

## **The Double Consciousness of Cultural Pariahs—Fantasy, Trauma and Black Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby***

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### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to investigate the pathological condition of identity formation by reading Morrison’s novelistic reflection of the pathology of cultural pariahs in light of the psychoanalytic concepts of fantasy and trauma. By reflecting on the issue of black identity in *Tar Baby* through Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian approach to ideology and the ethics of trauma proposed by Cathy Caruth and Petar Ramadanovic, this paper wishes to formulate a more sophisticated understanding of black identity and of the relationship between the subject and ideology. The discussion of the paper will first, by addressing the complex of “black skin, white self,” explore the alienation of black subjects in the white world and the identity crisis brought about by black embourgeoisement. The second part of the discussion will focus on the complexity of Morrison’s “double vision,” as embedded in the double consciousness of the protagonists, and on the pathological and ethical dimensions of double consciousness. The last part, then, will

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tackle the intertwining relationship between black trauma and the reconstruction of black identity. The double consciousness of blacks as cultural pariahs, I would argue, can be taken as signifying the libidinal economy of the black subject and pointing to the double burden of the cultural pariah: this is a task of confronting the seduction of white culture and the legacy of black trauma and thus of confronting the real of black identity.

**Key Words:** double consciousness, fantasy, identity, *Tar Baby*, trauma

Toni Morrison articulates in unique ways the pain and struggle of a traumatized self and community. In her novels, the traumatic reality of a black self manifests itself in the characters' self-loathing and self-contempt, and in the loss of their individual and cultural identity. In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1987b), this is embodied in the poverty-stricken, despised, love-seeking black girl who trades her sanity in exchange for the bluest eyes because the world, it seems to her, has more affection for girls with blue eyes. This metaphor of the bluest eyes is continued and further developed in Morrison's fourth novel, *Tar Baby* (1987a), in which the black girl, a beautiful, well-loved model with a promising future ahead of her, is endowed with the charm of possessing the bluest eyes. In constructing the intricate power and psychic struggle underlying such a "success" story, Morrison calls the power of blue eyes into question.

*Tar Baby* portrays the intricate complex of being black. Through her representation of the paradoxical *tar baby* identity, Morrison explores the ways in which the black subject grapples with the allure of capitalist values, the seduction of white culture, and the legacy of an African heritage. The dilemma facing the dream-driven, trauma-ridden protagonist Jadine Childs demonstrates the **pariah** status of black people and their struggle with what W. E. B. Du Bois calls the double consciousness of black folk in their quest for a self-identity and authenticity. In the process of reconstructing their individual and cultural identity, black subjects must experience and confront the pathological disturbances caused by ideological fantasy and the burden of racial trauma. This paper attempts to investigate this pathological condition of identity formation by reading Morrison's novelistic reflection on the pathology of cultural pariahs in light of the psychoanalytic concepts of fantasy and trauma, and it wishes to formulate a more sophisticated understanding of black identity and of the relationship between the subject and ideology.

The following discussion is divided into three sections. The

first part will explore the alienation of black subjects in the white world via Frantz Fanon's analysis of Negro psychopathy and the psychoanalytic conception of alienation. The ideology of the dominant culture, I would argue, whether we address it as white values, capitalist values or the psychoanalytic Other, serves as the fantasy-framework through which the subject may access a sense of reality and selfhood. As embodied in the identity crisis of Jadine Childs, the protagonist of *Tar Baby*, the complex of "black skin, white self" is a cultural and psychological reality with which the black subject has to grapple; this is particularly clear with the identity crisis brought about by black **embourgeoisement**. In the second part, I will focus on the complexity of the "double vision" as embedded in the double consciousness of the protagonists by exploring both the pathological and ethical dimensions of double consciousness.<sup>1</sup> As with Du Bois's double consciousness, Morrison's double vision points not only to the plight of black identity but also to the developmental possibilities of black subjects, which, as Morrison suggests, should be reflected upon with a deep understanding of the black subject's entanglement of being both "white" and black. As implicated in the dual identity of African-Americans, Morrison's double vision makes clear the cultural and ethical significance of incorporating doubleness: this is

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<sup>1</sup> In her essay "Contested Visions/Double-Vision in *Tar Baby*," Judylin S. Ryan argues that contestation in *Tar Baby*, as embodied by the contentious relationship between Jadine and Son, "facilitates a decisive resolution in mediating these differing visions toward the construction of a critically enabling double-vision" (1993: 607). Thus she concludes that the contested visions will continue to challenge and inspire Jadine and help her to "move beyond double consciousness to double-vision" (1993: 619). Whereas Ryan focuses on the positive potential of contested visions/double-vision—how one is able to view oneself through one's own "culturally informed, historically meaningful and communally affirmative perspective" (1993: 605), I attempt to underscore the pathological and yet ethical task of doubleness by addressing the black subject's struggle with the allure of white values and the burden of black trauma, that is, the cultural and ethical task of confronting the pathological constructions of whiteness and blackness.

the doubleness of the American and the Negro, the individual and the community, the past and the future of blackness. For the community of cultural pariahs, the pursuit of the ideals of the American dream—the right to life, liberty and happiness—should be taken not only as the goal of self-realization but also as a communal dream and cultural task. The last part of my discussion, then, will tackle the issue of black trauma. For the black subject, the trauma of being black has become a trans-generational property and thus an indelible part of black identity, as if the trauma of being “lesser and inferior” has been inscribed into black people’s collective consciousness and unconsciousness. Painful as it is, the black subject’s traumatic encounter with the social, historical, and psychic real of being black is the only way for him/her to really intervene into the legacy of black trauma on the formation of self- and cultural identity. In this regard, the double consciousness of blacks as cultural pariahs can be taken as signifying the libidinal economy of the black subject and pointing to the double burden of the cultural pariah: this is a task of confronting the seduction of white culture and the legacy of black trauma and thus of confronting the real of black identity.

## I. Black Skin, White Self

The quest for self and its cultural identity, as many critics have noted, has been the main preoccupation of Morrison’s novels (Otten, 1989: 112; Samuels & Hudson-Weems, 1990: 5). Such a quest is largely manifested in the characters’ attempts to survive their victimization and seek for psychic wholeness, given that one of Morrison’s central concerns, as J. Brooks Bouson says, is “how to survive whole in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, victims of something” (2000: 2). Through her writing, Morrison confronts the effects of shame and trauma on the lives of African Americans: she dramatizes the “devastating effect of chronic shame on her characters’ sense of individual and social

identity, describing their self-loathing, self-contempt, their feelings that they are, in some essential way, inferior” (Bouson, 2000: 4). Right from her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison has focused on the ubiquity and complexity of shame and trauma in the African-American experience: throughout her writing, this is what black people have to confront on their quest for self, psychic wholeness and cultural identity.

But the impact of white values on the black community has complicated the issue of the black identity crisis, particularly with reference to “the **embourgeoisement** of black culture” and “the lure of affluence” (Peach, 1995: 25; Rubenstein, 1993: 154). Quite unlike the three preceding novels, in which the power of white values is painfully overwhelming and destructive to black people, *Tar Baby* tells a success story in which the female protagonist, Jadine Childs, attains her personal goals of success, freedom and happiness by identifying with the values of the dominant white culture. In the case of Jadine, a sense of euphoria has replaced that ubiquitous sense of shame and trauma which seems always already inscribed as a part of black identity. In this sense of euphoria, in this non-traumatized, white-oriented black identity Morrison sees the identity crisis caused by the intricate entanglement between the allure of white civilization and the burden of black trauma. This is the crisis/complex of black skin, white masks, to use Frantz Fanon’s words.

