



*The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*

**JASSS**

*International Journal of Social Science*

Doi number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9761/JASS1649>

Volume 6 Issue 6, p. 455-473, June 2013

**TRIPLE OPPRESSION ON WOMEN IN TONI MORRISON'S  
TAR BABY AND THE BLUEST EYE\***

**TONİ MORRİSON'IN KATRAN BEBEK VE EN MAVİ GÖZ ROMANLARINDA  
KADINLARIN ÜZERİNDEKİ ÜÇLÜ BASKI**

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**Abstract**

This article intends to interpret Morrison's novels, *Tar Baby* and *The Bluest Eye* considering primarily the black women's oppression and their struggles in the oppressive environments they inhabit as well as the white women's positioning in the patriarchal society. This study discusses the effects of Western beauty concept on the characters of both of Morrison's novels as a universal standard requiring whiteness in American society which leads self destruction and sexual objectification of women. Both of Morrison's novels elaborate domestic violence, rape and white beauty standards. However, *The Bluest Eye* solely concentrates on black feminist problems while her novel *Tar Baby* also stresses the suppression of white women along with the black women's issues. White or black, all women experience different kind of subordination and varying levels of oppression. No matter what class, race or position in the society they have, someone as desperate as Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* and as beautiful and successful as Jadine or though being white and beautiful like Margaret in *Tar Baby*, women are treated as subordinate by men. However, the African American women's position in the society seems harsher

than white women in general since they experience triple oppression as race, class and gender simultaneously. Therefore, questioning the impact of class differences, gender oppression and racism and also the differences of skin color which elevates the status of those light skinned blacks whereas aggravates the sufferings of the ones with the darker skins, both within the black community and within society as a whole is critical to understand the black women's positioning.

**Key Words:** Gender oppression, Class discrimination, Racism

### Öz

Bu makale Morrison'un romanları, *Katran Bebek* ve *En Mavi Göz'ü* öncelikle siyah kadınların ezilmesi ve onların baskıcı ortamlardaki mücadelelerini ve ayrıca ataerkil bir toplumda beyaz kadınların konumlarını göz önünde bulundurarak yorumlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu çalışma, kadınların cinsel nesneleştirilmesine ve kendilerini yoketmelerine yol açan Batı güzelliği kavramının Morrison'ın her iki romanında karakterlere etkisini Amerikan toplumunda beyazlık gerektiren evrensel bir standart olarak tartışmaktadır.

Morrison'ın her iki romanı da aile içi şiddet, tecavüz ve beyaz güzellik standartları üzerinde durmaktadır. Ancak, *En Mavi Göz* sadece siyah feminist sorunları üzerinde konsantre olurken, *Katran Bebek* siyah kadın sorunları ile birlikte beyaz kadının baskılanmasını da vurgulamaktadır.

Beyaz veya siyah, tüm kadınlar farklı türlerde bir boyun eğme ve çeşitli düzeylerde baskı yaşarlar. Toplumda sahip oldukları sınıf, ırk ya da konumları ne olursa olsun, *En Mavi Göz'deki* Pecola kadar umutsuz ve *Katran Bebek'deki* Jadine kadar başarılı ve güzel ya da Margaret gibi beyaz ve güzel olsalar da, kadınlar erkekler tarafından aşağı kabul edilir. Ancak, Afrika kökenli Amerikalı kadınlar ırk, sınıf ve cinsiyet ayrımı şeklindeki üçlü baskıya eş zamanlı olarak maruz kaldıkları için onların toplumdaki konumları genel olarak beyaz kadınlardan daha kötü görünmektedir.

Bu yüzden sınıf farklılıkları, cinsiyet baskısı, ırkçılık ve ayrıca açık tenli siyahların durumunu yükseltip koyu renklilerin acılarını ağırlaştırarak ten rengi farklılıklarının etkisinin sorgulanması hem siyah topluluk içinde ve hem de bir bütün olarak toplum içerisinde siyah kadınların konumlarını anlamak açısından önemlidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Cinsiyet baskısı, Sınıf ayrımı, Irkçılık

Race, class and gender are socially constructed entities abused by power relations that influence both societal and individual levels of society. These mutually dependent inequality systems restrict and oppress some individuals while privileging others.

