

## CHAPTER 4

### PSYCHOLOGICAL REALM

“What is identity?” is the question always asked by the majority of people at least once in their lifetime. Because the problems related to identity are as old as the world begins. It is widely accepted that the identity formation starts at birth and continues throughout the life course. Young children understand their roots- ethnicity and race- through family and community. Later, as children’s social and cognitive developments progress, they understand and describe themselves based on situational and environmental factors and form an individual identity. In other words, the formation of identity is a process that involves personal insight and observation of oneself in a socio-cultural context. Do Afrikans have an identity? The central focus of this chapter is the search for the essence of Afrikan personality of a century and an understanding of the nature of the lived experience of Afrikans, that is, their search for an “ego”, a self-definition as members of a society, and family.

But Afrikan identity formation happened entirely in a different environment. To understand the Afrikan’s self-image, one must go back to the birth of Afrikans as American slaves. Over 300 years back, when Afrikans were forcibly taken from their homeland for slavery in the Unites States, they occupied the most degraded of human conditions- a slave, an inhuman being, and a piece of

property. Eventually, the enslaved African families and cultural values were broken and they were forcefully acted according to the will of their white masters.

It is clear in Poussaint's words:

The Negro male was completely emasculated, and the Negro women systematically exploited and vilely degraded. The plantation system implanted a subservience and dependency in the psyche of the Negro that made him forever dependent upon the good will and paternalism of the white man. (350)

Thus, typical Afrikan psyche has gradually formulated with lots of negative attitudes.

It is clear from the history of the Afrikan people that they are viewed as people with no history, no cultural heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white-oriented America. Although in 1865, slavery was abolished in America, the South was still led by whites. Ku-Klux-Klan, an organization established in 1865, terrorized, mutilated and lynched the Afrikans. Racial discrimination was imposed on all aspects of Afrikans' lives-education, art, religion, community. Afrikan women had to face a twofold struggle because they suffered both racial prejudice and sexual abuse by the white owners and the black counterparts. Thus, they were treated as animals and prostitutes.

These numerous treatments on Afrikan people by whites resulted in an inferiority complex, as they fail to live up to the standards of the white imposed stereotypes. In addition to this, the white man projects his worst notions onto Afrikans. White Americans see the Afrikans as animals, with a lust to murder. The main racist propaganda of the whites behind this is the exclusion of Afrikans from the American society. As a result, Afrikans, consciously or unconsciously, feel like outsiders within the American white society.

Whites, in all the ways, could convince Afrikans that they really are inferior and whites are right. Accordingly, light-skinned Afrikans have shown the tendency to reject their darker brothers in some or all aspects. Poussaint clearly mentioned this notion as: “in the earliest drawings, stories and dreams of Negro children, there appear many wishes to be white and a rejection of their own colour. They usually prefer white dolls and white friends, frequently identify themselves as white, and show a reluctance to admit that they are Negro”(352). Most of these negative attitudes have been passed to them by their parents who are accustomed to believe in their own inferiority and to hate their blackness. Thus, the Afrikan is conditioned to say “Yes, I am inferior” (Poussaint, 352).

The most tragic fact is that the Afrikan has come to form his self-conception on the basis of what whites have said. And, they have been described as having a negative self-concept because of their inferior status in American

society. Consequently, being an Afrikan has many implications for the development of one's ego as these implications are related to economic class status and to the color of one's skin. For example, when an Afrikan child has brought up in American society, the color discrimination hits him deeply. To pour further fuel, segregated schools, neighborhoods and the indirect response of his family, bring him the consciousness of being sociologically and psychologically rejected. These negative forces shape the Afrikans' personality with conscious or unconscious feelings of inferiority, insecurity and self-deny or self-destruction.

The only remedy to bring Afrikans with positive spirit or to infill his self-esteem is developing an Afrikan consciousness in an Afrikan centered environment. This brings to light the idea that Afrikans must undo the centuries of negative self-image created by white men and replace it with a more positive self-image and greater self-confidence. Poussaint points out that "the development of black consciousness could serve, as an alternative and supplementary approach to the building of the Negroes' self-image along with the present drive towards complete racial integration" (356).

Conceptualization of self depends on culture and socialization. And, in order to place Afrikan psyche in the midst of the Afrikan environment, one must understand the basic nature of the Afrikan culture and how the community supports the psyche of its members. Based on the general characteristics of

cultures, Markus and Kitayama categorized culture into two: Collective, where people have an interdependent view of the self, and Individualistic, where people hold an independent view of the self.

In individualistic culture, focus is placed on the uniqueness of the self. Their attitude is clear from the statement that “if I am a member of independent culture, my self-interest and well-being are more likely to direct my thoughts and actions than others” (Marcus& Kitayama, 236). These people will be less likely to care about the consequences of their action, because they want to stand out as individuals. Examples of this category are cultures of Europe and America. Whereas in collective culture, the self is seen as connected to the surrounding social context. That is, the self is considered in relation to others. This type of culture gives prominence to relations. It means that “if I am a member of collective culture, I cannot make a decision about anything unless my family or community member approves it” (236). They should consider the goals of others in order to meet their own goals. It indicates that maintaining a connection to others means being constantly aware of others’ needs, desires and goals. Examples for this type of culture are cultures from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

It has clearly shown in the third chapter that African people give first priority to community, then to family, and finally to individual. That is, Afrikans have an extended sense of self. This extended self encompasses others who are

significant to the individual. That is, one's personal well-being is closely connected with the well-being of others in the group or community. The saying, "I am because we are, and because we are I am" (Mbiti) exemplifies this conceptualization of the self. Hence, for placing Afrikan psyche in an Afrikan environment, one should analyze their social identity too. This social identity may also include one's identity with nation, religion, gender, sexual orientations, and racist and ethnic identity. And the latter two types of identity have been studied with greater importance as they act as a whole apparatus of Afrikan psyche.

The formation and reshaping of identity in America have involved complicated relationships between race and ethnicity. Michael Omi and Howard Winant on the history and sociology of racial formations say,

the process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed- teaches us that *race* is a means of establishing and maintaining a hierarchy of social order based on perceived differences among human groups. Within this scheme, *ethnicity* is a function of 'culture' (which can include shared elements of group identity such as religion, language and nationality) and 'descent' (which involves heredity and sense of shared origin). (15)

In Afrikan culture, there is a link between the past and present, a combination of cultural memory and spiritual beliefs. As already stated in the second and third chapters, in America, African tradition, beliefs, and experience are modified by the Christian religion. Within the Afrikan community, the church plays an important role in the lives of people. It has been considered as the center of Afrikan culture. From the time of slavery to the present, the church has been serving as the Afrikans' sole outlet for all emotions. In addition to this, family structure is changed. Relationships with individuals and with community also have changed. Hence, Afrikan identity is not exactly African. Based on their past experience and mental traumas, Afrikan identity is a typical identity of their own.

With these aspects of identity in mind, the selected novels for the study can be analyzed as the most representative ones in the Afrocentric approach. The main characters in each of these works highlight how Afrikans negotiate the racial identities foisted upon them by the United States' society as well as the cultural identities that shape their world views.

Alex Haley's *Roots* is considered to be a racial odyssey as it mainly deals with the suffering of the people who lost their identity during enslavement. Thus, he fixes the Afrikan problems of identity from African soil itself than starting from American soil. His attitude towards his heritage is directly connected with his views on African life. Africa fulfills the mysterious and racial past of the

Afrikans that includes the fact of being black and possessing a different spirit and sensitivity. In Africa, black color was considered to be the ideal one. Binta says, “The more blackness a woman has, the more beautiful she is” (34). Hence, “Even Binta, along with every other female in the village over twelve rains old, was nightly boiling and then cooling a broth of freshly pounded fudano leaves in which she soaked her feet- and the pale palms of her hands- to an inky blackness”(34).