In his *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon has depicted the “various attitudes that the Negro adopts in contact with white civilization” so that he may, as he asserts in the book, destroy a massive psycho-existential complex that is embedded in the Negro’s attitudes by analyzing it (1967: 12). The vicious circle of the painful effects of racism and the Negro’s inferiority complex, Fanon notes, is perpetuated because “the white man is sealed in his whiteness and the black man in his blackness,” which signifies “alienated blacks and alienated whites” (1967: 9, 29). As Fanon elaborates, this vicious circle is pathological, since “white men consider themselves superior to black men; black men want to

prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" (1967: 10). Besides economic inferiority, black people, particularly the educated Negro, also suffer from their awareness of being a race of no language, no culture, no civilization, and no "long historical past" (1967: 34).<sup>2</sup> Understanding as he does the psychopathology of the Negro, Fanon does not hold back his criticism of the deified, white-masked Negro:<sup>3</sup> "the black skin of the compradors was masked by their complicity with the values of the white colonial powers" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998: 99). If the problem of complicity, as suggested in Fanon's critique, helps illumine the issue of identification in *Tar Baby*, Fanon's remark on the educated Negro helps account for the plight of the well-educated Jadine in the novel: "The educated Negro . . . feels at a given stage that [her] race no longer understands [her], or that [she] no longer understands it" (1967: 14). As shown by the disruption at the novel's end, Jadine feels free on her flight to Paris in search of a life of success and happiness, whereas Therese, the black native of Isle des Chevaliers, urges her lover Son to forget Jadine, the woman who "has forgotten her ancient properties" (Morrison: 1987a: 305). The mask of civilization represents more than a form of cultural cosmetic, a make-up that one may take off at any time. The plight of the black subject, as seen in Jadine's forgetting of her racial properties, lies in the fact that this mask of civilization can be fused into one's selfhood and one's cultural identity, which cannot be removed as easily as taking off a mask.

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<sup>2</sup> In Chapter One, "The Negro and Language," Fanon analyzes his own complex by drawing from his personal experience of meeting a Russian or a German who speaks French badly: "I can hardly forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that he is a lawyer or an engineer there" (1967: 34).

<sup>3</sup> In his study of the mentality of the colonized people, Fanon notes, many of the Antilleans, after stays of varying length in metropolitan France, "go home to be deified" and the culture of the mother country seems to create a "magic circle" around them (1967: 19, 23).

On the issue of identification with white values, Fanon has provided a sophisticated critical model through his analysis of the effects of the white-dominated colonial discourse—in the form of school books or other kinds of publications—on the psyche of the Antilleans since early on in their lives. Fanon writes:

The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about “our ancestors, the Gauls,” identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth. There is identification—that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man’s attitude . . . Because the Antillean does not think of himself as a black man; he thinks of himself as an Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. (1967: 147-148)

Fanon’s analysis shows that education, which can be seen as the subject’s forced choice of alienation in/of language according to the Lacanian formulation, interpellates the Antilleans and turns them into the bringers of civilization, alienating the Antillean Negroes from their blackness.

In *Tar Baby*, Morrison portrays the black female protagonist as a character who identifies with white culture, just as the black schoolboy in Fanon’s analysis identifies himself as “the bringer of civilization who carries an all-white truth.” As the niece of Valerian Street’s black servants, Jadine has been educated with Valerian’s financial support and has become an art history graduate of the Sorbonne in Paris, an expert on Cloisonne, and a cover model for *Elle*. Growing up in L’Arbe de la Croix, an Eden-like residence on an isolated island in the Caribbean, and later getting an education in the cosmopolitan city of Paris, Jadine has little knowledge of the colonial history of the island or the predicament of the present-day black community, and shows no interest in knowing about these cultural and historical burdens. She likes Ave Maria better than gospel music, and in her view “Picasso is better than an Itumba mask . . . the fact that he was intrigued by them is proof of his



genius, not the mask-makers” (1987a: 74). These remarks on art should not be taken merely as Morrison’s rejection of art’s universality or her race-inflected aesthetic judgment. Rather, they should be taken as a way of dramatizing the tremendous shaping force of the dominant culture on the way the subject feels and thinks about things around him/her. Jadine’s contemptuous and somewhat pathological reaction to black art belies the powerful legacy of white civilization, of a racist mode of thinking. Thus, a sense of the primitiveness and inferiority of black culture has dominated Jadine’s mind: “Little matches of embarrassment burned even now in her face as she thought of all those black art shows mounted two or three times a year in the States. The junior-high school sculpture, the illustration-type painting” (1987a: 74). Like the Antillean in Fanon’s description, Jadine thinks and conducts herself like a white, and her whiteness stands out as the legacy of white education and way of living, particularly in the eyes of the black-native-son character Son. Jadine is addressed as “white girl” by Son, since he recognizes that Jadine assumes his identity as a rapist just as white girls will fantasize about black men as sexual predators. In spite of her occasional awareness of her blackness, Jadine is characterized as a black girl who ironically possesses a white self. If by whiteness we mean having a desire for what is desirable in white culture, then we may well argue that Jadine has a white identity and that her fantasy is purely “white.”

In light of the Lacanian approach to the critique of ideology, the relationship between the subject and the ideological Other can be better delineated through the categories of desire, fantasy, and enjoyment (*jouissance*). In psychoanalytic terms, fantasy is neither the opposite of reality nor an imagined scenario in which our desires are satisfied. Rather, it is a frame of reference through which the subject may attain a sense of reality—“the frame that guarantees our access to reality, our ‘sense of reality’ (when our fundamental fantasy is shattered, we experience the ‘loss of reality’)” (Žižek, 1999: 122). In this regard, ideology functions as such a fantasy-framework that holds the subject so that he/she does

not feel any opposition between the ideological fantasy and reality (Žižek, 1989: 49). As is suggested in psychoanalytic theory, alienation in the system of signification qua the ideological Other is a forced choice for the advent of the subject. What is at stake here is not to advocate a kind of deterministic discourse of the subject by saying that the subject is always already determined in/by ideology. The sophistication of this psychoanalytic concept of alienation lies in the point that the forced choice is a flawed choice since the gap between the subject and the Other can never be bridged through alienation, so that there remains a constitutive gap between the subject and the Other. In psychoanalytic terms, the gap qua the lack or the void is also part of both the alienated subject and the Other. To maintain a sense of reality, that is, to enact a world which makes sense, fantasy functions as an attempt to fill out the void of the subject by providing it with a tangible answer or “an element which constitutes its identity” (Žižek, 1992: 89). As for the void of the Other, writes Žižek, “there is always a leftover which opens the space for desire and makes the Other (the symbolic order) inconsistent, with fantasy as an attempt to overcome, to conceal this inconsistency, this gap in the Other” (1989: 124). Fantasy, then, not only serves as a mask to conceal the inconsistency of the ideological Other, but also provides the subject with a mask of identity, a way to organize and domesticate his/her *jouissance*. The Lacanian formulation of fantasy also helps explain why the subject can be held in the grip of ideology—even it is quintessentially inconsistent: “Fantasy,” as Jason Glynos aptly puts it, “sustains the subject as a desiring subject by providing it with a way of enjoying, a mode of *jouissance*” (2001: 201).

