live just like mum. So, Jadine in this case shaped her gender by her social position as a model and well educated woman.

He tried to imagine what kind of woman she would be in fifty years. Would she be Thérèse? Or Ondine? Or Rosa or Sally Brown, or maybe even Francine, frail as a pick tearing all her hair out in the hospital.

(TB, ch9, p198)

In this example the male character, Son, looks at the female gender and think of women will become, he did not imagine that Jadine will be very successful. He thinks about the idea of Jadine who is the woman live for herself not for someone else like Thérèse, Ondine and other female characters. This is completely unaccepted in son's point of view as a male.

As in feminism ideologies, the male have all major social institutions and dominant and controlled by him in economy, political, system, and family religion.

Now he sat in the December sunlight watching his servant pour coffee into his cup.

"Has it come?"

"Sir?"

"The salve."

"Not yet." Sydney removed the lid from a tiny box of saccharin tablets and edged it toward his employer.

(TB, ch1, p15)

Valerian who is the owner of L'Arbre De La Croix, white and wealthy man who retired from candy manufacture, controls his servants; also most of them are women so they feel oppressed.

Also, in this quotation “I do know that and I know my kitchens. Better than I know my face.”(TB, ch1, p38) as we explained before that she is a servant; in this case her occupation forced him to neglect her beauty as woman because she works in house of male and white owner, obviously she does not find time to care about herself as a woman and she used to cook and work in the kitchens. So, she forgot about her identity as a woman.

### 1.1.2 Personal

Which are actions and attitudes that reflect prejudice against a social group (Hardiman, Jackson & Griffin, 2010).

“She thought she was rescuing him from the night women who [...] wanted her to settle for wifely competence when she could be almighty, to settle for fertility rather than originality, nurturing instead of building.”

(TB, ch9, p198)

Jadine wants to realize her goals and ambitions by travelling the world and being famous model, after visit Eloë which is the hometown of Son she realizes that she will be just wife and mother of kids, but Jade will not accept this kind of life because she wants to be a real woman.

I don't want to learn how to be the kind of woman you're talking about because I don't want to be that kind of woman.

(TB, ch10, p89)

In this quote Jadine response to her aunt Ondine about the issues of being a real female, she want to live for herself not to another one, she does not to be a worker like the servant of the house or a mother of kids, also achieve her objectives for her life.

For son , “That was why she was ashamed. He was the one who smelled [...] Treating her like another animal and both of them must have looked just like it in that room. One dog sniffing at the hindquarters of another and the female, her back to him, not moving. “

(TB, ch4, p93)

When Son makes bad things with smell her hair, Jadine thought that she is like animals because smell is animal behavior. So she feels shamed, because of her occupation as educated and civilized woman. After that she recognized that she equals nothing than female animal because he told her that her smell like everything else Jade feels Ashamed. So the male character in this case is in power against female because he treated her as an animal applies his dominant over her.

Son's sexual behavior against him makes Jadine react by hitting him in his face (because he rape her), feminists define rape as "committed overwhelmingly by men and boys, usually against women and girls" appears in this quotation; "but she was hitting him in the face and on the top of his head" (TB, ch4, p92).

"It was easy not to believe in Margaret's hysteria; he had seen examples of it many times before and thought she was up to her old combo of masochism plus narcissism that he believed common to exceptionally beautiful women."

(TB, ch5, p105)

Also, here Valerian continued his blame against Margaret which is the way to neglect him by throwing negative words and emotions because women are irrational. Valerian again thinks that pretty women do not take about their position as real women, but to be just spoiled.

As known the feminism theory comes to end oppression against woman, in this novel the oppression appeared when the character Ondine She complained to her husband to take her from this place

Ondine looked at her husband over her shoulder. "Don't fool with me this morning."

"And apple pie."

"You better get me a plane ticket out of here." She straightened.

(TB, ch1, p32)

Ondine feels that she is not a real woman because of her social position as a servant in a house full of oppression, so she decided to leave it to find another life differ from this one which controlled by male character

### 1.1.3 Institutional

Policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that disadvantage some social groups and advantage other social groups. These institutions include religion, government, education, law, the media, and health care system (Hardiman, Jackson & Griffin, 2010).

I wonder if the person he wants to marry is me or a black girl? And if it isn't me he wants, but any black girl who looks like me, talks and acts like me, what will happen when he finds out that I hate ear hoops, that I don't have to straighten my hair, that Mingus puts me to sleep, that sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me?

(TB, ch2, p42)



When she had to make an important decision: there were three men who wanted to marry her and the favorite named Ryk is a white rich boy: she is concerned however that he wants to marry her only because she is black while in truth she rejects all forms of blackness and black culture and that she sometimes even wishes she could get out of her skin so as not to be black or American but just herself. This quote addressed many messages from Jadine; first she wants to free not American (origin) and not black (racial identity), but women as she wants to be modern women not traditional one.

[They] did not wish to see the crying, crying girls split in two parts by their tight jeans, screaming at the top of their high, high heels, straining against the pull of their braids and the fluorescent combs holding their hair.