Race, class and gender studies first emerged in Women's Studies (Weber 14). In 1970's African- American women argued that they face triple oppression as race, class and gender which have interconnected and multidimensional nature. Collins mentions that "African-American women's oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions" (4). First, the economic exploitation that obliges ghettoization of Black women in service occupations; second, the political subordination of Black women that forbid them to vote, exclude them from public office and deprive them of quality education in inner cities and rural areas are among past practices of oppression. And the last one is the ideological dimension that assumes the oppression is inevitable since the negative representation of African-American women as jezebels, breeder women of slavery, Black prostitutes of contemporary popular culture which leads stereotypes (Collins 4,5). Collins further concludes that all of these dimensions constitutes a social control system to keep African-American women in a subordinate place while suppressing the ideas of African-American women intellectuals and protecting elite White male interests and worldviews (5).

Black feminists' claim that the societal relations based on race, class and gender operate interlockingly to structure inequality and oppression on African-American women. Frances Beal also concerns race, class and gender issues as interconnected oppressions. Beal's article "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" provides a critique regarding the economic exploitation of black women stressing that women in general were in fact oppressed, but it is the black woman who always labored the "degrading and dehumanizing"(148) jobs and receives the lowest income: "The wage scale for white women was even below that of black men; and the wage for non white women was the lowest of them all" (149). Beal also compares the White Women's Liberation Movement with black women's struggles. White women, mostly belong to middle class were engaged in intellectual protest against male chauvinism, whereas black women were facing a life and death struggle combating the capitalist, racist exploitation.

Toni Morrison's fiction is mostly concerned with racism, the black women's oppression and class conflicts and how they interact to lead discrimination in the society. The essential aim of her works is to create and spread awareness in black community. As she indicates in her Nobel prize lecture that "narrative has never been merely entertainment for me, it is, I believe, one of the principle ways in which we absorb knowledge" (Morrison, *The Nobel Lecture in Literature* ).

Toni Morrison's novels *Tar Baby* and *The Bluest Eye* articulates race, gender and class conflicts while constitute a critique of the oppression of black women in the United States and how the social structures are influenced by these conflicts.

African-American female characters in both of Morrison's novels are influenced by multiple oppression and are triply marginalized on account of their race, gender and class. Racism plays a vital role as it oppresses inferior groups, especially in this case the black women who are a gendered subaltern. These issues of racism and being the second sex get more complicated in the context of a capitalist society where the poor black women are exposed to more repression and discrimination.

The aim of this work is to discuss her novels, *Tar Baby* and *The Bluest Eye* focusing on class discrimination, race and gender problems and how male dominance affects women when compared with different classes that they belong to. Questioning the impact of class differences and racism and also the differences of skin color which elevates the status of those light skinned blacks whereas aggravates the sufferings of the ones with the darker skins, both within the black community and within society as a whole is critical to understand the black women's positioning. Besides, Morrison's approach to the Black Women's Liberation Movement will be taken into consideration, since both texts explicitly touch upon black feminist issues. Among the gender problems that both novels discussed include the perception of beauty in American society which leads sexual objectification of women and racism and the issue of how the media constructs Western beauty as a universal standard requiring whiteness. This study attempts to resolve how the western beauty standards influence Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, a dark-skinned black girl, as she cannot epitomize the cultural requirement of beauty, and on the other hand in the *Tar Baby*, Jadine a light-skinned black model symbolizing black beauty and Margaret symbolizing the white beauty.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison criticizes the visual system within popular American culture and white-defined female beauty, as Kubitschek stresses that "Morrison narrates various ideological dilemmas introduced in the black power and the black women's liberation movements. She concentrates on illuminating how the adoption of white standards and ideals of beauty have corrupted black community"(30). In *Tar Baby*, she similarly questions beauty, black sexuality and commercial images of female beauty which are among the concerns of black feminism.

*The Bluest Eye* elaborates gender problems especially "domestic violence, rape and incest that were the focus of the black women's liberation movement of the 1970's" (Berkeley 5). The text "concentrate[s] distinctly on black feminist issues, rather than examining women's position in the society at large" (Denard 171, 172). On the other hand, her novel *Tar Baby* also stresses white women's suppression along with black women's issues.

Mostly, in white women narratives, there is a tendency to underestimate black women's oppression. As Feifer and Maher pointed out the fact that "there are prominent distinction between the black feminist and womanist movement from the modern feminist movement, and this has created a separation of ideologies from one

another [...] [W]omen of color's concerns and struggles have been marginalized, slighted and even ignored with in the agenda of women's movement" (*The History of Black Feminism and Womanism: Their Emergence from the Modern Women's Movement*). However, unlike the Womanist movement which ignores the problems of black women, Morrison in *Tar Baby* argues both black women's and white women's suppression in male dominant society with class-sensitive manner.