Fantasy, then, as a psychoanalytic concept, may serve as a good starting point for our meditation upon the relationship between the fantasy of the white world and Jadine’s “white self.” L’Arbe de la Croix, where Jadine lives as a privileged girl endowed with limitless opportunities to pursue her personal interests, provides all its residents with a fantasy-framework through which they may approach a desirable sense of reality and ward off any

disturbance caused by the return of the repressed. This isolated paradise, breeding its own ideological dream, works as “a dreamlike construction” hindering people from seeing “the real state of things, reality as such” and at once giving them a reality to hold onto and sustaining them as desiring subjects (Žižek, 1989: 47).<sup>4</sup> Before the intrusion of the black stranger, which allows for a greater black consciousness and enacts the return of trauma,<sup>5</sup> people within this most impressive house on the island seem to remain in a state of happiness, of total innocence, as if they were living in the prelapsarian Eden. As Terry Otten argues, Son’s coming brings about the Fall for this dreamy Eden and all are forced to confront their “crime of innocence” (1989: 107).<sup>6</sup> For years Margaret has evaded the truth of child abuse, Sydney and Ondine have settled into a passive acquiescence, and Jadine has had indulged herself in her free and happy lifestyle. Given the

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<sup>4</sup> As Žižek notes, the Lacanian theory provides a more sophisticated model for us to analyze the mechanism of an ideological construction, for Lacan has distinguished reality from the real and highlighted the complicity between the real of the subject’s desire and the working of ideology. “The difference between Lacan and ‘naïve realism,’” Žižek states, “is that for Lacan, the only point at which we approach this hard kernel of the Real is indeed the dream,” which should not be taken as a fantasy that separates us from reality (1989: 47).

<sup>5</sup> Many critics have expressed similar ideas on the symbolic meaning of Son’s intrusion in the narrative. As Terry Otten points out, “Son’s presence restores something of [Jadine’s] black awareness just as Guitar Bains awakens Milkman’s black consciousness in *Song of Solomon*” (1989: 106). Wilfred D. Samuels maintains that Jadine’s interactions with Son cause her hidden contradictions to surface (1997: 81). Marilyn Sanders Mobley argues that Son’s intrusion exposes the repressed antagonism within the household: “His presence, . . . throws the entire house into a state of disarray which exposes the hostilities, lies, secrets and untold narratives that had been concealed under the guise of being ‘like a family’” (1993: 286-287).

<sup>6</sup> Morrison touches upon the theme of the Fall in the novel: “An innocent man is a sin before God. Inhuman and therefore unworthy. No man should live without absorbing the sins of his kind, the foul air of his innocence, even if it did wilt rows of angel trumpets and cause them to fall from their vines” (1987a: 243).

disturbing nightmarish experiences that force Jadine to define the nature of her blackness, the fantasy of affluence and happiness created and perpetuated by the capitalist world—as symbolized by L’Arbe de la Croix, New York and Paris in the novel—enables a desirable sense of reality and selfhood in which she can be a model, open up a shop, get rich and live happily ever after (Morrison, 1987a: 30, 226). This fantasy of pursuing personal freedom and material gain fills the void within Jadine and constitutes a new identity for her to hold onto, or, in psychoanalytic terms, constitutes the possibility of enjoying herself as a desiring subject. Immersing herself in the world of capitalist fantasy, Jadine feels she can best fulfill herself in a world founded on the prospect of success, freedom and happiness, one whose phantasmic power may cover up or tone down the anxiety and pain caused by the reality of the fundamental social antagonism, which is, as Žižek proposes, the inconsistency, the gap in the Other that the social fantasy attempts to overcome and conceal (1989: 124).

As suggested by the title of the novel, the problems of alienation and identification will haunt and entrap tar babies when they are in search of their identities for, as we have seen, alienation in the fantasy of the dominant values is a forced choice and yet a new trial for the modern-day black subject. As Linden Peach notes, the tar baby myth, used by Morrison to address the black predicament, originated in Africa as part of a cycle of trickster tales that developed before contact with Europe, reappeared in nineteenth-century America and later transformed into the Uncle Remus plantation tales that mark African-American responses to slavery (1995: 79). In the Uncle Remus version, Brer Fox sets the tar baby in the road to catch Brer Rabbit. In the version told by Son, the tar baby is placed in the road by a white farmer to entrap Brer Rabbit, who had eaten a couple of cabbages on the farm (Morrison: 1987a: 270). This story of entrapment cited by Son is used to illustrate Jadine’s being trapped by the allure of white values. For in Son’s view Jadine has been transformed into a tar baby used by white men to ensnare blacks: “You turn little black

babies into little white ones; you turn your black brothers into white brothers” (1987a: 270). Thus Roberta Rubenstein argues that the tar baby is viewed by Son as “the white world’s corrupting lure for upwardly mobile black people” (1993: 154). In this sense, the tar baby identity represents a new form of enslavement and a dangerously alluring identity—“once they are caught by the lure of affluence, they become psychologically and materially enslaved” (Rubenstein, 1993: 154). The “magic circle” of white culture, as Fanon names it, may confer upon the black more than a pretentious white mask. This magic mask interpellates tar babies and glorifies them with a white self that embraces white desires and enjoys what they desire—the subject desires the Other’s desire, to use Lacan’s words.

As has been discussed with regard to the problem of Jadine’s identity crisis, **being white** has become a way for the black community to address and denounce those non-black or indefinable features that seem antithetical to the values of the black community. Whiteness, as Bouson notes, has been constructed as “a sign of pathological difference in Morrison’s novels,” as being “white” represents cultural and economic privileges that signify what the pariah community is historically deprived of (2000: 5). But in *Tar Baby*, Morrison has demonstrated the ways in which the black subject has to struggle not only with whiteness as a sign of pathological difference, but also with the pathology of blackness. Throughout the novel the gaze of the traditional black community, as embodied by the African woman in yellow, Son and also his all-black hometown Eloë, makes Jadine’s non-blackness and her disposition of individualism stand out as a cultural disturbance. Critics who are critical of Jadine’s non-black identity (or her whiteness) tend to follow this race-inflected mode of thinking. As Samuels says: “[Jadine] is trapped between two cultures: black and white, European and African-American” (1997: 79). The distinction between being black and being white, as the opposing

class interests of the two protagonists may show,<sup>7</sup> is intricately entangled with that between being poor and rich, rural and urban.

Being “white” also stands for a racial/cultural symptom that bespeaks the legacy of the uneven development of whites and blacks, whose pathological character is explored and dramatized repeatedly in Morrison’s novels. In *The Bluest Eye*, the desire to be “white,” embodied by the quest for blue eyes, is described as the most tragic and pathological way of earning dignity and affection. In *Song of Solomon* (Morrison, 1987c), Morrison focuses more on the **embourgeoisement** of black culture and the complex of rich blacks. Mr. Macon Dead will always slow down his fancy car when driving through the black neighborhood so the not-as-wealthy black people may witness his achievement. In this case, being “white” becomes a way to prove one’s respectability, one’s superiority to one’s own people: this is, it seems, a pathological reversal of the inferiority complex. *Tar Baby* addresses a more intricate (more complex) “white complex.” As represented by Jadine’s middle-class upbringing, her schooling and her profession, being “white,” which might be equated with a life of privilege, has become a “natural” state, something more like one’s birthright. The sense of culture shock Jadine has experienced during her stay in the Southern small-town of Eloë can be seen to be related to what we might call the effect of the cultural mirror image. Looking at Eloë through Isle des Chevaliers, Paris, New York, Jadine feels trapped in a “rotten, boring, burnt-out and lifeless place” and desires “air, taxicabs and conversation in a language she understands” (Morrison, 1987a: 259). These cultural images she craves are a sign of “cultural misrecognition,”<sup>8</sup> and they also show

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<sup>7</sup> In *Toni Morrison’s Developing Class Consciousness*, Doreatha D. Mbalia (1991) highlights class struggle and Morrison’s heightened class awareness as developed through her writing.

<sup>8</sup> Here I use Lacan’s notion of **meconnaissance** (misrecognition) to describe the white cultural condition in which Jadine was born into—an enactment of the cultural mirror stage—and is internalized as part of her selfhood. In his essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in

the way in which the tar baby enjoys her status of being “white,” being free, happy and individualistic, as this white fantasy-framework provides a sense of reality for her and sustains her status of being a desiring subject who is drawn to the magic circle of white civilization. Nonetheless, the tar baby continues to be plagued by the **white-but-not-quite** complex, by the inconsistency between the tar features in her and the values of whiteness.

