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Directeur de Publication: M. Pierre KRAMOKO, Maitre de Conférences

Adresse postale: 01 BP V 18 Bouaké 01

Téléphone: (225) 01782284/(225) 01018143

Courriel: pkramokoub.edu@gmail.com

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THE VOICE IN THE PERIPHERY: BLACK CULTURE IN TONI MORRISON'S *TAR BABY*

Désiré Yssa KOFFI
Maître-Assistant
University Alassane Ouattara Bouaké

ABSTRACT

Although the slavery system in America was founded on the negation of Blacks' cultural values brought from Africa, Toni Morrison shows in *Tar Baby* that analyzing black culture differently leads to a conflict between white and black race. White people denied any culture in the process of the Blacks' dehumanization. Whites destroyed black culture and imposed them theirs. Blacks meanwhile, revived cultural values of the black race to show Whites that they had an advanced culture that gave meaning to their existence and identity. They highlight the importance of their culture that contributes to their integration into the fabric of the society in The United States of America.

Keywords: cultural conflict, racial identity, cultural alienation, cultural identity.

RESUME

Bien que le système de l'esclavage en Amérique ait été fondé sur la négation des valeurs culturelles que les Noirs ont apportées d'Afrique, Toni Morrison montre dans *Tar Baby* qu'analyser la culture noire autrement entraîne un conflit entre la race blanche et la race noire. Les Blancs ont nié toute culture dans le processus de déshumanisation des Noirs. Les Blancs ont détruit la culture noire et leur ont imposé la leur. Pendant ce temps, les Noirs ont ravivé les valeurs culturelles de la race noire pour montrer aux Blancs qu'ils avaient une culture avancée qui donnait un sens à leur existence et à leur identité. Ils soulignent l'importance de leur culture qui contribue à leur intégration dans le tissu social aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique.

Mots clés : conflit culturel, identité raciale, aliénation culturelle, identité culturelle.

Introduction

Since the period of slavery, White people have dominated and exploited Black people. By destroying and degrading African cultures, White people alienated them and pushed them into the margins of American society. Black writers denounced these inhuman treatments by heightening the African sense of identity. Their goal was to assert the ethos of Black people and to defend the originality of their culture. Among these writers, Toni Morrison portrays social problems relating to the living conditions of Blacks in America. Her major themes are about the burden of history, effects of racism and social stratification on Blacks. She lays a particular stress on the impact of White culture on Black culture and Blacks' attempts to create a separate culture.

This paper purports to read Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* as a neo-slave narrative that writes another cultural history. The novel simultaneously questions white dominant culture imposed on the Black slaves. Thus, this approach to the study of Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* resorts to Jacques Derrida's theory of Deconstruction, in that the novel poses as a tactic of decentering the issue of culture. It attempts to subvert the central term so that the marginalized term can become central (Derrida, 1974). In considering black culture another way, *Tar Baby* evokes the subversion of binary opposition pattern evoked through white culture and black culture. White culture is presented as central and the black one is marginalized. This hierarchy is undone and upset to reveal the importance of black culture.

To develop the issue of the voice in the periphery in *Tar Baby*, we will first describe the negation of Black culture in the United States. The White society denies any Black culture in such a way that the Blacks have the feeling that they are inferior to Whites and, as a result, their culture is inappropriate. Taking into account White cultural values in their way of life becomes one of the attitudes of some characters, a choice that has progressively led to cultural alienation and the extinction of Blacks' culture as well. Secondly, we will deal with the resistance of Blacks' culture, in so far as white racist society did not succeed in dismantling it.

I- The Negation of Blacks' Culture

In *Tar Baby*, Toni Morrison reveals the living conditions of Blacks since their arrival in the United States. They were separated from their families and their social groups and sold to White farmers. Divided into several groups, they worked on plantations in difficult conditions where they progressively learnt the language and culture of their masters. Their original cultural values were lost in so far as their masters attached any importance to them. To be

accepted and understood in this new environment, they had to incorporate white cultural elements in their way of life. This contributed to the loss of their cultural identity.