Morrison's *Tar Baby* focuses on contentions and contradictions based on learned biases which cause false convictions. These biases appear on race, ethnicity, gender and class levels and sometimes merge with each other. The central contradiction, however, is the contradiction within the central characters, Jadine and Son whose class status are unequal. It is important to look at the class levels as Gerrig and Banaji state about classes in *Tar Baby*, "there are at least three well-defined levels of status in the book - the wealthy white Americans, the "refined" black American servants, and the "rough" Caribbean servants - but much of the action of the book arises because two characters, Son and Jade, don't fit comfortably into this hierarchy" (175).

Jadine Childs the female protagonist, orphaned at age twelve, raised by her aunt Ondine and her uncle Sydney, the black servants in the wealthy white household of Margaret and Valerian Street. The Streets send her to private schools and the Sorbonne resulting cut off from her African-American roots. She has assimilated into the white world as an educated fashion model and she is attracted by big cities, such as New York and Paris.

Son, in contrast, was raised in an all-black community in rural Florida. While on Isle des Chevaliers, a small island where Jadine has been working as Margaret Street's personal assistant in the Street's mansion, Son is an intruder who is discovered in Margaret's closet. When Margaret would find out that Son was hiding in her closet, everyone except Valerian would be terrified. Valerian Street invites Son, to stay the night. As the novel progresses, we find out that he is a criminal but his appropriate role is never clearly worked out. Much of the novel's growing tension is related with the power struggles between Jadine and Son, two vastly different characters with different backgrounds and education. They consistently try to drag each other into one another's world but that doesn't work and they fail to achieve happiness together. While Son symbolizes the ethnical Black identity, Jadine represents inauthentic identity that can not be reconciled with rural black culture. Goyal stresses the cultural difference of the two, "as an authentic representative of blackness allied at once to the mythic female presences as well as to a masculine itinerant culture, Son functions in opposition to the white Western world. In contrast, Jadine follows a

broadly cosmopolitan approach where rootedness and tradition signify backwardness" (396).

In *Tar Baby*, Jadine, adopting the culture of the whites, is often being judged by everyone around her; her black family members, friends, and lovers because the ethnical black identity she is expected to perform does not conform with her cultural background. As Coleman points out "Jadine is the antithesis of black folk and community values. She is the successful, educated young black woman whose beauty and panache have been a smash among whites in the high-fashion circles of Paris; she seems the opposite of Son, the filthy young black man with dreadlocks"(64). Despite her self-assured and self-sufficient character, Jadine is exposed to violence from Son.

Culturally constructed male behaviour patterns often try to justify the power and authority which men enjoy at the expense of women. In the case of black women, who are doubly marginalized; first as Blacks and then as women, establishing the same rights that are granted to men becomes more difficult.

Class differences effect the women's suppression as well. Therefore the class distinctions between the characters in both novels would help to better understand and evaluate their relationships and positioning in the society. When both novels are compared, it becomes apparent that the upper-class characters have the assumption that they are superior because of their social status,

In *Tar Baby*, wealthy Valerian Street has all the power and control in their early relationship with their marriage and feels superiour because Margaret comes from a lower class. He neither sees her as an equal nor tries to understand her perspective . Furthermore, Margaret does not see herself as Valerian's equal and believes that Valerian married her only for her beauty.

Class differences causes problems in the relationship of Son and Jadine, too. While, Jadine represents the African American upper class as she is accepted in the mainstream society, Son comes from the poorest class. Jadine regards herself superior and is disgusted by Son in the beginning whereas she fears not to resist his charm.

Son scares Mrs Street when hiding in her closet, looking "like a gorilla" (Morrison 129) for her. This beastly perception of Son represents a critique of stereotyped black male identity in the gaze of Whites. Though being poor, Son is proud of his culture and traditions and does not seem to be influenced by not having money. He is self-confident and even acts superior to Jadine. However he is also quite determined to earn Jadine's love despite their different views to their roots and class distinction. She loves him in return but soon he realizes that their lives are not compatible. Ultimately, their relationship fails because of the class warfare and cultural differences between them and their unwillingness to compromise anything.

Valerian's show of power over her wife and controlling manner become obvious when Son makes the first appearance in the Street's mansion. When discovered as an intruder hiding in the closet of Margaret's, surprisingly enough,

Valerian Street treats him very kindly. While Margaret is struggling to recover from the shock, Valerian's attitude to Son takes everybody by surprise: "Good evening, sir. Would you care for a drink?" (Morrison 80). Instead of protecting her wife, being polite towards Son, Valerian wants to distress or punish her.

After Valerian offers him drink, he asks Son's name but couldn't take an answer. Son has been running and hiding for a long time so he has used different identities that make him hardly remember what his real name is.