## II. American Dream, Cultural Pariah

Through Jadine’s whiteness, Morrison shows her concern with the individual’s disconnection from his/her racial, historical and communal heritage. Through her complex characterization Morrison is expanding our understanding of the nature of black identity, making of it a concept too complex to be analyzed in terms of a simple distinction between whiteness and blackness. The dynamics of Jadine’s ambiguous identity call into question the race-based model of identity and authenticity: now we must consider the notion of “essential blackness,” the relationship between the individual and the community, and the tension between one’s racial past and future.<sup>9</sup>

Given her affinity with the dominant values, Jadine strives throughout the novel to break away from a conventional idea of blackness, attempting to carve out a new definition of self as well as a new cultural identity. Her quality of independence and her

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Psychoanalytic Experience,” Lacan proposes that the effects of the mirror stage on the formation of the I shows “*the function of meconnaissance* that characterizes the ego in all its structures” (1977: 6).

<sup>9</sup> Some critics tend to reduce Jadine’s complexity to a stereotype and thus fall short of exploring the cultural significance of her ambiguous relationship with the black community, particularly with reference to the definition of the new black woman. For instance, in Jill Matus’s analysis, Jadine’s resistance to the notions of essential blackness, instead of prompting further discussion of this issue, is regarded as evidence of her conforming to dominant, white American values (1998: 100).

insistence on freedom and individualism are most clearly seen in her love of the urban mobility of New York and her confrontation with the traditional black community in *Eloe*. For Jadine, New York feels like home, a place where she can be free and happy:

New York made her feel like giggling, she was so happy to be back in the arms of that barfly with the busted teeth and armpit breath. New York oiled her joints and she moved as though they were oiled . . . if ever there was a black woman's town, New York was it. (Morrison, 1987a: 221-222)

*Eloe*, in contrast, symbolizes the racial, cultural and sexual constraints she has attempted to flee. These constraints define the night women of *Eloe*, who “were all out to get her, tie her, bind her [and] grab the person she had worked hard to become and choke it off with their soft loose tits” (1987a: 262). Choosing to escape this cultural bondage, Jadine shows her decision to break with the past and move on to a better life in her parting remark to Son: “You stay in that medieval slave basket if you want to. You will stay there by yourself. Don’t ask me to do it with you. I won’t. There is nothing any of us can do about the past but make our lives better” (1987a: 271). Through the disparity between the past and the future and the conflict between the individual and the community, Morrison seems to ask whether black people have to turn their backs on their trauma-ridden past in order to embrace the ideals of the American dream—the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Apparently, Morrison’s answer is no. It is through the complexity of conflicting views that Morrison expresses her perception that the burden of the double consciousness is an ethical trial for African Americans to take up on the journey to fulfill their American dream. Morrison’s own double consciousness, or, we may say, her double vision, is embedded in Jadine’s inner



conflict and struggle.<sup>10</sup> As Mobley points out, on the one hand Morrison wants to “affirm the self-reliance and freedom of a black woman who makes choices for her own life on her own terms”; on the other, “she also seeks to ‘point out dangers . . . that can happen to the totally self-reliant if there is no historical connection’” (1993: 284).<sup>11</sup> For Morrison, American dream ideals, so real to Jadine, may universally apply to all humanity; they should not be taken as values for the whites only, as suggested by Jadine’s critique of Son’s “white-folks-black-folks primitivism” (Morrison, 1987a: 275). Son’s limited view of the white world, as Morrison contends through Jadine, is not adequate in developing a vision for transforming the black condition.<sup>12</sup> But as seen in Morrison’s reflection of African Americans’ future possibilities, the claim of the American dream—celebrating the spirit of individualism—fails to address the significance of the black racial and communal values.

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<sup>10</sup> In his *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness*, John N. Duvall argues that Morrison’s first four novels, which overtly represent identity formation, serve as the writer’s reflections on the formation of black authenticity as well as her fashioning of a usable identity as an African-American woman novelist (2000: 10). Duvall calls our attention to Morrison’s shifting attitude toward what constitutes black authenticity in her fourth novel, *Tar Baby*: [*Tar Baby*] shows that “Morrison’s fiction dialectically overturns the syntheses of her previous fiction. One way the novel does so is by rethinking the relation between race and class to entertain the notion that black identity need not be linked to black poverty” (2000: 21). This shifting attitude toward black authenticity, I would say, can be clearly seen in the characterization of Jadine Childs: Jadine’s interrogation of locating black authenticity in the racially pure, impoverished rural community of Eloë can be viewed as representing Morrison’s attempt to redefine the possibilities of black authenticity, which, as Duvall notes, “lie squarely in economically distressed African-American communities” in Morrison’s first three novels (2000: 21).

<sup>11</sup> Mobley’s quote here is based on Morrison’s statements from an interview published in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*.

<sup>12</sup> This can be related to Craig Werner’s reflection of the strengths and limitations Therese represents: “Therese’s understanding is severely limited because she refuses to recognize the white world and without this operating double consciousness she is incapable of effecting transformation for Son or the black community” (Heinze, 1993: 147).

For Morrison, the American dream has to be carried out alongside the construction of a black heritage. As embedded in Morrison's double vision, the notion of the American dream, for the pariah community, signifies a communal dream and a cultural task, rather than a personal goal of self-realization that is embraced by Jadine and impairs her vision of seeing her communal role in the pariah community. Morrison's consciousness of the need to preserve the value both of the individual and the community, the past and the future, and the universality of the American dream and the particularity of African American culture, was already present in the process of writing *Tar Baby*. In the commencement address she delivered at Barnard College in 1979, Morrison expressed her own double consciousness, one reflected in the thematic concerns of the novel:

I am suggesting that we pay as much attention to our nurturing sensibilities as to our ambition. You are moving in the direction of freedom and the function of freedom is to free somebody else. You are moving toward self-fulfillment and the consequences of that fulfillment should be to discover that there is something that is just as important as you are. (qtd. in Mobley, 1993: 286)

Morrison observes that freedom as such is at once fulfilling and destructive, as it enacts opportunities for self-realization yet turns the American dream into selfish individualism and Jadine into a cultural orphan who "sought after other cultures [s]he could love without risk or pain" (Morrison, 1987a: 145).<sup>13</sup> Rejecting any attachment to the black community and its past, Jadine embraces her freedom in order to forsake the burden of black American identity, the burden of double consciousness in the souls of black

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<sup>13</sup> As Mbalia notes, in *Tar Baby* Morrison reveals "her awareness of the selfish individualism promoted by capitalism and its devastating effects on African people" (1991: 84). This helps explain the complex relationship between the American dream and the capitalist culture, particularly with regard to the pursuit of material gains.

folk.

As Jadine's identity crisis makes clear, Morrison's notion of double consciousness corresponds with Du Bois's late nineteenth-century discourse on double consciousness as the sign of African American racial and cultural difference. In his essay "Of Our Spiritual Striving," Du Bois articulates the notion of a painful and particular black spirituality:<sup>14</sup>

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One even feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1986: 364-365)

By detailing the blacks' identity conflict in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois points out the devastating impact of slavery and racial prejudice on black folk: their "powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed or forgotten. (1986: 365)" More importantly, he appeals for a cultural uplifting of the black race through the realization of all the ideals proposed by black leaders at different stages of the American Negro's development: the right to attend school, the power of the ballot and a long-sought freedom—"the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire" (1986:

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<sup>14</sup> According to Bernard W. Bell, Du Bois first articulated the notion of double consciousness in a speech—"The Conservation of the Races"—he presented in March 1897 as a founding member of the American Negro Academy (Bell, 1996: 90).