I.1- The Depreciation Blacks' Culture

In *Tar Baby*, Toni Morrison uses several elements such as greenhouse, sealskin coat and hair to describe the depreciation of black culture. She describes these elements as symbols of white power and domination. At the beginning of the novel, she presents a greenhouse belonging to a wealthy white man called Valerian Street, who has a peaceful retirement on an island known as "Ile des Chevaliers". He employs and dominates most of the Black characters in his greenhouse that symbolizes the domination of civilization over nature, human's attempts to control nature. A green place is covered with grass, plants, and trees and not with houses and factories. But on that island, Valerian has not only a big greenhouse, but also a factory since he is a candy manufacturer. His effort to dominate the natural world by building a factory indicates not only his power on nature, but also his domination over his Black employees whom he considers as indigenous, primitive and uncivilized. In his greenhouse built on "Ile des Chevaliers", Valerian destroys and devalues his Black employees' culture and replaces it by White civilization that he thinks more appropriate. Valerian's greenhouse has the same symbol as Macteer's big greenhouse in *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Macteer's house is the place where Claudia and her sister Frieda grow and learn that they live in an environment that recognizes no quality to them and denies their presence. When Mr. Henry, a White man visits their house for the first time, he thinks that they are White girls when he greets them. The canons of beauty in his mind are not those of Black blues or jazz singers, but rather those of White cinema actresses in fashion. He simply mistakes their criteria of beauty for White girls, without taking into account their racial characteristics.

Another symbolic aspect used by Toni Morrison in *Tar Baby* to show the impact of White culture on Blacks is the sealskin coat that Jadine, one of the characters receives from Ryk, her rich White boy friend. That coat represents for Jadine several choices she has to make among which we have miscegenation and civilization over nature. When she accepts that coat, she wonders whether she has to marry Ryk or not. Her acceptance of the gift seems to indicate her agreement to get married with Ryk. But the marriage means for Jadine an abandonment of her aunt and her uncle, Ondine and Sydney who embody her past, her history and her culture, as this marriage will bring her to Europe. By accepting the coat, Jadine dismisses the possibility of marrying a Black man and having Black children. Thus, the coat signifies Jadine's decision not to help perpetuate the Black race. The garment is symbolic of

life of the city, a civilized place. To make the coat, people have to trap and kill seals. This killing represents the triumph of the civilized world over the uncivilized one. The White culture is here perceived as advanced while Black one is viewed as primitive. The meaning of the gift that Jadine receives from Ryk is the same as the doll that is given to Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

In that novel, Claudia, a Black girl receives every year a blond doll with blue eyes as a Christmas present. For her, that doll is the most blatant sign that nobody takes interest in her. First, that doll has none of her own criteria of beauty, and second, it does not look like her. She dislikes the doll because it has White canons of beauty that is imposed on her. It means that she must behave like a White girl and understand that beauty has to be found in White culture.

Hair is also used by Toni Morrison in *Tar Baby* to express the effects of White culture on Blacks. Hair helps define a person's beauty and personality. When Son arrives for the first time at Velerian's house, he has wild hair that threatens everybody. The residents of "l'Arbre de la Croix" cut his hair and invite him to take a bath. While washing himself, the water that runs from his body is described as being as black as the water of the sea. Because the residents wish him to enter society, they remove wildness which is the blackness from his appearance. His haircut totally changes his image. He moves from a threatening presence to an attractive man. Cleaned up and civilized, Son can now talk with Valerian Street and share a joke with him. He is even given access to the room reserved for guests of honor. The condition for Son to be fully integrated within the residents living on "Ile des Chevaliers" is to get rid of any characteristic that makes him look like a Black man and he must behave as a White man.

In this perspective, Son looks like Ralph Ellison's protagonist in *Invisible Man* (1952). Ellison's main character sees an inscription on the window of a store in Harlem stating that Blacks can really be beautiful and sociable if they accept the White canons of beauty. Otherwise, they will be excluded from mainstream American society.

In analyzing the symbols quoted above, Morrison's depiction meets Jacques Derrida's. For Derrida, language conveys signs, and signs contain two elements: the signifier and the signified (Of Grammatology, P.112).