When Son encounters Mr. Street the next morning, the following conversation happens between the two:

"Good morning, Mr. Sheek." said the man.

"Street. Valerian Street," said Valerian. "What did you say your name was?"

"Green. William Green."

"Well, good morning. Willie. Sleep well?" (Morrison *Tar Baby* 146)

Mr. Street wants to show his power and superiority against black man by calling him Willie. Valerian's attitude shows that wealthy white men don't consider black men as equals.

Gerrig and Banaji have interesting settings regarding how "Son's names" constitutes his identity and how he is understood by different groups of individuals:

The wealthy white man immediately coins an uninvited diminutive, Willie, to refer to the black intruder. As the book progresses, the name Willie is only used by the white characters. One stratum of black characters, those who have come with Valerian Street from the United States to the Caribbean Island, Isle des Chevaliers, call Willie Son. A second stratum of black characters, natives of a neighboring island, refer to Son as the chocolate eater. Son's identity – his concept of his function in the world - is partially defined by how he is named by these groups of individuals. His identity is further constructed by the names he must use to refer to those around him (174).

Son's identity is perceived differently according to different classes of people. In case of Mr. Street, he disdains Son, when calling him Willie. Valerian Street has the power to do whatever he wants. As Nubupko noted "He owns a mansion and employs many people. Those are well-known symbols of wealth, and in Morrison's fiction wealth has always been depicted as a metaphor for power: Valerian is an achiever who, by virtue of what he owns, has a lot of power at his disposal" (10). In this respect, when considering Valerian's attitude towards Son, it becomes apparent that Valerian

may show his kindness and hospitality whomever he wants in his house. In fact, he wants to show his power to control everything. It could also be possible that he wants to annoy his wife since the two not get along very well.

Valerian is not hospital towards the other blacks, "Thérèse the Thief and Gideon the Get Away Man" (Morrison 201), the other servants, living in a separate hut distant from the Street's estate are among the poorest class members. Unable to earn enough money, these characters sometimes steal things. Thérèse and Gideon are ignored and disdained not only by the Streets but also by Jadine, and as if they are nameless objects and they are called as Yardman and Mary since they are belong to the lowest class being the poorest and black There is a gap between Son and Jadine's attitudes towards Gideon and Thérèse which can be seen in bellow conversation:

[Jadine begins.] "Yardman can get some things for you."

"Who?"..

"Yardman. The gardener."

"That his name?"

"No." She smiled ... " (Morrison 115)

While Son calls them with their name and respect them, Jadine disregard them which gets Son annoyed with her ignorant and contemptuous manner.

The Childs' also call them Yardman and Mary feeling superior to them. They even accuse Gideon for stealing food whereas Son is the one who steals food when hiding in the house: "'Well, somebody is [stealing]. And not just chocolate either. The Evian, too. Half a case.' 'Must be yardman,' said Sydney, 'or some of them Marys'" (Morrison 39). This accusation addresses the racist stereotypes that lower-class blacks are immoral and disorderly.

Thérèse and Gideon, the poorest Blacks in the novel are always seen as the lowest and discriminated even among the Black servants, Ondine and Sydney Childs, who are allowed to live in the house of the millionaire couple which makes them superior and privileged unlike other servants.

At Christmas dinner Son mentions their original names which also proves Valerian Street's indifference and disdain towards them:

"Too bad Gideon couldn't come." Son, who seemed to be the only one genuinely enjoying the food, had been silent until then.

"Who?" asked Valerian.

"Gideon. Yardman."

"His name is Gideon?" asked Jadine.

"What a beautiful name. Gideon." Valerian smiled.



"Well, at least we knew Mary's name. Mary." said Jadine.

"Nope." said Son.

" No?"

" Thérèse."

" Thérèse? Wonderful." said Valerian. (172- 173).

The upper class white characters The Street's as well as wealthy Black model Jadine ignore them as persons as long as they serve their interest.

When both novels are considered, it becomes apparent that the upper-class characters discriminate against others feeling superior and avoid having close relationship with the poorest class. For instance, in *The Bluest Eye*, the upper-class family living close to the school playground humiliates Pecola who belongs to poorest class. A light-skinned, wealthy black girl, Maureen who is new at the local school, accepts everyone else's assumption that she is superior and temporarily befriends her and makes fun of her. Pecola even raped by her father and she gets pregnant. With this trauma, Pecola begins to think that her father's abuse is resulted from her ugliness and becomes convinced that beauty would make people respect her, and would solve all of her problems. When she stays at the MacTeers, the only family that helped her and took care of her, she spends the happiest time in her life. Pecola wishes to have blue eyes obsessively since she feels that they will make her loved and accepted by the people in her life. Pereira states that "Pecola's desire for blue eyes reflects a community absorbed by white ideas of what is beautiful. References to idols of white female beauty [...] and to the child icon of beauty, Shirley Temple, bespeak an obsession with a standard of white female beauty that, in turn, renders black women and girls invisible"(74). At the end of the novel, Pecola because of her mental state believes that her wish has been granted.

