

**T. C.**  
**ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY**  
**IN NELLA LARSEN'S PASSING AND TONI MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE**

**THESIS**  
**BIRDOST MOHAMMED KARIM KARIM**

**Department of English Language and Literature**  
**English Language and Literature Program**

**Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gillian ALBAN**

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T.C.  
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*This thesis is dedicated to those who deal with human beings equally and regardless of the racial, social, religious and cultural diversity.*

## **FOREWORD**

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## NELLA LARSEN'IN GEÇİŞ VE TONI MORRISON'UN EN MAVİ GÖZ ESERLERİNDE KİMLİK BUNALIMI

### ÖZET

Nella Larsen'in *Geçiş* ve Toni Morrison'un *En Mavi Göz* eserlerinde siyah karakterler kimliklerini nasıl inşa eder. Irkçılık, beyaz bir toplumda yaşayan siyahlar üzerinde her zaman olumsuz etkiler bırakmış, onların ya kendilerinden ya beyazlardan nefret etmelerine sebep olmuştur. Bu çalışma, yukarıdaki sorulara cevap verme çabasında olup, siyah karakterlerin kimlik oluşumundaki motivasyonlarını araştırmaktadır. Tez, W.E.B tarafından ortaya konulan çifte bilinç teorisinin ışığında incelenmektedir. Du Bois, aynı zamanda bu çifte bilinç teorisinin, siyah karakterlerin ırksal kimlik yapılanmasında oynadığı role değinir. Ben, bu çalışmada, *Geçiş* eserindeki siyah karakterler Clare ve Irene ve *En Mavi Göz* romanındaki Pecola'nın, baskın olan beyaz kültürün etkisi altında kendilerine bir kimlik edinme çabasını ve siyah kültürü reddederek bu ikili bilince sahip olduklarını savunmaktayım. Bu ikilik, hayatlarında engeller oluşturmakta, çünkü kendi özgün kimliklerinin yanı sıra, beyaz topluluk tarafından da kabul görmek için başka bir kimlik daha inşa etmeleri gerekmektedir. Siyahlar çifte bilince tutunarak, kendilerine beyazların gözünden bakarlar. Oysa ırkçılığın yarattığı kötü durum, *Geçiş*'de Brian ve *En Mavi Göz*'de Claudia karakterlerini reddetmeye zorlar ve beyaz topluluğa karşı bir çeşit nefret beslemelerine neden olur. Irene, Clare ve Pecola'nın aksine onlar siyah kimliklerini ve değerlerini koruma eğilimi ve gayreti içindedirler. Baskın, beyaz kültüre ait ne varsa reddederler. Baskın kültür iki romandaki siyah karakterlerin de acı çekmesine ve kendilerini tanımlamalarında zorluklar yaşamalarına neden olur. İki romanda da çifte bilince tutunanlar, kendi standartlarını karşılamadıkça onları fark etmeyen beyaz toplum tarafından fena halde kabul edilme ihtiyacı duyarlar. İki eserde de siyah topluluk korkunç bir durumdadır ve kendilerinin ikinci sınıf olduğuna inanan beyazların yararına çalışmaları beklenir. *Geçiş*'de Irene siyah topluluğun içinde huzur ve güven bulamaz ve New York'da yaşamakta ısrarlıdır, diğer yandan sadece çok çalışması beklenen Clare siyah bir hizmetçi olarak yaşadığı zor hayattan kaçamayacak kadar beceriksiz olduğunu düşünür ve kendine beyaz bir kadın maskesi takınır. *En Mavi Göz*'de Pecola, beyaz toplumun güzellik standartlarına karşılık gelen mavi gözlere sahip olma isteğindedir fakat bu durum her iki topluluk tarafından da reddedilmesine sebep olur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Nella Larsen, Toni Morrison, Çifte Bilinç, Irksal Kimlik Yapılanması, Geçiş, En Mavi Göz.*

## THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

### IN NELLA LARSEN'S PASSING AND TONI MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE

#### ABSTRACT

How do the black characters build their identities in Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*? The practice of racism has always left negative impacts on the colored and black people in white societies leading them either to self-loath or detesting the white culture. This study is an attempt to provide an answer for the above question and explores what motivates the black characters in the formation of their identities. The thesis will be conducted under the light of double consciousness theory put forward by W.E.B. Du Bois and it also looks at how this double consciousness plays a role in constructing the black characters' racial identities. In this study, I argue that black characters, Clare and Irene in *Passing* and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, make attempts to establish their identities under the influence of the dominant white culture and reject their black ones; thus, they hold double identities. This twoness creates hurdles to their lives because beside their original identity, they should strive to build another one so as to be recognized in the white society. Holding double consciousness, the black characters look at themselves through the lens of the white people. On the contrary, the plight of racism makes Brian in *Passing* and Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* reject and create a sort of abhorrence towards the white culture. In contrast to Irene, Clare and Pecola, they are inclined to and endeavor to preserve their black identities and black community values, meanwhile they refute everything belonging to the dominant social white culture. The dominant culture causes the black characters of both novels to suffer and struggle to identify themselves. The holders of double consciousness in both novels are terribly in need of recognition in the white society, which does not recognize them unless they obtain the standards set up by the white dominant culture. The black community in both novels is in a terrible situation, and the black characters are expected to act and work in favor of the white society interests, which look at the black characters as secondary people. In *Passing*, Irene cannot find security and pleasure in the black community; therefore, she feels comfortable and insists on living in New York; furthermore, Clare concludes that she is incompetent of escaping her arduous life as a black servant, who is expected to only work hard, as a result she disguises herself as a white woman. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is rejected in both her community and white society due to her blackness, and this results in her striving to beautify herself by attempting to attain two blue eyes, one of the white standards of beauty.

**Keywords:** *Nella Larsen, Toni Morrison, Double Consciousness, Racial Identity Construction, Passing, The Bluest Eye.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The major goal of this study is to explore the construction of racial identity and scrutinizing the idea of double consciousness proposed by Du Bois through examining Irene and Clare in Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Pecola, Claudia and Pauline in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Throughout the investigation, by identity I mean racial identity, in other words how the black characters construct their racial identities. Therefore, wherever in my study the word identity is referred to, its use is constrained to only race. Identity crisis has always been a burning issue for the black people particularly in the white society which was always more powerful than the black community. The white culture value is so prominent that it drives the black people into self-rejection as Pia Kohler elucidates that the worth structures of the principal, white culture is partly responsible to the trouble, which is to force some characters to denigrate their African-American tradition and hearten them to crave for the White's unattainable capitalist and patriarchal worth (2006, p. 20). In both novels, the importance of white society plays a pivotal role in building the black characters' racial identities.

Du Bois actually delineates the political situation of the modern era stating that "the color line" is the trouble of 20<sup>th</sup> century (1989, p. 1). These two novels, which I investigate, have been written in two dissimilar periods of twentieth century, *Passing* in 1929 and *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. I intend to defend the argument that between the two periods no essential difference and improvement took place over the Negroes' racial issues as the black characters' of both novels suffer from the same plight of racism and strive to achieve almost the same goal, which is to turn into white. This is the major factor behind choosing these two works. It is a fact that these two texts were written by two women writers, Nella Larsen and Toni Morrison; thus, the reader of this study might wonder what lies behind evading gender issues. I have considered that dealing with gender issues is another separate topic of study, and I chiefly endeavor to look at race in the two works. In black feminism, both issues have been tackled and are dealt with together. If a white woman

suffers once due to her femininity, then a black woman suffers twice, once owing to her blackness and another because of her gender. Likewise Gurleen Grewal claims that if a universal womanly subject has the problem of gender, then the dark-skinned-females have racial problems in addition to their gender ones. They have to try to protect their femininity and cover their skin colour (1998, p. 26). In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola as a black girl is twice a victim. First, she suffers from racism due to her blackness, and secondly she is raped by her father. Thus, she suffers from both her race and her being female.

Larsen and Morrison in their works strive to unveil the Negroes' sufferings and that how the superior culture value is embraced by the black characters. In both works, the black community is seen as inferior to the white society. Racial discrimination leads most of the black characters of both novels to lose their racial pride as well as black values and commence to get fascinated in the white culture; thus, they become outcasts in a society dominated by Whites. If the agony of racism does not make a black person reject the self, then it paves the way for him/her to start detesting the white community. In *Passing*, Brian dislikes to live in New York because he is offended by racism; furthermore, in *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia holds racial pride and hates the Whites for their racist perspectives towards black community. To put it simply, racial discrimination makes black people hate either the self or the Whites.

The first chapter of the study is dedicated to the theoretical background of the study covering these topics: racial identity, black identity, the concept of passing, Harlem Renaissance, identity in post-colonialism and double-consciousness. The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of Larsen's *Passing*. Chapter three is an attempt to analyse Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and the last chapter covers a comparison between the two novels and provides a conclusion.

## **1.1 Racial Identity**

There are diverse definitions and descriptions of racial identity by various critics, for instance Max Weber believes that racial classes are the human divisions holding shared opinion concerning their racial origin due to the resemblance of bodily kind and customs or due to their past of colonization or resettlement; this idea has to carry its significance

for the spread of group creation; on the contrary, the existence or nonexistence of blood relationship is not vital (qtd. in Smith and Hutchinson, 1996, p. 35). Accordingly, those who hold the same skin colour and customs belong to the same race, and their viewpoints are the same regarding their origins.

According to Herbert W. Harris, the formation of ethnicity and racial group in the United States are sophisticated and hard to identify and formulate. Researchers are inconstant in their connotation making these notions principally difficult to comprehend. In addition to the perplexity, ethnic and race-related identity exceeds usual categories and has turned to be a key topic in psychology, literary works, theology, philosophy, and many other regulations (1995, p. 2). Race is formed out of human beings' external characteristics as Paul R. Spickard also claims that in biological terms, race is derived from someone's outer features, "gene pools and character values" (1992, p. 14). The determination of someone's racial identity through bodily attributes paved the way for the white people to rank the races according to their interests. Similarly, Employing these characteristics as distinctive characteristics, Spickard believes that Europeans put people into groups hierarchically by bodily aptitude and ethical value in a way Caucasians stood first, subsequently came Asians and Native Americans, and Africans stood last on the race-related ranking (1992, p. 16). Consequently, it was people's outer features which determined a race's ranking.

Kerry Ann Rockquemore and David L. Brunnsma believe that bodily appearance is essential to the growth of racial identity since human beings' corporal bodies are a collection of cultural denotations providing others with fundamental information and encourage particular understandings (2002, p. 340). Accordingly the body delineates someone's cultural heritage and unveils their racial details. Likewise, according to Omi and Winant, race is irrelevant to a fact based on genes; however, it refers to the symbolic connotations which are tied to bodily dissimilarities (qtd. in Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002, p. 340). Therefore, bodily features, for instance the colour of skin, determine membership in racial groups and stress the way appearances simultaneously demonstrates someone's identity (Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002, p. 340). Accordingly, a person's physical appearance tells his or her identity. Field, Tizard and Phoenix declare that the colour of skin has been frequently attached to the growth of a singular black racial identity; furthermore, Brown claims that researchers have discovered that the darker a biracial

person's skin is, the more probably he/she takes on a singular black identity (qtd. in Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002, p. 340). As a result, only the completely white people are far from adopting black identity.

Rockquemore and Brunnsma further delineate that the colour of skin is possibly conceptualized as a social and individual feature. Actors identify the colour of their skin, but they understand their appearance via others' lens. Usually, people's racial identity and appearance are interrelated. There are biracial individuals in an American scheme of cultural coding which enforces a distinctively dichotomous white and non-white diagram of racial classification; thus, appearances constrict their identity choices (2002, p. 340). In both novels, the same stance can be found, and skin colour tells the characters' racial identity. Ethnic identity appears mostly to be a circle wherein individuals classify others frequently on the base of skin colour. The employment of skin colour is a useful way for an individual and groups of people to keep themselves away from those they deem dissimilar from themselves.

By the passage of time the identification of racial identity altered. Janet E. Helms claims that nowadays the manifestations of racial identity within the framework of literature and theory are talked over not in biological expressions, which possibly denote a racist viewpoint, but as a social creation, which is relevant to a denotation of group or joint identity founded on one's view that he or she holds common inheritance with a certain racial category (1993, p. 3). Thus, racial identity is a superficial demonstration hinging on what humans are similar to yet has bottomless connotations concerning how humans are dealt with. Helms explicates that racial identity theory advances out of the custom of treating race as a socio-political and cultural creation; furthermore, ethnic divisions are presumed not to be biological facts rather socio-political and financial conveniences wherein socially identified inclusion decisive factors establish membership (1995 p. 181). This demonstrates that races are not discrete in biological terms. Consequently, I deduce that the bodily characteristics mostly used to describe racial categories do not weigh up any importance other than to propose social facts.

## 1.2 Black Identity

Thomas Parham illustrates the phases of racial identity growth as a permanent, constant nonstop process for blacks. He hypothesizes that individuals experience cross feelings about whites and enlarge a constructive black frame. Imaginatively, this results in a practical understanding of someone's racial identity as well as bicultural victory (1989). Parham combines black identity openly to white individuals, and the combining process helps unconscious individual black identity holders to be conscious racially. This model evidently explains that when blacks brush up against white society and others' harmful differential dealings, feelings of exclusion and awareness of race-related identity are precipitated. Furthermore, the model demonstrates a transformation from racial identity unconsciousness to ethnic identity consciousness.

Accordingly, the self-loathe model illustrates black ethnic identity as a more or less inflexible and static notion. There are stage models, which is a paradigm expanding Black identity from the self-rejection model to an identity going through a chain of sequential stages as an individual response to social, environmental forces and situations labeled as the Nigrescence model. According to N. Chabani Manganyi, the body occupies an essential position in being since he presumes that people make approaches to life via their superficial being. In this respect, he claims, "[t]he body is a movement inwards and outwards" (1973, p. 6). To put it in different words, the body plays an essential role in human beings' lives selecting their life styles.

Leading life with objects; one depicts black identity as wishing to become white (Manganyi, 1973, p. 31). Consequently, Black individuals internalizing white principles possibly imitate Whites through having aspirations for material belongings while what is different for them lies in the fact that they are principally deprived of the financial means of making such ambitions come true. Black individuals commence to judge themselves in accordance with the things they own. This act demonstrates Manganyi's fascination in the examination of "false consciousness", a state whereby black individuals take on a white identity and, therefore, become estranged from the self as well as their own group. The absorption of white society renders a fake identity to the black person, who is compelled to replace their African society with a White culture (Manganyi, 1973, p. 35).

Additionally, the replacement is asymmetrical because it fails to produce what it pledges. While embracing the white society, the black individual is duped by the culture which imposes a lower status upon them.

Barbara Burlison Mooney investigates the thought that the African- American's post-Civil War and pre-Civil Rights movement obliged them to abide by a white prevailing society's outlook of the world. Mooney argues that African-Americans were under pressure to do their best to be neat and tidy so that the white culture could offer them preference. The nasty reality is that a lot of white individuals have thought and maintain to think that black people to some extent hold deficiency in living in a clean way metaphorically or literally (2002, p. 48). African-Americans took on a strategy of accurate cleanness so as to oppose to this terrible misperception. Mooney claims that "orderly, enlightened, domestic environment" helps the African American deserve recognition and freedom in American social cultures, "churches, and politics" (2002, p. 49). Accordingly, the black people should attempt to prove that it is only misunderstanding by sticking to neatness. Following that strategy, the black people probably approach a sort of fair treatment.

Considerably, however, Mooney proposes that apart from the principal society, the people from the African-American communities put pressure on African-Americans, for instance Mooney makes reference to W. E. B. Du Bois' endeavour to inspire the architectural improvement of his race through two depictions, before and after what the wealthy and highly regarded black individuals' dwelling might and has to be like. Mooney claims that Du Bois contradicts the picture of a dilapidated hut entitled "The Old Cabin with a picture of the mansion of J. W. Sanford in Memphis, Tennessee" (2002, p. 57). The point is possibly apparent that prosperity may be reached through the acceptance of the architectural iconography of the white society. A lot of Morrison's novels deliberately elevate this vision of what African-American houses should become. Many of the African- American houses in Morrison's novels like *The Bluest Eye* decidedly bear resemblance to cabins and are definitely untidy and dirty.

It is not only completely black people who are deemed as black identity holders but also biracial ones are considered as so. When it comes to biracial people, they have always been considered as black identity holders. Likewise, Davis explains that biracial

individuals have been presumed to take up a black identity. This supposition was grounded at the time of slavery when raping black female slaves was widespread; moreover, their biracial children increased the affluence of the slave's parent or master (qtd. in Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002, p. 337). The mere identity choice for biracial individuals was the singular black identity. This social norm was so intensely rooted that it was not even imagined as a choice, and no one would have thought of another racial identity (Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002, p. 337). Likewise, Maria Root labels the singular black choice a biracial, someone's approval of the identity which society decides upon (qtd. in Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002, p. 337). Despite the fact that the closeness rate of their skin colour to blackness is possibly equal to its closeness to whiteness, there is no choice for the biracial people but black identity.

### **1.3 The Concept of Passing**

Passing is fundamentally associated with identity politics and examines identity ontology. According to Gayle Wald, several reviewers assert that passing deconstructs identity whereas others state that it underlines the simultaneous unsteadiness as well as instrumentality of identity types (2000, p. 52). Their readings are undoubtedly established on their description of identity itself. The practice of passing leads the passer's original identity to decline and makes them appear in another identity which is not constructed in accordance with their racial background.

Traditional understandings of racial passing, which is dependent upon modernist concept of unchanging and stable identity, emphasize that passing is to fake one's genuine identity. According to Samira Kawash, the interpretations explain that passing has things to do just with appearance and that the authentic identities underlying the misleading appearance stay intact (1997, p. 126). Likewise, Carl Van Thompson points out that passers endeavour to render their blackness unseen through mimicking "white mannerism" constantly (2004, p. 15-16). In accordance with his views, those "impostors," putting on "the mask of whiteness," are "self-exiled within whiteness"; furthermore, they assent to an "unstable identity" (2004, p. 16). He adds that passing eventually leads to self-obliteration (2004, p. 18). Likewise, Jacquelyn McLendon proposes that the act of passing is possibly deemed

as a type of “pretense or disguise” leading to identity disappearance and submission. Passing provides the passer with impermanence, realization anxiety and loss of place within a cultural and racial society (1995, p. 96-98). Accordingly the passer loses his or her original identity and the self.

This traditional interpretation of passing depends on modernist notion of identity or as Walter Benn Michaels labels it, on “identity essentialism”. Benn Michaels puts forward that cultural pluralists stick to identity superiority since in accordance with them, “instead of who we are being constituted but what we do, what we do is justified by who we are” (1995, p. 140). Modernism, which is in theory reliant on cultural pluralism, turns identity into “an object of *cathexis*” and into something which may be found or lost, protected or given up by “*deriving* one’s beliefs and practices *from* one’s cultural identity instead of *equating* one’s beliefs and practices *with* one’s cultural identity” (Benn Michaels, 1995, p. 141). The advocates of Cultural pluralism assume inconsistency between the passer’s authentic racial identity as well as their new supposed one. Therefore, Kathleen Pfeiffer believes that a lot of passing stories stress “the experience of disconnect” between a character’s internal identity, usually black, as well as his or her external one, apparently white (2003, p. 3). Doing so, a great number of black authors unavoidably associate themselves with Harlem essentialism, propelled by the devotion to the cultural modernist pluralist concept of identity.