365, 370). The end of the American Negro's strivings, Du Bois writes, is "to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius" (1986: 365). To accomplish this racial and cultural dream—this dream of "work, culture, and liberty" as Du Bois calls it, black Americans must take up the burden of double consciousness until the pure human promise grounded in *The Declaration of Independence* has been fulfilled. For Du Bois, as Bernard W. Bell notes, double consciousness, a mythic blessing and a social burden, signifies "a biracial, bicultural state of being in the world, an existential site of socialized cultural ambivalence and emancipatory possibilities of personal and social transformation" (1996: 96). The double vision embedded in this double consciousness can give to the world what it lacks.<sup>15</sup> In Du Bois's own words, "[the American Negro] would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that the Negro blood has a message for the world" (1986: 365).

Morrison knows, just as well as Du Bois does, that the burden of black double consciousness has a message for the world. In *Tar Baby*, the juxtaposition of Jadine and Son dramatizes the role of such a double consciousness in the constitution of a new black identity. Both protagonists carry with them significant features that can inspire the cultural regeneration of the black community. As Morrison says in the novel, "Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be. One had a past, the other a future and each bore the culture to save the race in his hands" (1987a: 269). Son is limited by his romanticization of the past, which alienates him from the modern world, but Jadine is much more alienated for she totally rejects her racial heritage and the black community and

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<sup>15</sup> As Bell points out, Du Bois's concept of double consciousness has been borrowed and further developed by the following generations of black writers. One example is Ralph Ellison's "double vision" in his *Shadow and Act*, which signifies a "fluid, ambivalent, laughing-to-keep-crying perspective toward life" (1996: 97).

chooses to bleach her black blood in a flood of white Americanism, to use Du Bois's image. What Jadine refuses to reconcile herself to, to take up, is the burden of black identity as a cultural pariah. Yet this is, for Morrison, what black people have to grapple with in their quest for self-identity. As Morrison once remarked:

The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs. The civilization of black people that lives apart from but in juxtaposition to other civilizations is a pariah relationship . . . . But a community contains pariahs within it that are very useful for the conscience of that community. (qtd. in Rubenstein, 1993: 154)

Thus, for Morrison, this pariah identity marks a very important racial, cultural and historical legacy that should not be forgotten. In *Tar Baby*, she suggests that this pariah identity has to be recognized, and identified with, by black people, the bourgeois class in particular, when they are trying to define who they are and what blackness is. Without the awareness of such a historical and communal identity, black people will always be alienated in a world where they can become nothing but cultural orphans. Therefore, they will continue to be enslaved, even while they have the nominal freedom to pursue their American dream.

### III. Black Trauma, Black Self

The legacy of racial and historical trauma, implicitly or explicitly, has become a recurrent theme of Morrison's novels. As Bouson notes, writing for Morrison is her way of speaking the unspeakable and confronting the effects of shame and trauma on the lives of African Americans (2000: 2). In many ways, writing about trauma is Morrison's way of effecting a psychological and cultural cure for the pariah community, just as Baby Suggs in *Beloved* attempts to do for the slave community. But what seems rather paradoxical about the notion of conjuring and confronting trauma—which is supposedly “a way of effecting a [psychological]

and cultural cure”—is the cultural burden it may bring to the culture-bearers (Bouson, 2000: 5).<sup>16</sup> Jadine can be seen as the clearest manifestation of a potential culture-bearer, but she chooses to evade the historical burden of racial trauma, as she cries out to Son: “You stay in that medieval slave basket if you want to” (Morrison, 1987a: 271). Jadine’s desire to leave behind all racial baskets poses a fundamental question with reference to the cultural significance of claiming one’s own traumatic history: why confront trauma?

Trauma, described by Cathy Caruth as “a wound that cries out,” enables our access to the historical truth of the wound, yet this truth can be made known only belatedly and via traumatic repetitions, as Caruth argues. Trauma, in Caruth’s view, seems to be “much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (1996: 4).<sup>17</sup> Rather than focusing on the pathological character of traumatic neurosis as developed by Freud, Caruth’s reflections on trauma in *Unclaimed Experience* turn to its historical, communal and ethical dimensions by highlighting its signifying power, as also do Freud’s texts.<sup>18</sup> For Caruth, the

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<sup>16</sup> As Bouson notes on the cultural function of Morrison’s novels, “Morrison seems bent on effecting a cultural cure both through the artistic rendering and narrative reconstruction of the shame and trauma story and also through the fictional invocation of the protective power of the black folk community and the timeless ancestor figures” (2000: 5).

<sup>17</sup> Caruth points out that the originary meaning of trauma comes from “the Greek trauma, or ‘wound,’ originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body,” but in its later usage, particularly in Freud’s text, the term trauma is understood as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (1996: 3).

<sup>18</sup> As Caruth notes, in the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes “a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in the lives of certain individuals,” as he addresses the story of Tancred from Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* to explicate the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will (1996: 2). Caruth also refers to the discourse of trauma in Freud’s

complexity of history can be clearly defined in terms of the “double-telling” we find at the core of traumatic narrative: “It is the inextricability of the story of one’s life from the story of a death, an impossible and necessary double telling, that constitutes historical witness” (1996: 8). In her elaboration on trauma’s power, as witness, to render history possible, Caruth is highlighting how the identity of the subject is to be formed through listening to, knowing, and representing the trauma, the voice of otherness. She speaks of how “we” can be formed through trauma: “History, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (1996: 24). Trauma then is related to the basic structure of one’s self-identity, which is inextricably entangled with one’s relation to otherness. Caruth suggests that trauma reveals, at the heart of human subjectivity, “not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an *ethical* relation to the real.”<sup>19</sup> The effort to help the black community establish an ethical relation to its own historical and cultural trauma has always been at the heart of Morrison’s writing.

Morrison’s attempt to confront the effects of shame and trauma on the lives of African Americans in her novels demonstrates what Petar Ramadanovic calls an attempt to attain the futurity of trauma and identity. As Ramadanovic points out, trauma, in the last twenty years, has come to signify as **the structural trauma and the historical trauma**, which is thus often associated with the duality of the general/the particular, the textual/the political (2001: 110). In Ramadanovic’s view, however,

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<sup>19</sup> *Moses and Monotheism*.  
 Discussing Lacan’s analysis of Freud’s dream, in which the father dreams that his dead child addresses him and wakes up in fright, Caruth points out that this traumatic nightmare explains the way in which, in the father’s traumatic awakening, “the very identity of the father, as subject, is bound up with, or founded in, the death that he survives” (1996: 92). For Caruth, Lacan’s analysis suggests that through traumatic awakening the subject may form an ethical relation to the real, as trauma is related to the identity of the self and also one’s relation to others (1996: 92).

the point of representing trauma is not merely to recount the story of otherness, but to recognize and negotiate the relation generated by the duality of trauma: “We [should] define trauma studies as a discourse which points to and interrogates certain constitutive limitations” (2001: 113). For Ramadanovic, the purpose of describing and studying trauma is to attain a kind of futurity of trauma, memory, and identity: “[The] recognition of the radical disturbance (of constitutive elements) that is trauma seems to me,” he writes, “to be a prerequisite for negotiating the relation between the structural and historical, literary and factual aspects of a trauma” (2001: 115). Morrison’s *Beloved*, Ramadanovic argues, makes it clear that the futurity of trauma/memory/identity can be attained through confrontation with trauma and its limitations: “*Beloved* falls short of representing either the general (the slavery) or the particular (Margaret Garner), and manifests only the singular, the unique (Sethe, Beloved, Denver, etc.)” (2001: 114).