But in America, black color marks segregation between Afrikans and Americans. And, it is believed in America that the blacker a man is, the more animal instincts he might have. So Afrikans wish to acquire whiteness in order to get rid of color and racial discrimination. But Kunta accepts his blackness and proud of that color, that he is an African. He believed that those who deny his blackness, also reject his African heritage. Haley seems to defend the pure physical image of an African in this way and his true identity before being enslaved and mixed with the whites: “Kunta noticed his reflection in the still surface of the pool- a narrow black face with wide eyes and mouth. Kunta smiled at himself, then grinned with all his teeth showing” (67). After being enslaved, Kunta still feels proud of his color. “Kunta grew so furious every time he thought about that brown one that he wished he knew enough of the toubob tongue to go and shout, ‘At least I’m black, not brown like you!’”(252). In a way, irrespective

of the colour perspectives that existed in America, Kunta loves black skin more than brown or white and thus establishes a racial identity of his own.

But the physical identity is not the only issue that Afrikans faced in America. Haley is proud of all his past and of his people, and Africa is his emotional and ideal home. Four hundred years of alienation from Africa have turned the Afrikans into Americans and their destiny is in the country's destiny. But the novel is a shout of hope for him and for his people, asserting themselves. It is with pride that Haley discloses the social identity of Africans- both tribal and national identity- as a reaction to the Americanism of Afrikans.

Haley develops the tribal identity largely and passionately. He points out the way of living in the tribe, how the Mandinka's children learned to read Arabic, worshiped Allah in day-to-day life, hunting; how they counted their age by rains; how the young people respected the old ones; how they communicated by drums; how marriage occurs and how the wives respected their husbands and look after their children to fit for communal life; and how the boys were trained rigorously for both tribal and personal life. Haley describes at length about the facts of Mandinka history and their religion and, finally, describes their sexual practices.

By glorifying the African life in the beginning part of the novel, Haley distinguishes Africans precisely between freedom and slavery. Emphasizing the life of being free Africans, he has purposefully proved the fact that Africans had a

rich cultural heritage before slavery. By such a picturisation, he also tries to show how the Afrikans who lived as tribes are denied their privilege of being humans. He says, “slaves aren’t always easy to tell from those who aren’t slaves” (52). They can easily be free again by buying their freedom from their earnings.

From all these descriptions, Haley wants to prove that the tribal life is an important aspect in both African and Afrikan cultures. Those who lead community life feel security and get more empowered than those who live in disintegrated families. He expresses the importance of community through Kunta.

As the days passed, he began to see that although these black ones lived better than those on the previous toubob farm, they seemed to have no more realization than the others that they were a lost tribe, that any kind of respect or appreciation for themselves had been squeezed out of them so thoroughly that they seemed to feel that their lives were as they should be (251).

Kunta acts as an ideal path finder for Afrikans to possess their identity. He points out the significance of communal and religious lives for getting an identity for Afrikans. He teaches about the life of African villages to those Afrikans who have lost and forget their African links:

Kunta told her how all the children in his village were taught to write, with pens made of hollowed dried grass stalks, and ink of

water mixed with crushed pot black. He told her about the arafang, and how his lessons were conducted both mornings and evenings . . . . Kunta told her how the students in Juffure had to be able to read well from the Koran before they could graduate, and he even recited for her some Koranic verses. (331-31)

Later, he named his daughter "Kizzy", a Mandinka name to continue his daughter being an African descendant. He teaches her African words, offers her a Mandinka doll as a toy, and speaks about Mandinka tribe and his people.

But, ironically, Kizzy and Bell have rejected the African life to a degree equal to how much Kunta opposed Americanism. They love American way of life, follow Christianity and even wish to get a light- skin to mingle with the Americans. The more he rejects those Afrikans who are intimidated by the master to shun anything African, the more Kizzy and Bell wish to encourage the white culture. This happened mainly because the idea of Africa and its ethnic roots is not so important for an unselfconscious Afrikan, such as Bell and Kizzy, as it is to a self-conscious African, who exiled in a strange place, such as Kunta.

Kunta represents those Afrikans who are proud of their roots and of African peoples, and who want to continue being African from Africa, with their own identity, but not able to do that. Therefore, he would have to integrate his life as a part of slavery into American lifestyles. Freedom is the ultimate dream of

Kunta, but he dies without being free again. Although he dies physically, all his efforts to survive spiritually never end up, and it continues alive in all his descendants.

From establishing a national identity of Africans in America, if one analyses Kunta as a family man, one can undoubtedly say that Kunta is a successful family man who kept a family identity of Kunta clan for seven generations in America. Though Kizzy has acted half-American circumstantially, she never forgets her father and his concept of Africa. Instead, she exchanges those memories and genealogy to her son. She says to her son, George:

His gran'pappy had come on a ship from Africa. 'to a place my mammy said dey calls 'Naplis', she said that a brother of her Massa Waller had brought him to a plantation . . . . When he kept on runnin' 'way, dey chopped off half his foot'. (445- 46)

She continues to tell George about her African words which she taught from her father

'yo' gran'pappy like to tell me things in de African tongue like he call a fiddle a *ko*, or he call a river *Kamby bolongo*, whole lotsa different; funny-soundin' words like that'. She thought how much it would please her pappy, wherever he was, for his grandson also to know the African words. (446)

George is a clever boy who picks up all the words that Kizzy has taught him. He is the son of Kizzy and his master Mr. Lea. That is, he is of mixed blood. But he never forgets what his mother told him about Africa and his grandfather:

“‘Mammy’, he said, ‘one time you tol’ me gran’pappy give you de feelin’ dat de main thing he kept on his mind was tellin’ you dem Africa things’ . . . . After another silence, George said, ‘Mammy, I been thinkin’ Same as you done fo’ me, I gwine tell my chilliuns ‘bout gran’pappy’ (454-55).

The passing of Kunta Kinte’s name and family history becomes a refrain thought throughout the book. It binds Kizzy, then George, who in turn passes it on to the son Tom, a master blacksmith, who is emancipated after the Civil War. One of his daughters, Cynthia, marries Will Palmer, who in 1894, became a prosperous owner of a lumber company. They were Haley’s grandparents. Haley was born as the son of Bertha Palmer and Simon Haley, both were college-educated teachers and solid members of the black bourgeoisie.

An Afrikan identity which is based on African inheritance has been brought to America by Kunta Kinte. Thus, Kunta stands out as a reverse figure to some of the most enduring stereotypes about Afrikans and provides a counter- hegemonic narration of Afrikan identity, which indicates a rediscovered racial pride for Afrikans of all ages. To the general perception, the character, Kunta Kinta, demonstrates as a valuable ancestor who survives slavery without losing his

African identity so much so that the name has turned into an example of self-determination, proud racial identity, and a popular mythical forefather to the collective Afrikan identity. Kunta's ability to retain memories from his homeland and the family's original name is the central vehicle for a broader self-determination and for the elevation of Africa from a place of provenance to a symbol of racial pride.

Just like *Roots* that narrates the story of a real family history of the narrator himself, Walker's *Jubilee* also is about a true family history narrated by the author herself. The novel is about Vyry, a mixed-race protagonist, and her life before, during and after the Civil War. Having a good Afrikan ground values in life, the novel thus tells about the real Afrikan woman even in the adverse political and social situations. The novel, thus, demonstrates the identity issues from a female point of view.

Most Afrikans remember the Civil War as a triumphant rather than a traumatic event since it marks the end of slavery. The Post Civil War period, however, witnessed the formation of an Afrikan identity in all means. And the survived communities in Afrikan ghettos have a significant role to empower, nurture and strengthen the Afrikan orphans with a proper Afrikan identity, values, and ethics. Vyry is such a culprit of the inhumanities of slavery.