(TB, ch7, p161)

This happened when Son gets to new York with Jadine; he finds many prostitutes on the corners' street and most of them are black, that what makes him ashamed to get a look to them because they are selling their bodies to white male, also it is hard for black male.

Ondine was just about to show her how to make crust (and Margaret by then knew the honor of the offer, since Ondine didn't like sharing recipes or kitchen space) when Valerian put a stop to it saying she should guide the servants, not consort with them.

(TB, ch2, p48)

This quote clarifies the fact that man are controlled woman; first when Valerian tells Margaret to guide the servants not consort with them , second when Margaret applies this order against the servants. This case explains the power position of male over female in terms of controlling them in the system, family etc.

As known the feminism theory comes to end oppression against woman, in this novel the oppression appeared when the character Ondine She complained to her husband to take her from this place

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"You better get me a plane ticket out of here." She straightened.

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Ondine feels that she is not a real woman because of her social position as a servant in a house full of oppression, so she decided to leave it to find another life differ from this one which controlled by male character

[If a girl] never learns to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman. I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man—good enough even for the respect of other women.

(TB, ch10, p207)

According to Ondine, the girls cannot acquire the role to be a woman otherwise she realizes her function toward family. So, women need to take care of family and kids unlike others. Thus means that the woman is like good; for kids, man, and the respect of other woman.

## 2. Patriarchy

One of the main principles of feminist is the patriarchy of male against females, they feel male in power over them, and so they feel some fear (Hooks, 2000).

### 2.1 Male Vs Female

Jadine thinks that:

White but European which was not as bad as white and American; they would understand that, or would they? Had they ever said? They liked her being in Paris, the schools she'd gone to, the friends she'd had there.

(TB, ch2, p43)

So, Jadine in this quotation means that all males patriarchal; nor American neither European, because they are in power over female even though European lesser than American because she lived, worked, and studied there. She knew everything about them in terms of civilization, education and so on.

Also, when Ondine tells Sydney that:

“You and Mr. Street just alike. Always thinking evil about that girl.”

“When she get to be a girl?”

“She was a girl when I first saw her. Seventeen.”

(TB, ch1, p34)

In this quotation, we can infer that men are domination over women within American society i.e. they followed the patriarchy system. Thus, she insults Mr. Street and Sydney by they are always thinking evil about that girl. In this matter, she refers back to the ideology of sixteenth century that men controlled everything in the society.

The face in the peaches compelled him to dismiss Margaret's screaming entrance as the tantrum of a spoiled child, the deliberate creation of a scene, which both father and son understood as feminine dementia.

(TB, ch5, p105)

Valerian blames Margaret in everything even she gets upset; he used to blame her in the fact that she is a woman. In addition to that he uses the issues of gender many times in the novel to neglect them by blame and takes woman's opinion seriously.

"I don't have to sit here and be called names!"  
"Idiot. I married an idiot!"  
"And I married an old fool!"  
"Of course you did. Who else but an old fool would marry a high school dropout off the back of a truck!"  
"A float!" Margaret shouted, and when the wineglass bounced from the centerpiece of calla lilies and rolled toward him he didn't even look at it. He simply watched his wife's face crumple and her boy-blue eyes well up."

(TB, ch3, p57)

In this example the female character Margaret tried to get angry on the male character ( her husband), but she does not succeeded because of the dominance of male is applied on Margaret when the wineglass rolled toward him and get afraid of her husband Valerian reaction.

## 2.2 White Vs Black

When Jadine is in her room laying in the fur coat, she thinks about her blackness she finds the black men standing in her room. After a long conversation about clothes and jewelry he wants to do sexual action with her, but she refuses and says: She stood with her back to him, rubbing her wrists. She said: "I'll have to tell Valerian."(TB, ch4, p93)

Thus, means that she controlled by white male the owner of the house Jadine wants to tell him about everything that Son did with him. She is a woman and cannot control herself because of her social position in this house unlike Paris.

""LAUGHING?" Margaret could not believe her ears.  
"I'm telling you! They were in there laughing! I was looking right at them when you called out the window."  
"Good God. What's gotten into him?"  
"I don't know."  
"Are you scared?"  
"Not really. Well, sort of."  
"You don't know him, do you?"  
"Know him? How would I know him?"  
"I don't know. This is making me crazy. Maybe we should do something."  
"What? We're the only women. And Ondine. Should I go to the Broughtons' and..." Jadine stopped and sat down on Margaret's bed. She shook her head.  
"This is too much."

(TB, ch5, p96)

In this example the role of women and gender is very obvious by most of female character because Jadine reports to Margaret that Valerian and the man was laughing together, and discusses what they should do about him. So, they decided to call police because they feel scared or think about their position.

### **Conclusion**

Through this chapter, we have induced some important quotes to find and understand position and reaction of black towards oppression and both racial segregation and social discrimination to get their identity in white and racist society. We have analyzed Tar Baby with a feminism theory, we have concentrated first on: the principle of oppression and its type like Social/cultural, Personal and Institutional oppression. Second: patriarchy system between black and white, and male and female. We have concentrated on reason behind the characters' problem of identity in the novel. We have shown the fact that gender identity has a relation with the race's differences.

# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

African American literature depicts the most important issues that blacks suffered from. So, those issues led African Americans writers and poets to produce such works including novel, short stories, novella, and poems and so on. From those issues, Racism and Gender are the most important concern the African American life, because within their community they suffer from their blackness which leads to racism, and gender inequality that is applying on female.

Toni Morrison deals with race identity through showing the two binaries of the American society. These two binaries are the whites and the blacks, whites are superior to blacks and this superiority creates a relation of ambivalences between the two races. Thus, she uses characters of different races to show how the white character treats the black one in terms of racism. Also, she focuses on how the black character reacts and resists to create his own ethnic identity, Though, some of her characters trapped in diasporic identity.

She adopts a series of characters, blacks and whites, who are divided into two types “oppressor” and “oppressed” under the system of racism. Racism is a principal issue that opened a real discussion in this novel. Morrison uses setting, characters and characters relations in order to explore this problem.

Morrison in her novel *Tar Baby* deals with the issues of Gender Identity as well. Through depicting different and opposite genders living in the same society; she uses some actions that happened between them in contradictory way to show the oppression imposed on black characters in general and black female characters in specific in terms of Gender, as the female’s inferiority to male. Also, she depicts the way that male has the power to control female in terms of patriarchy.

Moreover, Morrison in her novel shows that Gender is a significant part in the novel by creating many events and scenes that shows the female characters suffering to gain their gender identity as sociological and biological categories.

Race and gender identity are noteworthy in the literary work *Tar Baby*. Both of them are in interconnected relation, so that, we cannot separate one theme from another because racism is experienced through inequality of gender. We can say that gender inequality is related or shaped by the race or ethnicity of the oppressor. In other words, women may undergo racism as a result of their gender; such racism is characterized by sexual violence

against women. So, we can say that racism and gender are two ideologies entail the superiority of one group over the other either whites or males.

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## Abstract

The problem of racism in USA made blacks inferior to their counterpart whites. Thus, the situation of blacks and in particular black women in disadvantaged position from two sides; of being black in racist society and being female in patriarchy society. This dissertation seeks to give a better understanding to the reasons behind characters' problem of identity , the way they experienced and how Toni Morrison deals with the issue of identity in her novel " *Tar Baby* " .

This study is fourfold: the first chapter gives a historical, social and biographical background about African American, the second chapter about Toni Morrison and African American literature and literary background, the third and fourth chapter based on a deep analysis of actions and behavior of the major characters to quest their race and gender identity.

**Key words:** African American literature, identity, racism, discrimination.

## المخلص

إن مشكلة التمييز العنصري في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية جعلت السود اقل منزلة من العرق الابيض لذلك اصبحت مكانة السود و بالخصوص المرأة السوداء متردية لمعاناتهم من جهتين ، اولا كونهم ذو بشرة سوداء في مجتمع عنصري هذا بالسبب للجنس الاسود ككل. ثانيا كون المرأة ذات البشرة السوداء تعيش في مجتمع تعود السيطرة فيه للجنس الآخر. حيث تسعى هذه الدراسة لمعالجة الاسباب المتعلقة بمشكل الهوية في الشخصيات الادبية لرواية " تار بابي " او طفل الفطران للكاتبة توني موريسون و كيفية تجسيد الكاتبة لهذه المشكلة . تنقسم هذه الدراسة الى اربعة فصول : حيث سيتم خلال الفصل الاول عرض للخلفيات الاجتماعية و التاريخية للأمريكيين السود وكذا السيرة الذاتية للكاتبة . اما الفصل الثاني سيتطرق الى عرض للأدب الافريقي الامريكي و كذا الكاتبة توني موريسون و خلفيتها الادبية ، اما الفصل الثالث و الرابع سيقدم تحليلا معمقا بالاعتماد على سلوك الشخصيات الاساسية في الرواية و افعالها سعيا منها لتحقيق المساواة في الهوية من حيث العرق و الجنس .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب الأفروأمريكي ، الهوية، التمييز العنصري، التفرقة.

## Abstrait

Le problème du racisme aux États-Unis a fait des noirs inférieurs à leurs blancs de contrepartie. Ainsi, la situation des Noirs et en particulier des femmes noires en situation défavorisée des deux côtés; D'être noir dans la société raciste et être féminin dans la société patriarcale. Cette thèse vise à mieux comprendre les raisons du problème de l'identité des personnages, de la façon dont ils ont vécu et de la façon dont Toni Morrison traite la question de l'identité dans son roman «*Tar Baby*».

Cette étude est quadruple: le premier chapitre donne un fondement historique, social et biographique sur l'afro-américain, le deuxième chapitre sur la littérature et l'histoire littéraire Toni Morrison et afro-américaine, le troisième et le quatrième chapitre, basés sur une analyse approfondie des actions et du comportement des Personnages majeurs pour rechercher leur race et leur identité de genre.

Mots clés: Littérature afro-américaine, identité, racisme, discrimination.