In *Tar Baby*, the signifier refers to the greenhouse, the sealskin coat and hair and the signified is their rejection and negation of black culture. These symbols (greenhouse, sealskin coat and hair) deny any African cultural value and advocate its replacement by white culture.

In her writing, Morrison insists on the pressure that the White society exerts on Blacks in such a way that they cannot express their cultural identity. Thus, her Black characters are symbolically imprisoned not only because of their gender, but also because of the devastating effects of the American culture. The social borders that delimit them are psychological restrictions and prejudice that they internalize. Through that internalization of stereotypes, Blacks consider their culture as inferior to White culture and consequently tend to live according to white cultural standards.

I.2- Cultural Alienation

Cultural alienation constitutes a major theme in Toni Morrison's literary work. It is a factor that endangers the stability and cohesion of Black communities in the United States. In her novels, several Black characters are alienated because they reject their own culture in favor of White cultural values. Their way of life is so anchored in Whites' habits that their behavior and their view of things are swallowed up by White cultural values. In *Tar Baby*, the author juxtaposes Black and White characters to dramatize racial differences that determine American racial atmosphere.

Jadine, one of the protagonists appears as a cultural orphan because she rejects her own cultural legacy and identifies with a culture which is not hers. The novel reveals the drawbacks of her bad cultural and social behavior and examines inherent behavior, in the binary opposition between Blacks and Whites. The divided consciousness of Jadine coincides with her refusal of her culture, race and motherhood which constitute a part of her African cultural heritage. Jadine's quest results in failure because she accepts values and customs of White middle class and rejects the cultural elements of her race and motherhood which can heal and transform her conscience. She is warned of the risk she runs in refusing her culture.

The first warning occurs in Paris, when a Black woman in a yellow dress meets her in a store. That woman stares at Jadine and spits on her. The feeling that Jadine has in seeing that woman is expressed as follows: "The woman had made her feel lonely in a way. Lonely and inauthentic." (45). Jadine desperately admires the woman whose dark skin and tribal marks embody what Jadine imagines as "true" blackness. Her despair and fear stand in the fact that she does not want her European boyfriend to discover her blackness and thinks that she desires to look like the woman in the yellow dress. Although Jadine is Black, she is completely different from other Black characters in terms of thoughts, passions, possessions and family connections. Through the spittle, the woman rejects Jadine because she does not

desire to represent “true” blackness. In this way, Jadine rejects her past and her ancestral mothers.

The second warning to Jadine is from Michael, the son of Valerian Street. He notices that she treats her culture with contempt. He considers her attitude as inappropriate when she prefers forms of European high culture while despising hers. For example, she attaches more importance to Picasso’s¹ paintings than African masks. She disdainfully qualifies what comes from Black race as primitive.

The third warning is from Son, her friend who tries to save Jadine from her cultural orphanage. Their opposition can be analyzed in terms of geographical and cultural background. Son comes from a small village of Florida densely populated by Black people whereas Jadine is from Baltimore, Philadelphia and Paris. Son invites Jadine to visit his village, Eloë. Upon her arrival, she qualifies the village as a space with no life. For her, Eloë has a past but has no future. She perceives the house in which she is accommodated as a cellar, a grave and a black womb. Late at night, when Son’s aunt Rosa notices that she is naked, she gives her a cloth and asks her: “You are all right daughter?” (252). As soon as she goes out, Jadine replies in a monologue: “No Rosa, I’m not your daughter.” (252). Next, other women come in her living room and show her their breasts. Frightened, Jadine screams: “I hate Eloë and Eloë hates me. Never was any feeling more mutual.” (266). The Black women in Eloë, representing Jadine’s cultural past condemn her for having given up motherhood. The rejection of these women by Jadine symbolizes her refusal of her family, her tradition and cultural legacy, breaking with her ancestral roots which can teach and feed her. She literally and metaphorically rejects her own mother.

Like Jadine, Alma Estee, another black girl in the novel is culturally alienated. In order to be more beautiful and consequently be appreciated by her white friends, she decides to operate an effacement of her own identity by wearing a wig. That wig masks her cultural heritage by covering and hiding her hair, which according to her, makes her look more African.