Walker has mentioned about a little on Vyry's biological mother in the opening of the novel. She became an orphan after her mother Hetta's death. Later, she is allowed to live with Mammy Sukey until she is seven years old. In the warmth of this relationship, Vyry learns the basics of Afrikan cultural values like the importance of faith, kindness, and strength and Afrikan manners through the example of the old slave woman. This surrogate mother of Vyry teaches her about curtsy and speaks respectfully but also to guard her sense of dignity: "Mind your manners good, and be real nice and polite. You a big gal now, but you aint gone be no field hand and no yard nigger. You is gone wait on Quality and you got to act like Quality" (19). In a way, she is the first person in Vyry's life to know about her identity based on African culture, and Vyry's journey to attain an Afrikan womanhood started from that moment.

The next Afrikan woman who has become Vyry's surrogate mother after Mammy Sukey's death is Aunt Sally. Aunt Sally, the plantation cook, then continues to nurture Vyry's developments like "a mother hen clucking over one biddy" (42). Aunt Sally teaches her further how to behave in the plantation. "Aunt Sally showed her how to do everything the way she did it and how to please the Marster's family"(41). She also litted up the spirit of real Afrikan identity through the stories about her own past. "Most of all Vyry loved the stories Aunt Sally would tell about who she was and where she came from, and what life was like,

and how to live in the Big House and get along with the Big Missy” (43). She has attended the Christian prayers of Brother Ezekiel and thus has brought up as Afrikan woman with both communal and religious ties of a hybrid Afrikan culture.

Based on the teachings of her surrogate mothers, Vyry has made a strong cultural base and starts to develop her own identity after their disappearance.

With Mammy Sukey dead and Aunt Sally sold, Vyry must become self-reliant in order to endure. Her only source of inspiration is herself. The spiritual continuity derived from a learned oral tradition asserts itself, however as the voices of her ancestors and mother figures rise within in the form of their song, ‘and Vyry, through singing, finds relief and strength’. (Taylor- Thompson and Washington 46)

Apart from the duties assimilated with a traditional African house wife, Afrikan women have a lot of additional responsibilities such as, supporting the family, protecting the children of their own and others, acting as surrogate mothers, and finally empower the community especially in the absence of males. To accomplish these goals, the middle part of the novel charts the adult Vyry’s strength of will and self-assurance to start a new life. She is hardly sixteen when she met Randall Ware and she had Jim and Minna in that relationship. She acts as

a protective mother to them from the very beginning, takes care of them, nurtures them and instills the Afrikan values and morals in them. “As soon as the evening meal was over and Vyry was free to leave the kitchen, she took her children and set out across the plantation to find Brother Ezekiel” (158). She does not run away leaving behind her two children despite Randall Ware’s assurance of getting their children back. Instead, she takes the risk of being caught and bearing the consequences, and dares to run away carrying both children with her.

The era of slavery, for Afrikans, means a period of destruction- destroying the African centered values, morals, ethics, religious beliefs, family structure, community activities and finally an identity of their own. The post-Civil War, thus, witnessed the rebuilding of family, house, land, communal activities, and identity and so on. Vyry’s family is also such a broken family. After the Civil War, she is in a dilemma on where to go and how to settle because she is completely ignorant of her husband, Randall Ware, who went for participating in the Civil War. “But the summer days wore on and she heard no word from Randall Ware” (296). She waits for him for several months in the Big House and finally marries to Innis Brown. Soon they decide to leave the big mason. Vyry collects all the things that a small family wants to start a new life. “She filled the chest with her most valuable keep sakes from the plantation and Big House and tied it on the wagon” (316). But finding out a land becomes uncertain thing since

“looking for a place to settle where they could begin a new life was typical of hundreds of thousands of emancipated Negroes”, and “people were moving from place to place, nevertheless, at great inconvenience” (315). The rest of the novel thus brings the real agony of having a land, family and community life for rebuilding a new identity.

When the family sets out to establish a new life in freedom, music again assumes an important role. “Everybody was feeling fine and in wonderful spirits. They laughed and joked along the way, planning what they would do with the years of freedom stretching a lifetime before them, and they sang” (316), “and in their to the building a home of their own, everything seemed possible” (320). The family first settled in a pine forest on the border of Georgia and Alabama and cultivated their new land. After their first prosperous years of farming, a flood washes away the next year’s crop, and the children fall down with Malaria. And, finally they decide to leave the place.

The main issues of the Afrikans in America during the Reconstruction Era are that in one way or another, the Afrikans

Were still forbidden to own fire-arms and to be seen on city streets at night after nine o’ clock or they could be arrested for vagrancy and loitering. Every Negro who had no job and was not working for some respectable white man was a suspect . . . . And in one way or

another the freed black people were a menace to the lives, property, and liberty of white people and their local government. They rarely addressed themselves to him personally, and when they spoke to him it was strictly about shoeing their horses, but he sensed their moods and caught the meanings of their undertones. (324-325)

Soon Innis has made a contract with Pippins about share cropping. But soon they realize that Pippins is made use of their ability to cultivate a land. But because of their ignorance they earn little. So soon they decide to leave that house and start again their journey.

When their wagon breaks down near Troy, Alabama, Innis finds employment with a businessman named Jacobson, and Vyry as the couple's cook. Their combined earnings of twenty-five dollars a month afford the family a degree of prosperity, but Vyry is worried of their neighbors. With Jacobson's help and support, they could make a complete house for them which provoke Ku Klux Klan and end up in putting their house to fire.

Then the family is tried to migrate to Butler County. There they begin a new life of their own. Vyry gets more opportunities to become a part of society, and because of her mixed color, she has won the heart of all. She has run a business of selling eggs and soon she becomes a midwife for both colors. Innis

and Jim have concentrated on land. Thus, they rebuild everything they needed to start a peaceful life there.

When Vryy is set free to start a new life of her own, she proves herself to be wiser and more sensible than Innis in many instances. Instead of denying her white color which is an outcome of mixed blood, she makes use of that color for lessening the racial discrimination existed between blacks and whites that time. Taking advantage of her own skin color, she works in the white community as a mid-wife and succeeds in buying the confidence of the whites over the Afrikans, and thereby destroying their racial prejudice to a great extent. As Carmichael says,

The building of the new house is a community effort. Vryy's midwifery and the marketing of her vegetables establish a bond between blacks and whites in the community. The house-building celebration concludes with quilting bees, plenty of food, and the solidarity of the neighborhood watch. (272)

It is also Vryy and not Innis who remarks the significance of Afrikans' education for eradicating discrimination and achieving an identity of their own. She dreams and tries to fulfill her dream by getting Jim an admission in the school. She says:

Freedom won't mean much more than they can't buy and sell us on the auction block. Even the Confederates abolished the slave trade. But they mean to keep us down under some kind of different system,

controlling our labor and restricting our movements, and not allowing us to vote, and trying to keep us ignorant. (472-73)

Vyry's acquaintances with whites have enabled her to understand some of the hidden motives of whites. She strongly believes that keeping the Afrikans away from education is the white man's racist attitude, because they know that if the Afrikans get ideas in his head about freedom and equality, then he never lives under slavery. But Innis does not accept the view. At this point, Vyry discloses the white man's mentality to Innis as

'Well, that's the white man's attitude'. He says an educated Negro gets ideas in his head about being free and equal, and that's the truth. When you can read and write and the white man can't make a fool out of you, he never likes it. . . . The white man must have had some fear about educating colored people . . . . He knows as long as we are ignorant people we are helpless. (471-72)

Thus she suggests education as one of the main remedies to the problems of the ex-slaves.

Thus, each character in the novel achieves their own identity in different manner. For Innis, making a place for their own marks identity. It is clear in the end when they finish making a permanent home and land of their own, he remarks: " we's going do well here. I feel, it in my bones. God's gwine bless the

plowing and the sowing, the reaping and the thrashing. He's done give us a home, and me a farm at last" (439). He is thus successful in answering the question like "where do they belong?"