In his chapter on Caruth’s analysis in *Unclaimed Experience*, Ramadanovic formulates his own concept of the futurity of trauma by elaborating on Caruth’s concepts of trauma, entanglement, history and writing. For Caruth, what trauma, or the writing of trauma/history, has shown to us is that we are implicated in each other’s traumas/histories/identities.<sup>20</sup> As Ramadanovic argues, Caruth’s concept of entanglement is what makes “we” possible and helps situate the possibility of historical writing between two presents, the present present and the past present:

[W]riting is a historical act not because it belongs to the time when the text was written, nor because it lends itself

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<sup>20</sup> As Ramadanovic notes, “nation” is conceived of as a symptom of history in Caruth’s discussion of *Moses and Monotheism*, in which the term “nation” is used to address the Jews and mark a specific collective reaction to an underlying trauma (2001: 92). That is to say, Caruth is pointing out that the traumatic event marks the formation of a nation’s identity: “What appears to be the originary moment in which a nation comes into being . . . is, in fact, the nation’s origin in the sense that the nation forgets the event, and in acting it out, in departing, forms its current identity” (2001: 92).



to an immediate meaning, but because it makes subjectivity and experience possible . . . Writing thus confirms the historical trauma and makes it possible for the “we” to refine itself in the silence or in the break. And it is here that the “we” in and of trauma is born. (2001: 92-93)

In addition to the point that trauma helps us rethink what it is that makes us into who we are, Ramadanovic’s idea of “futuraity” points to the emergence of “a form of becoming” that may enact changes in the construction of such assumed “organisms” as nation, identity, culture, etc. Here he refers to Blanchot’s phrase—“to keep watch over absent meaning”—to illustrate the possibility of creating who we are through our taking up the absent meaning in the repetitions of trauma (Ramadanovic, 2001: 115).<sup>21</sup>

In *Tar Baby*, the legacy of black racial trauma complexly intersects with the values of the dominant culture and the conflicting values of the black community, and this legacy fails to enact an identity or a history shared by black people. The opposition between Son and Jadine reveals the lack of a shared cultural identity, one through which the black middle class and black working class might feel implicated in each other’s histories/traumas, as Caruth claims that the identity of “we” can be constituted through claiming traumatic experience. For Morrison’s predecessors slavery was the founding trauma of African American identity.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in *Tar Baby*, Morrison creates the myth of a blind

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<sup>21</sup> Ramadanovic claims that by “organism” he is referring not only to an individual but also a group formed through a particular history which is/was shared: “What I would like to propose,” Ramadanovic notes by referring to Blanchot’s absent meaning, “is that trauma, which leads to this absent meaning, has also changed what we mean by organism, culture, society, structure, history, and what we mean by meaning itself” (2001: 115).

<sup>22</sup> As Ron Eyerman points out, the formation of an African American identity is grounded in the relationship between the memory of cultural trauma and the making of collective identity: “the notion of an African American identity was articulated in the later decades of the nineteenth century by a generation of black intellectuals for whom slavery was a thing of the past, not the present. It was the memory of slavery and its representation through

race, descended from the Caribbean slaves, in order to address the trauma of slavery and its legacy in global terms. But for her, what seems just as traumatic as, if not more traumatic than, the long history of exploitation and oppression is the forgetting of this shared racial and cultural trauma. *L'Arbe de la Croix* epitomizes just such a traumatic condition: to be upwardly mobile is presumably to lose contact with one's cultural roots and lose one's black self in the flood, the "whitewash," of white values. As Morrison has indicated in her novels, one becomes less connected with one's racial identity and cultural heritage as one climbs higher in class terms.<sup>23</sup> The divided black community shows the negative impact of such upward social mobility and its accompanying cultural amnesia: whereas none of the black residents in *L'Arbe de la Croix* know anything about the island's colonial past, the myth of the blind race has been preserved by Therese and Gideon, the black laborers of the island, and later been passed on to the black vagabond Son. The myth imparted to Son by Therese functions as what Caruth calls "the voice of otherness," a voice through which Son is implicated in the trauma of his ancestors, and a black identity founded in slavery and its legacy is thus constructed. The "we" in and of trauma is born in such a process of reclaiming history/identity, as Ramadanovic notes. Morrison tends to show us in the novel how a shared black identity, established upon the blacks' "ancient properties," is rendered possible through reclaiming and bearing shared racial and cultural wounds.

If Jadine, as suggested in *Tar Baby*, represents the future of the race, how can our understanding of trauma—as a historical

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speech and art works that grounded African American identity. . . ." (2001: 2).

<sup>23</sup> As Kirby Farrell notes, in her "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison gives the supernatural "a defining place in black culture and defends it in class terms, suggesting that 'the press of upward social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge as possible' because the supernatural has been unfairly 'discredited' as superstition" (1998: 234).

wound that helps foster the collective identity of/as slaves as a founding trauma for the black pariah identity—account for Jadine’s yearning for escape from the medieval slave basket that she thinks has trapped Son? Doesn’t the escape from, forgetting of, trauma indicate something hopeful, a warding off of what Freud terms the death drive, the compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle?<sup>24</sup> So are we justified in arguing that Jadine’s scorning of Son’s Southern small-town romanticism can be viewed as an attempt to release oneself from the death drive, the drive to maintain a collective (traumatic) identity like that which Eloë embodies? In Jadine’s eyes, “Eloë was rotten and more boring than ever. A burnt-out place. There was no life there. Maybe a past but definitely no future . . .” (Morrison, 1987a: 259). In drastic contrast to Jadine’s Eloë as a backward black town going nowhere, Son’s Eloë gives the feeling of a close-bonded home and community where you may find “yellow houses with white doors which women opened and shouted ‘Come on in, you honey you!’ and the fat black ladies in white dress minding the pie table in the basement of the church” (Morrison, 1987a: 119). Through Son’s attachment to the black community and his reclaiming of the island’s colonial history, Morrison articulates the idea that one has to become a part of, become absorbed within one’s ancestral history in order to construct one’s individual and cultural identity. As Caruth claims in her formulation of constructing what we are in trauma, identity/history can be formed through our own recognition of and our own implication in each other’s traumas so we may form an ethical relation to **the real** bursting from the wound that cries out. In this sense what Ramadanovic calls the

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<sup>24</sup> For Freud, as Ramadanovic notes, “trauma, child’s play, transference, are all characterized by a compulsion to repeat ‘which overrides the pleasure principle’” (2001: 106). Freud’s text shows that the boy’s desire for the mother and his pleasure in her, as seen in the fort/da game, becomes complicated as another desire emerges in the very process of substitution. This desire that turns toward dissolution is conceived of by Freud as an example of the manifestation of the death drive (Ramadanovic, 2001: 107).

futurity of trauma, as well as the nature of trauma writing, should be thought of as an ethical departure from one's pathological entanglements with trauma through identification with a traumatic collective identity, as reflected in the dialectic relationship between Son and Jadine.

For Morrison, I would say, the futurity of trauma for the black individual and community is like the futurity of Eloe as an embodiment of black trauma. The distinction of the affect toward Eloe, as respectively embodied by Son and Jadine, is a reflection of the pathological entanglements that black subjects have to grapple with in their confrontations with the legacy of racial and cultural trauma. Thus, we may as well argue that the double consciousness of these cultural pariahs is an embodiment of the racial and cultural death drive. As embodied by Son's indulgence in the tradition of black patriarchy and by Jadine's escape from the burden of black trauma by hiding in the shelter of white fantasy, the legacy of black trauma and the compulsion to repeat or resist this legacy might lead to the death drive, to the embracing of a past with no future or a future with no past.<sup>25</sup> This death drive will never lead to the futurity of trauma, memory, and identity.