Black women’s attitude that consists in behaving as Whites is also depicted in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982). In that novel, when Sofia is in jail, the black community decides to find ways to free her. Squeak, a young black girl is sent to see the warden because he is one of her parents’ acquaintances. To be successful and to influence the warden to free

¹ Robert Maillard et Frank Elgar, 'Picasso, *étude de l'œuvre et étude biographique: Paris, Fernand Hazan, 1955, p. 3*

Sofia, the women dress Squeak like a white woman. Celie, in one of her letters to God reveals: “ Us bathe Squeak so clean she smell like a good clean floor and Us dress her like she a white woman” (98). This sentence shows the limits and the powerlessness of black people. They are compelled to behave like Whites in order to be seen or understood by the latter. It is one of the conditions on which they can be listened to; otherwise they are ignored and marginalized.

Most of Morrison’s black characters long to free themselves from restrictions that they associate with black identity, family loyalty and communal values. They liken freedom to their acceptance of white culture. Thus, to be free, they must renounce their own culture.

I.3- The Progressive Extinction of Blacks’ Culture

Most of Morrison’s Black characters are influenced and fascinated by white culture. Accordingly, they consider that theirs is negative and inappropriate. They feel a scorn for themselves and their culture. This scorn is in fact a self-destruction which prevents any peaceful family or community life.

In *Tar Baby*, Morrison portrays Jadine who renounces her own culture in favor of the white culture. She considers that any cultural trait that comes from black race is useless and cannot help her to reach her ambitions. When she meets Son for the first time, she describes him as a symbol of nature, a man who exemplifies authentic blackness. For that reason, she hates him saying that he smells like an animal. She views him as violent and uncivilized. Son, in turn, is not attracted by her because of her attachment to European culture; he calls her “White girl”. Jadine’s comparison of Son to animals becomes even more intense when she remembers an event that took place in her childhood: a female dog was sniffed and mounted by male dogs. All her life, she fights not to look like that female dog. When Son enters her room and behaves that same way toward her, she realizes she can possibly undergo that ill treatment. She perceives him as the figure of pure black animal that threatens her.

The conflict between Son and Jadine is an opposition of two different ways of being Black. In another episode of the novel, Jadine considers the financial assistance provided by Valerian as liberation, while Son sees it as a cultural prostitution. She tries to save him from his primitive behavior, while Son fights to free her from white domination. During her stay in Eloe, Son’s village, she shows her astonishment as she observes that no white people live there. Next, she has to submit to traditional rules. After being away from his village for eight years, Son does not find it good to come with a woman without the knowledge of his father,

Old Man. So Jadine has to spend the night with Rosa, Son's aunt. For Jadine, Eloë represents a nightmare of restriction and oppression. She does not understand the rules that distance her from women or prevent her from sleeping in Old Man's house. For her, these rules are arbitrary, sexist and unfair. In fact, she is an orphan raised by her aunt and her uncle, Ondine and Sydney. She has never had a true family, one that could tie her down and teach her the various set of obligations and responsibilities that make up family life. Instead, she has learnt white values. Her values are not part of a specific local community defined by obligation and history. That is how she feels oppressed. This sense of oppression is also connected to her desire to be free of the burden of blackness. Jadine refuses to identify with the residents of Eloë, as she considers this village as a dreadful place. Because she is unable to understand why Son is so tied to Eloë, she calls him "country baby". In reply, Son qualifies Jadine as "city girl", since she comes from New York, Baltimore and Paris. From Eloë to New York, Jadine moves from nature to civilization. Her desire to return to Europe means that she has chosen white culture and rejected black one. In returning to Europe, she also abandons Ondine and Sydney that is to say her family, her past and above all her history. Jadine's fight to get rid of her cultural legacy is similar to Geraldine's effort to impair the quality of being Black in *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

In that novel, Geraldine is Black woman who considers that her blackness represents "evil". She decides to suppress and deny that "evil" by refusing any elements of Black cultural values. For her, getting rid of difficulties means to remove the color of her skin, because the fact of being Black is synonymous with "evil". She adopts white national values of good manners. Her act can be conceptualized as an attempt to change the color of her skin. Her attempt to eliminate what she considers as "evil" drives her to hate her husband and her son. When she meets Pecola, a young Black girl of twelve years in her house, and notices that her pet is dead, she reacts with horror and anger. For her, Pecola is the repulsive poverty, the real explosion of fear she fights to avoid. She orders Pecola to get out of her house by insulting her: "Get out....you nasty black girl. Get out of my house" (75). When she tells Pecola to leave her house, she suppresses the "evil" that destroys her. Her tragedy is caused by her attempt to eliminate her natural blackness.