But for Vyry, it is the emotional freedom, which she attains in the end of the novel by showing her horrible scars of slavery on her back to both Innis and Ware.

That's what they done to me that morning when I was trying to meet you at the creek. That's how come I got them there scars

Hysterical now, she had thrown off piece after piece of her clothing, and now in the moonlight the two men stood horrified before the sight of her terribly scarred back. The scars were webbed and her back had ridges like a washboard . . . Vyry was still weeping, but just as quickly as she had torn off her clothes she recovered herself and threw her apron around her shoulders to cover her back again and began to draw her skirts closer. Now she was drying her eyes and trying to compose herself. (484)

Thus, she frees her painful past and feels relaxed.

For Jim and Randall Ware, education is the ultimate goal of achieving identity. Ware achieved it long before and established his own identity. He says "I'm a black man. I don't believe in licking any man's boots. I've always had gold in my pockets and I always felt like I was just as much as any mom, a lot better

than some”(479). Finally, he takes Jim with him for providing education, and thus lights up Jim’s future. “Jim’s eyes shone and the happy look on Innis Brown’s face and he knew better than to say anything. Vyry knew, too, that their reconciliation was now complete”(494).

And in the end of the novel, Vyry’s neighbors’ offering of building a new home for Vyry’s family display to a level of inter-racial care and concern that is rare in the Antebellum Southern context in which the novel is set. As James Weaver writes in his essay, “the neo-slave narrative not only represents rehabilitative storytelling but enacts it, situating readers in a position to confront United States’ slave past as a source for social regeneration in the present”(129). With this idea, Weaver is asserting the notion that it is not black or white voice, but rather a multi-racial voice that will ultimately bring the discussions on race, class and gender in America’s past, present and future to a productive, healing place.

If *Jubilee* is a novel that dealt with slavery, Civil War and Post Civil War period, *Beloved* dealt with Reconstruction Era. Slavery has made devastating effects both in the Afrikan family and community. Therefore, their identity is remained collapsed even after the Independence. The publication of the Moynihan report in 1965 lighted up a racial controversy regarding the dysfunctional nature of Afrikan family. Moynihan reported that “the family

structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown". The aftermath of this result is the political division regarding race that lasted into the 1980's: "The discourse of race in the 1980s, then, was constrained by a double denial: Reaganist conservatives denied American racism and descendants of the New Left denied any dysfunction within African American communities." (Berger 414)

Sethe's family is certainly dysfunctional. As stated in the second chapter, Sethe's family is typically female-centered. It is governed first by grandmother Suggs and then by Sethe. Suggs is a preacher who devoted her words and deeds completely for religion and society. But she fails to free Sethe from her memories. Sethe, a single mother is working a low paying job and completely lives away from the community. Both of her sons run away, never to be seen again. Sethe murders one of her daughters and the other is so weak to leave the yard. The family's dysfunction stems from their unwillingness to face the past traumas which appears as a ghost in the house. The historical parallel to this is the ideologies of racial denial. That is, if traumas are repressed and not worked out, their effects will never go away.

When the novel begins, Sethe is in such a position that both her family life and community life has been collapsed, and her mind is wandering for getting an identity of her own in America. Because of enslavement, every Afrikan created

his/her identity based on the definition provided by the white people. That is, they begin to perceive each other according to what white defines them and their race. Therefore, a significant obstacle of finding out Sethe's identity can be attributed to the actions of the Afrikan community which use the definitions based on white hegemony, rather than of their own. This is why Sethe's act of murder can be scrutinized at least in two ways, depending on whether the "black" or "white" definition is applied. Consequently, some people consider the act as barbaric, while others see it as heroic.

The Cincinnati community that has previously welcomed Sethe as its member, now ostracizes her due to the white ideologies. The community invites her to join their free community for empowerment once she has escaped from slavery, and seek shelter in the embrace of Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law. Now she is among her people. Still, it is only for a month that she enjoys the status of a "black sister". "Those twenty-eight happy days were followed by eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life" (204). After being rejected, Sethe finds her 124 Bluestone house as a place for desolation and succeeds in isolating herself and Denver, from the community. Thus, the family is completely dysfunctional in effect.

Sethe, though she is considered to be the second generation of the real African ancestors, is deeply filled with the African traditional religious beliefs that

are related to the spirits and ancestors. As a result, Sethe's subconscious longing for clarification of the past, and simultaneously for forgiveness, brings into being the ghost of her murdered child. It has been stated that

According to West African belief, the dead are not finished with the living because the past (the dead), present (the living), and future (the unborn) are co-existent. Deceased ancestors can and do communicate with their descendants, especially if certain rites of the dead have not been performed. Such a world view posits a fluidity and continuity between the past and present. (Grewal 106)

It takes eighteen years for the ghost, Beloved, to come back in flesh and claim the love she has been denied. In other words, Beloved's "return of the repressed" denotes the comeback of the suffering soul to "possess" (Grewal 105).

Initially, the effects of Beloved's appearance in Sethe is that she came to "love and be-loved". As time goes by, Sethe and her living daughter, Denver make every effort to provide the regained family member with all the love they previously reserved for each other. Sethe's repeated assertion: "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine" (236), is followed by Denver's conviction: "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk" (242), and Beloved's final declaration: "I am Beloved and she is mine . . . . I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own" (248). These statements show their mutual longing for possession and love.

The presence of the Beloved as a spirit and the beliefs related to spirits and spirit world are clear from conversation of Beloved and Denver:

‘You see anybody?’

‘Heaps. A lot of people is down there. Some is dead’.

‘You see Jesus? Baby Suggs?’

.....

‘I wait; then I got on the bridge. I stay there in the dark, in the daytime, in the dark, in the daytime. It was a longtime’.

.....

‘What did you come back for?’

Beloved smiled ‘To see her face’.

‘Ma’am’s? Sethe?’

‘Yes, Sethe’

.....

‘She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have’. Her eyes stretched to the limit, black as the all-night sky. (88-89).

For in reality, what Beloved seeks is a compensation for being abandoned in the past. Incapable of perceiving the true purpose behind Beloved’s actions, Sethe

exists only as if the ghosts possession, which later became a threat to Sethe's existence that lasted in the Clearing ritual.

Apart from Sethe, Denver also faces identity issues. The major aspect of Denver's incapability to achieve self-confidence is the lack of a well-established family. Traditional joined families in Africa had a significant role for the empowerment of its members. And family unity is regained as the backbone of individuals (family members) for achieving their identity. But the disintegrated or modified Afrikan families in America have failed to fulfill the basic elements (unifying, empowering and nurturing) of its purpose. As a result, the individuals fail to perceive identity from families. Sethe's family also comes under this aspect. To cite Elizabeth Kella, Sethe's family is "neither normative, nor 'pathological (because) fatherless'. The blame for its deformed structure is on the "traumatizing forces of white racism" (116). Since the family stands as a unit to guard the racial solidarity, it threatens the institution of slavery and is, therefore, the main target for destruction. "Although Sethe is willing to create a substitute of a traditional home for Denver, the source of domestic nurturance and familial love does not have its source in her biological mother" (Groover48-49).

The best remedy for a haunting past is remembering the past, and fills the unfulfilled gaps. Sethe's re-remembering the past can work both ways: either enslaved or free her. In order to free herself of the burden of the traumatic past,

Sethe needs to experience it anew. It is not until Beloved's physical arrival that Sethe is finally allowed to "re-examine her story with regard to sacrifice, resistance, and mother love" (Kella 129). Being a realization of the past trauma, Beloved also becomes "the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (Grewal 98). If Beloved serves as a revival of painful memories that for Afrikans interchangeably meant the time of slavery, then Sethe's and Denver's journey to self-identity can be impeded by their unwillingness to undergo the torment anew. It is clear that Beloved stands not only as a symbol of forgotten history, and the pain of slavery, but also as a key element in the construction of both Sethe's and Denver's self-identity and self-recognition. Thus, Morrison admits that "the presence or the absence of an ancestor determined the success or the happiness of the character" (Mardberg 183).