Beauty is linked with respect and happiness in both *Tar Baby* and *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola is obsessed with being beautiful. Jadine, on the other hand is rich and beautiful but that doesn't enough to make her content. These characters are influenced by the standardized idea of beauty -having fair skin, blue eyes- and Eurocentric values established by the society. Morrison most probably wants to display how these characters are affected by these western ideologies.

Both the beauty ideal and the "economic freedom" appeals to African American women since African American women "[are] denied access to the most ordinary kind of jobs"(Washington 36). So they believe that without beauty there is no way to earn their living or live a comfortable life.

While Jadine in *Tar Baby* is lucky to have beauty, education and successful carrier, Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye* is the most unlucky and oppressed girl ignored by society. She is treated horribly by everyone she encounters. Even her father rapes her and her mother misbehaves her. Therefore she would do anything to be beautiful and to change her fate which cause developing the delusional notion that if she had blue eyes, she could be loved and accepted by people without being pitied. So Pecola thinks: "As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people [...]. 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" (Morrison 45).

Pecola unconsciously poisons a dog, keeping Soaphead's advice because Soaphead dislikes the dog and misuses Pecola's determination to do anything to have blue eyes. She deeply believes her wish will be fulfilled if she does what she is told: "Take this food and give it to the creature sleeping on the porch. Make sure he eats it. And mark well how he behaves. If nothing happens, you will know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one" (175).

When the dog dies, Pecola believes that she has got the blue eyes. Despite her perception of herself is the consequence of her mental state, Pecola believes the opposite. Unfortunately, she is not satisfied with the idea that she has become beautiful because no real changes occur in her life. She becomes obsessed with being the most beautiful person possible and does not realize that beauty is not the answer to her problems, even when she achieves it. It seems that, the negligence of Pecola's parents caused her already fragile mental state to the degree of schizophrenia.

Pecola's mother Pauline has a lame foot and she also suffers from White standards of beauty. She is isolated by the society and loses herself in romantic movies, which reaffirm her belief that she is ugly and doesn't deserve that kind of love. She even obeys her husband's violent behavior. She finds meaning not in her own family but in her work caring for a well-to-do white family. She loves this white family while despises her own.

Society's denigration of Black women and the imposed idea of Western beauty by movies and media influences the Black women's perception of their self and leads a self destruction. They are not only struggle against these racist white ideals but also patriarchal society.

Toni Morrison's both novels support the idea that the life of African American woman is ruled by the male members of her family. She also describes African American women as inferior to African American men to present a critique to this oppression. She illustrates Black women's life style in an environment that the women have to serve their husbands, although they are subjected to bad treatment, often beaten or insulted. In *The Bluest Eye*, the oppression of black women is mentioned as follows:

Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, "Do this". White children said, "Give me that." White men said, "Come here." Black men said "Lay down." The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other [...]. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from victim. (Morrison 138).

No matter how they are rich and educated, black women are suppressed by poor men as well. In *Tar Baby*, despite the fact that Son is in love with Jadine that does not stop him from beating her: "'He hit you?' 'Yes, among other things [insults and rape]'" (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 279). It seems that, Son does not care about Jadine's upper-class status and the great differences between them. He feels superior to her and treats her like any other woman. Despite the beauty, education, independence, wealth and upper-class status of her, Jadine is still treated as subordinate by Son, one of the poorest characters in the novel. As Page pointed out, despite Jadine's "self-reliance and determination are admirable, the novel's discourse undermines her" (127). This proves that the wealth, and high status, cannot improve the suppressed position of African American women.

The oppression not only exists among African American women but in white women as well. In *Tar Baby*, generally men and especially the white man, have the ability to tyrannize and silence others. The money makes the men feel more powerful and this effects the treatment of their wives. Through reading the novel, this can be observed in the relationship between Valerian and Margaret.