In her depiction of the voice in the periphery, Morrison shows that it has a negative influence on Blacks. Having succeeded in instilling in Blacks' mind the notion of inferiority, and the feeling of the subaltern, Whites have come to devalue any features of Black culture. Black characters who accept and adopt white cultural values, have a superficial existence and lead an inauthentic life. Their fake existence that makes them appear as sub-humans and

subordinate pervades their cultural heritage and their psychology and results in a complex of inferiority.

To promote a strong sense of communal life and values, Black people remember and bring back African cultural elements. Thus, within black communities a distinct culture emerges enabling them to analyze events according to their own vision.

II- Black Culture in the Pattern of Binary Opposition

In analyzing Blacks' living conditions in her literary work, Morrison shows that through contacts and exchange of ideas between Blacks, they develop distinctive cultural traits that include aspects from African tradition. Thus, a distinct culture emerged within black communities permitting them to feel in a Black environment, analyze and understand things according to their own view of things. They lay a particular stress on their ancestral roots.

II.1- The Importance of Ancestral Roots

Morrison shows an interest in ancestry as a literary theme, because it constitutes an element that gives Blacks the feeling of membership, in terms of race and origin. This feeling creates solidarity within black communities and is at the same time a means to reinforce brotherhood and keep hope in the fight against racial discrimination and cultural alienation.

In *Tar Baby*, Son is presented as a Black man who swims across the sea to reach the island where Valerian and his family live. When he gets there, he fights to preserve black culture as to show the usefulness of his African roots. He says that black people who assume white values like Jadine are traitors of their race. He joins the group of horsemen on the island who are descendants of the first slaves brought there. These horsemen represent people with pure relationship to nature and to their black race. Son admires the horsemen because they are directly of African descents and symbolize the survival of African culture on that island known as "Ile des Chevaliers". Black characters like Therese, Gideon and Son value racial and family connection and they demonstrate the importance of their African origins. They have a strong belief in the past and think no present action can be divorced from the actions of the past. Son deeply asserts his blackness considering that Africa is his home. That is why he frequently goes to his hometown, Eloë, where African culture is in rapid expansion.

In Eloë, Son's connections to his roots are perceived through his happiness to see his village again and his eagerness to embrace local rules. The deep joy he feels shows how much he has missed this place. The narrator informs that in Eloë, time goes slowly. That mostly

indicates two opposite views of time. While the Whites' conception of time parallels speediness and haste, (as time is money), the Blacks' understanding of time has no business or merchandized grounding. In Eloe, social codes have a weight on Son. For example, he is not bothered when he leaves Jadine while he goes with men. Next, he does not mind accepting his father's insistence to ask Jadine to sleep with Aunt Rosa and not with him. Aunt Rosa gives her a nightgown and refers to her as her daughter. Black women in Eloe adopt Jadine as their own daughter and want her to feel at home. In Eloe, social codes are part of everyday life and must be respected. The relationship between Son and his father shows how Eloe is dear to him. The significance of their names implies that this village has a real impact on Son's development. His father has been called Old Man since his youth and people have even forgotten his real name: Franklin Green. That implies that Old Man is the name which ascertains his personality throughout his life. As a consequence, the name of his boy, that is, Son relates to the honor the father is attributed in his community. Franklin Green and William Green are the names that the outside world uses respectively for Old Man and Son. But in Eloe, where they are truly known, they are just Old Man and Son. These two nicknames have traditional background and value a sense of place, home and rootedness. Son is a nickname that reflects the main character's commitment to his heritage and to his family.