Beloved's healing power is the vital force for Denver to go out the yard. But when Denver realizes that Beloved is a ghost who made devastation in her house, she decides to do something to save her family. Remembering her conversations with Baby Suggs, Denver memorizes that, despite the inability to defend oneself against the white folks, one must claim freedom through action.

'But you said there was no defense'.

'There ain't'

'Then what do I do?'

‘Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on’. (288)

Accordingly, Denver leaves the four walls of 124 Bluestone Road. Thus, she has broken the domestic confinement, and transcended the biological bind that disabled her searching for integrity with the Afrikan community. Maria Mardberg’s study strongly evinces the view that “communal identities are crucial to the well-being of Morrison’s women” (212), where daughterhood preserves an Afrikan heritage in the sense of cultural continuity. Alienation has made Denver to stay away from the expectancies imposed upon her as a daughter and as member of the community. Instead, “she grows up self-centered and lonely, afraid of her mother and the world outside the yard” (Payant, 196). Thus, *Beloved*’s devastating power has resulted therapeutic effect in Denver’s life.

Memorizing the past and filling the gap in the past is not the only step for achieving identity. When the Afrikans feel completely recovered, proud of them and say it aloud, then the process ends and their identity is declared publically. In the novel, *Beloved*’s significance is undeniable, but in order to recognize herself as an independent person, Sethe has to believe in it by admitting her “self” aloud. During one conversation Paul D affirms: “You. Your best thing, Sethe. You are” (322). Through these words, Paul D attempts to awaken Sethe’s self-perception, and urges for the detachment from her children. By doing so, he strives to build her self-conviction of separateness from them, of her as an independent whole.

Sethe's subsequent reply: "Me? Me?" can be regarded as a final proclamation of herself, not in the sense that "her children were her best thing, but as a reflection of 'herself as her best thing'" (Dubey, 161).

An analysis of the novel clearly portrays the successful development of the Afrikan identity in times when an Afrikan is denied it. During the struggle for acquiring self-identity and self-recognition, Sethe and Denver learn to self-possess their own selves, and overcome the conviction of being someone else's possession. Morrison constructs a story of the personal aspiration of an Afrikan individual to be recognized as a human being, when subsequently marks the beginning of the communal crusade to self-acceptance. Only when the individual succeeds in finding out his/her own identity, the possibility of gaining the collective self-recognition emerges.

According to Morrison, the institution of slavery not only destroyed the identity of a generation of former slaves, but also destroyed the collective memory of a deplorable past, which has destructive repercussions on the Afrikan identity. Slavery's impact on the identity of former slaves is portrayed through Sethe and its aftermath consequence through Denver. These characters are unable to develop a strong identity after escaping from a life of slavery because of their lack of self-esteem and their inability to believe in their own existence. Morrison highlights a possible solution that defining oneself according to one's own standards, by

rejecting those standards imposed by the white owners and uniting with the Afrikan community for the construction of a complete Afrikan identity.

Unlike the previous novels that are dealt with pre-slavery, slavery and post-slavery periods, the next two novels (*Black Boy* and *The Sell Out*) deal with the modern notions of the identity crisis. Richard Wright is regarded as the first novelist who broke the so-called literary tradition that defined the Afrikan either as a savage or as a superhero. His concentration upon subjugation, alienation, violence and frustration is similar to that of subsequent writers who have used his achievement as a literary touchstone. *Black Boy*, which is an autobiographical novel of Wright, traces the first seventeen years of his life. This novel suggests how he attempts to suppress his tendency toward extreme behavior and how he has to act before White Southerners who expected him to be submissive.

The novel is opened by setting fire in author's house. Everything is destroyed in that act. But Richard has justified his act as, "Any way, it was all an accident; I had not really intended to set the house afire. I had just wanted to see how the curtains would look when they burned" (5). He actually does not mean to set fire. And, it is clear that some factors in his personality produce violent nature. Ralph Ellison explains in *Shadow and Act*, the reason why Richard felt that thirst for violence. "He felt violence was inflicted upon him by both family and community" (83). It is clear from the novel that poverty and hunger were the

reasons behind the violent actions. After the Civil War, Afrikans are freed to live independently. But, they don't have any wealth to start a life of their own. Consequently, poverty hits them badly. "They were a wild and homeless lot, culturally lost, spiritually disinherited" (68) who feel frustration towards life. Thus, frustration and discrimination affect negatively on the Afrikan psyche during the post-Civil War period.

But in the end of the novel, it is shown that by acquiring education, Richard wishes to eradicate violence, or at least he wishes to live away from violence. He writes: "In the main, my hope was merely a kind of self-defense, a conviction that if I did not leave I would perish, either because of possibly violence of others against me, or because of my possible violence against them" (413). In his mind, life in the South revolves around violence. He wants to live away from South because, either others in the South will inflict violence on him, or he will inflict violence on others. It shows the point that he understands his own violent nature and tries to hinder that violence to others when he becomes an educated man.

From the very beginning of the novel, Richard shows a sense of protest against everything. His biological hunger in childhood gradually changes into the literal sense of hunger in adulthood. "The hunger I had known before this had been no grim, hostile stranger; it had been a normal hunger that has made me beg constantly for bread, and when I ate a crust or two I was satisfied. But this new

hunger baffled me, scared me, made me angry and insisted” (14). In adulthood, he gradually perceives what it means to be black and white, and why some people had enough food and others do not. But, he never wishes to be submissive, so he starts to think differently. It is clear from the incident where he has to wait for food until the Whites finish their food. He questions the act as “Why could I not eat when I was hungry?” (19).

As Afrikan psyche has collective nature, it is related to the social, religious, ethnic and racial identities. Afrikan family in the Post-Civil War period is not united strongly as in African culture. The absence of parents, irresponsible figures, runaway children, poverty, and so on is prominent in those disintegrated families. In Richard’s family, his father is soon vanished from the scene as an irresponsible figure that is unwilling to take care of his family, and mother becomes the leading figure. “After my father’s desertion, my mother’s ardently religious disposition dominated the household” (25). His community is also weak to protect him, since poverty and discrimination have overpowered each and every family.

It is clear that Richard’s family is not enough capable to empower him and give him an identity since it is completely shattered by slavery. In a female-centered family, he is influenced by female characters such as his mother, Granny and Aunt. It is evident in his early childhood that one day, he has killed a kitten by his father’s instruction. After he killed the kitten, his

mother instructs him to repeat a prayer after her in which he asks God to spare his life even though he did not spare the kitten's:

‘Shut your eyes and repeat after me’, she said.

I closed my eyes tightly, my hand clinging to hers.

Dear God, our Father, forgive me, for I knew not what I was doing...’

.....

‘And spare my poor life, even though I did not spare the life of the kitten’ (14).

Richard views this incident as an example of how religion suppresses the Afrikans from any act of protest.

One of the reasons, he claims, for the development of his personality is his uneasy childhood experiences. For instance, when he is a boy, he is instructed to join in a Methodist Church by her mother. But he rejects and his rejection, according to all the people in society, has caused his mother to fell down with illness. Based on the mixed belief of traditional African and Christianity, his grandmother accuses his faithlessness as a reason for his mother's illness. He explains:

My position in the household was a delicate one; I was a minor, an uninvited dependent, a blood relative who professed no salvation

and whose soul stood in mortal peril. Granny intimated boldly, basing her logic on God's justice, that one sinful person in a household could bring down the wrath of God upon the entire establishment, damning both the innocent and the guilty, and on more than one occasion she interpreted my mother's long illness as the result of my faithlessness. (103).