Davis claims that in *Passing*, Larsen, who backs an individual identity rather than the “general objective of the New Negro Renaissance,” which is “the forging of racial identity”, disassociates herself with the principles of the Renaissance by her handling of the notion of identity as well as passing (1994, p. 242). Both Harlem Renaissance essentialism and white racial essentialism align a personal identity with the entire race or culture. However, this interpretation is deficient in considering personal identity features. Passing produces individuation because it presents the individual with an opportunity to identify himself or herself independently and refute the imposed and inborn features. Pfeiffer maintains that the passer is able to blatantly sense “the urgings of self-reliant individualism” to dispose of a historically identified identity and to gain “a freer and fuller expression of selfhood” (2003, p. 6).



## 1.4 Harlem Renaissance and Racial Essentialism

During the Harlem Renaissance, literature, black culture and art blossomed, and a clear pride in blackness as well as a racial awareness were formed; thus, it was in favour of black community. Richard Gray maintains that the Harlem Renaissance was a blossoming African-American cultural movement in the 1920s. The term Harlem indicates the Harlem district of New York city, and renaissance signifies rebirth; thus, it connotes the cultural, political, artistic, musical and literary rebirth of African-American literature. The movement attempted to raise the voice of African-Americans and make others hear them. Renaissance artists were committed to demonstrate a respectable image of African-Americans to the white society (2004, p. 510).

According to Donald Hall, race refers to the approaches according to which physiological features are tied to distinctions “in social history (such as region of original habitation)” to differentiate and name groups of people (2004, p. 265-66). Nevertheless, the official meaning of race in the United States in the 1920s is related to biology and has nothing to do with either “social history,” or culture. The Supreme Court stated in its verdict in *1896 Plessy v. Ferguson* that someone holding one-eighth Negro heritage would be officially categorized as Negro. The verdict was hinged on “a commitment to the biology of race” (Benn Michaels, 1995, p. 130). The essentialist judgment which shrank race to only a drop of blood meaninglessly enlarged this drop to specify the chief “essential” border between races, particularly between Whites and Blacks. To express it simply, depending on the Supreme Court verdict, the all-white judges made the colour line essential as the races were measured innately dissimilar from one another. The racial essentialism combines racial identity with outer physical characteristics. Larsen strictly criticises these essentialist ideas of race because she portrays black women passing for white, and their corporal looks fail to tell their races. As a result, their skin colour does not identify them. Larsen mocks the “blood tells” hypothesis with Irene’s self-assurance in her appearance, not exposing her race. The rule of one-drop is verified to be incompetent as no one is able to discover that blood drop in the passer’s body at all. Hence the one-drop rule sketches the colour line merely to deny the race by racial passing, which, Elaine Ginsberg asserts, propels reexamination of “the cultural logic” that the exterior part is the place of “identic

intelligibility” (1996, p. 4). Jack in *Passing* and advocates of the one-drop rule suppose that “the black blood” creates dissimilarity to an individual’s inherent identity, even if the dissimilarity is unseen (Benn Michaels, 1995, p. 130). Larsen deconstructs this fabricated concept by portraying Clare, who is lawfully classified as a Negro, but who does not hold Negro features which may cause even a little doubt in Jack.

In confrontation with racial essentialism, which sees races as separate and natural division in the human type hinged on evident physical dissimilarities, “cultural pluralism,” phrased by Horace Kallen, or “American cultural nationalism” appeared as an outcome of the anthropological declaration saying that human beings are not explicit, evidently distinguished and biologically different groups (American Anthropological Association, 2004, p. 97). Walter Benn Michaels asserts that “two significant changes in racial sense happened, one of them demonstrated ‘alien’ races as distinctive not as inferior, and the other commenced to embody their difference in relation with culture not politics (1995, p. 11). In accordance with that viewpoint, each type of identity had its distinctive attributes, and the term uniqueness substituted racial superiority and inferiority. And also culture replaced race. The term of racial identity was converted into the concept of cultural identity by Franz Boas, who is deemed as the founder of American anthropology. Censuring the “scientific” racial discrimination with his investigations in anthropometry, Boas rebutted the essentialist idea of describing human actions biologically. Boas similar to George Hutchinson claims that the construction of racial groups is not a biological occurrence but a social one (qtd in Hutchinson, 1995, p. 65).

Boas adds that between Culture and race, Culture, which historical conditions and social experiences form, has to be advanced and enjoyed so as to shun the unfairness coming from the essentialist racial discourse (qtd. in Hutchinson, 1995, p. 70). To put it blatantly, the employment of culture annihilates the unequal behavior done towards a certain race and the superiority of a particular race. Therefore, at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “cultural pluralism”, according to which the notion of culture substitutes spirit and blood as the effective type of group identity, emerged with Boas’ Impact (Hutchinson, 1995, p. 78). As its name mentions, cultural pluralism connotes various cultures, and Horace Kallen explains “cultural pluralism” as “the right to be different” (qtd. in Hutchinson, 1995, p. 85). The idea is that not only one dominant culture is in existence, but there are different

cultures which hold their distinctive features. Alain Locke maintained that he was a human; furthermore, his skin colour should not cause any difference. However, Boas explains for Locke that it was necessary for the colour to be recognized, enjoyed and also to cause a difference (qtd. in Hutchinson, 1995, p. 85). Hinging on cultural pluralism, every culture possessed its own unique attributes. By laying stress on and boasting about the “difference”, cultural pluralism declines a “hierarchical ranking of the races” (Benn Michaels, 1995, p. 65). Thus, its motto was “Difference Not Inferiority” ((Benn Michaels, 1995, p. 63). Racial pride was formed during that time, and owning a black race was not embarrassment anymore.

Therefore, cultural pluralism was in opposition to the principles of “[p]rogressive assimilationism,” “melting-pot” and the scheme of “Americanization,” classifying races “by degree” rather than “by kind” (Benn Michaels, 1995, p. 66). This indicates that the idea of the variety of cultures eradicates the racial hierarchies and addresses racial types. He further describes the difference and says that the commitment to white sovereignty shows that races should be dissimilar from one another merely to the extent that one owns more or less of the things the others also own. “[T]he antisupremacist and pluralist commitment to” dissimilarity devoid of hierarchy led races to become fundamentally dissimilar from each other (1995, p. 66). This elucidation unveils that no culture is superior to another, and every culture is positively different holding their own distinctions.

Hutchinson delineates that Harlem Renaissance scrutinizes black cultural dissimilarities and encourages Black Nationalism, pan-Africanism, folk experience, racial awareness as well as pride and dialect as black vernacular language (1995, p. 90). First of all, cultural pluralism, embraced by the Renaissance, is completely essentialist as monitored in its fierce conservation of cultural dissimilarity. Benn Michaels maintains that “the commitment to difference” signifies theoretically deepening rather than shrinking of racism (1995, p. 65). Secondly, though the Harlem Renaissance writers attempt to tie race with culture not with heredity, many of them cannot entirely avoid racial essentialism.

Harlem Renaissance thinkers endeavoured to portray themselves in relation to their cultural uniqueness not to racial heritage. Culture for them played a role to conserve the superiority of identity while eschewing the blood humiliation (Benn Michaels, 1995, p.

13). Thus, cultural distinctiveness carried more significance than racial heritage. The black identity holders were no more embarrassed by their race as Alain Locke, who is considered as the father of the New Negro and the dean of the Harlem Renaissance, asserts that the New Negro restored the race in “world esteem” (1968, p. 14) employing “self-expression”, self depiction, self-esteem and self reliance (1968, p. 4-5). The New Negro is dissimilar to the Old one, who is more of a “myth” or “formula” than a human being (Locke, 1968, p. 3). Accordingly, the Negro wears a new cover and is filled with a sense of racial pride; thus, the skin colour and blood no more humiliate him/her. The New Negro feels his/her existence as a human being and is not strange anymore.

Anthony Dawahare claims that depending on the characterization of New Negro, black people of America were of a distinctive race of human beings. Their ancestry conveyed a unique precious culture and racial identity. The New Negro became free from the burden of racial discrimination associating blackness with savagery and was filled with pride of his or her race as well as inheritance. A lot of writers thought that the New Negro's racial revaluation would pave the way for the white Americans to revalue the black Americans. Writers indicated the New Negro's emergence as the outset of a new stage of American past wherein the construction of black culture would aid African Americans to gain respect long overdue in the United States and overseas. (2006, p. 23). Accordingly, the appearance of the New Negro would lead the Americans to look at the African-Americans from another angle that was in the service of the black people.

The familiarisation of cultural pluralism in the Harlem school is demonstrated in two approaches, although in a complementary way because they both represent Harlem Renaissance essentialism at the heart of their arguments. On the one side, there is the Afrocentric branch of the Renaissance, as Robert Bone labels it the Harlem School (1958, p. 98). Amritjit Singh believes that the Harlem School emphasises and occasionally enhances definite features of the race they deem to be distinctively Negro (1976, p. 13). On the other side, the Rear Guard wing charges the Harlem School with enhancing the inferior strata of Negro life, surrendering to the power of white Bohemia, which views black world as a source of otherness and primitivism (Bone, 1958, p. 95). Though both wings follow dissimilar directions, they are headed to the same destination with the Afrocentric wing. The chief variation is that the Rear Guard's stresses the “double-

consciousness” of the African American put forward by Du Bois illustrating, “One ever feels his two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts ... in one dark body” (1897, p. 194). Du Bois is dissimilar to the Afrocentric thinkers like Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Black Nationalism, and lays emphasis on the American facet of the black society and the African facet. His adjustment of the cultural pluralism in the agenda of the Harlem Renaissance is not against, but in favour of “the greater ideals of the American republic” (Du Bois, 1897, p. 197). Therefore, he is a proponent of cultural pluralism and advocates absorption so as to attain factual democratic system in America.

His absorption policy does not signify orienting black culture into the white in relation with “kind” and “degree”. He just favours a reciprocal understanding between the two cultures so that one day the two cultures might offer each other those features that both are short of (1897, p. 197). His endeavours side with the ideas of pluralism and adds that he does not attempt to make America African because America holds a lot to convey to the world; furthermore, he does not intend to melt his black soul in the American white culture and adopt a white one since he maintains that the black culture is also the holder of a message for the world. His efforts are for a goal, which is to render it workable for someone to act like an American and a Negro without being damned and losing the chance of advance (1897, p. 195). Consequently, Du Bois is a backer of the uniqueness of every culture; furthermore, his policy favours the principles of cultural pluralism. Chip Rhodes claims that Du Bois imagined a society which would exceed “racial hierarchies—if not racial differences” (1997, p. 436). Ultimately, their call to the notions of racial-commitment, racial pride, race devotion and racial advancement tie both Harlem Renaissance wings together.

Nella Larsen is a nonconforming author in the Harlem Renaissance, since she disregards Harlem Renaissance essentialism, formed by embracing cultural pluralism. Carla Kaplan declares that a lot of black Harlem thinkers advocated concepts of racial loyalty and race devotion maintaining that the races were and ought to stay vitally different whereas Larsen confirms the stupidity of any racial classification either in an essentialist way, or in a cultural pluralist way (2007, p. xviii). In Larsen’s view, racial essentialism and cultural pluralism are not dissimilar from one another; but they overlap. To put it blatantly, she outlines that the Harlem Renaissance ideals of race allegiance do not produce a discourse

against racial essentialism; however, it appears as another type of essentialism. Benn Michaels attacks the proponents of cultural pluralism due to the same cause. Benn Michaels reaches a point that cultural pluralism is an “essentialized racism” and is not a substitute to racial essentialism because cultural pluralism considers “one’s difference from others as essential,” (*American Modernism and the Poetics of Identity*, 1994, p. 45; *Our America*, 1995, p. 64). Similarly, in *Passing* Larsen harshly criticizes both racial essentialism and cultural pluralism. Irene mirrors cultural pluralists such as Alain Locke and Du Bois as she counts the conditions to be a member of a race. Larsen demonstrates that Harlem Renaissance essentialism, which culturally attempts to depict race, fails to totally shun racial essentialism.

### **1.5 Racial Identity in Post-colonial Period**

Colonization does not only include the occupation of a geographic territory, but it is also to impose the colonizer’s hegemony on the colonized. Frantz Fanon asserts that the purpose of colonization is not merely to take over the colonized people’s life, but also to attempt to empty colonized people’s brain from all “form and content” preventing them from developing as much as the white people, damaging and devastating them. Obliterating the colonized people’s past and culture, the white colonizer has effectively produced a new group of values for the colonized (1991, p. 169). The black people commence to lose their own worth and embrace the white values and are prevented from cultural and economic development. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain that colonial discourse inclines to eliminate the development of the colonized and characterize their society as “barbaric” or “uncivilized”. The Colonizer considers these attributes as justifications to intervene to improve it (2007, p. 43).

Predominantly, postcolonial studies place emphasis on writing from the colonized peoples’ perspective. In accordance with this, the postcolonial studies emerge only subsequent to the European colonization occurrence. The colonized people begin to ponder and include their cultural identity destruction and secondary position in their writings. Consequently, the African-American writers of modernism consider that the African worth renovation is necessary. Toni Morrison was one of the Afro-American

writers who were courageous enough to protest and confront the white principal cultures as well as the supremacy of these cultures. Morrison through the character of Pecola demonstrates the painful effects of the white culture domination, and through the character of Claudia she confirms confrontation of white culture and the black worth restoration.

It is indisputable that the definition of beauty notion is one of the consequences of colonialism. The white society has always endeavoured to set beauty standards and impose them on the colonized. Paul C. Taylor's argument is that, the prevailing white society has made beauty racial, identifying beauty as white, so the white people are expected to have that standard beauty (1999, p. 17). As a result, if beauty equals whiteness, then ugliness is paralleled with blackness. Taylor further explains that, consequently, while attempting to obtain beauty, the understanding of a female nigger is dissimilar to the ones of Jewish and Irish females (1999, p. 20). The West has drawn a "racial line" to specify "human types" showing blackness as a state to be detested (Taylor, 1999, p. 16). Accordingly, the white, beautiful, people are loved and treated properly whereas the black, ugly, ones are abhorred. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is despised because she is black, ugly. Similarly, Jerome Bump holds the same opinion with Taylor concerning beauty standards and argues that the western culture has likened the outer beauty with inner beauty as the Greek and Hebrew considered a "bodily stigma" a demonstration of an internal ugliness, a spiritual breakdown (2010, p. 154). This shows that black people are already bad people not because of their actions but rather their blackness, which is an unfair criterion of judgment.

In her book *The Beauty Myth: How Lineages of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, Naomi Wolf claims that American culture advocates a beauty standard for females to follow. Her trouble is with the standards, which are virtually impracticable for every female to gain. Wolf adds that the attributes factually destroy females around the world. She further argues that ideal females appear on television, magazine advertisements, movies and posters; furthermore, for a woman anywhere, there is a reminder of what she fails to become, yet has to desire for it (1991, p. 12). For example, in *The Bluest Eye* Pecola's mother learns beauty standards from movies and applies those standards on her children. On the other hand, Ruth Rosenberg claims that blackness has never implied to connote beauty (1987, p. 439). Therefore, in relation to beauty creation, the prevailing society

chiefly functions to simply instruct and name the weaker culture for the purpose of following the idea of beauty they hold in their mind.

Truthfully, the colonial beauty creation significantly functions to make Pecola and Claudia understand that blackness is equal to ugliness; furthermore, this beauty reading incontestably is closely associated with the colonialism impacts. The black identity is truly ruined because the colonialism purposes are to damage, mutilate and wipe out the former identity of the colonized. The impacts totally shape the colonized individuals in various ways. Yancy clarifies that the white colonialist scheme is to force the colonized Black to experience “a process of epistemic violence”, a process in which black people commence to absorb the entire “colonizer’s myths”, starting to view his/her identity through the paradigm of white dominance, European culture. In reality, the colonialist’s intention is to render the Black sightless towards the meaningless need of their being colonized. The thought is to make the black people “conceptualize” their identity as a dishonourable savage, uncivilized, barbaric, aggressive, filthy, inferior and as a *trouble* (2005, p. 257).

Frantz Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks* has portrayed the diverse feelings which the Negro takes on while communicating with white society in order to wipe out an immense psycho-existential preoccupation implanted in the Negro’s manners (1991, p. 12). The cruel circle of racism, hurting impacts and the Negro’s preoccupation with inferiority is perpetuated since “the white man is sealed in his whiteness and the black man in his blackness,” denoting estranged blacks as well as estranged whites (Fanon, 1991, p. 11). Accordingly, the white world and the black one remain strange towards each other, and this alienation results in the blacks’ inferiority and the whites’ superiority. Fanon adds details and clarifies that this cruel circle is pathological, because white individuals deem themselves superior to black ones; furthermore, black people intend to confirm to white men the broadness of their thinking as well as the equal worth of their intelligence (1991, p. 12). Apart from financial inferiority, black people, chiefly the well-informed Negro, also suffer from their consciousness of being a race which does not own a language, civilization, culture and a “long historical past” (Fanon, 1991, p. 36). As a result of Blacks’ inferiority, the compradors’ black skin was masked by their involvement in the worth of the white colonial authorities (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007, p. 99). The black compradors had to adopt the values of the white powers.



Concerning the matter of identification with white worth, Fanon has given an elaborate critical model through his study of the influence of the colonial discourse controlled by whites. He elucidates that the black student in the Antilles categorizes himself with the white man identified as the source of civilization and the holder of truth to the uncivilized. The Negro personally takes on a white man's thoughts since the Antillean does not consider himself as someone black but sees himself as an Antillean. The Negro leads life in Africa. Intellectually and individually, the Antillean acts as a white man (1991, p.148). Fanon's investigation unveils that education, which is possibly regarded as the subject's compelled option of estrangement in/of language according to the Lacanian formulation, makes Antilleans the holders and bringers of civilization and distances and estranges the Antillean Negroes from their blackness.

Indeed, the colonizer's or the white's perspective on the colonized or the black connotes what the colonized or the black is. As a result, The Black person, for instance, is ugly, uncivilized, not decent and not human. The colonialist reason does not lie in the colonized but rather in the colonizer, white. As in fact, the Blacks are liable to be categorized as subordinate and the Whites as superior regarding several facets, for example schooling opportunity, social ladder, the concept of beauty, financial situation, and health care. Hugh Thomas also affirms and clings light on the superiority of the Whites, asserting that the white people of Europe were not just superior but the most; thus, they had the competence to make Africans their slaves in South America, the United States, the New World and the Caribbean (qtd. in Tembo, 2010, p. 2). In *The Bluest Eye*, the Blacks lead their lives in terrible circumstances and have difficulty surviving in the white society. Consequently, the colonized individuals have to abide by the rules and norms of a colonizer society; furthermore, they are lacking of the aptitude to advance their race and will not be able to shun the colonizer's imposing subordination in almost all sides of their lives. Additionally, it is beyond dispute that society itself influentially plays a pivotal role in determining to construct the idea of what is good and bad in the society. While referring to a culture; a person can recognize the self as a social being possessed by the society, which gives her that identification. A self is unquestionably coupled to social living. Society always includes minor and major groups, and it is undeniable that the minority stays powerless and ineffective; however, the majority remains stronger and influential. Supremacy and

privilege go to the majority, or powerful group, but the minority remains weak and deprived of even their rights. Haleh Afshar, Myfanwy Franks, Mary Mayn and Sharon Wary maintain that the word “dominant” signifies the word majority, and minority goes along with “subordinate” (2007, p. 4). One of the reasons which generate this subordinate group is colonialism procedure. The minority group is the secondary group in society. The secondary group members do not have adequate power and control over their own lives as compared to the majority group. Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* is a clear example of this and the black families are the minorities of society and lead a life out of control particularly the Breedloves family.