The significance that Eloe has for Son is the same that Shalimar has for Milkman in *Song of Solomon* (1977). Like Son, Milkman undertakes a travel from North to South initially in search for gold. In Shalimar, he discovers something more valuable than gold: the history of his family. Shalimar represents for Milkman an ancestral home, where he joins up with a Black community whose pure lineage stretches back to Africa. In recounting the past of his family, he discovers that he is a descendant of a noble family, the one of flying Africans. In Shalimar, the legend says that to escape slavery, some Africans came back to Africa by flying. His great grandfather is one of those flying Africans. The legend has given birth to a song: Song of Solomon. Solomon is Milkman's great grandfather, the founder of his family. This legend is transmitted from generation to generation.

Eloe as well as Shalimar symbolizes pride, dignity and honor for Morrison's black characters, because they are places where African cultural values can be expressed. By recreating "villages" in rural South, Morrison gives her black characters the possibility to pay tribute to their African ancestors. The knowledge of their history gives them not only pride, but also power, since they no longer fall prey to white cultural values.

Son's fight to remain in contact with his African roots continues until he refuses Valerian's financial support. Jadine tries to convince Valerian to pay Son's school fees,

insisting that he should be educated since it is the only way he can succeed in the “real world.” This is the way Jadine was raised and she thinks everyone should go to school as she did when she was in Paris. When she says “the real world,” she means the one that embodies white culture and civilization. Son rejects her proposal arguing that Jadine’s way of education does not make sense because it does not include Black People like Old Man, Aunt Rosa, that are people in Eloë representing his African lineage. When he tells Jadine that he cannot give up his roots, he indicates that he cannot live in her “real and civilized world,” a world opposed to his African environment that he considers as more authentic and valuable than hers.

In their fight to resist the domination of white culture, Blacks seek their African origins to renew their culture and show its values. In addition to ancestral roots, folklore is another factor which expresses the survival of Black culture.

II.2- The Importance of Folklore

In *Tar Baby*, oral tradition plays an important role in the preservation and development of black culture. Oral expression remains a communicative medium by which cultural and social values are transmitted to younger generations. One of the folklore frequently used by Toni Morrison is tale. A tale is a wonderful short story that deals with imaginary facts and adventures. In Morrison’s fictitious world, tales are meant either to entertain young people or to transmit them teaching.

In *Tar Baby*, Gideon, one of Valerian’s servants tells a story to Son about slaves’ mystical powers to escape. The story is about wild horsemen who are descendants of the first slaves who landed in Dominica, a French island. Like those slaves who lost vision when the island came into sight, the wild horsemen are also blind. Their boat sank with the French, slaves and horses on board. At the mercy of current, they swam and reached the island with their horses. Gideon tells this story to Son because, he claimed that he came to this island the same way the horsemen did. After having listened to the story, Son admires those horsemen because they descend directly from Africans and live in the wild. This story is useful to Son who understands not only the history of people living on that island, but also his new environment of which he becomes familiar.

The use of stories involving teaching which bears witness to the survival of African culture is also found in *The Bluest Eye* (1970). That novel presents Cholly Breedlove, a young Black man who fails at school after the death of his aunt who takes care of him. He finds a job at a seed merchant’s shop where he meets an old man, Blue Jack, renowned for his better knowledge of folktales. He tells Cholly a story relating to ghosts:

A white man cut off his wife's head and buried her in the swamp, and the headless body came out at night and went stumbling around the yard, knocking over stuff because it couldn't see, and crying all the time for a comb (P22).

Through this tale, Morrison insists on the fact that the belief in ghosts is a cultural trait, since a ghost is the spirit of a dead person that people believe it can see or feel. As popular in African tradition, this opinion holds that the spirit of a deceased person is supposed to have an influence on social life. This implies that the physical and spiritual worlds are closely connected and the latter has a great impact on the former.

Tar Baby deals with a distinct black experience. It recalls the importance of storytelling in African tradition. It reinterprets a folktale that originated in Africa, but became American through retellings on southern plantations. According to that folktale, a farmer sets out to catch a cabbage-stealing rabbit by building a baby-shaped scarecrow out of tar. When the usually clever rabbit encounters this tar baby in the cabbage field, the rabbit tries to shake hands. Not knowing that the baby is fake, the rabbit gets angry and starts to hit it, only to get caught in the tarry surface. The rabbit continues to hit the baby until it gets totally trapped.