Richard further feels that even the Afrikans also try to suppress themselves keeping white notions in mind. So, from his childhood days itself, he has to fight against all these notions. He recollects one incident where his aunt falsely accuses him of eating walnuts in the classroom. Aunt punishes him both in the classroom and in the house. These kinds of unethical punishment are unbearable for him. He writes:

I stood fighting, fighting as I had never fought in my life, fighting with myself. Perhaps my uneasy childhood, perhaps my shifting from town to town, perhaps the violence I had already seen and felt took hold of me, and I was trying to stifle the impulse to go to the drawer of the kitchen table and get a knife and defend myself. But this woman who stood before me was my aunt, mother's sister, Granny's daughter; in her veins my own blood flowed; in many of her actions I could see some elusive part of my own self; and in her

speech I could catch echoes of my own speech. I did not want to be violent with her, and yet I did not want to be beaten for a wrong I had not committed. (107)

It is clear that he wants to assert himself as a man, but this is not possible due to the pressures imposed upon Afrikans by Whites. Afrikans continue to behave exactly in the manner that the whites want. But, for him, this becomes a problem.

According to Steve Mintz: “early twentieth century families contained, on average, just three children, half the number in 1850, allowing more self-expression for each family member. But there was a great decrease in the physical independence of family members” (216). With his father out of the picture, and his mother being incapacitated most of the time, Richard finds himself alone most of the time which has resulted in the birth of an independent thinker in him. His isolation and independence makes him that much more responsible for the way in which the original “Southern Nights” ends, on his own terms. He says “I stepped from the elevator into the street, half expecting someone to call me back and tell me that it was all a dream, that I was not leaving”, and continues on with, “this was the culture from which I sprang. This was the terror from which I fled” (256). The ending focuses his responsibility for his own life, indicating that the choices he made were his own. Hence, the responsibility shifts from him to those surround him. Thus, by claiming responsibility for one’s self becomes the core of

the novel. Wright has thus made a direct statement to make about taking responsibility of one's own action rather than blaming others and he makes a direct correlation at the end between himself and the man who stands by doing nothing.

Richard also puts blame on the Afrikan community for their inactive nature of being lived according to white notions. Community has never done any good steps for eradicating the negative concepts on Afrikans by Whites. He sees Afrikans as buying into what the Whites say about them. Even his friend could not understand why he would not steal. He recalls: "Yet, all about me, Negroes were stealing. More than once I had been called a "dumb nigger" by black boys who discovered that I had not availed myself of a chance to snatch some pretty piece of white property that had been carelessly left within my reach" (199).

It is true that education sets Richard free from all bondages. And the first person who has littered the spark of education in him is his mother. He says, "She taught me to read, told me stories. On Sunday I would read the newspapers with my mother guiding me and spelling out the words" (23). Later, he continues his self-education by collecting and reading newspapers and books. The more he reads, the more he becomes aware of his surroundings. He gradually realizes that neither his family nor his community did anything for the empowerment of

Afrikans. And, though they are freed, they are still unconsciously enslaved by the whites in their thoughts, attitudes or mentality. He writes:

I used to mull over the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes, how unstable was our tenderness, how lacking in genuine passion we were, how void of great hope, how timid our joy, how bare our traditions, how hollow our memories, how lacking we are in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was ever our despair. After I had learned other ways of life I used to brood upon the unconscious irony of those who felt that Negroes led so passionate an existence I saw that what had been taken for our emotional strength was our negative confusions, our flights, our fears, our frenzy under pressure. (37)

Richard understands that Afrikans by a century of slavery has forgotten their racial identity that they are Africans who has a rich cultural heritage. He further understands that even if the Afrikans become whites in color, Afrikans

had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it. And when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered if clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember were native with man. I asked myself if these human

qualities were not fostered, won, struggled and suffered for,  
preserved in ritual from one generation to another. (37)

Another problem which hinders to develop an Afrikan identity is White's established attitudes on Afrikans. It is evident in Richard's life. Richard is a man who has an independent personality from his childhood onwards. But whites never wish Afrikans to keep an identity of his own, since it threatens the already established notions on Afrikans. Richard, a man of honesty, sees himself as an outcast based ironically on his decision to act as a law-abiding citizen. He mentions:

But I, who stole nothing, who wanted to look them straight in the face, who wanted to talk and act, like a man, inspired fear in them. The Southern Whites would rather have had Negroes who stole, work for them than Negroes who knew, however dimly, the worth of their own humanity. Hence, whites placed a premium upon black deceit; they encouraged irresponsibility; and their rewards were bestowed upon us blacks in the degree that we could make them feel safe and superior. (200)

This passage, thus, shows the double standard whites have for Afrikans and hold them accountable for their problems in the South.

Soon, the life in the South seems to be boring and exhausted for him.

Richard says: “The face of the South that I had known was hostile and forbidding, and yet out of all the conflicts and the curses, the blows and the anger, the tension and the terror, I had somehow gotten the idea that life could be different, could be lived in a fuller and richer manner” (412). Thus, he quickly plans to move from South to North. He continues: “ The next day when I was already in full flight-abroad a northward bound train-I could not have accounted, if it had been demanded of me, for all the varied forces that were making me reject the culture that had molded and shaped me” (412). Here, he rejects his culture and everything. But he does not have any regret for his action. “I was leaving without a qualm, without a single backward glance” (412).

After his life in North, Richard gradually understands the truth that both South and North are same for an Afrikan to submit himself. He tells,

But what was it that always made me feel that way? What was it that made me conscious of possibilities? From where is this southern darkness had I caught a sense of freedom? Why was it that I was able to act upon vaguely felt notions? What was it that made feel things deeply enough for me to try to order my life by my feelings? The external world of whites and blacks, which was the only world that I had ever known, surely had not evoked in me any belief in

myself. The people I had met had advised and demanded submission. (413)

Richard is aware that good exists in the world, but he does not know how he could know this. And he realizes that it is not the place, but the attitude of people that may change to eradicate all his problems. In the conclusion of the novel, he comments a harsh criticism against the above sentence:

The white South said that it knew ‘niggers’ and I was what the white South called a ‘nigger’. Well, the white South had never known me—never known what I thought, what I felt. The white South said that I had a ‘place’ in life. Well, I had never felt my ‘place’; or rather, my deepest instincts had always made me reject the ‘place’ to which the white South had assigned me. (414)

Thus, he places all the blame for his problems on the whites in the South, than anybody else.

The novel clearly portrays the injustices inflicted upon Afrikans in America. The first part of the novel tells the fact that childhood did not end on a happy note for Wright and other children, because of the despair and anguish nature of post-slavery era. In the second part of the novel, one can clearly see his movement towards disillusionment. What he thinks he can escape from proves to be inescapable. He wants to live freely and be accepted as a human being. He

longs for equality, where men are judged based on truth and not social order.

These ideals continue to grow during his childhood and into his adolescence.

It is clear from *Black Boy* that Richard values education more and proposes the same as a good solution to voice out the real problems of Afrikans and also to eradicate all their problems. The final sentence of his restored autobiography throws light on this notion:

I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human. (384)

Richard sees little hope around him, and yet he has chosen not to give up. He also reveals a sense of hope that there are ideas and words from education that may make some changes. He knows that his life has been filled with horror and terror, but he will continue his search for identity through education.

Paul Beatty's novel *The Sell Out* recreates both communal and individual identity by reinterpreting historical identity. Unlike other five selected novels, this novel deals with the identity of a boy who is living alone. The character "Me" has father, but has died in an attack. In the opening of the novel, the narrator stands before the Supreme Court of the United States of America for a case, Mevs. the

United States of America. The case becomes highly controversial and popular as it accuses 'Me' of reinstating slavery. So the reader makes his ethos of an identity to the whites in the very opening sentence of the novel: "This may be hard to believe, coming from a black man, but I've never stolen anything" (3).