### **1.6 Double Consciousness Theory**

At the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, European Americans and African Americans changed their outlook of race and attempted to define it again. Forty years after the end of The American Civil War, and without the firm racial hierarchy of servitude, the social creation of race altered radically. W.E.B. Du Bois, a famous scholar of the era, investigated the changing social conditions in his text *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. He produced *The Souls of Black Folk* prior to his going through the certain situations that would create this theory. As a school boy, he found out that he was unlike the others, and his immense veil forced him to be out of their circle (1904, p. 2). He throws more light on the African Americans’ situation and says that a nigger comes to the world with a veil. The American world brings him no factual self-awareness but rather obliges him to view himself via the lens of the dominant culture. Du Bois identifies the term of double consciousness, and he claimed that it was an awareness of identity held by African Americans due to their conflicting society-related functions as Americans and as black individuals. Double consciousness, seeing one’s self via the lens of the others, (1904, p. 3), is a clarification for the black understanding of identity, which according to Du Bois is reliant on how black people imagine white individuals perceive them. The essential assertion of Du Bois’ theory critically functions in Nella Larsen’s 1929 novel, *Passing*, and Toni Morrison’s 1970 one, *The Bluest Eye*, through its impacts on the major characters’ awareness of herself and others.

Du Bois' hypothesis of double consciousness is deepened in his experiences of growing up as a black individual in a society controlled by white people. Du Bois initially endeavoured to find an answer for the question of how it feels to "be a problem" (1904, p. 2), because Du Bois assumes that black people are considered as a problem in a culture taken over by whites. Du Bois reached a conclusion that since blacks are so derided, they are "gifted with a second-sight" in this American society, a world that does not provide him with real self-awareness, but merely allows him to look at himself through the white dominant society's revelation. The source of this "second-sight" is white culture, which impels black people to decide upon themselves employing white standards which see them with "contempt and pity" (1904, p. 3). For example, in *The Bluest Eye* Pecola's mother deems her as ugly due to her blackness and even she herself does so. Du Bois asserts that a black individual "feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled [sic] strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (1904, p. 4). Black people lead their lives under the dominance of white society; therefore, duality lies in their identity, to put it simply they initiate to possess two identities, African and American. In *Passing*, Irene goes through this position as she attempts to act as an American and African woman.

Du Bois is not the sole scholar who has touched on African Americans' double identity. Labelling them as "African American" exposes an identity which is an African and American mixture since whites, Americans, prevent blacks from becoming merely Americans and attribute them as African Americans. In his essay, "Stranger in the Village", James Baldwin also reflects on identical issues and investigates the ways and the factors behind duality of a black identity. He states that when slaves were transferred from Africa, the whites, slave owners, refuted black people's cultural history; thus, slavery eradicated black identity (1984, p. 169). To put it blatantly, blacks were brought to the United States and then lost some of their cultural traditions, history as well as beliefs. In *Passing*, Irene's black friends call her Rene, which is a name within her black community, but when she is in America, she loses it and is called Irene. The sociologist E. Franklin Frazier Black claims that black people had two choices, hunting for a "drive for leading their lives within American society or death (qtd. in Baldwin, 1984, p. 170). It was their compulsory absorption into American identity which resulted in the double identity

described by Du Bois, and it was difficult for the black to live in the white society and hold only their black identity. This impelled blacks to weigh up themselves not in conformity with their own standards but the standards of white culture. As a result, black people were compelled to comply with what the white expected from them and look at themselves through the lens of white society. In other words, they were not recognized and accepted within white culture as black people holding their own distinctions.

Because of their blackness the black folk encounter the problem of recognition. The white society refuses to accept them as a distinctive people; as a result they feel unwanted and rejected in the white culture. As soon as they become aware of their race, their feeling of being rejected also commences. Concerning the time when they feel so, in *Prejudice and Your Child* psychologist Kenneth Clark exposes that Negro children become conscious of their racial being as soon as they are three years old (1998, p. 19). This denotes that Clark adds that as soon as children realize their racial identity and distinctions, they accept the prevalent social outlook concerned with race and skin colour. The children perceive that they are unwanted and even reject the thing making them rejected (1998, p. 46).

Because double consciousness constructed such a conflict of self-perception, the African American literary works of that era frequently investigated the restrictions of identity and the demonstration of double consciousness controlled by white culture. When racial passing and assimilating into white values turned to be relatively widespread, the connotations of racial passing on the double consciousness were the subject matters of many novels such as Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, which I work on throughout this thesis.

Giving every aspect of black people's identity conflict, Du Bois throws light on the damaging influence of slavery and racial unfairness on black individuals and asserts that the capacity of their mentality as well as body have been dispersed, squandered and ignored (1986, p. 365). Accordingly, their existence was in favour of white people, and all their talents and competence were in vain. More significantly, he calls for a cultural advancement of the black race through the understanding of all the ideals which black leaders suggest at diverse phases of the American Negro's improvement: the right to go to school, suffrage and freedom, which included the freedom of living, working, thinking,

loving and desiring (1986, p. 365, 370). His attempts were in the serves of the black folk's interests and were to better Blacks' awful circumstances. Du Bois also unveils that the intent of the American Negro's endeavours is to become a co-participant in the realm of culture, to get away from both seclusion and death, to save and employ his best capacity and his covert intelligence (1986, p. 365). To achieve this racial and cultural objective, as Du Bois labels as the objective of "work, culture, and liberty, black Americans are obliged to put their shoulders under the burden of double consciousness till the clean human pledge established in *The Declaration of Independence* has been fulfilled. Bernard W. Bell claims that for Du Bois double consciousness, a social burden, indicates "a biracial, bicultural state of being in the world", an existential location of socialized cultural contradiction and liberty prospects of individual and social alteration (1996, p. 96). The double image implanted in this double consciousness can offer the world what it is short of. Du Bois believes that the American Negro would not whiten his Negro heart in a sea of white Americanism since he is aware that the Negro blood holds a message for the humanity (1904, p. 365).

## **2. NELLA LARSEN'S *PASSING***

The 1920s in the United States was an era identified by extensive apprehension as well as argument over exceeding racial restrictions, what is called "color line" between black and white people, intensified by the Great Migration, according to which hundreds of thousands of black individuals moved from the rural south to northern and Midwestern cities. The people's practice of exceeding the color line and endeavouring to claim recognition in another racial group dissimilar from their own one was identified as passing. Nella Larsen produced her work in 1929 and has reflected the issue through her characters, Irene and Clare.

The story is comprised of three parts, Larsen has employed third person narrative. The first part, titled "Encounter," starts with Irene, who receives a letter from Clare Kendry, reminding a past encounter she had with her at the Drayton Hotel in Chicago, during a short stay there. Irene and Clare grew up with each other but lost contact after Clare's white father passed away. Irene find out that Clare "passes" for white, living mostly in Europe with her naive, wealthy, white husband and their daughter.

The second part, "Re-encounter", opens with the present as Irene has got this new letter from Clare. Subsequent to Irene's neglecting the letter, Clare visits in person; therefore, Irene half-heartedly consents to see her. Clare invites herself to the "Negro Welfare League" dance, in spite of Irene's advice not to attend it due to the fear that Jack will realize her authentic identity. Clare goes to the dance and enjoys herself, but her black identity is not revealed by her husband. The dance attending pushes her to continue visiting Harlem. Irene and Clare restart their childhood friendship; furthermore, Clare often visits Irene's home.

The last part begins with the point that it is Christmas time; moreover, Irene's connection with her husband has become more and more unstable. While shopping with her clearly black friend Felise Freeland, Irene comes across Jack, who finds out her racial status and then Clare's. Later, Clare goes with Irene and Brian to a party organized by Felise. The assembly is put hurdles to by Jack, who charges Clare with being a "damned dirty nigger!" (Larsen, 1929, p. 208). Irene hurries to Clare, standing by an open window. Unexpectedly, Clare falls out of the window from the top floor of the building, and she is announced dead by the guests gathering down there. It is uncertain that how she has fallen. The narrative reaches the end with Irene's fragmented agony of Clare's loss of life.

## **2.1 The White Dominance and Perception of Blacks**

Gayle Wald explains that Larsen displays the uselessness and meaninglessness of the one-drop rule, the collapse of the racial essentialism and the pointlessness of deeming the body as "the ultimate location of the identity"; furthermore, she questions the actual incentive to racial classification (2000, p. 17). Thus, she is totally against Elaine Ginsberg's affirmation that "racial classes have been constructed throughout the past in the service of "exploitation, domination, or persecution" of one category by another (1996, p. 6). Larsen brings the idea to light that the ethnic identity discourse is a social formation and enforced on the self so as to build a hierarchical structure wherein the white can excuse their dominance as well as exploitation of the black. Larsen, in her novel, shows what nowadays the American Anthropological Association formally states as the disparity between what is labelled as "racial" classes is not outcomes of "their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (American Anthropological Association, 2004, p. 99). Consequently, it is society which assigns superiority to the white and inferiority to the black.

Catherine Rottenberg in "*Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire*" states that within a white supreme culture, norms operate according to building a dual opposition between black and white wherein black people are constantly underprivileged, and the white ones are privileged (2003, p. 437). Accordingly, white individuals are superior and have more opportunities of happiness in life than the black ones do. Rottenberg adds that a chain of

attributes are ascribed to whiteness: “civilized intelligent/moral/hardworking/clean” and blackness: “savage/instinctual/simple licentious/lazy/dirty”; furthermore, ascribing these features work in the service of certain social hierarchies (2003, p. 437). This transparently shows that skin colour determines who is good, bad, clever, lazy, clean and dirty in favour of the white people; moreover, the white people always expect to have comfortable lives compared to the black people. Consequently, the white confirm their dominance over the black and even make efforts to keep distance from them.

In *Passing*, Clare originally holds an African American identity as an alcoholic janitor’s child and then as two white great-aunts’ orphaned niece; however, she later wears a white cover owing to certain racist behaviour done to her and marries a white man. Clare illustrates to Irene her upbringing which is corresponding to her Aunts’ ideology, borrowed frankly from the slavery adherent of the Old South:

I was, it was true, expected to earn my keep by doing all the housework, and most of the washing. But do you realize, 'Rene, that if it hadn't been for them, I shouldn't have had a home in the world? ... Besides, to their notion, hard labour was good for me. I had Negro blood and they belonged to a generation that had written and read long articles headed: 'Will the Blacks Work?' Too, they weren't quite sure that the good God hadn't intended the sons and daughters of Ham to sweat because he had poked fun at old man Noah once when he had taken a drop too much. I remember the aunts telling me that that old drunkard had cursed Ham and his sons for all time. (Larsen, 1929, p. 39- 40)

The aunts repeat nineteenth-century paternalist arguments of pro-servitude as they declare the curse of “Ham” upon Clare, allocate her a submissive position in the family and announce a moral ruin that merely hard labour as well as white direction can rectify. The white aunts expect her to do almost all of the housework just because she has “Negro blood”, and additionally “Will the Blacks Work?” is ironical as the aunts intend to attribute laziness to the black. Assigning these features to the Blacks is the indication of the idea that the Blacks’ existence carries no significance at all except for that they should act as slaves in favour of the white culture expectations. Donald E. Hall reaches a conclusion that the entire racial discourse presumes that whiteness is connected to merit, purity and rational and spiritual dominance whereas darkness is related to badness and degradation and is created in terms of politics to allocate the white exploitation as well as



hegemony over the black (2001, p. 268). This hegemony and exploitation can be easily found out in *Passing* when the aunts expect Clare to work hard and do almost all of the housework as quoted above. I believe that the white people's justification for dealing with the black badly is the essentialist one-drop rule. According to Carlyle Van Thomson, the colour of skin and hair texture basically carry no weight and meaning, but the essentialists have granted them "political, financial and psychological worth; furthermore, when hair texture as well as the colour of skin are ascribed significance to, "a hierarchical order" is set up (2004, p. 13). Thus, it is the skin colour which determines human beings' position in life, and the black are subject to living an austere life. Racial passing undermines the basis of privilege established on ethnic identity (Ginsberg, 1996, p. 8). Therefore, Larsen employs the practice of passing to build a self that has a competence to shun ideologies. Larsen levels harsh criticism at the essentialist one-drop rule and wants an identity to be formed with no interference of any ideology.

I believe that looking at the black from that specific angle, the aunts' perspective, leads to terrible upshots as in a moment; Clare trusts and discloses to Irene that her white aunts' principles left financial and psychological influence on her to dispose of her black identity and turn to be white. She tells Irene that she "wanted things," (Larsen, 1929, p. 41); therefore, it seems that she was lacking of her basic needs, and Nell Sullivan states that her purpose is not barely "material goods but love and emotional comfort", too (1998, p. 375) because she wants "to be a person and not a charity or a problem, or even a daughter of the indiscreet Ham" (Larsen, 1929, p. 40). This quote allows me to argue that Clare endeavours to be dealt with as human being rather than as a charity to be pitied or the bringer of troubles; therefore, her existence again remains worthless. Sullivan adds that the aunts' description of being black is an attempt to disjoin Clare from her humanity; thus, she is compelled to discard that black identity to become a human. To achieve that, she is obliged to literally turn white through passing and assent to the requirements of assimilation.

White domination and its racist affront towards Blacks prolong in *Passing* and leave its horrible impact on the black characters. Jack Bellew, Clare's racist husband, also calls upon and echoes the same racist discourse employed by Clare's white aunts as he expresses his opinion to Irene, "I don't dislike them [black people], I hate them.... They

give me the creeps. The black scrimy devils. ... And I read in the papers about them. Always robbing and killing people... And worse” (Larsen, 1929, p. 69-70). He unveils that not only he does not like the black but carries abhorrence towards them; furthermore, he adds that they make him nervous and frighten him. Attributing those bad features to Blacks signifies that Blacks are odd and dangerous creatures but not human beings. Rumour and biased press familiarize him with those viewpoints, claiming, “I read in the papers about them”. He himself does not reach this conclusion about them through experience; therefore, white culture takes over and employs media against the black community for the purpose of imposing its domination. In *Passing*, Clare is the holder of none of the aforementioned bad attributes, but since she has the blood of the black, she is ascribed to those features.

In his reply to Irene wondering whether he ever knows any Negroes, he says, “Thank the Lord no! And never expect to!” (Larsen, 1929, p. 70). He is even thankful for not knowing any Negroes. Accordingly, only black individuals are attributed to those bad traits, and the quotations signify that the white are the opposite. He even does not expect to know any Blacks; therefore, this means that he makes efforts to keep distance from them. Bellow again confirms Blacks’ dehumanization and the idea that Blacks are hazardous creatures from whom one should keep distance. Bellow keeps on his racist remarks on black people unknowingly that he is surrounded by three Negroes and says, ““Oh, no Nig’ he declared, ‘nothing like that with me. I know you are no nigger, so it’s all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I’m concerned, since I know you’re no nigger. I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be” (Larsen, 1929, p. 68). Irony lies in his calling his partner “nig” for he is convinced that she is not a Negro, and he thinks in a way as if being a Negro is disgusting. His remark perceptibly uncovers that the black are not even worth of being known at all and that he is proud of not having Blacks as relatives; moreover, he vows not to have them in his family forever. I claim that Bellow is among the one-drop rule proponents such as Walter Benn Michaels, who assumes that “the black blood” creates a difference to someone’s inherent identity although the dissimilarity is imperceptible (1995, p. 130). Larsen dismantles this belief through portraying Clare who is “legally” classified a Negro by the law but does not hold Negro features which may lead to even doubt a little in Jack. According to Sullivan,

Bellow's unchallenged viewpoints are quickly received as "truth." While holding a transient white identity as well as obligatory silence, Irene is subject to internalizing Bellow's "truths" as a form of "unconscious ideological assimilation." His views on "black scummy devils" incites in Irene a hysteria which is a sign of loss of control and the outset of a mental decline pestering Irene all over *Passing* (1998, p. 376).

This racial essentialism combines ethnic identity to exterior corporal traits. Similarly, Elaine Ginsberg claims that according to cultural logic, the superficial attributes, the colour of skin and hair texture as well as colour, play roles in race establishment; thus, it is what Franz Fanon has called the "epidermal schema of racial difference" (1991, p. xvii). Larsen levels harsh criticism at those essentialist ideas of race through portraying black women altering their identities, whose corporal features do not give an indication of their race. To put it more blatantly, their "epidermal schema" does not categorize them racially.

I view that white dominance intensifies itself in the novel and draws a horrible and disgusting image of the coloured people, who feel inferior either endeavouring to pass for white or suffer under the burden of their black identity. Their inferiority is felt and realized even since their childhood. Brian's son, Ted, asks her father, "Dad, why is it that they only lynch coloured people?", and Brian replies, "Because they hate 'em, son ... because they are afraid of them" (Larsen, 1929, p. 190). It is evidently obvious that the coloured individuals suffer owing to racial discrimination and feel the white people's perception of them. The white deem that the black are terrifying and hated; thus, they should be killed. In conformity to this, Blacks' anguish commences from their childhood, and they become conscious of their racial discrimination in the early stages of their lives. According to Jennifer De Vere Brody, the conversation between Brian and his son implies that Irene puts an end to Clare's life partly because Clare has black heritage, is hated and puts her secure life at jeopardy (1992, p. 1062).

I argue that in *Passing* racial discrimination either leads black characters like Irene and Clare to embrace the white culture and abandon their own natural ones or others like Brian to reject the white culture and refuse to get integrated in it. Brian is the holder of the black heritage and conscious about his racial identity. He has aspirations to leave America and move to Brazil where he and his household can promote and develop their African legacy as the narrator says, "That strange, and to her fantastic, notion of Brian's of going off to Brazil, which, though unmentioned,

yet lived within him” (Larsen, 1929, p. 100). This yearning lends support to my argument, provides Brian with a personality similar to Marcus Garvey and combines him with the Back-to-Africa movement. His unshakeable persona puts focus on his well-built black identity and is blatantly at odds with Irene’s doings impacted by her double consciousness.

Accordingly, Brian is the sole character of the black who starkly sticks to his black identity, and the white society does not influence his identity. When Irene objects that he should not touch on racial issues in front of their children, he responds, “[y]ou’re absolutely wrong! If, as you’re so determined, they’ve got to live in this damned country, they’d better find out what sort of thing they’re up against as soon as possible. The earlier they learn it, the better prepared they’ll be” (Larsen, 1929, p. 191-92). Brian finds it significant for their sons to find out about their racial problems soon before being called niggers and getting discriminated by the white. Irene insists to lead their lives in America whereas Brian has a big desire to return to Brazil, his black heritage. He does not attempt to escape from the burden of blackness but rather endeavours to confront the white society informing his children of Blacks’ racial circumstances and wanting them to get prepared for that racial discrimination, which awaits them.

## **2.2 Identity Construction and Double Consciousness**

Nella Larsen’s *Passing* places emphasis principally on the impacts that double consciousness leaves on ethnic identity. The work’s conflict is deepened in the major character’s, Irene Redfield’s, inner conflict, which results from her ethnic identity-based paradox being there because of her double consciousness. The inner conflict coincides with Irene’s understanding of her own ethnic identity and her identity as a whole. Despite the fact that her skin is light enough to appear as white, having “warm olive cheeks” (Larsen, 1929, p. 9) which can be regarded as the skin tone of “an Italian, a Spaniard, a Mexican, or a gipsy” (Larsen, 1929, p. 19), Irene does not pass for white as evidently and everlastingly as Clare does. Irene has involvement in the black community and participates in a lot of the social activities of upper-middle class African Americans in her aristocrat group. She energetically functions as the female janitor of the family that she considers herself to be. She is proud of herself having a “special talent” (Larsen, 1929, p. 101-02) for apprehending her spouse, Brian, and thinks that this understanding is the sole

factor for preserving the success of their legal togetherness (Larsen, 1929, p. 101-02). However, much of the proof in the novel unveils that Irene's firm doings in conformity with the concept of domesticity, combining her to some extent with white ethnic standards, essentially carry no significance to help her comprehend Brian, the stereotype of black people.