Margaret, not realizing the responsibility to have a child, abuses her son. Her dictatorial and affluent husband, who is older than her, humiliates her in front of others and neglects her. She isn't even allowed socializing with the servants and she reflects her annoyance and impotence to her son- the only being less powerful than herself. Although abusing her son she loves him obsessively. And Ondine, the only witness to the abuse and the person who finally exposes Margaret, understands at the end that Margaret "didn't stick pins in her baby. She stuck em in his baby. Her baby she loved" (Morrison 279). "The "he," of course, is Valerian, who kept Margaret isolated (most damagingly forbidding her to become friends with Ondine) and continued to remind her of her "inferior" background (he points out her lack of table manners and poor French pronunciation)" (Moffitt 21). Her husband's subordination of her and his ignorance leads Margaret's depression.

Margaret and Jadine have been not only suppressed by men but also have had to deal with the sexual harassments—Margaret "fighting off cousins in cars, dentists in chairs" (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 83) and Jadine vexingly remembering how, as a child, she

"was so quick to learn, but no touchee, teacher, and no, I do not smile, because Never" (124).

Since women are seen as sex objects and subordinated as being the second sex, they are more likely to experience sexual harassments and violence from men. Gilligan says that the root cause of violence is the gender roles that construct men as "violence objects" and women as "sex objects" (83).

In patriarchal communities men are constructed as violence objects and Son's actions towards women proves this right. Long before meeting Jadine, Son accidentally kills his first wife after learning of her unfaithfulness. His wife, Cheyenne literally dies as a result of male violence. The patriarchal community is tolerant toward this murder as an act of male rage because of female infidelity. He isn't punished for her death as he flees away and refuses to take the responsibility of it.

Son tells the truth to Jadine and he says the killing is a mistake; her sarcastic reply is:

"Sure. You didn't mean to, right?"

"Oh, I meant to, but I didn't mean to. I meant the killing but I didn't mean the death. I went too far."

"That's not so smart. Death frequently follows killing [...] Who'd you kill?" she said.

"A woman."

"I should have known. That's all you could think to do with your life? Kill a woman? Was she black?"

"Yes."

"Of course. Of course she was [...] Don't tell me. You found her with somebody else and shot her.'

"No. I mean yes." (Morrison 176).

Son's violent action justifies Jadine's preconceived ideas about stereotyped rural black male character which is associated with criminality. Knowing what he is capable of, Jadine withdraws from him physically and Son confesses that he "liked her fear [. . .] it made him feel protective and violent at the same time." (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 177).

After narrating such a story, he simply proceeds to tell her "I won't kill you. I love you" (177). Jadine perceives it as a threat. And later on he tries to convince her that it isn't a threat. "I wasn't trying to scare you. I was trying to comfort you." Then she gets angry: "You thought I sat this way because I was afraid?" (178). Actually Son likes to hold the power and subordinate Jadine with his threats and insults.

At another scene, Son insults her as he thinks that Jade has to have been a prostitute to be a successful model in Europe. Jadine starts a fight and says "You rape

me and they will feed you to the alligators. Count on it, nigger", Son's response is "Why you little white girls always think somebody's trying to rape you?" (Morrison 121). Son assumes that Jadine is acting like a white woman and gives the right of complain of sexual violation solely to the white women. It is noteworthy that an increasing number of black women tend to insist that rape and sexual denigration become an issue only if the victim is white (hooks: *Ain't I a woman: Black Women and Feminism*; Harris; Giddings; Jarret-Macauley; Mullings).

By assuming in his question that all rapists are black and that all rape victims are white the author clearly questions Jade's "blackness" and puts Son in the position of an arrogant man who thinks he knows what it takes to be a black woman. For some time now, black women have been consistently denying black men the right to define black womanhood. (Nubukpo 11)

Morrison explores the question of what it means to be a black woman in a society dominated by white ideals. For instance, Jadine is acting like a white woman unconsciously since she grew up in a white society. Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, as a solution to her problems, does not want to become a man but white woman. So it is not just the problem of being equaled to a man like in the modern feminist movements but being equaled to a white woman since being a black woman considered as the lowest position a woman can acquire.

As hooks observes in *Talking Back*:

As far back as slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men, who are ranked third, and black women last. What this means in terms of the sexual politics of rape is that if one white woman is raped by a black man, it is seen as more important, more significant than if thousands of black women are raped by one white man. (52-53)

The conditions of white women are more promising when compared with colored women as Leitch put it "Many black women find closer allies with women of color and Third World women than with white women because for them the issue of gender is inextricably enmeshed with the issues of class and race"(85).