In the Prologue of the novel, Beatty pictures the reality in America on race problem. Though Emancipation Proclamation announced in America by Lincoln, the conditions of Afrikans have not changed yet. With a broken psyche of slavery, the Afrikans are still living under the racial discrimination and violence in America, which tempt him to make a sarcastic statement:

I stared in awe at the Lincoln Memorial. If Honest Abe had come to life and somehow managed to lift his bony twenty-three-foot, four-inch frame from his throne, what would he say? What would he do? . . . . Would he read the paper and see that the union he saved was now a dysfunctional plutocracy, that the people he freed were now slaves to rhythm, rap and predatory lending, and that today his skill set would be better suited to the basketball court than the White House? . . . . The Great Emancipator, you can't stop him, you can only hope to contain him. (4).

Before appearing in front of the court, Me knows that "the word 'EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW' . . . was a charade, a last minutes meaningless show of

power by the State. . . . Because in the eyes of the Court he was simply property: a black biped ‘with no rights the white man was bound to respect’” (7-8). By showcasing a real life event, he then searches for a solution to solve all these race problems in America and the solution is creating an identity of his own.

The search for the ethos of his identity becomes the priority concern for him, since Me’s childhood, as he explains: “Growing up, I used to think all of black America’s problems could be solved if we only had a motto” (10). He believes that every race has their own peculiarities. For example, the Afrikan folklore, hairstyles, rhythmic dances and Jazz music heightened Afrikan glory to the Zenith. So Afrikans should make a motto based on these achievements. The narrator invests in his belief, stating that “every race has a motto” (10) but he soon becomes frustrated in his attempts to find a motto that can encompass everything. He is a man who has independent identity, yet when he stands before the court, he does not feel guilty. He reveals that one of the main psychological problems of Afrikans is the collective guilty, derived from slavery. But at the same time, he reveals the fact that “the only time black people don’t feel guilty is when we’ve actually done something wrong, because that relieves us of the cognitive dissonance of being black and innocent, and in a way that cooning is a relief, voting Republican is a relief, marrying white is a relief-albeit a temporary one” (18). So purposefully, he wishes to be one among the Afrikans.

Me's sense of identity is strong, since he has been accepted his blackness and African presence. He explains the reason behind this attitude or how he learns to be Afrikan in his childhood. He recounts how he is raised by his father, who is a sole practitioner of "liberation psychology" (27) and how his father has been utilized psychological techniques to socialize and imprint a Pavlovian sense of black identity on him. His father would put

toy police cars, cold cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon, Richard Nixon campaign buttons, and a copy of *The Economist* in my bassinet. . . . I learned to be afraid of the presented stimuli because they were accompanied by him taking out the family. 38 Special and firing several window-rattling rounds into the ceiling, white shouting, 'Nigger, go back to Africa!' (29).

Through similar techniques, his father inscribes "blackness" into his psyche. Symbols of identity are imprinted mainly in a historically lateral sense, as lynchpins of identity, devoid of the historical culmination of social relationships. The ultimate result of all these efforts is not a socialized individual, but rather a detached identity that the people cannot grasp. And, the entire novel is rang out the central question which his father has asked to the neighborhood psychologist: "Who am I? and how may I become myself?" (40).

If the Afrikan is able to answer these questions sincerely, he /she will get out of all psychological problems that they are facing in present America. And answers to these questions evolve in four different solutions in the novel. Firstly, these questions have been asked to the narrator's father by himself. And his father tries to answer these questions through his various psychological experiments. In the novel, his psychologist father uses him as his "Own Anna Freud" by conducting experiments on him in order to make him a real Afrikan person. "And in his quest to unlock the keys to mental freedom, I was his Anna Freud, his little case study, and when he wasn't teaching me how to ride, he was replicating famous social science experiments with me as both the control and the experimental group" (28-29).

For instance, the father ties his four- year- old son's right hand behind his back so that he can grow to be left-handed; right brained, and well-centered. Or, he tests the "bystander effect" as it applies to the "black community" (29) on the narrator when he was eight years old by beating the boy in front of a throng of bystanders who do not stand around too long. But what does it mean to be black-laughing to keep from crying in an America, and insisting that it's moved on from their trauma- is the tension at the heart of Beatty's writing. Beatty writes up an incident in the novel.

Two months later, a census worker shows up at my door, takes one look at me, and says, “you foul nigger. As a black man, what do you have to say for yourself?” and as a black man, I never have anything to say for myself. Hence, the need for a motto, which, if we had. I ’d raise my fist, shout it out , and slam the door in the government’s face. But we don’t. So I mumble Sorry and scribble my initials next to the box marked ‘Black, African-American, Negro, Coward’. (44)

Me’s psychologist father is a Nigger Whisperer, the ad-hoc mentor who talks young Afrikan men off bridges and highway overpasses, and out of their moments of beaten -down desperation. But he fails to reach that goal of empowering his son and the whole Afrikans through his studies. Finally, he burns all his findings published and perished-in utter desperation in the fire place. “I was a failed social experiment. A statistically insignificant son who’d shattered his hopes for both me and the black race” (35). Sadly, his father has shot to death, while talking down to a young man in front of a Swat team.

Secondly, at the moment of his father’s death, the question is asked to the narrator himself. “So introspective questions like ‘who am I?’ And ‘how can I be that person?’ didn’t pertain to me then, becomes I already knew the answer. Like the entire town of Dickens, I was my father’s child, a product of my environment, and nothing more”(40). The real problem is formed when he became alone in the

society and realized just the life he is going to lead. “Dickens was me. And I was my father. Problem is, they both disappeared from my life, first my dad, and then my hometown, and suddenly I had no idea who I was, and no clue how to become myself” (40). And the whole novel is an answer to these questions.

After the death of the Me’s father, temporarily he becomes a nigger-whisperer. At this time, he understands who is he, and how he should become that person. Curiously enough, instead of his father’s little social experiment, the narrator turns his neighborhood into a larger sociological study by promoting segregation to the extent of drawing a white boundary line around the space. When his town Dickens is taken off the maps, or in the nightly weather reports and all of the town’s signs are removed overnight, he reckons it is bad for local morality. It is evident that “[b]ut the city of Dickens’s disappearance was no accident. It was part of a blatant conspiracy by the surrounding, increasingly affluent, two- car-garage communities to keep their property values up and blood pressures down” (57). So he decides to reinstate Dickens by working on cohesion and collective identity among the Afrikan community. For this, he established Dickens on two spheres; geographical and emotional. For a geographical positioning, he paints and hangs his own Dickens signs. He circles the town with strip of white paint to say we are here, and this is Dickens.

It took about six weeks to finish painting the border and the labels . . . .  
 . . . When the niggers were just as trifling, but for some reason they  
 felt like they belonged on this side . . . . The implication of solidarity  
 and community it represented. And while I hadn't quite  
 reestablished Dickens, I had managed to quarantine it. And  
 community-cum-leper colony wasn't a bad start. (108-109)

For an emotional positioning, he reintroduces racial segregation with the help of a  
 volunteer slave, Hominy Jenkins, and a determined school teacher, Charisma.  
 In order to replace Dickens emotionally, the narrator's prime task is to save  
 Hominy, the last surviving member of *The Little Rascals*. Bonbon brings an  
 identity to Hominy by giving enough inspiration to think that who he is?