Regardless of Irene's behaviour in accordance with white culture, it is unambiguous that she deems herself as black but makes efforts to show up as a white person, yet she attempts to appear as a white woman in definite situations since her skin is light enough and supposed to be of a European American. Similarly, Brody claims, "Irene has many moments in which she sees herself simply and purely as an American" (1992, p. 1055). Despite that, Irene holds black descent, making her black according to the law because of the one-drop rule and in the lens of the principal white race. On the one hand, Irene shows persistence on racial allegiance as well as her devotion to the black community, on the other hand she noticeably behaves in a way as if she does not belong to it. Irene declares to be an honest middle class black individual as she is a member of the Negro Welfare League, saying "It's the N. W. L. Dance, the Negro Welfare League, you know. I'm on the ticket committee, or, rather, I'm the committee. Thank heaven it comes off tomorrow night and doesn't happen again for a year" (Larsen, 1929, p. 123); however, she truly acts as a white woman; thus, double identity lies in her. She only pretends to work with this League as she claims that she is pleased and grateful that this black community event does not take place for a year. As a result, she does not stick to black community values.

Du Bois' theory of double consciousness leaves impact on Irene's understanding of herself and her ethnic identity. While Irene behaves like a white woman in the white world, where she can practise the rights of European Americans, she remains within the black group since she is assured that passing is unsafe as the storyteller proclaims Irene's curiosity about the act of passing and that she intends to receive information on it from Clare and desires to perceive that perilous practice (Larsen, 1929, p. 36). This shows that the desire of passing tickles her interests, nonetheless she regards it as a hazardous act. Irene believes in the idea of passing but holds anxiety announcing that someone's black heritage puts hurdles to passing and that she is filled with awkwardness in case of communicating with other Negroes (Larsen, 1929, p. 37). This unveils that Irene harbours an aspiration to

behave like a white woman, but she is afraid of being found out as she is originally a Negro. She is anxious about the way to stay away from being revealed and the probability of her passing exposure. She also discloses her acknowledgement that being escorted out of a place brings more embarrassment to her rather than her racial inheritance reality. Irene's wondering displays her main race of African America; furthermore, her awareness of the whole harmful perception that white people hold of Blacks leads to her hesitations and apprehension about passing. She confesses that her racial heritage brings embarrassment. Irene meditates as a black woman regarding the consequences of passing, not as a white woman, who is not worried about being escorted out of any place because of her race.

I claim that Irene's yearning for having a white identity is concealed, and she does not wear a white cover as explicitly as Clare does. Similarly, Brody thinks that Irene holds a covert craving to turn white (1992, p. 1055) as the story teller claims,

She belonged in this land of rising towers. She was an American ...Her race. Race! the thing that bound and suffocated her. . . It was, she cried silently, enough to suffer as a woman and an individual, on one's own account, without having to suffer for the race as well. It was a brutality, and undeserved. Surely, no other people so cursed as Ham's dark children. (Larsen, 1929, p. 201)

The aforementioned excerpt exposes Irene's acknowledgement of her desire to be white. It is also an interior monologue revealing some of the most significant facets of Irene Redfield's principles. She shows many stereotypical middle-class values. Indeed, she shows up closely like Clare Kendry's white, Christian, spinster aunts telling Clare that Noah "had cursed Ham and his sons for all time" (Larsen, 1929, p. 40). She asserts that she undergoes the agony of race and intends to stop suffering; furthermore, I believe that her stopping suffering can be done by embracing the white world. Throughout the novel, Irene constantly combines herself with conventional and bourgeois fundamentals in the American culture and looks at her friend Clare as an "exotic other." She to a great extent wishes to be void of the race-awareness load as well as finding herself within the inhabitants of the "rising towers" of the capitalist American culture (Brody, 1992, p. 1055).

Irene embraces the white culture and attempts to appear as a white woman wherever and whenever she feels that the passing is safe and not found out by the people around her. She seeks safety and intends to dissociate herself from the lower class people; a clear example of this is that when Irene walks in the Chicago streets to “shop for the things” she already pledges to take home from her visit, a man unexpectedly passes out in front of her. At that time, she "edges her way out of the increasing crowd feeling disagreeably damp and sticky from contact with so many sweating bodies" (Larsen, 1929, p. 11). This brings Irene's yearning for detaching herself from the "sweating masses" to the light; moreover, it is proof of her aversion for the working-classes. Anthony Dawahare says that Larsen's characters have the fear of being connected to the black working class, which has gone through exploitation and described as inferior; therefore, they wish for belonging to the middle class. Identifying their class comes into sight as racial since modern capitalism principles and the institutions demonstrate that race is a marker of identity and social value (2006, p. 24).

She thinks that she is in need of instant security and, feeling faint herself, she waves down a taxi. The taxi driver suggests that she go to the Drayton Hotel, and she accepts, “Thank you. I think the Drayton'll do nicely” (Larsen, 1929, p. 12). I think that her assent to the driver's suggestion is enough evidence for claiming that she feels comfortable among white people. Amazingly, while on the taxi, she simply "makes some small attempts to repair the damage that the heat and crowds had done to her appearance" (Larsen, 1929, p. 12). She ecstatically goes into the Drayton Hotel and feels "like being wafted upwards on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet and strangely remote from the sizzling one that she had left below" (Larsen, 1929, p. 13). Being securely secluded on an ivory tower roof-top, Irene examines the "specks of cars and people creeping about in the streets below, and thinking how silly they look" (Larsen, 1929, p. 14). The quotes disclose that this distancing, steadily needing to move "away from" as well as "above", is Irene's feature and wish. The Drayton enjoyable quiet becomes "white only" island in the “white hegemony”, merely a momentary shelter (Brody, 1992, p. 1057).

I believe that Irene's race and double consciousness create hardship for her and puts hurdles to her life as she is always apprehensive about her race not to be discovered wherever she finds herself among unknown people, for instance while meeting her old

friend in a situation, she gives justification for her passing and says that “she is not ashamed of being Negro ... but it is the idea of being ejected from any place . . . that disturbs her” (Larsen, 1929, p. 19). This discloses that she has awareness of her race putting her in the position of defending herself. The hardness of this situation particularly in America in 1920s is that being a “negro” is to be everlastingly in the position of being thrown out from one’s “place” that is to say, to be brought back into a place a person may not necessarily aspire to dwell in (Brody, 1992, p. 1058). As a black woman Irene feels that she is unwanted in the white culture, and she always seeks security and happiness which she believes that they cannot be found in the black culture; therefore, she attempts to dwell in the white society. Brody claims that according to Irene’s sight of American culture, she considers that she is compelled to think more highly of class than race, which is that constituent, to her mind, putting obstacles to someone’s pursuit of prosperity and cheerfulness (1992, p. 1059). Her race does not allow her to follow her objectives; therefore, she should close her eyes to her black identity. Similarly, Dawahare claims that for Larsen’s protagonists, affluence equals being white, and her works disclose “how this reification of race operates by converting social relations of class into ontological concepts that appear natural and universal” (2006, p. 25). Accordingly, the black individuals are not expected to be wealthy, so they need to take on the white behaviour.

In the Dryton Hotel, Irene attempts to appear as a white woman, and her attentions are occupied by the white people there. She looks at a woman, who sits next to her table, and stares at her appearance claiming, “An attractive woman with those dark, almost black, eyes and that wide mouth like a scarlet flower against the ivory of her skin. Nice clothes too, just right for the weather, thin and cool without being mussy” (Larsen, 1929, p. 15-16). She behaves very sensibly so that her race cannot be discovered. When the woman recognizes Irene and asks her whether her friends still call her “Rene” or not, in her reply Irene says, “nobody calls me ‘Rene anymore” (Larsen, 1929, p. 21). It is transparent enough that Irene has endeavoured to obliterate some of her heritage through maintaining that the letter “I”, a “rising tower” stays in her name as her Negro friend called her ‘Rene, therefore she thinks more highly of the white heritage rather than the African impacts. She is conscious of her feeling “outnumbered, a sense of aloneness in her adherence to her own class and kind; not merely in the great thing of marriage but in the whole pattern of



her life" (Larsen, 1929, p. 56). These factors can be taken as irrefutable proof that her friend, Clare, ironically insinuates herself into a segment of American culture while Irene craves for assimilation or inclusion in that similar society. When Irene finds out Clare's real identity by her "ringing" laugh, she instantly "starts to rise" (Larsen, 1929, p. 23), but Clare orders her not to get up. I consider this quote as proof for claiming that it is white authority, Clare's new white identity, over Irene ordering her not to get up. Brody claims that this seemingly harmless introduction of "old acquaintances" lays emphasis on the alter in authority divulging Clare's wish for equality with her bourgeois friends as well as Irene's equally ironic yearning for dominance and "white" safety (1992, p. 1059).

I assert that the encounter scene between Irene and Clare unveils Irene's double consciousness as while Clare gazes blatantly at Irene, Irene wonders whether Clare is aware of that Irene is passing or not claiming, "Did that woman, could that woman, somehow know that here before her very eyes on the roof of the Drayton sat a Negro?" (Larsen, 1929, p. 18). Her mind is all of a sudden preoccupied with feelings of how white people decide upon that someone is black or white as she says, "finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of ears, teeth" (Larsen, 1929, p. 19). Irene's double consciousness intensifies her uncertainties since she already imagines the potential upshots of being discovered and is alert to the judgments white individuals would make if she were identified as a black person.

Unlike Irene, who only passes into white culture in certain circumstances, Clare wears the cover of white identity permanently. Clare already passes into the white culture as prior to recognizing her, Irene considers her to be a white woman and gets surprised that she has altered her identity. Clare's first portrayal shows her as "a pale small girl sitting on a ragged blue sofa, sewing pieces of bright red cloth together, while her drunken father... raged ... up and down the shabby room, bellowing curses" (Larsen, 1929, p. 4). This concise depiction offers the reader a great deal information about Clare's background life and social category. It exposes that she was poor; moreover, she was a domestic worker at her white aunts' home in return for weekly income until she got married to a white man. If Irene's factors behind her passing is happiness and security, Clare's motivation for altering her identity permanently is to get rid of her terrible situation and her being accepted by society that she deserves a nice life as she reveals to Irene, "You had all the

things I wanted and never had ... I used to almost hate you for it ... but it also made me more determined to get them and more" (Larsen, 1929, p. 41). Therefore, I indirectly understand that one of the key factors for Clare's passing is her wish for Irene's appreciation, positive reception by her bourgeois neighbours.

The question *Passing* poses is that how racial identity is and should be described. Steve Pile investigates Larsen's thought on racial identity and believes that "the black/white epidermal schema, by itself, cannot provide an account of the lived experience of skin" (2011, p. 9). Accordingly, skin colour by itself is not a dependable marker of race or an approach to identify someone's racial identity. Pile also claims that any set of characteristics or standards fail to give a certain definition to racial identity, but rather it hinges on one's perception and personal selection (2011, p. 9). What Pile analyses is that the outer part colour of body does not tell someone's race neither the certain standards set by the white culture. The dominant white society should neither set up standards to determine racial identities nor interfere in someone's identity construction.

Despite the fact that Clare seems to be white and is married to someone white, she extraordinarily preserves a stronger sense of double-consciousness than Irene does. Brody describes Clare as unendingly attentive of her own racial source and her double-dealing positionality; moreover, she suits white authority and employs it to her benefit. On the contrary, Irene lives in many moments in which she looks at herself plainly as well as purely as an American (1992, p. 1055-56). To put it blatantly, Clare has been creating a white identity for many years; however, she has been able to remain informed of Negro society, but Irene attempts to be a pure American. Clare constantly wipes out the detachment between Irene and "the masses" and the distance between Irene's African traditions and her aspiration to become "white". A great deal of *Passing* is dedicated to perceiving Irene's yearning for not "being the link between her and her poorer dark brethren" (Larsen, 1929, p. 97) since such a position would hinder Irene's sight of herself as an American inhabitant.

According to Irene's and Clare's encounter in the Drayton Hotel, I argue that Clare's staring at Irene, not any other characters' inspection in the text, puts Irene's security about her race and social position in hazard. It can be clear evidence that Irene craves for turning

her back from her background whereas Clare yearns for demolishing the wall between her own appearance as well as her present chosen status. Clare further makes Irene more provocative and leads her to her insecurity more by claiming "Rene dear, now that I've found you, I mean to see lots and lots of you. We're here for a month. .. Jack, that's my husband, is here on business" (Larsen, 1929, p. 33). That is in fact a harsh proclamation to Irene's unspoken thoughts. Clare calls Irene, 'Rene, her old "Negro" label and also undermines Irene's postulations about her marital status. This makes Irene feel that Clare has a higher position socially and economically than before due to altering her racial identity, and I believe this creates envy in Irene.

Clare unquestionably passes; but with a totally dissimilar feeling compared to Irene's passing. Clare does not leave the black world internally always attempting to maintain a link to it, for instance when Irene advises her not to attend the Negro Welfare League dance, Clare replies, "I can't, I can't, I would if I could, but I can't. You don't know, you can't realize how I want to see Negroes, to be with them again, to talk with them, to hear them laugh" (Larsen, 1929, p. 129). Clare knows that she has apparently taken on a white identity, but she does not reject her black one. Brody makes an apparent distinction between Irene's and Clare's passing and analyses that Irene feels comfortable in white society, believing in her passing and embracing the white values. However, white society does not bring comfort to Clare, who intends to pass for white only in terms of appearance. She employs her "ivory mask" as a lure to "distract her adversaries and to allow her to infiltrate hostile territories" (Brody, 1992, p. 1058). Additionally, white culture does not bring comfort to her at all, even she feels alienated and is filled with loneliness in the white society as she says,

. . . For I am lonely, so lonely . . . cannot help longing to be with you again, as I have never longed for anything before; and I have wanted many things in my life. . . . You can't know how in this pale life of mine I am all the time seeing the bright pictures of that other that I once thought I was glad to be free of. . . . It's like an ache, a pain that never ceases. . . . (Larsen, 1929, p. 8)

The excerpt mentioned above shows that the white society is a weird world for her and she cannot get used to it. She seems to be comfortable within her own community. White identity also gives her pain as much as the burden of her original race. She longs to get back to her community as she claims that she craves for disposing of her life within the

white society. Clare embraces the white world because she as a black woman is destined to an austere life with her white aunts and has no opportunities to get rid of racial discriminations. I claim that that Irene accounts for the beauty of appearance as she, who does not recognize Clare as her childhood friend at first, esteems Clare's exterior being and believes that Clare is “[a]n attractive-looking woman” (Larsen, 1929, p. 15-16). Clare's bodily traits match up with an unchanging criterion of beauty which Irene idealizes or confirms as do those in the black community who label straight hair as good hair. It was straightforward for Clare to show up like a white woman as she had, “always had that pale gold hair. ... the ivory skin had a peculiar soft lustre. And the eyes were magnificent! dark, sometimes absolutely black” (Larsen, 1929, p. 45).

Irene and Clare do not endeavour to construct their identities in accordance with the black community values but rather in conformity with the white culture ones; therefore, their identities are not their own natural ones. Both protagonists go through double consciousness and intend to escape from their black community as they believe that if they remain within the circle of black community, they are in danger. Clare thinks that altering her identity brings her a life void of hard work and full of comfort, and Irene attempts to guarantee a secure life, which she believes she can do so within the white society. Nonetheless, it is questionable whether they thrive to conceal their black heritage eternally. Brian is the only black character who sticks to the black community worth and strives to preserve his blackness always wanting to get back to Brazil where he can develop his African heritage. Thus, he builds his identity in accordance with his community values.

### **2.3 Loss of the Self**

The disappearance of the self and attempting to look as someone else is a transparent issue in the novel. I argue that both Irene's and Clare's selves get lost, and they make attempts to escape from their natural existence as African-Americans. They no longer remain within the frame of blackness. Correspondingly, Sullivan claims that the word "passing" undoubtedly touches on the colour line crossing which was formerly very common in American stories of "race"; however, in Larsen's work the word colloquially has the

meaning of death as well. Accordingly, the novel's title alludes to the subject's fading in the story, or the likelihood of aphorisis, which is labeled as the loss of the subject behind the signifier in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* by Jacques Lacan. For Irene Westover and Clare, the two protagonists of the novel, the destroying signifier is nigger, a word coming to express their fight with the conflict of American racism as well as absorption (Sullivan, 1998, p. 373).

In *Passing*, the white culture affects Irene's and Clare's desires in a way that it obliges them to construct their desires in accordance with the ones of white society; therefore, they make efforts to act and behave like two other women who are not themselves. According to Sullivan, Irene and Clare are "tyrannized by the Other's desire"; furthermore, despite the fact that sexuality and gender complicate their connection, "the dynamics of white racism and the demands of assimilation" determine the two women's lives. Eventually, their lives are identified in the word Negro by "White racism"; moreover, that description decides upon the restrictions of their lives (1998, p. 374). What Sullivan tries to say is that the two female characters' wishes and aspirations are not their own but rather the production of the dominant white culture.

I assume that the key problem in the two characters' lives is their being acknowledged by the white society. They are terribly in need of recognition because they always feel rejected in the dominant culture. There is a clear connection between recognition and the Other's inscrutable desire, since as Jacques Lacan claims, "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (1978, p. 38). Accordingly, one's desires should not go out of the Other's circle of desires in order to be recognized. In *Passing*, Irene charges Clare, who is "exquisite, golden, fragrant, flaunting", of a "deliberate courting of attention" (Larsen, 1929, p. 135), whereas she herself takes an excessive amount of time putting on clothes throughout the text. Both do so for the purpose of being recognized. In conversations, the "subject" has to find out the wish of the "Other" (Sullivan, 1998, 375). Similarly, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan claims that the "subject" implicitly asks the "Other", "What am I to/of you?" (1986, p. 48). According to Sullivan's and Ragland-Sullivan's ideas, the subject should learn the desires of the "Other" and longs to know the viewpoint of the "Other"; thus, Irene as the subject aspires to realize how Clare as the "Other" looks at her.

Whiteness and affluence are the preconditions for someone to be recognized in the bourgeois environment of *Passing*. Irene crosses the racial line by taking on white values, including white principles of beauty whereas Clare does so by superficially embracing a white identity void of white values (Sullivan, 1998, p. 374). Depending on that analysis, Irene abandons the black values and background while Clare only takes advantage of white identity and does not dispose of black values. I believe that Irene intends to be close to Clare so that she can bridge Irene and white culture. Correspondingly, Thadious M. Davis considers Irene's "attraction to Clare" as an "aesthetic attraction to whiteness," a "logical extension of her black bourgeoisie life- style and ideology" (1994, p. 326). Though Clare proclaims that Irene is her connection to blackness, Irene brings about her longing for whiteness through Clare. Having her "ivory face under that bright hair" (Larsen, 1929, p. 46) as well as her marriage to a white investor, Clare turns to be Irene's vicarious link to the white culture.

The story is told in the third person narrative, and in describing the narrative voice of the novel, Jacquelyn McLendon touches on the issue of "the disguised 'I'". Despite the fact that the narrator is the third person, the story is "personal" since it is entirely Irene's; furthermore, it could simply be narrated in the first person. The "disguised I," places emphasis on Irene's repression and strengthens the theme of "passing" as disguise in *Passing* (1991, p. 159). McLendon's understanding of the "disguised I" leads to another anxiety of the novel, the problematic I. The first person would not be apt for Irene's narrative since the "I" as an empowered, integrated subject status avoided Irene (Sullivan 1998, p. 377). Accordingly, the "I" would not belong to Irene herself and be different from her as a passer.