Just as Freud's concept of the death drive pins down the pathological dimension of trauma and desire, Lacan's way of conceptualizing trauma carves out an ontology of trauma that brings back the dimension of the pleasure principle and of *jouissance*, the unsymbolizable substance of the subject.<sup>26</sup> As Lacan

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<sup>25</sup> The nurturing power symbolized in the breast of the night women brings up the theme of limiting black women's role as nurturers, which, according to Butler-Evans, was viewed as the problematic aspect of Black Aesthetic discourse by some black feminists in the 1970s. As Manning Marable notes, "the nationalists' position [on Black Aesthetic discourse] regarding the primacy of Black family survival superseded the desires and needs of black women" (qtd. in Butler-Evans, 1989: 34).

<sup>26</sup> As Colette Soler states, the problem in Lacan's *Seminar XI* is to show "how the subject, as an effect of language and speech, is related to the living being . . . how the asubstantial subject of speech is linked with the only substance at stake in psychoanalysis, i.e. with what Lacan calls *jouissance*"

notes, it is in the form of the trauma that **the real** makes us aware of its existence.<sup>27</sup> For Lacan, trauma emerges not only as wounds that cry out their repressed narrative but as the *tuche*, the encounter with the real, which is beyond the automaton, the insistence of the signs (1981: 53). By addressing the two disparate conditions—the *tuche* and the automaton, Lacan is trying to make us aware of **the real** that always hides behind the automaton and is governed by the pleasure principle: “[T]he reality system, however far it is developed, leaves an essential part of what belongs to **the real** a prisoner in the toils of the pleasure principle” (1981: 55).<sup>28</sup> Lacan’s concept of the real qua trauma, as Ramadanovic argues, helps us to detect the ontological affinity between historical and structural trauma and, I would argue, it also lays bare the *jouissance* underlying the narrative of trauma:

Lacan’s distinction between imaginary, symbolic and real introduces a tripartite division into the thinking of the dualistic relationship between historical and structural trauma. . . . The real is both within and without structure. So, to equate the real with either the structural or the historical would be to reduce its function to the domain of symbolization, and to exclude that which remains unsymbolizable . . . for Lacan, historical and structural trauma necessarily collapse into each other because they are ontologically indistinguishable. (Ramadanovic, 2001: 113)

Through his account of the intricate relationship between symbolization and the unsymbolizable, Lacan illuminates the identity of the subject as the subject—divided between symbolization and the unsymbolizable—is split in the discrepancy

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(1995: 43-44).  
<sup>27</sup> As Lacan points out, it is in the form of trauma that the real first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis (1981: 55).  
<sup>28</sup> As Lacan states, “trauma is conceived as having necessarily been marked by the subjectifying homeostasis that orientates the whole functioning defined by the pleasure principle” (1981: 55).

between the subject of language and the subject of affect. This discrepancy, particularly the disturbance brought about by the subject of affect, helps explain why trauma is characterized as something repressed, pathological, elusive and pointing to certain knowledge that can only be pinned down retroactively. As Žižek notes:

The trauma is the Cause [qua the Real] which perturbs the smooth engine of symbolization and throws it off balance; it gives rise to an indelible inconsistency in the symbolic field; but for all that, the trauma has no existence of its own prior to symbolization; it remains an anamorphic entity that gains its consistency only in retrospect. (1995: 31)

Lacan's concept of trauma reminds us that the subject of affect, which emerges with the return of trauma, is revealed by the language of the subject but may not be recognized by the subject of language.

The trauma of being black, even if unrecognized by the black subject, is still haunting the way black people define themselves as blacks and as individuals. Jadine's struggle with her racial identity makes it clear that black skin itself has become an indelible mark of racial, historical, and cultural trauma and that the trauma of being black is inscribed into the black subject, as the indelible melanin on his/her skin, as an inextricable racial and historical burden. Throughout the novel, despite her desire to renounce what she calls "the medieval slave basket," Jadine is still latently struggling with the trauma of being unable to clearly define who she is. In the beginning, trauma emerges in the form of an antagonism between self identity and cultural identity, as embodied by Jadine's vague awareness of the antagonism between being black and being American and the antagonism between being black and being her. Putting aside her promising career in Paris and flying back to L'Arbe de la Croix, Jadine hopes to figure out why she feels so much anxiety about the marriage proposal put forward by her

white boyfriend during her stay in the island sanctuary. While wondering whether the woman her boyfriend wants to marry is “her” or “a black girl,” she is also disturbed by the image of the yellow clad African woman she met in Paris. The encounter with the African woman, as Trudier Harris argues, brings up “the issue of blackness” which, I would say, is intertwined with the problem of assuming whiteness, a problem embodied by Jadine’s renunciation of the blackness and her embrace of the American dream (1991: 132). For Harris, Jadine is “the little ‘white’ girl who has forgotten that she is black” and who “can return to her ‘whiteness’ only by suppressing that blackness forever” (1991: 134-135). In this view, Jadine’s alienation from black roots, as seen in her rejection of a spiritual affinity with the black community in Eloë, not only reveals her wishes to forsake the racial burden of preserving the value of ancient black properties and embrace her freedom of being a modern woman; it also exposes the reality of a black identity which is shaped by the fantasy of white culture and the subject’s desire to enjoy the privileges made available to him/her. But the **trauma** of being black, which emerges in Jadine’s struggle with the way of defining who she is, reveals the unconscious truth of the subject. This truth, as seen in Jadine’s struggle, always points back to the issue of blackness, the issue of black authenticity, which is always already entangled with black trauma—the legacy of slavery and racism. As is embedded in Jadine’s paranoid consciousness of her blackness, the trauma of being black is the trauma of being a cultural pariah but not wanting to be one.

In *Tar Baby*, the return of black trauma also exposes the cultural symptoms, or what Ewa Ponowska Ziarek calls “the irreconcilable alterity” in racial/cultural relations (2001: 118), which, I would say, are caused by both the historical and fundamental antagonisms between blacks and whites. The tension between the black intruder Son and the white residents of L’Arbe de la Croix clearly epitomizes the irreconcilable alterity between blacks and whites. The rapist identity imposed on Son by Jadine

and Margaret is an indication that shows the white paranoid fantasy of the black other and points to the legacy of the black rapist myth—the trauma of being treated and rated as an inferior other. The origin of the myth can be dated back to the time during Reconstruction when white people insisted on maintaining the political economy of patriarchy and racism.<sup>29</sup> As Tommy Lott points out, the whites' underlying assumption was that “black men are prone to rape because black people as a racial group are bestial” (1999: 28).

The construction of black bestiality and inferiority, as suggested in *Tar Baby*, is not only an indication of historicized (traumatized) racial relation but emerges as **the real** of racial antagonism, the irreconcilable alterity in racial relations, which will always, as Žižek argues, remain in the symbolic order as “a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality” (1989: 44). This paranoid construction of blackness is another illustration of black trauma, as we see that Son's blackness, looked at through the white lens, is not only associated with the myth of the black rapist but aligned with the Negro-ape metaphor.<sup>30</sup> This is the metaphor used by Margaret, the white hostess of L'Arbe de la Croix, to express the threat she senses posed by Son's presence in their “peaceful”

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<sup>29</sup> According to Tommy Lott, in 1894 Frederick Douglass published as a pamphlet his lecture on lynching, in which he argued that the basic aim of lynching was disenfranchisement and attempted to expose “the political motive underlying this practice by deconstructing the claim made by apologists that lynching was necessary because white women in the south were menaced by black rapists” (1999: 28). Lott points out that Douglass's account of the social and political function of the rape accusation was deeply indebted to the view presented by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in 1892, who proposed that lynching should be understood in terms of the political economy of patriarchy and racism.