In order to be heard by the society, African American women must struggle with black men along with white man and women since they suffer from "triple-oppression" as race, class and gender. To understand the African American women's struggles described in Morrison's novels one should know the difference between the black and the white women's liberation movements. While white women wanted enter the business world where she can be considered equal to a man, black women had

been forced to work beside their husbands to provide basic needs without concerning being equal with them. We can see its examples with the character Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* and Thérèse in *Tar Baby*. Only expectance of this difference is Jadine in *Tar Baby* as having successful career and accepted in the mainstream society.

Although Jadine has a successful career and education she is exposed to domestic violence from Son since he wants to have control over her. When they live in New York, Jadine wants him to get an education and she suggests taking financial assistance from Valerian, but Son rejects the idea of asking Valerian for anything. They start to fight physically and Son dangles her out of the apartment building which proves his tendency to be violent against women. The main reason of this violence is that Son doesn't want to receive help from Valerian since he is bothered from white supremacy. As hooks mentioned in *Femism for Everybody*, "white supremacist patriarchy" can be observed as the fundamental reason for male initiated domestic violence since the men trying to regain their lost social control and power upon women (64-65).

Cholly and Pauline Breedloves' marriage in *The Bluest Eye* and Son and Jadine's relationship in *Tar Baby* can be considered as examples of patriarchal struggles of domination. In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly's attitudes towards Pauline and Pecola are both oppressive and destructive caused by his underlying powerlessness. Especially, as hooks concerns in *Femism for Everybody*, Pecola's destruction is a demonstration of patriarchal culture of domination where adults consider themselves to be allowed to rule their child despotically (73).

Patriarchal society plays an important role regarding the tragedies of the characters as Rigney explains in the *The Bluest Eye*: "Morrison embeds the political issues affecting her characters' lives into a narrative that concentrates on their individual tragedies. In the novel, community and society play a crucial role in influencing people's lives; the characters are especially molded by the values society places on race and gender issues (55).

Morrison's novels, *Tar Baby* and *The Bluest Eye* consider the black women's oppression and the obstacles they encounter in an attempt to negotiate life in the oppressive environments they inhabit. In *Tar Baby* the most oppressive environment where segregation of women is fostered is represented by Eloë, Florida. Son's desire to reconstitute Jadine's subjectivity makes him insist on their going to his hometown black agrarian Eloë. However in Eloë, Jadine could not perform the black female identity required by the community which does not allow the differences and mobility. In order to better grasp why Jadine would reject black identity a closer look at the underlying reasons which put women to a subordinate position in the rural black community is necessary. The community of Eloë presents a patriarchal agrarianism that strictly limits women's role to the motherhood who never questions male authority. This rural black community oppresses black women's identities as

individuals and fosters the segregation of women. Jadine feels alienated in this community where her independent female identity is marginalized.

Jadine, a successful black model with a Sorbonne degree and engaged in white culture, and Son who is uneducated, but rooted to his black culture cannot be reconciled culturally. Morrison, most probably, wanted Son to realize at the end that he needs to let her go her own way "Because she had a temper, energy, ideas of her own and fought back" (*Tar Baby* 298). According to Duvall, *Tar Baby* reveals Morrison's belief that "Black women need not be tied to an agrarian community in order to partake of the ancient properties but, like Jadine, (or indeed like Toni Morrison), may migrate freely, with or without men, to the city and beyond" (12).

Confronted by the reality of Eloë and Son's attachment to that community and its ideals, Jadine understands that their values are irreconcilable and she needs to retreat to her old position. As a consequence, Morrison most probably used such a way to show that, "for black women raised in the Diaspora, privileging individuality and mobility over community is the only option" (Mills 4).

Narratives of Morrison's like represented in *Tar Baby* have feminist connotations which related to the neglected conditions of black women in community. The author famously quoted in her article "What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib," as saying: The black woman "had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may very well have invented herself" (63). Morrison's remarks supports the argument of this study that black women have to struggle with the triple oppression in American society while seeking to invent themselves despite capitalist, sexist, and racist challenges.

The same oppression on women where men rule and women are often subject to such rule can be seen in *The Bluest Eye* as well. "They never seem to have boyfriends, but they always marry. Certain men watch them, without seeming to, and to know that if such a girl in his house, he will sleep on sheets boiled white, hung out to dry on juniper bushes, and pressed flat with a heavy iron" (Morrison 83).

Geraldine, an African-American character in *The Bluest Eye* belonging to the upper class considers her husband as an 'intruder coming home from work vaguely anxious about what's for dinner" (Morrison 86). Geraldine's observation of her husband proves how women are perceived like maids who serve men's interest.

In *Tar Baby*, male chauvinism also shows itself when Son insults Jadine and even rapes her. Son believes that women are not inferior to men, and he is misjudged by Jadine, since "she kept barking at him about equality, sexual equality, as though he thought women were inferior" (268). However, his actions prove the opposite as he insults her telling to go back to her ex-boy friend and have his children.