Irene often identifies herself in accordance with the desire of the Other; therefore, an unmediated depiction of her voice would be incompatible with her indispensable lack. Wish is an indication of lack; thus, Irene's aspiration for security throughout *Passing* brings the instability of the "I" to light (Sullivan 1998, p. 377). She associates her faintness with a "need for immediate safety" (Larsen, 1929, p. 12) and finds out "that, to her, security was the most important and desired thing in life .... She wanted only to be tranquil" (Larsen, 1929, p. 200). Irene undergoes "the menace of impermanence" (Larsen, 1929, p. 188), which she ascribes to Brian's wish to move to Brazil and to Clare's

disruption of her household. Her sense of permanence, her understanding of herself like a constant, integrated I, is constantly in hazard; furthermore, she is afflicted by a tense anxiety of destruction, even in Chicago prior to Clare's rejoining her. This tension is indicative of denoting the unavailability of fragmenting the subject.

Based on the argument that Irene undergoes a problematic "I", she hunts for an idealized figure to reflect herself as she does not remain black and must see herself in a different identity. In "The Mirror Stage," Lacan throws light on the idealized image function in subjectivity. The notion is that subsequent to seeing their image in the mirror, the baby describes themselves as "I," as subject at first. This reflection of the mirror is unified, masterful and, consequently, signifies "the mental permanence of the I" for the subject (1977, p. 2). Lacan adds that the supposition of the idealized image constantly involves incorrect acceptance since the reflection is not the self (1977, p. 6). At the beginning of *Passing*, Irene takes on Clare as her idealized image as Claudia Tate considers that Clare's regular connection with Irene renders Irene envious of Clare's unusual beauty. Tate adds that Irene is factually infatuated with Clare's beauty (1980, p. 142-44). However, the misrecognition eloquently becomes apparent after the mirror event.

Lacan's "Mirror Stage" in *Passing* evidently takes place when Irene declines to reply Clare's letters; consequently, Clare appears uninvited in Irene's room. Subsequent to asking Zulena to allow Clare, Irene "at the mirror ... dusted a little powder on her nose and brushed out her hair" (Larsen, 1929, p. 114). When she comes back from rest room hurriedly, she practises the rejection she means to give Clare:

But that was as far as she got in her rehearsal. For Clare had come softly into the room without knocking, and before Irene could greet her, had dropped a kiss on her dark curls. Looking at the woman before her, Irene Redfield had a sudden inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling. Reaching out, she grasped Clare's two hands in her own and cried with something like awe in her voice: "Dear God! But aren't you lovely, Clare!" (Larsen, 1929, p. 115)

In case the mirror were not absolutely there in the scene and in case there were no elision of identities, the "kiss," the "inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling," as well as Irene's mention of "awe" may all be interpreted entirely as symbols of an erotic desire between the two individuals (Sullivan, 1998, p. 378). However, I contend that the presence of the

mirror dampens that sexuality-based interpretation. While Irene stares at the mirror, Clare goes into the room; furthermore, the presence of the mirror creates ambiguity in Irene's seeing the woman in front of her in the mirror. The vagueness lies in the fact that it is not known whether the woman is Clare or Irene herself. Additionally, Irene's response to Clare's going in restates the Lacanian infant's "jubilant assumption" of their image in the mirror (Lacan, 1977, p. 2) because similar to the mirror-stage infant, Irene shows that she is interested in the image and cries out with ecstasy. Her "awed" shout, "'Dear God! But aren't you lovely, Clare!'" implies that in Clare she observes an image which is in superiority as compared to the one she apprehensively accounts for prior to Clare's entrance; thus, the image is apter to signify the "mental permanence of the I" (Lacan, 1977, p. 2). As if to emphasize the identification between the two women, Clare even takes a seat in Irene's "favourite chair" (Larsen, 1929, p. 115). According to Helena Michie, the scene proves the fluctuation between Irene's "desire for Clare and identification with her" (1992, p. 151). Consequently, Irene notices in Clare an "image of her futile searching" for permanence (Larsen, 1929, p. 129). As the story develops more, she finds it difficult to separate "individuals from the race, herself from Clare Kendry" (Larsen, 1929, p. 185).

When Irene reaches the fact that she is lacking of the competence to "master" Clare, the identification between the two individuals turns to be more challenging. Sullivan argues that Irene renounces the attractive, "idealized white image" as she commences to doubt that Clare makes attempts to seduce Brian and that both plan to be disloyal to her (1998, 378). As soon as this doubt becomes apparent, Irene experiences a momentary disappearance of existence, "The face in the mirror vanished from her sight, blotted out by this thing which had so suddenly flashed across her groping mind" (Larsen, 1929, p. 163). As the image ultimately re-emerges in the mirror, it is "her dark white face" which is not merely white anymore and which she sees not with delight but with "a kind of ridiculing contempt" (Larsen, 1929, p. 164). I claim that later while Irene and Clare get together in front of the mirror for the last time, Irene goes through panic and blame over her sin of omission; she has it in mind but is unable to inform Clare that Bellew possibly deduces Clare's ethnic identity because he already sees Irene with Felise Freeland having brown skin, "Irene passed a hand over her eyes to shut out the accusing face in the glass before her. With one corner of her mind she wondered how long she had looked like that,



drawn and haggard and ...yes, frightened” (Larsen, 1929, p. 196). Irene more and more loses her aptitude to control either herself or Clare; therefore, she undergoes a shrink of the "loveliness" in the mirror; moreover, the image is not masterful anymore but one of powerlessness as well as fright (Sullivan, 1998, p. 378-79).

When Bellew meets Irene and Felise Freeland, a big problem arises in Clare’s life. I believe that it is not merely Clare who mirrors Irene but Irene mirrors Clare as well; therefore, the mirroring is reciprocal. After Bellew receives Felise to be Irene's reflection, he also identifies Clare reflected in Felise's face:

But the smile faded at once. Surprise, incredulity, and—was it understanding?—passed over his features. He had, Irene knew, become conscious of Felise, golden, with curly black Negro hair, whose arm was still linked in her own. She was sure, now, of the understanding in his face, as he looked at her again and then back at Felise. And displeasure. (Larsen, 1929, p. 182-83)

The above-mentioned lines unveil that Bellew finds out Clare's African American identity. Greeting Irene with a smile denotes that he envisions Irene as a mirror of his white spouse; however, the smile expressively “fades” when he transfers his look from Irene to Felise, whose skin and hair label her as African American and disclose all what Irene and Clare already apprehensively hide from him.

Irene attempts to act out her own interests, “[i]nstitutively, at the first glance of recognition, her face had become a mask.... she gave him the cool appraising stare which she reserved for mashers” (Larsen, 1929, p. 183). While noticing Bellew's “displeasure,” Irene puts on the "mask" that signifies a form of self-concealment, and additionally her cool gaze indicates the manipulation of herself as the object of the Other's wish. Bearing resemblance to the Lacanian child, who yearns to become the object of her parents’ wish and accordingly contemplates the tantalizing likelihood, “Can he lose me?” (Lacan, 1978, p. 214-15), Irene alters the stare direction and uses the prospect of her own loss or fading to manipulate Bellew's wish. Revealing Clare’s black identity creates hardship for Irene and brings her away a big step from the white society. Tate says that the sole time Irene is alert that race even remotely leaves impact on her life occurs when the looming disclosure of Clare's racial identity is intimidating and hastens the disturbance of Irene's domestic safety (1980, p. 143). Irene starts to turn ambivalent about her African legacy;

furthermore, that ambivalence is linked to Clare. Clare becomes perilous for her; thus, she must rescue her objective, white identity, by detaching himself from her. Clare's identity exposure equals to the fact that she is also a Negro. The burden of her race makes Irene commence to crave "for the first time in her life, that she had not been born a Negro" (Larsen, 1929, p. 181). She fails to hold that burden and has no adequate competence to put up with blackness. Endangering her life leads her to reject herself as a Negro and wish that she were born a white child. Tate portrays Irene as "on the verge of total mental disintegration" (1980, p. 143), and at first she links her breakdown to her idealized image, Clare.

I argue that Irene makes two attempts to destruct Clare, and both attempts stem from racist behaviours done towards black people and escaping from blackness as Clare is not in a white identity anymore. The first destruction involves Irene's damage of Clare's letters at two dissimilar times in the story. Notably, both letters refresh for Irene the remembrance of John Bellew's racist attack while Clare is present there. Clare's first letter, sent to thank Irene for attending the tea party in Chicago, just rings a bell of the degradation of listening without a sound to Bellew's racist invective for Irene, as a result she

tore the offending letter into tiny ragged squares that fluttered down and made a small heap in her black crepe de Chine lap. The destruction completed, she gathered them up, rose, and moved to the train's end. Standing there, she dropped them over railing and watched them scatter, on tracks, on cinders, on forlorn grass, in rills of dirty water. (Larsen, 1929, p. 83)

Tearing the letter metaphorically connotes Irene's effort to stay away from Clare as "Nig." She splits it into "tiny ragged squares," and disperses the pieces in a gesture of removal, which Sullivan deems to be a forced fading of "Clare's asserted presence", bringing with it Bellew's abhorrence of "niggers" (1998, p. 380). Subsequently, Irene believes that if Clare appears personally, she "had only to turn away her eyes, to refuse her recognition" (Larsen, 1929, p. 84). Without thinking, she reproduces the white racist's deeds, desiring Clare's loss through a rejection to recognize. The second letter, Irene gets in New York, also brings the terrible remembrance, "bringing with them a clear, sharp remembrance, in which even now, after two years, humiliation, resentment, and rage were mingled" (Larsen, 1929, p. 9). She tears it, "tearing the letter across" and throws "it into the scrap-

basket' (Larsen, 1929, p. 109), expressing both her fury at Clare as well as the breakdown she feels with the recollection of Bellew's loathing. The remembrance of racial discrimination she has received before is due to Clare; therefore, Irene tears the letter in order to dispose of Clare. Irene does not want a Clare as a Negro to link her to blackness and to be a high wall between the white society and her, but she wants a Clare as a purely white woman building a bridge between the white world and her.

The destruction of the two letters occurs prior to merging Clare and Irene in the mirror. However, after Irene finds her corporal being in Clare in the mirror, she obliterates that image subsequent to commencing to suspect Brian and Clare as well as Clare's identity revelation. Thus, Irene expresses another destruction of Clare, crashing a white teacup. As she becomes furious at noticing Brian apparently courting Clare at another tea party, Irene either drops or flings the teacup to the ground with "a slight crash. On the floor at her feet lay the shattered cup" (Larsen, 1929, p. 171). I claim that the broken teacup scene uncovers Irene's own collapse or loss of control; however, to conceal her perplexity, Irene explains to Hugh Wentworth that she has smashed the cup deliberately because it "was the ugliest thing that your ancestors, the Confederates ever owned" (Larsen, 1929, p. 173). The broken teacup helps Irene realize that it is necessary for her to break and dispose of it everlastingly. Evidently, the breaking of the teacup with its "white fragments" foretells Clare's imminent death (Sullivan, 1998, p. 81). On the other hand, Brody believes that the cup, like Clare, is an ugly object calling to Irene's mind her black heritage, which she fails to endure anymore. It also indicates "Clare's own broken body" in the end of *Passing*. Irene thinks about a way to free her stable life from Clare Kendry (1992, p. 1062) as well as her "menace of impermanence" (Larsen, 1929, p. 187).

I believe that both Irene and Clare fail to leave their black heritage and embrace new racial identities everlastingly, and their attempts to do so lead them to their destruction in the end of the novel, Clare's death and Irene's loss of consciousness. Whether Clare herself jumps or Irene pushes her, Bellew's announcement, "So you're a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!" (Larsen, 1929, p. 208), initiates Clare's fading from the window. In the Lacanian version of disappearance of the subject, while making efforts to find out the wish of the "Other" with the question, "[h]e is saying this to me, but what does he want?", the subject gets lost behind the "signifier" in conversation with the "Other", (Lacan, 1978, p. 214).

Accordingly, Clare's death from the window is the other's desire. Similarly, Frantz Fanon also reckons that for black subjects in conversation with the "white Other", the reply has to be this, "Turn white or disappear" (1991, p. xxi). Clare cannot turn white eternally and must disappear out of her blackness. Bellew's speech, "damned dirty nigger", denotes his wish for Clare's exclusion; therefore, Clare, who is belittled in Bellew's mind for associating with Negroes, has to perish although Irene precipitates the death announcing, "One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing, like a flame in red and gold. The next she was gone. There was a gasp of horror, and above it a sound not quite human, like a beast in agony. "Nig! My God! Nig!" (Larsen, 1929, p. 209). The most noticeable reading, which has been given the widest approval, is that Irene in a moment of ephemeral madness pushes Clare out of the window (Tate, 1980, p. 145). There is no clear evidence for Tate's interpretation; therefore, suicide can be another interpretation. Tate also believes that Clare examines the pieces of her life; furthermore, she disappears, leaving behind a hurting state, which she fails to change. She is completely in a state of solitude; therefore, committing suicide is the ultimate getaway from the degradation awaiting her (1980, p. 145-146). In both cases, Irene's pushing her and Clare's suicide, Clare dies out of racial issues. Clare, like Irene, undergoes a problematic subjectivity resulting in her fading, or the disappearance of the subject behind the signifier. Her loss proves the fatal connection Lacan puts forward between signification and subjectivity because the word "Nig", similar to the Lacanian signifier, "manifests itself ... in the murder of the thing" (Lacan, 1977, p. 104). Accordingly, Lacan's term, signifier, is equal to Clare's blackness. Clare's death stems from being black, and she loses her life as a black person. Brody claims that Clare's collapse as an upper-class white" spouse would be a wanted "fall back into her past life as lower-class black Clare Kendry" (1992, p. 1061). She dies as a black woman, and Irene says, "Clare Kendry had remained almost what she had always been" (Larsen, 1929, p. 133), a lower-class Black individual. However, Irene entirely crosses her racial line to the white side as her support to John Bellew reveals "No, no! I'm quite certain that he didn't [push Clare]" (Larsen, 1929, p. 216). She defends Bellew as if she belongs to the white society. I claim that Clare embraces her death happily because as the narrator says she "seemed unaware of any danger ... There was even a faint smile on her full, red lips and in her shining eyes" (Larsen, 1929, p. 209). Clare's final vision

demonstrates that she goes towards death consciously and “perhaps proudly as a Black woman”; furthermore, Clare never has the fear of being realized, but it is Irene who holds that fear. (Brody, 1992, p. 1663-64).

I reckon that Irene’s desire to destroy Clare through letters and the teacup is an attempt to shatter herself. Irene is ruined when Clare undergoes corporal collapse because she is unable to “separate...herself from Clare Kendry” (Larsen, 1929, p. 185). Clare’s fall to her loss leads Irene to go through nausea as she envisions that Clare may stay alive. The nausea stems not only from “fear, but also from “the idea of the glorious body mutilated” (Larsen, 1929, p. 213). “The glorious body” does not entirely belong to Clare; however, it is a “shared, idealized image of self”; therefore, its deformity signifies both women’s breakdown (Sullivan, 1998, p. 382). While Irene attempts to free Bellew from blame, her unsteady subjectivity breaks as she says, ““No, no! 'I'm quite certain that he didn't. I was there, too. As close as he was. She just fell, before anybody could stop her. I-' ” (Larsen, 1929, p. 216). Considerably, the subject, Irene, is dismantled by the utterance of the “I”, as the storyteller claims, “Her quaking knees gave way under her” (Larsen, 1929, p. 216). She moaned and sank down, moaned again. Through the great heaviness that submerged and drowned her she was dimly conscious of strong arms lifting her up. Then everything was dark” (Larsen, 1929, p. 216). Saying her final and most problematic word, " 'I-' ", Irene loses her consciousness. Her passing out, the "darkness" that swallows up I, is another example of aphanisis in *Passing*, which is the reflection of Clare's brutal death. Her last word is “I”, and she fails to complete her last sentence. This vividly unveils that Irene does not belong to herself as a subject and cannot have her own voice because she is someone else.

The tragic end of the novel puts forward the belief that deciding upon ethnic values by the political economy of capitalism shows a “no-win situation”. In *Passing*, “The New Negro's revaluation of blackness as a source of pride” emerges as a desperate endeavour to challenge the demonstration of being black as an indication of working-class inferiority. Larsen's novel exposes that the New Negro advocates of racial pride, “like their white-identified detractor”, are continually ensnared because of the “capitalist semiotics of race” (Dawahare, 2006, p. 25). Dawahare’s stance is that the capitalist indication of race makes the New Negro proponents as well as their white opponents suffer in its trap.

Double consciousness affects Irene's understanding of her own identity and her understanding of Clare Kendry's identity for it results in Irene's inner racial conflict of identity. Double consciousness compels Irene to embrace white criteria of identity and play the role of a white mother; however, it brings to Irene's mind that her black descent identifies her as black in the eyes of white law; therefore, Irene's endeavours to perform both of American and African roles cause her a very strict conflict which leads to Clare's loss of life. Larsen's *Passing* places emphasis on the hazards of attributing a race to an individual, so it is difficult to allocate a firm racial identity to either Irene or to Clare. *Passing* is a remembrance to the fact that that racial identity is not rigid but flexible, and the social creation of race can effortlessly become complicated and results in the highest hypocrisy as well as inner conflict between two contrasting standards, white and black identities. Race in itself is the holder of this intrinsic threat since a racial identity cannot be described devoid of a conflicting racial identity, to put it differently, black is not there without white, nor does white is there without black as Jmaes Baldwin claims, "it is precisely this black-white experience which may prove of indispensable value to us in the world we face today" (1984, p. 175).

### 3. TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

Although Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is in one way or another a fiction, its story has been derived from a real event. Morrison got inspiration for her novel from one of her black colleagues longing for having blue eyes as she herself claims that the source of the literary work lies in a conversation she had with a school friend of hers during childhood. At the onset of their elementary school, her friend announced that she craved for blue eyes (Morrison, 2007, p. X). Morrison further says that racial self-abhorrence was implied in her wish; furthermore, after twenty years of her friend's desire she still pondered about what lied behind that sort of thinking. She raises questions, "Who told her? Who made her feel that it was better to be a freak than what she was? Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale? The novel pecks away at the gaze that condemned her" (Morrison, 2007, p. XI). Morrison in her work inquires the factors behind racial self-hatred. Laraine Wallowitz in "Resisting the White Gaze: Critical Literacy and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" sheds light on Morrison's aim of her novel claiming that Morrison produced this work for the purpose of investigating the sources and effects of ethnical self-abhorrence (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 153). She endeavours to discover why a black person hates the self racially and the upshots of self-hatred.

The story is told with the third person narrative style from a nine-year-old girl's point of view, Claudia's. The novel opens in the autumn of 1941, just following the Great Depression, in Lorain, Ohio. Claudia MacTeer and Frieda, her ten-year-old sister, live with their parents in an "old, cold, and green" house. The MacTeers take in young Pecola Breedlove, whose father is severely brutal towards the family especially towards the mother, Pauline. Pecola is a calm, uncomfortable girl, who adores Shirley Temple, considering that beauty lies in whiteness and that she is ugly due to her blackness. Pecola's life is hard. Her father heavily drinks alcohol, and her parents fight continually. She starts

to believe that her parents' fight stems from her ugliness. Boys and the new, light-skinned girl, Maureen Peal, taunt Pecola at school. She is also teased by her neighborhood boys, when for example Junior kills her mother's cat, he accuses Pecola of it, making his mother shout at her and kick her out of the house.

Pauline owns a distorted foot, always leading her to feel like an outsider in her family. She receives the idea of beauty from Hollywood films and commences to imitate white celebrities. Cholly is Pauline's husband, who has been brought up by his aunt. He also suffers from racism. One day Cholly gets back home drunk and sees that Pecola washes dishes. Cholly rapes her in the kitchen. Pecola is seen unconscious by Pauline. She does not trust Pecola that her father has raped her. Cholly repeats the rape. The rape renders Pecola pregnant. She visits Soaphead Church and requests him to offer her blue eyes. Soaphead tells Pecola to give his dog some meat, indeed poison, and if the dog acts weird, she will get her wish. While the dog starts to throw up and limp around, Pecola thinks that she will obtain her blue eyes. Everyone in Lorain intends that the baby should die whereas Claudia and Frieda wish its survival. Pecola's baby dies. Pecola and Pauline move to the edge of town; furthermore, Pecola commences to lose her mentality. She stares into a mirror and speaks to herself.