<sup>30</sup> As Lott notes, the use of ape images symbolically to represent black people, which is common in American culture, is an indication of xenophobia and the persistence of racist practice. According to Lott, studies have showed that “the association of apes with black people in Western discourse was facilitated by the European discovery of apes and the continent of Africa at about the same time” (1999: 7).



world: “He looked like a gorilla” (Morrison, 1987a: 129). This is also the metaphor which makes Jadine’s neck tingle and triggers the sense of a shared group identity that Jadine is not aware of, as she defends Son’s innocence and the innocence of his racial identity in her response to Margaret’s gorilla description: “If he’d been white we would still have been scared” (1987a: 129). Jadine’s defense of Son’s blackness reveals the black subject’s attempt, pathological as it is, to fight against the degradation of blackness embedded in the racist discourse of the rapist myth and the ape metaphor, which “provide a biological justification of anti-black racism” and supply “a convenient rationale for the ongoing subordination of black people” (Lott, 1999: 7). From the psychoanalytic perspective, Margaret’s fear, Jadine’s defensive act, and the implicit tension between Margaret and Jadine all point to what Lacan calls the real of *jouissance*. The emergence of this psychic real is not only an indication of the racial and historical real of black trauma but the real of black and white relation, the inassimilable antagonism that is not only brought about by racial/cultural difference but can be perpetuated by historical trauma.

The emergence of black trauma, as represented in the pathological form of racial confrontations in *Tar Baby*, carries with it the real of the traumatized subject and that of traumatized racial relations, which tends to be concealed by the fantasy of the ideological Other and the desiring mode of the subject. As Žižek notes, “Fantasy conceals the fact that the Other, the symbolic order, is structured around some traumatic impossibility, around something which cannot be symbolized—i.e. the real of *jouissance*: through fantasy, *jouissance* is domesticated, ‘gentrified’” (1989: 123). Before the intrusion of Son, the residents of L’Arbe de la Croix, white and black, maintain their fantasy world where all antagonisms are domesticated by the power of a well-kept order, like the kind of power which Mr. Street has imposed upon his well-maintained green house and his island sanctuary. Their sense of reality is built upon such a fantasy world, one in which

Margaret never has to face her past history of mental breakdowns and her crime of abusing her only boy, and in which black employees can feel equal to their white employer and superior to the black islanders. The cultural symptoms triggered by Son's appearance, however, expose the gap between the *jouissance* underlying racial antagonism and the ideological fantasy which tends to domesticate such *jouissance*. Hence on the one hand we see that the white host, Mr. Street, treats the black stranger Son as a son-like friend as if the fundamental racial antagonism could be removed; on the other, Margaret's fear of Son's alleged aggressivity and Jadine's anguish over the Negro-ape metaphor imposed on blackness demonstrate the impossibility of removing such antagonism, and yet their "peaceful" time together shows the working of the dominant ideological fantasy, where the *jouissance* of racial, historical and cultural antagonisms are domesticated and gentrified through the fantasy of "all-were-born-equal." As also can be seen through Margaret's use of race-inflected rhetoric and Mr. Street's latent sense of superiority over his black servants, the fantasy of treating the racial other as one's equal, in which the spirit of equality and brotherhood is paradoxically mixed with the myth of white supremacy, has domesticated the unsymbolized *jouissance*. The latent form of racial antagonism between Mr. Street and his black employees shows that the real of *jouissance* can be seen as the irreconcilable alterity that exists in between the subject and its social/racial others. The reality of racial antagonism, as is often embodied in the subject's paranoid constructions of self and social/racial others, not only reveals the irreconcilable alterity that is constitutive of the subject and social relations but also points to the legacy of centuries of racial confrontations.

In representing black trauma in ways that relate to the racial, historical, and psychic real, Morrison suggests the possibility of constructing an authentic self through recognizing and reclaiming the burden of the real that can only be discovered in trauma. As Žižek proposes in his concept of "traversing the social fantasy," through the encounter with the (traumatic) real of the psychic and

the social, the subject may get to recognize and thus confront the inconsistency—the traumatic lack, the fundamental antagonism—in the Other and in the subject him/herself.<sup>31</sup> This explains what the characters in *L'Arbe de la Croix* are going through in their encounters with the real of a traumatized (an alienated) world. Confronting the accusation of rape calmly, Son demonstrates the possibility of traversing the white fantasy directed toward the racial Other and transcending the haunting power of the racist trauma, as it emerges with white people's paranoid construction of their racial Other. With the emergence of the trauma triggered by Son's presence, the well-balanced, seemingly non-traumatized reality constructed through the fantasy of *L'Arbe de la Croix* crashes. It is in this moment that the black servants, Sydney and Ondine, no longer indulge themselves in their prideful sense of being Philadelphia Negroes and finally start confronting the repressed truth that they have nowhere to go now that they have no jobs. But the tar baby Jadine would rather hold onto the fantasy of being free and happy, through which she attempts to flee her entanglement in black trauma and embrace the dream of being unbound by cultural legacies.

The trauma of being black, however, may still haunt the tar baby, forcing the black subject to confront her blackness and negotiate the permanent condition of the unresolved double consciousness: "Sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me," as Jadine bemoans the black condition that is inextricably imprinted

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<sup>31</sup> Žižek states: "The notion of social fantasy is therefore a necessary counterpart to the concept of antagonism: fantasy is precisely the way the antagonistic fissure is masked. In other words, *fantasy is a means of an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance*. The thesis of Laclau and Mouffe that 'Society doesn't exist,' . . . implies that every process of identification conferring on us a fixed socio-symbolic identity is ultimately doomed to fail. The function of ideological fantasy is to mask this inconsistency, the fact that 'Society doesn't exist,' and thus to compensate us for the failed identification" (1989: 126-127).

on her body (Morrison, 1987a: 48).<sup>32</sup> What we see through the neurotic symptoms of this dream-driven, trauma-ridden tar baby identity is not only the socio-historical real of the black condition but also the psychic real of whiteness and blackness. From the psychoanalytic perspective, the only way for the cultural pariah Jadine to redeem herself from the slave basket is to intervene into what I would call **the real of identity** by acknowledging the ideological and yet libidinal economy of identity formation and the social, historical, and psychic entanglements underlying the subject's pathological constructions of self and otherness.

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<sup>32</sup> As Denise Heinze notes, "Morrison's successful career appears to have transcended the 'permanent condition' of double consciousness that afflicts her fictional characters" (1993: 10).

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## 文化賤民的雙重意識—— 從摩里森《黑寶寶》中看幻想、創傷與 黑色認同問題

邵毓娟

### 摘 要

本篇論文將借助學者齊傑克 (Slavoj Žižek) 所提出的意識形態幻想框架、學者卡路斯 (Cathy Caruth) 與拉馬丹維奇 (Petar Ramadanovic) 對創傷提出的倫理層面的討論，來分析摩里森作品《黑寶寶》中的黑色認同問題。論文內容分為三個部份：首先討論《黑寶寶》中白人文化意識形態對黑人中產階級知識份子形塑自我與文化身份的影響，藉由精神分析的幻想框架與主體欲望結構等觀念來剖析摩里森所呈現的「黑色皮膚、白色自我」的異化問題。第二部份分析文化賤民的雙重意識並討論摩里森的雙重視野 (double vision)——黑色身份的建構必須同時納入過去與未來、個體與社群之間連結的可能性。第三部份探討小說中浮現的主體身份重建與歷史創傷之間的糾結。摩里森對於黑色創傷的處理除了展現出如學者卡路斯所提出的主體經由創傷而與真實層建立倫理關係，真實層代表著黑色身份所承載 (或不願承載) 的歷史／文化身份 (奴隸／低等／落後等身份)。本篇論文強調，精神分析的架構深化我們對摩里森作品中所暴露的文化賤民雙重意識 (擺盪在白色誘惑與黑色創傷之間) 黑色身份 (authenticity) 的理解與思考。

**關鍵詞：**雙重意識、幻想、身份屬性、《黑寶寶》、創傷