Go have his children. That should suit you. Then you can do exactly what you bitches have always done: take care of white folks' children. Feed, love and care for white people's children. That's what you were born for; that's what you have waited for all your life. So have that white man's baby, that's your job. You have been doing it for two hundred years, you can do it for two hundred more. (269)

Son's insults of Jadine not only presents a critique of the stereotypes that depict Black women only caregivers of white children but also white slave master's exploitation of the black women's sexuality.

Son further tells her that there is no such thing as mixing races and that people either abandon their own race or choose it. He says that a black woman who raises her child as white is robbing him of his culture. As he talks, he gets more aggressive and invokes the story of the tar baby while rapping her. The text doesn't explicitly reveals Son's sexual violation of Jadine though this can be understood the dialogues between them: "...he tore open his shirt, saying, "I got a story for you."" (270) Though Jadine says "Don't touch me. Don't you touch me." (270) He doesn't seem to stop. Jadine resists ""You better kill me. Because if you don't, when you're through, I'm going to kill you." [...] After he banged the bedroom door, she lay in wrinkled sheets, slippery, gutted, not thinking of killing him." (271)

A few hours later when he returns Son is "repentant, terrified that he had gone too far." (271) Son's repentant thoughts and described situation of Jadine also proves the hidden sexual violation: "The Cheech and Chong T-shirt was up around her waist and her nakedness below embarrassed him now. He had produced that nakedness and having soiled it, it shamed him" (272).

Jadine speaks to him calmly:

I can't let you hurt me again. You stay in that medieval slave basket if you want to. You will stay there by yourself. Don't ask me to do it with you. I won't. There is nothing any of us can do about the past but make our own lives better, that's all I've been trying to help you do. That is the only revenge, for us to get over. Way over. But no, you want to talk about white babies; you don't know how to forget the past and do better. (271)

After this incident Jadine decides to go back to Paris to move on her carrier. Son's sexual violaton of her and her experiences in Eloë, in Son's world, which she finds sexist, oppressive and unfair, distance herself from Son. The reality of their values is incongruous and the sense of oppression forces her to escape from the roles that expected her to perform and the burden of blackness. She wants to flee to a global community defined by tolerance and opportunity where she can invent herself.



## Conclusion

Through reading both novels, it can be said that the upper-class members discriminate and avoid the poorest class and it is observed that female characters are oppressed and devalued by male dominance regardless of their class. In *Tar Baby*, despite both being "white", male chauvinism and oppression show themselves in the Street's relationship. Valerian is arrogant towards his wife and disdains her since she comes from a lower class. In her husband's gaze, she is only being valued by her beauty. Margaret is suppressed by her husband and abuses her own son. Actually she loves her son in a way and desires to revenge from her husband.

Son, exhibiting violence towards Jadine, is also conceited and always wants to teach Jadine their roots. He always forces her to be something that she is not. Despite making an effort to be a tar baby, Jadine, could not make it up to his expectations and rejects the black identity that Son tries to impose on her which puts women in a subordinate position.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is abused by her father Cholly and Pecola's mother Pauline is also beaten by her husband. Pecola's obsession to have blue eyes and her mother's admiration of idols of white female beauty imposed in movies reveal that how beauty is perceived by the American society which leads to the deterioration of the community.

Though both novels seem to narrate different stories, they address the position of black women in the society and how they are perceived inferior to men.

In overall, characters in both novels are influenced by the standard of white beauty and Eurocentric values established by the society. In Pecola's case in *The Bluest Eye*, being subject to neglect and sexual abuse makes Pecola obsessed with her wish for blue eyes which prepares Pecola's tragic end. Although being beautiful and accepted to the mainstream society, Jadine in *Tar Baby* is not content with her life and also suffered from male suppression. She is exposed to violence and sexual violation from Son.

Through her writing, Morrison wanted to create an awareness regarding the discrimination in society, emphasizing the ignorant conditions of the oppressed and the violated. White or black, all women experience different kinds of subordination and varying levels of oppression due to their race, class and gender identity. No matter what class, race or position in the society they have, someone as desperate as Pecola and as beautiful and successful as Jadine or though being white and beautiful like Margaret, women are treated as subordinate by men. However, the African American women's position in the society seems harsher than white women in general since they experience triple oppression as race, class and gender simultaneously. As long as they are exposed to the symbolic meanings attached to the devalued images created by

society and media, black women will continue to suffer from discrimination and the male domination.

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