### **3.1 The White Dominance and Perception of Blacks:**

Anna Zebialowicz and Marek Palasinsk make reference to McKittrick's viewpoint saying that although the number of black celebrities escalates, beauty and worth are still powerfully identified by "the white aesthetic" in the racist societies nowadays (2009, p. 222). This reveals the profound hegemony of the white culture over the black community. The white individuals have always differentiated and separated themselves from others and set up beliefs as well as standards which build deep gaps between the white and the Negro. Edward Said also touches on the notions of "us" and "them", which are illustrated in the colonizers' minds. The white suppose that "we" should rule "them" (1993, p. xiii). Similarly, Fanon states that from the white culture's perspective, "The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly ... 'Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up'" (1991, p. 113-14). Accordingly, the white culture perceives the Negro as an odd



creature holding hazard for the white individuals and does not recognize the black community as positively distinctive. In the novel, Mrs. Geraldine teaches her children, Louis and Junior those beliefs by distancing their children from the Negroes. She does not want her children to play with the nigger ones, claiming, "White people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison, 2007, p.71). This kind of upbringing and instruction unquestionably influences a child's manners and conduct. This sort of teaching intrinsically blossoms with the children's growth already thinking that they are superior and Blacks are inferior; furthermore, it will be too hard to dispose of them in the future. By the passage of time, those attributes turn to be facts. Mrs. Geraldine always thinks that her son is right; however, in reality, he is a liar. He is the reason behind the death of the cat but charges Pecola. Therefore, she discharges Pecola and affronts her, saying "you nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house"(Morrison, 2007, p. 75). The black people have always met inequality created by the white society. This inequality constructs a negative sensation in their minds feeling estranged within society. Similarly, McKittrick claims that imposing unjust and subjective outlook of race and place has excluded and deprived black people of equality; therefore, they experience distress and otherness in a culture which is taken over by white individuals (qtd. in Zebialowicz, Palasinsk, 2009, p. 222). According to her views, Blacks are dealt with neither fairly nor equally; thus, they remain inferior and alienated under the white superiority.

In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Bell Hooks touches on the history of feminism as well as diverse sorts of tyranny, declaring that concerning the past of servitude, white culture instituted a social ladder founded on race and sex in which white men stood first, white women second, although occasionally equal to black men, who stood third, and black women last. In terms of the sexual politics of rape, it signifies that in case a black man rapes a white woman, it is deemed more vital, more noteworthy than a case in which one white man rapes thousands of black women (2007, p. 52-53). Accordingly, if a white man and a black one commit the same crime like rape, the black man's one is accounted for more; therefore, the black individuals receive unfair treatment in the white society. Considering this categorization, black women are in the lowest position and inferior to other categories.

In accordance with the white standards of beauty, the black characters are ugly, and they receive that idea as a fact rendering them worthless. In *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: a Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*, C. Gillespie explicates that in *The Bluest Eye* self-respect and regard of almost all of the characters are influenced by the damaging impact of the physical beauty construction. The ideals of the principal society determine the objective description of corporal beauty so as to emphasize power dynamics. He also admits that African Americans conventionally have been cast aside and are not even regarded as good-looking; thus, they undergo the consequential lack of confirmation (2008, p. 55). In the novel, when Pecola feels her imposed ugliness, she is compelled to search for an unattainable thing, two blue eyes. Her lack of beauty, in conformity to the white criterion, leads to the worthlessness of the self as a black girl. Morrison attempts to question the concepts of beauty and race and how the whites view them. She criticizes power abuse of the dominant culture. Zebialowicz and Palasinsk claim that McKittrick finds similarity between Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Du Bois's *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. She points out that the approaches to defeat the assumptions of white ethnocentrism obsess both writers, and they weaken the fundamentals of white dominance, questioning the long-established notions of race and culture (qtd. in Zebialowicz and Palasinsk, 2009, p. 222).

*The Bluest Eye* narrates the story of Pecola Breedlove, an eleven year old girl. It begins with a narrative portrayal of Dick's and Jane's white family, who live in a lovely house comfortably. Donald B. Gibson thinks that the Dick and Jane story imposes a controlling culture via education, which tyrannizes the victim, Pecola, and shows her how to reject her black identity by internalising the beauty standards (1998, p. 20). Bringing up the Dick and Jane portrayal carries its weight due to the symbolic function the primer played in America. Timothy Powell in "Toni Morrison: The Struggle to Depict the Black Figure on the White Page" reveals the primer's aptitude which lies behind Pecola's self-destruction, believing that the Dick-and-Jane primer comes to denote the "institutionalized ethnocentrism" of the white symbol and of the ways white values and standards are stuck to every aspect of American life. Concerning the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove, it is specifically these standards that lie behind her catastrophic fall (1990, p. 749). Powell's standpoint recognizes the innermost crisis of

Morrison's novel, which is that the standards of another culture decide upon one's self-esteem and lead to one's obliteration.

However, I claim that Morrison employs Dick's and Jane's family story to bring the domination of the white culture to light that the white families lead happy lives, "They are very happy... she [Jane] wants to play" (Morrison, 2007, p. 1); furthermore, their domination allows them to have opportunities easier. Morrison gives the portrayal of the pleased family three times; however, except for the first time she gradually takes out grammatical indications such as, capitalization, punctuation, and even spacing between words. Within the third time description, the happy family's image is disordered, disjointed, and beyond understanding. Paul Douglas Mahaffey explains that this disruption bears resemblance to the turmoil and disintegration of the Breedloves as compared to either other black families such as the MacTeers or a white family like the Fishers hiring Pauline Breedlove (2004, p. 158).

Learning properly and internalising Western styles of life, Geraldine makes distinctions between coloured and black. She intentionally educates her child the dissimilarities between coloured and black. This discloses that Morrison constructs a ladder of skin quality selecting closeness and remoteness in terms of idealized bodily features. She divulges that as much as someone's skin colour is light, he/she is to that much extent closer to the white culture. Maureen Peel, a light-skinned child, is considered as appealing and Pecola as unattractive,

A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilets, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. (Morrison, 2007, p. 62)

Her classmates and teachers deal with Maureen Peel as "a high-yellow dream child," respectfully and admiringly not merely due to her financial supremacy, but because of her bright skin, her brown hair, her green eyes and her whiteness. If someone possesses only white or light skin, it is adequately sufficient for him/her to receive proper treatment and have opportunities regarding every aspect. Patrice Cormier-Hamilton in "Black

Naturalism and Toni Morrison: The Journey away from Self-Love in *The Bluest Eye*.” claims that for African Americans financial achievement is directly connected to having light skin, so a black person's opportunities of attaining both societal and financial benefits are low because of the beauty standards and general principles of the dominant culture they are lacking of (1994, p. 115). Accordingly, the black people are always subject to being deprived of the financial opportunities, and poorness is their destiny. The Breedloves live in a poor area because their economic state is terrible, “The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly” (Morrison, 2007, p. 38). Since they are black, they are deprived of prosperity and financial opportunities, which are under the control of the white people. They persist to lead their lives there owing to their ugliness, which makes them lose self-confidence and rejected.

In the novel, the domination of the white culture is so intense that it makes the black individuals offend each other, for example Pecola suffers more and gets insulted for her blackness by a group of black boys around her dancing and singing, “Black e mo. Black e mo” (Morrison, 2007, p. 65). Therefore, the white majority society is a tyrant directly and indirectly, holding back wealth, control and status to make Blacks stand against Blacks, constructing an inverted and abnormal social circle, in which its young boys and girls repeat songs of self-loathing. Another bad impact of Western culture penetration on Pecola is when Geraldine forces her out of her nice and clean house and offends Pecola attributing her as a “nasty little black bitch (Morrison, 2007, p. 92). While Geraldine gazes at Pecola and her dead cat, she notices Pecola’s unpleasant appearance as Claudia tells, “She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles” (Morrison, 2007, p. 91).

Morrison also exhibits the power of white culture that devours Pecola's self-worth and sense of self-image. In that dominant culture, wherever she goes the people around her belittle her for her dark skin. Pecola confronts Mr. Yacobowski in his shop and enthusiastically desires to buy Mary Jane candies at any price. Although Pecola is a paying customer, Mr. Yacobowski's expressionless eyes expose an entire lack of human respect,

and when he tentatively receives the pennies from Pecola's hand, he is careful not touch her dark skin (Morrison, 2007, p. 48). As soon as Pecola departs the candy shop, she again views and confirms her ugliness and worthlessness as a weed coming out of a crack in the pavement. Consequently, the white dominant society perceive the black identity as something perilous even not to be touched, and the black people in the novel are treated unfairly and even not like human beings because the white culture is practically superior and implements and imposes its standards on them. They are left with no opportunity of leading what is so called a worth-living life.

I argue that the principal cultural supremacy in *The Bluest Eye* is so influential that it leaves horrible impacts on the black families making them see their own children from the white lens since the black families assimilate to the white values and standards of life. This assimilation forces them to judge their children negatively, weaken their self-esteem and ultimately render them rejected even within their own community. Correspondently, Gillespie's analysis is that sadly the African-American descendants consistently perceive the meaning of beauty from the prevailing society and identify it in a way matching up with the white beauty image; thus, it causes characters like Pecola to be cast aside in society (2008, p. 55).

Pecola's being programmed to take on white beauty commences from her own family when her mother, Pauline Breedlove, watches movies from the silver screens and comes to know that white colour is the standard of beauty as the story teller says, "She [Pauline] was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (Morrison, 2007, p. 122). Therefore, the thought affects Pauline to believe that merely white females can be good-looking; furthermore, when she gives birth to Pecola, she cannot escape from the application of the thought to her. She learns to assign beauty only to the whiteness of skin. Cheryl A. Wall in "On Dolls, Presidents, and Little Black Girls" views that Pauline is estranged even from her black neighbours, for that reason she hunts for sanctuary in the movies; however, the movie female protagonists barely deepen her sense of inferiority (2010, p. 797). Pauline does not succeed in informing Pecola of the negative and menacing aspects of that imposed beauty standards and how to overcome them since she herself is also trapped into the fascination of that

white beauty. As a result, in the same way, the standard of beauty that Pauline sees in the movies is Pecola's perception of beauty. Similarly, Thomas H. Fick argues that the characters, evaluating themselves based on advertisement and films, are imprisoned for they believe in the existence of such a world (1989, p. 15).

Another source for Pauline to get fascinated in white beauty is that she works as a servant for the white Fishers family and comes across "beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise", in their house where she dedicates herself for the family and is pleased with it (Morrison, 2007, p. 127). She gets pleasure in being called Polly as a nickname and is contented with cleaning the nice house, but Pecola calls her Mrs. Breedlove because mother-child relationship is not in existence between the Pauline and Pecola, "They even gave her what she had never had—a nickname—Polly. It was her pleasure to stand in her kitchen at the end of a day and survey her handiwork" (Morrison, 2007, p. 128). Pauline comfortably works hard and affectionately cares for the white family; however, she does not give love or good care to neither of her own children, Pecola and her brother; therefore, the lack of Pauline's love contributes to Pecola's self-destruction. Pauline "taught them [her children] fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness.... Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (Morrison, 2007, p. 128). Pauline's role as a mother turns upside down neither being affectionate towards her own children and nor teaching them to be self-confident. Concerning love within the family, Pecola is agonizingly loathed at home, and her parents assume that they themselves do not deserve love, as a result their children put up with that self-hatred. Pauline detests herself; thus, she is lacking of the competence to love Pecola (Wall, 2010, p. 797). Pecola's rejection of self does not only result from Pauline's lack of love but also from the exterior world helping obliterate her mother. Pauline loves the white Fisher child too much and enjoys washing and touching her blonde hair in comparison with her own son and daughter, who are "tangled black puffs of rough wool" (Morrison, 2007, p. 127). In "The Blues Aesthetic in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye" Cat Moses assumes that Pauline's narrative reveals that she is on the way toward the "white bourgeois values", which the Hollywood movies seducing her and the perfect home of the Fishers represent. The allurements of materialism occupies her mind leaving no room for the memories of

community although she is unable to look forward to possessing what she aspires for (1999, p. 628).

I believe that the white culture in the novel makes the black characters close their eyes to their reality and create an unattainable and ideal world. Pauline's self-decline stems from disregarding her own reality and attempting for a life existing only in her imagination. Pauline aspires for the movies in which "the black-and-white images came together, making a magnificent whole" (Morrison, 2007, p. 122). She is lacking of aptitude for strengthening black identity and self-confidence as much as the white identity in her practical life, for that reason she endeavours to find that racial equality between white and black in those movies. The concept of racial equality springs to her mind due to the material world owned by whites. On the one hand she does not reach her objective of a Western ideal life in reality; on the other hand she wants to disregard that attractive colour imagery which is a part of her own experiences, saying, "I could feel that purple deep inside me. And that lemonade Mama used to make when Pap came in out the fields. It be cool and yellowish . . . And that streak of green them June bugs made on the trees . . . All of them colors was in me. Just sitting there" (Morrison, 2007, p. 115).

Pauline exchanges her rich images with a dream world which is devoid of the authentic feelings and beauty of her own image. She does not acknowledge the defect the actual life may have but surrenders to the movies as well as her labour for the white family. In her employers' household, "Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowed like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain, white woodwork, polished cabinets, and brilliant copperware" (Morrison, 2007, p. 107). White beauty is around her, and she imagines that she is a part of it. She craves for this tidiness and rejects the turmoil and the uncontrolled situation of her own home life. Pauline's need for order is obviously manifest the narrator claims, "Whatever portable plurality she found, she organized into neat lines, according to their size, shape, or gradations of color" (Morrison, 2007, p. 111). She refutes the fact that she is placed at the lowest level of that ordering by the Western beauty and flawlessness.

Commencing their relationship, Cholly, her husband, considers neither the foot nor Pauline revolting, and she starts to feel satisfied with her life. Her contentment remains intact until the movies familiarizes her with the standards culture carries concerning

beauty and love; furthermore, she aspires for fitting into those certain standards, even though she is relatively happy up to this point:

Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another—physical beauty. Probably the most distinctive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self contempt by the heap . . . She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty. (Morrison, 2007, p. 122)

Pauline becomes familiar with physical beauty and judges someone's beauty by appearance subsequent to receiving beauty-related education from the movies. She does not even exclude her daughter to judge by appearance and corporal beauty, and this judgment leads to Pauline to feel that Pecola is not wanted and loved unconditionally, declaring “[b]ut I knowed she [Pecola] was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (Morrison, 2007, p. 126). Pecola's physical beauty does not match with the dominant standards of beauty; therefore, Pauline determines that Pecola is ugly. This is an obstacle that Pecola can never jump over at all since she is incapable of changing her skin colour. Pauline does an absolute revision of her identity as well as her happiness since she does not occupy a high level of the Western position of beauty, and additionally her tooth falls out. The fallen tooth bears resemblance to the white ideal beauty, which decays and helps obliterate someone; “[b]ut there must have been a speck, a brown speck easily mistaken for food but which did not leave, which sat on the enamel for months, and grew, until it cut into the surface and then to the brown putty underneath, finally eating away to the root” (Morrison, 2007, p. 116). Pauline could stand against this apparently losing fight with the ideal of beauty and happiness others enforce on her; however, she agrees to it without questioning. I believe her acceptance stems from the movies, books, and everything else around her declaring to her what belongs to the white is good and that is what she should desire for as well.

The ideal world shown on the screen comes out to her as something she has constantly craved for, but as Tmdier Harris in *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* believes she does not attempt to rescue her life from its loss, and the movement puts her into a set of fixed values (1991, p. 35). Her powerlessness or satisfaction with her



circumstances not only tears down an independent and joyful life but leads to Pecola's decline, too. I believe that the white culture creates identities like Pauline's, which is so weak that it melts in the white standards without any resistance. Pauline's consent to the white standards paves the way for Pecola's assenting to the Western ideals. The dominant society does not even leave room for Pauline to create a spirit of self-esteem in her daughter and to strengthen her self-confidence to be happy with her life endeavouring to demolish the tradition of slavery.

The impact of the white culture also includes Cholly, Pecola's father, producing an aggressive personality out of him as Wall describes him as a forsaken child whose sexual growth is prevented by the disfiguring stare of bigoted white men, and who never attains his sense of self. While making efforts to show love toward Pecola, "he rapes her" (2010, p. 797). Pecola is a victim regarding every aspect of life under the rule of the dominant culture and even inferior within her own community. The white culture in the novel makes Pecola twice rejected, once within her own community and once more within the white society, and anything from it is desired by everyone even the black people. For example, the adults in *The Bluest Eye* feel that all children aspire for the blonde baby dolls having blue eyes.

### **3.2 Identity Construction and Double Consciousness**

I argue that Pecola constructs her racial identity based on the influence of the white society. To do so she obliterates her black identity as a result of self-abhorrence and builds a white one. She is conscious of her original racial identity, which is deemed as inferior in the white world; therefore, she endeavours to create another identity for herself compatible with the beauty standards set up by the white culture. Gillespie claims that Pecola is a "marginalized and oppressed character". The colour of her skin, social category and heritage do not provide her with a position equal to other white girls. Gillespie adds that her being as a black person is indisputably paid no heed to because the power owner of the society encircles Pecola. Based on the white ideal beauty, Pecola and Claudia are undeniably identified as ugly owing to the blackness of their skin colour and their poverty (2008, p.

55). The black characters are incapable of fleeing from defining themselves in conformity with the white standards.

The black families inhabit in a terrible area in the white society because of their skin colour as the story teller gives a description of their neighbourhood revealing, “The dying fire lights the sky with a dull orange glow” (Morrison 2007, 10). In the beginning page of *The Bluest Eye* pollution is there from the steel mill. It stands over working-class area but does not widen to the neighbourhood of the rich-dwelled families like Pauline Breedlove’s employers. Wall shows that “the environmental pollution” is similar to the pollution of race, class and gender tyranny, at which the novel levels criticism. These oppressions as well as their detrimental impacts on black families continue nowadays (2010, p. 800). The suffering and inferiority of the black families are unveiled from the outset of the novel. The white society only allows them to reside in a dirty environment, and their ugliness denotes that they are filthy; thus, they deserve such filthy areas.

Appalling circumstances and poverty surround black children’s lives in the novel and leave less opportunities of happiness for them than for the white lower-class children. Similarly, Jane Kuenz in “The Bluest Eye: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity” elucidates that the White lower-class children are capable of envisioning themselves posited in the realm likelihood of the narrative. The lower-class white child is heartened to stop thinking about the details of her current life and hope for a future of welfare whereas black children possibly encounter a double reversal or negation for having that probability, for instance Pecola as a black child is compelled to look at herself in a white little girl’s body, which is a recurring process throughout *The Bluest Eye*. To put it differently, it is compulsory to see herself holding a black identity (1993, p. 422). What Kuenz analyses is that black children like Pecola are lacking any hopes of a better future and are obliged to endeavour to attain something which is impossible and employ a wrong approach to construct her identity.

Blackness equals to physical ugliness which connotes the lack of high-quality values. In “Racism and Appearance in *The Bluest Eye*: A Template for an Ethical Emotive Criticism” Jerome Bump clarifies that the postulation that the exterior of someone mirrors the interior is one of the excuses of our powerlessness to even bring “an ugly Jesus” into

our imagination. The perception of equalizing bodily beauty with virtue is rooted in fairy stories and religious texts (2010, p. 154). Pecola and Claudia do not commit any crimes and are normal individuals like others in society. They neither cause chaos nor even harm any other characters' feelings, but they are still thought to hold a bad and ugly internal being. Their lack of virtue is not derived from the fact that they are really bad characters but from that they are connately black; therefore, they are ugly. The white culture asserts that Pecola's and Claudia's eternal being reflects their internal one. Bessie Jones views Pecola as a "composite of many fairy-tale heroines" and claims that she is the ugly young duck; however, unluckily she does not grow to become a swan. (1985, p. 27).