That folktale has two connotative meanings. The first one is that it refers to the relation between Son and Jadine. The encounter between the rabbit and the tar baby, Morrison theorizes, might represent a seductive woman and a clever man who face off and then find themselves bound together. In the novel, Son sees Jadine as a tar baby figure. He imagines that she is set in his path by the hands of white people to hinder his progress. But, like the rabbit that also gets caught in the tar, Son cannot resist temptation. So, he too finds himself trapped. On their way back from the picnic, Jadine falls into a swamp and literally gets stuck in tar. This experience shows that although Son too has the potential to entrap Jadine, she is strong enough to resist and escape.

The second connotative meaning is that the rabbit represents a Black slave who outwits his White master to stop his domination. In the novel, there is a reversal of Sydney's relationship to Valerian. The servant is now becoming the master, as he makes decisions regarding the management of the house and Valerian's life. Through *Tar Baby*, Morrison lays the stress on oral tradition that is part of blacks' cultural heritage. She recalls that storytelling is so anchored in black culture that it is still alive. Folktales bear witness to past events, mainly the long struggle undertaken by Blacks for freedom and for fitting into the mainstream of American society. They also bear witness to the survival and resistance of black culture to White one. On top of ancestral roots and folklore, pride that Blacks have for their race as a communal identity constitutes another form of resistance of their culture.

II.3- Blacks' Racial Identity

In *Tar Baby*, there is a frequent use of the black color to describe nature and the elements of the natural world. At the beginning of that novel, Son swims in the black ocean, beneath the black sky. The swamp where Jadine nearly gets stuck has at its center a pit of black tar. Similarly, Jadine complains about and fears the darkness of the night in Eloë. Those characters, like Son and Thérèse, often seem to blend in with the black parts of it. The wild horsemen associate comfort with nature and comfort with blackness to a logical extreme: Blacks themselves competently navigate the island's wild hills in the darkness of their blindness.

Son, the Black runaway, is also connected to nature. As he decides to join the horsemen in order to get his heritage, the island opens to accommodate him. The narrator also emphasizes the connection between nature and a woman's role as a mother, implying that motherhood is a woman's most natural state. Jadine does not clearly identify with these traits and her nightmare brings all of these forces together. All around her, Black women from her past and from Son's past assemble and show their breasts to her. The women insist that Jadine should accept her role as a nurturer and propagator of the black race, a role illustrated by the eggs that the woman in the yellow dress holds.

Nature contains elements in their pure state and is authentic. In connecting blackness to nature, Morrison shows the basic quality and value of black race. Her novels are suggestive that Whites must recognize and accept Blacks' racial difference. In this perspective, in her fictional world of *Tar Baby*, the hierarchy established in Valerian household has changed. His servants, Ondine and Sydney, now join him at the dinner table. Moreover, after the fight between Margaret and Ondine, the former acknowledges her wrong and apologizes.

With the episode of servants, their masters, and Margaret, the mistress eating at the same table, one understands that the process of recognition has started. Through this recognition, Morrison insists on the fact that Whites should no longer ignore and devalue black culture. Instead, they must perceive it as a valuable factor that gives meaning to Blacks' way of life and above all, their race.

Conclusion

In Toni Morrison's fictitious world, Blacks encounter a series of adversities, namely the destruction of their family systems, the removal of their original names, the loss of their

identity, the distortion of their history and the negation of their culture. That negation of their culture entails Blacks' cultural alienation because they adopt Whites' living standards and cultural values. This leads progressively to the extinction of their culture. Helpless and powerless, Blacks are at the mercy of Whites who treat them as properties and sub-humans.

But, Black people do not resign to this ill treatment. They remember and revive their culture that gives them more pride and dignity. This remembrance enables them to feel less the burden of racism and discrimination. They demonstrate that their culture is as useful as Whites' culture and can contribute to the American cultural development.

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