"Beauty" is identified as an extremely problematic notion in *The Bluest Eye* (Moses, 1999, p. 633). Claudia as the omniscient storyteller emphasizes that "physical beauty" and "romantic love" are "[p]robably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought" (Morrison, 2007, p. 122). It is the concept of beauty which creates enormous hardship and complexity for the black community. Moses adds that innermost paucity in Morrison's work is the black people's absence of self-love, solidified by the enforcement of "a master aesthetic" prioritizing the blue eyes as well as light skin to be intrinsic in the community's "master aesthetic" internalization (1999, p. 634). Accordingly, the black community's lack of self-esteem is caused by the enforcement of the white beauty, which makes blue eyes and light skin essential for internalization.

I declare that physical beauty is equal to the internal beauty and value in the novel, and the black characters' black skin, which is considered to be ugly, lies behind their anguish. It is the movies which teach Pauline to liken "physical beauty" to "virtue" as she "stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap"; furthermore, the films takes her away from her reality and leads her to illusion because she fails to find what she receives in the movies, for instance she sees in the movies that "white men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses" (Morrison, 2007, p. 122-23). Pauline's attempts and considerations to get back to her own thorny life are in vain; consequently, she "more and more ... neglected her house, her children, her man" (Morrison, 2007, p.101). Pecola is described as an ill-treated and harmed step-child, whose real parents are ironically her cruel step-parents (Jones 1985, 27). Accordingly, ignoring her child signifies that she hurts and deals with Pecola badly; therefore, her real parents'

role turns to be step-parents' one. The films endlessly offer her a seemingly ideal life, which she does not now have and has little, if any, opportunity of ever reaching as she is only competent to remain as "the ideal servant" (Morrison 2007, p. 101).

The notion of equaling physical beauty with virtue gets down to Pecola, who is determined that she is ugly because of her blackness, "they [The Breedloves] believed they were ugly" (Morrison 2007, p. 38). To escape from ugliness she must attempt to obtain white features, two beautiful, blue, eyes as the novel narrator claims, "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes,....if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 2007, p. 46). Accordingly, Pecola wishes she had two nice eyes and if she had them, she would be someone else maybe someone respectable and beautiful. She believes that two beautiful eyes could alter her entire life. As she encounters Maureen Peal, Pecola tells her her name, and Maureen Peal wonders that whether Pecola is the name in the "Imitation of Life" film or not and explains that in the film, "this mulatto girl" detests her mother for she has black skin and is ugly. Pecola's reply and reaction is only a "sigh", uttering "Oh" (Morrison, 2007, p. 67-68). Blackness and ugliness are always tied up in the novel, and wherever she goes, she should undergo the poisonous taste of this tie. Even her name jogs Maureen Peal's memory of a film character named Pecola, who detests her mother due to her blackness and ugliness.

Mary Helen Washington claims that whenever a black novelist has produced a novel, there is always a black young female desiring to change her appearance into white colour (qtd. in Rosenberg, 1987, p. 439). The same case in this novel takes place when Pecola strives to attain the standards of white beauty making efforts to change the colour of her eyes, "Each night, without fail, she [Pecola] prayed for blue eyes" (Morrison, 2007, p. 46). She is engrossed in seeking the factors behind her ugliness, for example the narrator says, "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk" (Morrison, 2007, p. 45). She intends to find out the ugliness mystery because of which her colleagues and teachers abhor and neglect her; therefore she experiences alienation and does not have close friends. Pecola receives bad treatment either at home or at school with her friends and teachers. At school, she is aware that if one of the girls likes to particularly offend a

boy, “or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say. ‘Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!’” (Morrison, 2007, p. 46). The girl’s insult explicitly offends Pecola as if she is a disgusting and unwanted girl. This uncovers that she goes through rejection by her mates. She is even exploited as an object by her classmates to offend each other; therefore, I claim that she is twice affronted.

I believe that quotes mentioned above are adequately sufficient evidences which gradually create the self-rejection in Pecola and push her to dream of something impossible to achieve. To put it differently, the people around her deal with her very badly and violently; therefore, she starts to hate her identity. Based on her own condemnation that her teachers neglect her, her colleagues detest her, and her parents fall out because she is ugly. Pecola discovers that her ugliness lies behind her family’s troubles, and if she were beautiful, her family would lead a trouble-free life as the narrator discloses, “If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they’d say, “Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes” (Morrison, 2007, p. 46). She even imagines that beauty is so influential that it annihilates bad actions.

Pecola acts as a sufferer for she is offended by three devastating sides: from the minute she is born, she is victimized by the black society, by the ruling white civilization, and ultimately by herself. Brooks Bouson also says that Pecola is a sufferer not merely of racial dishonour but also of her “crippled and crippling family”. Apart from the bigoted white culture, who acts like an enemy towards the black people, other adversaries from their black community and family are there to victimize themselves (qtd. in Bump, 2010, p. 157). Similarly, Cormier-Hamilton elucidates that Pecola is an effortless sufferer, who replies with tears not with affront since, similar to her mother; she entirely absorbs the importance of the prevailing culture shown in posters, advertisements, and films (1994, p. 116). Analysing Pecola from a psychological standpoint, one can claim that Pecola and many members from her group circle are ensnared in Showalter's first stage of development to become a subculture, saying that following the prevalent modes of the leading culture and programming its principles as well as its outlook on social position play a great role in becoming the inferior culture (qtd. in Cormier-Hamilton, 1994, p. 116).

I argue that if light-skinned females have only feminine agony and gender problems, they are not treated in a racial way similar to Pecola, but the black women suffer twice: first from their black colour and second from their gender issues. Gurleen Grewal correspondingly claims that if a universal womanly subject has the problem of gender, then the dark-skinned-females have racial and feminine problems. They have to try to protect their femininity and cover their skin colour (1998, p. 26). Pecola suffers from both, on the one hand, she is described to be ugly, and on the other hand, she is raped by her own father; therefore, she is twice a victim, once out of her skin colour turning her to be ugly, once more out of gender issue being impregnated by her father while she is too young.

The racial categorization is also touched on noticeably throughout *The Bluest Eye*. The society casts Pecola's and other black characters' existence aside. This racial neglecting leads to the emergence of racial lines. Yancy expresses that the society is classified into two racial lines or two strata, one black and one white. Black children are incapable of fleeing from the prevalent existence of the dominant culture's societal icons of female beauty (2005), for example Shirley Temple. I believe that Pecola belongs to neither black community she attempts to reject and escape from nor to the white world which she does not have the capacity to be part of, but she is positioned somewhere between the black and white embarrassing communities where she is rejected and alienated. She rejects everything of her community and her blackness, simultaneously she cannot be accepted in white culture for she is black and ugly and fails to reach the standards of beauty, for example the storyteller announces, "to have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time....only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people" (Morrison, 2007, p. 46-47).

The massive domination of white society leads Pecola to weakness and leaves her with no competence to respond and defend herself whenever and wherever necessary. As a result she remains silent to all the insults, being abused sexually by her father and other racist deeds done towards her. She accepts her position as a victim in the community around her. For instance she fails to defend herself against her offensive colleagues when they use her to insult one another saying, "Bobby loves Pecola" (Morrison, 2007, p. 46). She

also chooses quietness when Junior tells his mother a lie that Pecola has injured and killed Geraldine's valuable cat (Morrison, 2007, p. 91). She fails to raise her voice to say no, and the sole thing she can do is just to react with tears silently. Consequently, Pecola's experience of disappearance, her assurance of her own ugliness and her lack of value render her weak in a way that even the weakest characters within her society are able to abuse her.

Pecola is treated as an outcast and cannot deny it even herself as she behaves like an outsider not being aware of her own community as if she does not belong to it, but Claudia is the opposite because she lives with black values and is privy to the things which are related to her community. Correspondingly, Moses believes that the "gypsy" fortune teller figure is harmfully personified in the novel by Soaphead Church. Claudia comprehends that Soaphead Church might dwell in the community although he is not from it. She unconsciously perceives that Church loathes blackness and lives under the power of a value system which does not include him. Claudia keeps abreast of the information spread verbally about Church's spiteful habit of assaulting young girls since she belongs to the community (1999, p. 628). She has awareness of the adversaries of her community and realizes how her community goes through agony under the supremacy of the white society. Moses adds that Pecola is blissfully unaware of this information for she is dealt with as an outsider. She perceives that Church is also an outcast like herself, leading life on the margins of the community; furthermore, while visiting him for the first time, she is made to realize that his hatred towards blackness bears resemblance to the one she holds towards her own blackness. Pecola's visit is to get some magic from Church; however, Morrison shapes "the fortune teller figure" into a self-hating child assaulter so as to highlight the hazardous nature of the sole source of information and assistance accessible to children like Pecola, whose communities and families do not account for their comfort (Moses, 1999, p. 628-29). In accordance with this, Pecola only physically belongs to her own community otherwise the black values do not carry any significance for her, and she is lacking in the aptitude to recognize the adversaries of the black community.

The standard of white beauty has an indispensable function to persuade Pecola and Claudia that a black individual is ugly; moreover, this beauty understanding is indisputably tied up to the colonialism outcomes. In perceiving the idea of beauty, Pecola

and Claudia have different perceptions. Unlike Pecola, who is more concerned with achieving bodily beauty and constructs her identity based on white values, Claudia builds her identity based on black community values discarding the white culture standards of life. On the contrary to Pecola's assimilation of the white standards of beauty, through the character of Claudia Morrison elucidates that there is an action to confront the white beauty creation. She fights to alter the understanding of ideal white beauty, which determines that the beautiful are those who have white skin, blue eyes and blonde hair, to the idea that the black are worth being defined as beautiful. Moses perceives Claudia as the holder of an overall dissimilar understanding of social structures. She is instinctively aware of a fundamental belief of blues wisdom and looks for alternative types of information and understanding in her community, not within the white authority structure (1999, p. 628). In accordance with this, Claudia pursues her life within the black community and does not surrender to the white one. To transmit her objective, Claudia loves her blackness and poverty. Moses adds that the cultural worth and information, which the blues manifests and Claudia orally receives, empowers her to flourish what is labelled a "black aesthetic". Claudia actively assimilates this "body of cultural knowledge" and receives power from it. She hears, listens to and more significantly, "sings" the blues (1999, p. 629). However, what she does does not contribute considerably to change the white beauty creation. The white people are still the power possessors of the society rendering it unworkable for Claudia to confront the power of white supremacy in her environment. Ultimately, Claudia's struggle toward the White power declines and her conflict to redefine the beauty perception fails to be conducted.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia intends to challenge the ideal beauty of the dominant culture by fighting to demonstrate the beauty of the Black through loving her own blackness. She makes efforts to confront the ideal beauty of the Whites as she commences to take on the way the Whites love their skin colour. The white individuals admire their whiteness to a great extent; therefore, Claudia begins to admire her blackness to confirm that the black people are also worth being described as beautiful. An example of this can be that when Claudia and her sister, Frieda, are pleased with their distinction, their blackness, proclaiming, "We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness"



(Morrison, 2007, p. 74). This suggests that Claudia and Frieda oppose the force of a white image of beauty, and they are content with their black identity and act accordingly. Both attempt to shield the black community and black people, for example in a situation some boys offend Pecola, but Claudia and Frieda accidentally sees her being affronted. Frieda courageously endeavours to stop the boys and threatens them, saying, “Leave her ‘lone, or I’m gone tell everybody what you did!” (Morrison, 2007, p. 66).

Claudia fruitfully views her own racial identity as a black person and rejects all the logos which represent the white culture and beauty. She despises the white dolls offered at Christmas as well as Shirley Temple and tears apart all the Christmas dolls because they usually represent white beauty, revealing, “Frieda and she [Pecola] had a loving conversation about how cute Shirley Temple was. I couldn’t join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley” (Morrison, 2007, p.19). Claudia proclaims that the blue-eyed Baby Dolls render her uncomfortable while sleeping with them. They are expected to lead children to happiness, but give Claudia the opposite, saying that the white dolls, which are expected to offer her ecstasy, brings her only depression declaring, “It was a most uncomfortable, patently aggressive sleeping companion” (Morrison, 2007, p. 20). I argue that Claudia does not hate dolls as childish objects to play with, but she detests what makes them beautiful as their beauty is mystery for her, declaring, “I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me (Morrison, 2007, p. 20). She believes that she is the only person who does not desire them. She is not fascinated in them because she harbours hostility towards the dominant standards of beauty.

Concerning the idea of hating the white beauty, she also declares that she does not detest light-skinned Maureen herself indeed but despises the thing rendering her beautiful, claiming, “[a]nd all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us” (Morrison, 2007, p. 74). Giavanna Munafo in “‘No Sign of Life’ – Marble-Blue Eyes and Lakefront Houses in *The Bluest Eye*” asserts that it is the principles of determining beauty, the belief of whiteness, which renders Maureen beautiful (1995, p. 8). Accordingly, Claudia’s fear and abhorrence is towards the criteria which decide upon ugliness and beauty. Correspondingly, in *Quiet as It’s Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race*

*in the Novels of Toni Morrison* Brooks J. Bouson unveils that the thing Claudia finds out to be afraid of is the white criteria of beauty, which have been internalised by individuals of the African American society. It is a standard which approves of the “high- yellow” Maureen Peal but disparages the “black and ugly” Pecola Breedlove (2000, p. 31). Although Claudia is still a child, she feels discriminated and questions why Maureen is dealt with well. The answer, because she is beautiful, remains odd for her and does not satisfy her, saying, “Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what?” (Morrison, 2007, p. 74). She suffers from not knowing the secret and does not understand why everyone treats Maureen properly but deal with them severely. Claudia prolongs her questions about the secret which she feels she lacks. She seeks answers as she observes people having high regards for little white girls but not for her, saying, “What make people look at them and say, ‘Awwwww’, but not at me?” (Morrison, 2007, p. 22). She wonders what that thing is which Maureen has, but they are lacking. Claudia holds awareness about the fact that people belonging to her community are considered ugly and Maureen beautiful, for that reason she declines to internalize those standards.

When Pecola is impregnated by her father, the only ones who wish for her baby to remain and be born alive are Frieda and Claudia, proclaims, “More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live—just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals” (Morrison, 2007, p. 190). Her craving for the birth of the baby stems from her belief that the baby’s birth is necessary; furthermore, her objective is only to thwart the love of the worldwide white image, and by doing so, she preserves black community and affirms her pride in it. I also consider this as standing against the white beauty construction claiming that while a white culture exists, another distinctive community is also there with its value and importance.

Claudia’s attempts to challenge the domination of the white society are in vain, and she is oblivious to the fact that her fight to alter the way Whites look at the Blacks is too arduous to accomplish. However, she is conscious about the minority of her community as she says, “being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of

life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment” (Morrison, 2007, p. 17). Throughout the novel the black community is left no room to confirm their importance and show their distinction; consequently, they should surrender to the dominant society and assimilate its standards; furthermore, the Blacks are cast aside. This is despite the fact that they possess their own values as Franks in *Women in Later Life: Exploring Race and Ethnicity* discloses that minority community individuals share bodily or cultural features, for instance the distinctive colour of skin or language separating them from the principal society (2008, p. 6-7). Therefore, the hegemony of the dominant culture compels the minority group, black community, to close their eyes on their own worth and distinctions in order to maintain to live in the society. If any challenges, like Claudia’s, exist, the white society is so powerful that the challenge appears weak and unworkable.

The notion of human inequality is another issue which renders Claudia unable to prolong her confrontation toward the white beauty creation. The conception of ideal beauty still places the Whites in the superior position rather than the Blacks. Franks confesses that based on European standards, the black races are nowadays the least developed in society (2008, p. 10). Therefore, while Claudia powerfully strives for equality regarding understanding the beauty notion, she unluckily does not succeed in doing so for the power of white domination cannot be beaten yet. Bennet affirms that authentic conception of equality embodies the concept of distinction. Equality is not a matter of the object but the subject and an issue of the way one deals with the others (1998, p. 64). Accordingly, equality is not the question of property equally shared. The black individuals suffer from the lack of this equality as they are not dealt with as the white ones; thus, Claudia encounters failure to seek this equality.

I argue that Claudia has to acknowledge the whites’ standards of beauty due to the intensive supremacy of the white culture and also due to maintaining to live in white society. She should lead her life in compliance with the social norms and later comes to know to love Shirley Temple confessing, “I learned much later to worship her [Shirley Temple], just as I learned to delight in cleanliness...” (Morrison, 2007, p. 23). Anne Anlin Cheng analyses this quotation and elucidates that Claudia’s love of Shirley Temple can be interpreted not only or principally as a signification of social conformity but rather a

reply to “the call of the mother, as a perverse form” of motherly association. Little black girls are enabled to be similar to their mothers merely by coming to know to love little white girls (2000, p. 200). Learning to love Shirley Temple does not connote that she rejects her black identity and endeavours to obtain a white one like Pecola does. She remains proud of her own identity and community, asserting, “the change was adjustment without improvement” (Morrison, 2007, p. 23).

Consequently, Claudia’s awareness can also be comprehended as an approach rendering her mind independent of the colonial tyranny clearing herself from white principles of beauty enforced on black individuals. Terry Eagleton Grewal asserts that the hardest thing in emancipation is to free “ourselves from ourselves” (1998, p. 21). Looking at Claudia, *The Bluest Eye* discloses that some black individuals hold the competence of confronting the white-standard-beauty construction, but for others like Pecola this beauty construction makes them lose their racial identity and embrace the white culture; therefore, they are deficient in Claudia’s consciousness and become victims of this racial tyranny. Depending on the above-mentioned analyses, I reckon that Toni Morrison intends to convey a message which is to argue that those standards of beauty are not connate but rather socially constructed; therefore, she levels harsh criticism at them. She raises her voice to say that Blacks are also beautiful. Throughout the novel Pecola strives to construct her identity in compliance with the white culture standards of beauty as she internalises the dominant cultural worth. On the contrary, Claudia builds her identity in conformity with her own community values and does not surrender to the dominance of the white culture although she cannot change the white society’s perspective on the black owing to their supremacy. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison confronts the white standards of beauty and illustrates that the notion of beauty is a social construction and is not biological. To put it simply, it is the society which determines beauty and ugliness. She also discloses that whiteness is employed as a criterion of beauty; as a result the worth of blackness is lessened.

### **3.3 Disappearance of the Self**

The disappearance of the self and attempting to look as someone else is an apparent matter in the novel. I argue that Pecola’s self gets lost, and she makes attempts to become

someone else. She no longer remains within the frame of blackness. In *The Bluest Eye*, the white culture affects Pecola's desires in a way that it obliges her to construct her desires in accordance with the ones of white society; therefore, she makes efforts to act and behave like another girl, who is not herself. I assume that the key problem in the protagonist's life is her being acknowledged by the white society. She is terribly in need of recognition because she always feels ejected and alienated in the dominant culture as Claudia says, "Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond" (Morrison, 2007, p. 45-46). Pecola feels rejected in the white society and also in her own one, as a result she is neither recognized by the supreme culture nor by her own minor community. The only action to take is to forget about her racial identity and strive for a white one in order to be recognized.

There is a vivid connection between recognition and the Other's inscrutable desire, since as Jacques Lacan claims, "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (1978, p. 38). Accordingly, one's desires should not go out of the Other's circle of desires in order to be recognized. Pecola ignores her wishes based on her own identity and contemplates that acquiring two blue eyes, the Other's desire, is the requirement to be recognized. She is engrossed in having blue eyes and is ready to annihilate her racial identity in a way she even consumes candies to turn into the portraits on their covers, a white visage with "blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort.... To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (Morrison, 2007, p. 50). She devours the blue eyes on the Shirley Temple face with her stare and drinks lots of milk to ingest its whiteness. Failing to view herself as a valuable girl, Pecola depends on the leading culture's seeing of her for acceptance. I claim that she is blissfully unaware of the threat of her identity loss because of the lens via which the white culture views and portrays her. She cannot comprehend that she has to abandon her life as a black girl so as to attain blue eyes, to put it differently; she intends to become another person, Shirley Temple. Kohler views that the novel places emphasis on the black African-Americans' wish to clear themselves from their own community worth and commence to take on Eurocentric worth materialism, capitalist triumph as well as beauty and how those wishes stay "unrealistic", "destructive" and "un-necessary" (2006, p. 42). Kohler's standpoint is

true for Pecola, who assimilates white values not workable for her and destructing her in the end of the novel, because those values are unrealistic; therefore, she cannot have blue eyes. Those values force her to cast her own racial identity aside and seek a white one, but this is an unachievable goal, for that reason they remain unrealistic.

Tally, in *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, shows that planting blackness as a “negative signifier” in the black community individuals’ minds leads to Pecola’s obliteration and insanity (2007, p. 14). In conformity to this analysis, blackness is Pecola’s signifier causing her madness. In the Lacanian version of disappearance of the subject, while making efforts to find out the wish of the “Other” with the question, “He is saying this to me, but what does he want?”, the subject disappears behind the signifier in conversation with the “Other” (Lacan, 1978, p. 214). Pecola becomes insane in the end of the novel; therefore, it is what Lacan calls the loss of the self behind the signifier, blackness. In order to be recognized in the white society Pecola should seek the Other’s desires and pay no heed to her own ones. For Pecola the Other’s desires are whiteness and blue eyes as Fanon asserts that for black subjects in conversation with the “white Other”, the reply has to be this: “Turn white or disappear” (1991, p. xxi). Pecola endeavours to satisfy the Other’s wishes by attempting to attain two blue eyes, which is an impossible action. She fails to obtain them; thus, she is compelled to perform Fanon’s other option, which is to disappear.

Fanon adds that others’ views do not enslave him, but it is his appearance which does so. White lens judge upon him and gradually tears his being into pieces; therefore, he wishes to disappear (1991, p. xxi). Knowing that she is a problem for her family as Yancey says that Pecola strongly feels that she is in charge of her parents’ irritable and cruel deeds and views herself as the devalued “Other” and ultimately as a trouble (qtd in Bump, 2010, p. 159). Consequently, she craves for her own vanishing as she passionately begs God to make her disappear (Morrison, 2007, p. 45). She prefers her disappearance to her existence with blackness, and the dominance of the white culture makes her to have such a prayer. Similarly, According to Kohler, in *The Bluest Eye* the Eurocentric values, granted by the admired culture, persistently denigrate the black community; thus, the black people persist to have the incorrect colour for triumph in life and remain poor, uneducated and emotionless. While they strive to take on the Eurocentric values, it signifies taking no

action since they never remain the same (2006, p. 42). In addition, the Breedloves pursue a path far from the worth of the “black, poor, rural South” and toward values which are in favour of the interests of “a privileged, white upper-middle class and of capitalism itself”. This path serves to implant a sort of lack and valuelessness in the Breedloves' own family. Pauline hunts for recognition and victory in expressions, which are defined by a white authority structure already rejecting her (Moses, 1999, p. 628). The white culture makes the Breedloves feel that they hold no values due to their blackness, and once they truly reach this conclusion, they reject their racial identity and embrace the white culture. They are no more themselves, and their tastes of life are not their own natural ones.

Pecola has an idealized image in her mind as a substitute for herself, “eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane” (Morrison, 2007, p. 50). Lacan’s “Mirror Stage” has a deep connotation in women’s psyche. It is a stage which establishes the infant girl’s subjectivity, ego as well as identity. The mirror allows the woman to see herself as “I” and distinguish herself (Lacan, 1977, p. 1). Pecola goes through Lacan’s “Mirror Stage” and has the intent to become conscious of herself as the narrator discloses, “Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness” (Morrison, 2007, p. 33). Pecola turns to the mirror to discover her subjectivity and reality and realizes that she undergoes the lack of the thing which beatifies her because she is undoubtedly assured that she is ugly. Subsequent to her ugliness realization, she experiences the wrong self, to put it more blatantly, what appears in the mirror is not the correct self belonging to her. While staring in the mirror, she may wish to see someone else appearing rather than herself as the subject.

In the end of the novel Pecola reaches the conclusion that in her imagination she has achieved two blue eyes. Simultaneously, she makes a friend with someone always confirming her that her eyes are very blue. Pecola continuously carries a mirror to gaze at herself seeing her blue eyes, her imaginative friend reveals, “*I’d just like to do something else besides watch you stare in that mirror*” (Morrison, 2007, p. 194), and also when her friend and she want to go out, her friend asks her whether she has the mirror, “*Got your mirror?*”, in her reply she says, “Yes dearie . . .” (Morrison, 2007, p. 195). I believe that in the mirror Pecola does not view herself as someone holding a black identity, and the one she sees there is an entirely different person. Thus, she encounters aphorisis, which is

what Lacan refers to as the loss of the subject behind the signifier. At first, she attempts to discover her ugliness when she stares in the mirror, but in the end of the narrative when she keeps looking in the mirror, she views her reflection as her idealized image having two blue eyes, saying “My blue eyes. Let me look again.... Yes. They get prettier each time I look at them (Morrison, 2007, p. 201).

In my viewpoint, Pecola’s eyes do not turn blue, but only she herself imagines that they do so as her friend tells her that the brightness of the sun harms her eyes, but Pecola says, “Not mine. I don’t even blink. Look. I can look right at the sun” (Morrison, v, p. 195). This uncovers that her eyes are identically the same as before. Another evidence for my stance is that when Pecola tells her friend that no one accounts for her blue eyes even her mother, asserting, “Ever since I got my blue eyes, she [Pauline] look away from me all of the time. Do you suppose she’s jealous too?..... Everybody’s jealous. Every time I look at somebody, they look off” (Morrison, 2007, p. 195). From the other characters’ eyes Pecola still has her own appearance as well as her black identity; therefore, they persist to hold the same perspective on her. When she finds out that no one pays any heeds to her blue eyes, as only she herself believes she has, she accuses them of “jealousy”. I consider this accusation as a justification to convince herself that her eyes have truly altered to blue colour, and she persuades herself that the others get their looks away from her because they are jealous. As another interpretation, the aforementioned quote reveals that Pecola is not wanted as someone else and that it is crucial for her to preserve her racial identity. Even her own mother refuses to care for her with blue eyes; as a result her existence with blue eyes carries no weight for the others. It serves her own goodness to accept herself as she is. For her, reality becomes blurry, and having an impossible-to-reach dream brings her this obscure reality. Altering identity and appearance is not something positive from others’ eyes, for that reason Pecola’s existence as a black girl without blue eyes and remaining as she is carry significance for her.

I consider that Pecola’s long journey for searching and finding beauty, which she thinks she lacks, is not solely a failure, but its harmful upshot is her own identity loss. To put it differently, she is twice a failure, once she does not succeed in achieving the beauty standard, attaining blue eyes, to become a white girl; once more she loses her own identity and blackness. Pecola goes insane in the end of the story, and her madness stems from her beauty seeking. Similarly, Michele Wallace views that Pecola cannot recover and embodies a sufferer who fails to talk on her behalf at all (1990, p. 230).



To recognize her that she has blue eyes, Pecola makes a friend with someone, who is not real as Bump claims that in the end of the novel her friend's voice, whom she talks with, belongs to Pecola herself. However, both of her voices are ensnared in her mind. This helps the reader to "hear her stream of consciousness" through which they become aware of the inner reality of an individual, who can be attributed as "schizophrenic", meaning that they can go through the protagonist's anguish of racism and terror of ugliness (2010, p. 162). In this way the reader is aware of what goes on in Pecola's mind. To further support the idea that her friend is not a real one, Cormier-Hamilton argues that Pecola's friend is imaginary making her sure that her eyes are the bluest (1994, p. 121). Pecola and her friend converse, "They are bluer, aren't they? *Oh, yes. Much bluer. Bluer than Joanna's? Much bluer than Joanna's. And bluer than Michelena's? Much bluer than Michelena's.*" (Morrison, 2007, p. 197). She considers someone as a real and faithful friend who sees her as someone else not as a black girl. At school she does not have any friends because her classmates deal with her as a black girl. However, she deems her imaginative friend as a best one only because her friend treats her the way she prefers assuring her that her eyes are the bluest and does not consider her as a black person. Pecola tells her friend, "You are my very best friend. Why didn't I know you before?.... I was so lonely for friends. And you were right here. Right before my eyes" (Morrison, 2007, p. 196). Pecola's speech allows me to believe that she is constantly terribly in need of a friend like this one to see her in a white identity and also to recognize her. Throughout *The Bluest Eye* the characters treat her as a black subject; therefore, she creates a friend in her own imagination to recognize her as someone possessing two blue eyes. Even she is not recognized and does not receive a proper treatment within her own family, hence the external white world's good treatment towards her is beyond expectations. Through her imaginative friend Pecola can solve the issue of recognition.

Pecola becomes the scapegoat of the socially-constructed standards of beauty in the dominant culture and is rejected three times. First of all her own mother does not treat her affectionately and motherly ascribing her with ugliness. Secondly, the white society places her out of the circle of beauty. Consequently, she is rejected by herself and commences to detest her black identity, and this self-loathing leads to her obliteration as well as disappearance. I believe that Morrison in her novel also addresses serious criticism at the

black community rendering itself valueless and assenting to the dominance of the white culture. Her work is an endeavour to unveil that Pecola is the upshot of the white culture supremacy and the black community assimilation. She also makes an attempt to construct the beauty of blackness through the character of Claudia as she can survive in the end. Claudia does not internalise the white standards of beauty but rather confronts them. Morrison employs Claudia's confrontation to assert that there are Blacks who believe in and hold the worth of blackness, but this voice is not influential enough in a principal culture to alter their perspective towards the black community.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

My argument was that most of the black characters in Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* have double identities. The characters endeavour to abandon their original racial identities and to construct new ones in conformity to the white world standards. They do not remain within their black community and make efforts to internalise the white dominant culture values. Changing their racial identities stems from the fact that they feel inferior in the white society, which discriminates them racially assigning them to appalling features and casting them aside. The black community individuals in both novels are in racial agony due to their blackness and have no prospects to better their lives. Their blackness puts them in troubles regarding almost every facets of life, puts hurdles to their financial opportunities and renders them weak. The white culture views them as their servants and expects them to work hard for them in return for a small amount money.

In *Passing*, Irene and Clare commence to dispose of their racial identities owing to their blackness. Irene seeks a life guaranteed by security and filled with pleasure, and she fails to attain such a life in her own community. Clare lives in austerity in her aunts' home. Her aunts' deal with her strictly and oblige her to work as hard as a slave for them in return for a tiny sum of money just not to die as if she is a charity. To get rid of such a terrible life, Clare must wear a white identity and does so. The white society takes over everything; therefore, neither Irene nor Clare have the capacity to pursue their objectives because the opportunities are under the control of white society, and Blacks are deprived of equality. Irene does not have an opportunity to achieve security and comfort as a black woman. As a result, she is compelled and commences to lose fascination in her racial identity and occasionally appear as a white woman, and even she wishes that she were not born as a Negro. Clare also has no chance to escape from her severe life; thus, she is obliged to turn

white. Irene is not content with only altering superficially but also attempts to internalise the white values whereas Clare merely wears the white cover superficially not assimilating into the white culture. On the other hand, in *The Bluest Eye* Pecola and her mother internalise the white worth and grow a sense of abhorrence towards blackness and begin to reject themselves as black individuals. Pecola's mother becomes fascinated by the white world through films and working as a servant for the Fishers, a white family. This fascination leads her to think that blackness is dirty and ugly; therefore, she believes that her daughter is ugly. She rejects to render her children motherly love and affection, but she feels comfortable to work for the Fishers offering love to their child. Pecola also receives the imposed standards of beauty from her family and the white surroundings as well. She gets bad and unfair treatment from school because of her blackness, ugliness. Pecola reaches the fact that she is lacking the white standards of beauty, having blue eyes and white skin. As a result, she commences to reject herself and seeks two blue eyes. Pecola like Irene and Clare also strives to build her identity based on the white society rules. Pecola's family also live in a poor area of the society, and the white dominant society does not allow them to better their lives. In both novels, the dominant societies set up the social norms in favour of their own interests leaving no space for the black community people to feel their existence.

In both novels, the aforementioned characters' shared major concern and problem is recognition. They are only not recognized but also rejected and rendered worthless. As a result, they should assimilate the white culture worth and attempt to appear as white individuals. They are obliged to renounce their own desires and start seeking the white culture individuals' desires. The black characters' objectives are alike in both novels since they similarly endeavour to embrace white identities. However, diverse factors lie behind each one of them. Clare suffers from the plight of poverty, ill-treatment from her aunts and hard work. Irene cannot find a life filled with security and comfort in the black community. Pecola also suffers from the ugliness imposed on her by the white society. Thus, all three endeavour to dispose of their original black identities and receive white ones. Accordingly, Irene, Clare and Pecola hold double consciousness concerning their racial identities.

The black societies in *Passing* and *The Bluest Eye* are so weak under the intensive influence of the white culture that they fail to construct self-esteem spirit in the black characters; therefore, all Irene, Clare, Pecola and her mother easily surrender to the white culture. The white individuals' racist allegations towards the black community soon become facts to them. The domination of white culture leaves no room for the black community people to act as black individuals proudly having to either remain ignored and poor or consent their self-rejection. They have no other alternatives. In *Passing*, Clare's aunts are terribly strict towards her, and Bellow claims that he has heard about Negroes' badness and danger. He attempts to distance himself from them. Irene and Clare cannot persist to bear the burden of their race and strive to escape from it. Similarly, in *The Bluest Eye* Pecola is always dealt with severely feeling alienated both at home and school. She comes to know that attaining two blue eyes will rescue her from her awful circumstance.

The white society makes the black characters play wrong roles within their community and brings troubles to the black families in the novels. Clare superficially appears as a white woman but still has aspirations to get back to her community as she does not assimilate the white values only employing whiteness to reach her goal. She only has to visit the black community covertly so that her authentic racial identity cannot be realized. She has desires to talk with black people, but she must not do so. Irene's intention is to appear as a white woman internally and externally, but she comes up with problems doing so. Her husband as a black man aspires to get back to Brazil and preserve the black community worth. This is somehow problematic for the family as Irene wants to prolong their lives in America. On the other hand, Irene works as a member of the Negro Welfare League dedicated to the black community; therefore, she must satisfy both roles in both societies. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's mother identifies Pecola as ugly not functioning as a real mother; however, her role as a servant at the Fishers' is dissimilar acting as a real mother and being affectionate towards their child. Cholly's sexual practice is spoiled by white men, and instead of giving his daughter fatherly affection, he rapes her.

Irene, Clare and Pecola similarly fail to abandon their black identities everlastingly. Their attempts to do so lead them to their decline and obliteration. Although Clare is able to act as a white woman and is recognized by the white culture, she dies due to her black identity realization in the end of *Passing*. Racism makes all three characters lose their own racial

identities and incapable of receiving new ones; thus, they are twice a failure. Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* cannot achieve blue eyes and be a white girl, so her attempts result in her destruction, madness, by the end of the novel. She imagines that she has received two blue eyes and creates an imaginative friend for herself to affirm that her eyes are blue. In *Passing*, Clare fails to conceal her blackness eternally, and her identity realization leads to her death falling from a window either as a suicide or being pushed by Irene although Clare's inner world belongs to the black community uncomfortable within the white society. However, Clare's dissimilarity lies in the fact that she does not internalize into the white society; furthermore, she only takes advantage of whiteness to serve her personal interests. She is not comfortable in the white society, frequently wishing to be free from it and go back to her community, whereas Irene and Pecola internally crave for the white culture absorption and intend to leave their black community behind. Irene strives to employ Clare to link her to the white society while Clare wants Irene to link her to the black community, as a result they become the reflection of one another. When Clare's black identity is found out by her husband, Irene's desire is put in hazard. Clare's death is equal to Irene's decline as they mirror each other. In the end of *Passing*, Irene undergoes unconsciousness just subsequent to Clare's death and loses her voice. She cannot even complete her last sentence.

Despite the fact that the supremacy of the white cultures and racism in both novels cause several characters to construct their identities according to the white standards, there are other black characters who make efforts to conserve their own community values and racial identities. In *Passing*, Brian is a black man, does not surrender to the white society values and intends to confront the domination of the white culture as he teaches his children that black people are killed merely due to their blackness. He wants his children to gain their racial awareness from their childhood. Similarly, in *The Bluest Eye* Claudia blatantly fights the white culture values as she rejects the white dolls and everything coming from it. The domination of the white society does not affect her in her identity construction because she relies on the black community worth to build her racial identity and is comfortable with her blackness. However, Claudia's voice is not powerful enough to change the dominant society perspective of the black community. Morrison uses Claudia to disclose that there are black characters who hold self-love and racial pride.

The two novels date back to two dissimilar literary periods, *Passing* was published in 1929 and *The Bluest Eye* in 1960. Racism issue and racial identity passed diverse phases during those two eras, Harlem Renaissance and Post Colonialism. During Harlem Renaissance, racial attempts were made to serve cultural pluralism and racial distinction. In accordance with this, the proponents of the movement asserted that the inferiority of the black community and the superiority of the white culture were not biological but socially constructed. The development of black community circumstance was that black individuals were proud of their skin colour, which is something distinctive. However, the white society was still dominant. Larsen harshly criticizes this movement and intends to disclose that someone's choice of racial identity belongs to him/herself not hinging on any ideologies. She also addresses criticism at racial essentialism by arguing that essentializing a race is another form of racism; furthermore, she says that a person's physical features do not tell their race at all, as her character, Clare, passes for white not being known by her white husband. However, I consider that the idea of passing is not the solution for the biracial people because they cannot leave the black community values forever as Clare is an example of this. However, in post colonialism big changes did not happen to the racial identity issues. The white culture even remained powerful and superior to the black culture. Everything was under its control, and it set up all the standards not recognizing the black community. The white culture imposed all its standards on the black community. Subsequent to the colonization process, the colonized people lost their identities and became subordinate. Toni Morrison raised her voice to stand against the dominant white culture and attempted to plant the spirit of African values. I can infer that the dissimilarity between Larsen and Morrison is that Larsen intends to show that one should build his/her racial identity depending on no principles whereas Morrison attempts to uncover that black individuals are as valuable and beautiful as the white ones, so they should be proud of their colour skin. Morrison also endeavours to convey the message that if black people reject their community worth and embrace the white beauty, they will encounter Pecola's situation.

Despite the existing gap between the publication dates of the two novels, I have reached a conclusion that racial issues and identity crisis did not meet big differences and remained almost the same within the two dates, Harlem Renaissance and Post Colonialism. In both

novels, Irene, Clare and Pecola suffer almost identically due to racism and not being recognized in the society and have similar approaches, which are to leave their community and enter the white world, to escape from the burden of racism. In addition, both of the novels end with the three characters' destructions owing to racism and their blackness. The novels expose that black people's situation did not improve properly between Harlem Renaissance and Post Colonialism. To put it clearly, the black individuals' objectives in Harlem Renaissance time bear resemblance to black people's objectives in Post Colonialism time. I believe that racial issues and racism are ongoing and last until no human beings are alive in the world. The annihilation of racism hinges on the end of the world.



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