Sometimes we just have to accept who we are and act accordingly.  
 I'm a slave. That's who I am. It's the role I was born to play. A  
 slave who just also happens to be an actor. But being black ain't.  
 Method acting. Lee Strasberg could teach you how to be a tree, but  
 he couldn't teach you how to be a nigger. This is the ultimate nexus  
 between craft and purpose, and we won't be discussing this again.  
 I'm your nigger for life, and that's it. (71)

That is, his life has lost direction until he reunites with Bonbon, someone who can  
 finally fulfill the role of 'massa' in his self-imposed role as slave.

It is not just slavery Bonbon and Hominy reintroduce to Dickens. Instead, they introduce segregation too. It appears piecemeal; first on a city bus, and then at the local middle school. ‘But how does one segregate a “shanty town” already deprived of whites? The answer is, by creating the illusion of segregation. His second task is to put up signage announcing the development of a cross-town rival school for privileged white children to be built across from the predominantly black and Mexican middle school. Hominy said: “ ‘massa’ signs are powerful things. It almost feels like Dickens exists out there in the smog somewhere. Hominy, what feels better, getting whipped or looking at that sign?” (88). Hominy thought a moment. “The whip feels good on the back, but the sign feels good in the heart” (88). Hence, by establishing competition, the children are faced to tackle their complacency and work hard to maintain the rights reaped after the Civil Rights Movement. It is as if Dickens needs to go back to move forward.

Segregate the school. As soon as I said it, I realized that segregation would to be the key to bringing Dickens back. The communal feeling of the bus would spread to the school and then permeate the rest of the city. Apartheid united black South Africa, why couldn’t it do the same for Dickens ? (167)

Bonbon, despite of his profound self –knowledge which is a mystery even to himself, is always searching an answer to his father’s questions. “who am I?

And how may I become myself?" He is irreducible to certain extent, a blunderer at constant struggle with his self, but a striver nonetheless.

Thus, Beatty brings a fantastic handle on the complexities of racial identity and how that's depicted in the media and in popular culture; on how personal identity is enmeshed with group or collective identity; on how urban geography is mixed up in all these; and on the intersection between self-love and self-hatred. With his continuous efforts, Dickens is put back on the map.

Thirdly, these questions point out to the identity of every Afrikan; their dreams, hopes and potentialities in American Society. Does the melting pot of American society really melt for the Afrikans or do the Afrikans have an identity of their own in the midst of multiculturalism. *The Sell Out* brings out the dwindling sunset of American possibility. It is a story of dark, nihilistic, pessimistic, and impolite ways of American approach, and how it makes a mockery of the dream that things will get better, that includes a new era of racial harmony is right around the corner. "That like the pigs, we all have our heads in the trough. While the hogs don't believe in God, the American dream, or the pen being mightier than the sword, they do believe in the Sunday paper, the Bible, black urban radio, and hot sauce" (53). Freedom vexes Hominy; instead, he lives in the past, carrying with him a constant thirst of being put back in his place. "That's the problem with history" (115), Bonbon thinks, regarding his friend

Hominy, an old-timer who's disturbingly comfortable with how Jim Crow warps his outlook. Bonbon says,

I'm jealous of Hominy's obliviousness, because he, unlike, America, has turned the page. That's the problem with history, we like to think it's a book—that we can turn the page and move the fuck on. But history isn't the paper it's printed on. It's memory, and memory is time, emotions, and song. History is the things that stay with you. (115)

At the same time, Afrikans have a hope that, one day this segregation will surely erase from America as they fore visage. "As the blackness peeled from our hides, the melanin fizzing and dissipating into nothingness like antacids dissolving in tap water"(114). Eventually the narrator becomes a part of that history when he lands in front of the Supreme Court, the latest in the long line of landmark race-related cases, From 'Plessy V Ferguson' to the time they try to bury everything. The same is evident in the following:

Carbon- date my pipe and determine whether I'm a direct descendant of Dred Scott; that colored conundrum who, as a slave living, in a free state, was man enough for his wife and kids, man enough to sue his master for his freedom, but not man enough for the Constitution, because in the eyes of the Court he was simply

property: a black biped 'with no rights the white man was bound to respect'. (8)

American Constitution offers 'Equal Justice Under Law' and the narrator is showing up the reality.

In the fourth level, these questions challenge the reader to look honestly at themselves. Though the book is about race and racial stereotype from within and without, this is about identity at every level- individual, racial, community, human and country. These questions ring everywhere. That is, all the human beings experience self-love and self-hate at one point in their life. Beatty uses these weapons in his novel to acknowledge the audience that these elements may help one to answer these questions in their life. In the novel, he used the latter to power the former to know him. In a racial world, no matter how much we love ourselves, our hood or race, our strongest force will break down once. And when we do, the people once protected by unnatural energies will have a reckoning with the world outside, one that will cast them as either hero or villain, no matter what their inspirations.

In the end of the novel, Me provides a theoretical explanation for answering the question of Afrikan identity, based on his father's comprehensive theory on "Quintessential Blackness". It is a theory based on linear development rather than a metaphysical clearing of Afrikan identity. According to this theory,

black identity is formed in stages. . . .Stage I is the Neophyte Negro. Just as many children would be afraid of the total darkness, the Neophyte Negro is afraid of his own blackness. . . . They suffer from poor self-esteem and extremely ashy skin. . . . The distinguishing feature of Stage II blackness is a heightened awareness of race. Here race is still all-consuming, but in a more positive fashion. . . . Blackness is idealized, whiteness reviled. Emotions range from bitterness, anger and self-destruction to the waves of pro-Black euphoria and ideas of Black supremacy. . . . Stage III blackness is Race Transcendentalism. A collective consciousness that fights oppressions and seeks serenity. They are people who believe in beauty for beauty's sake'. . . . There should be a stage IV of black identity- Unmitigated Blackness . . . . On the surface Unmitigated Blackness is a seeming unwillingness to succeed. Its the realisation that there are no absolutes, except when there are. It's the acceptance of contradiction not being a sin and a crime but a human frailty like split ends and libertarianism. (275-77).

This passage differentiates the contradictory nature of the post-colonial identity “‘that there are no absolutes except when there are’: that there is no either or once the Other is exposed, but instead an ability to detach from identity in the hope that

one is free to respond (or not) as an individual, then not as a category” (Astrada, 117). That is, Me’s culmination of Afrikan identity is not based on transcendentalism as his father, rather than succumb to a fatalistic nihilism. Consequently, the narrator gives up his search for a motto, and instead formulates an identity of “Unmitigated Blackness” as the reprioritization of the individual.

In a nutshell, slave owning ideologies resulted intense institutionalized trauma, the damage of which has lasted even after the abolition of slavery. That is, Afrikans formulated their ideologies based on white doctrines. As a result, dealing with the past traumas of slavery in white dominant society, Afrikans require the effort of not only the individual but also the Afrikan community. Me, Richard, Kunta Kinte, and Vyry are individually possessed self-identity and empowered their communities with their mortalities, actions and ideals, which are part of their personality. Whereas, Sethe and Denver, being unable of finding out an identity of their own, finally seek help from the community, and through the intervention of community, they are empowered.

From an analysis of identity struggle in all the novels selected for the study, certain key elements come out into lime light. In *Roots*, it is clear that accepting the past, African values, and heritage help the Afrikans to establish a link of existence and in that way, establish their identity in America. *Jubilee* points out the fact that what Afrikans need to establish their true identity in American soil

are: land, education, house and release from the past mental traumas. Vry, like Kunta, earns knowledge on African culture from her surrogate mothers which helps her to establish a unique personality of herself and strengthens her to face the future realities in the Reconstruction Era. It implies that those who have strong knowledge on African culture can survive better and make a strong identity of their own. Through *Beloved*, it is clear that community has a significant role for Afrikans' empowerment. The memories of bitter experiences of slavery should eradicate for getting a mental freedom. For that, religion helps the Afrikans, as seen in *Beloved*. One should make a good tie up with the past for establishing a good identity in the future.

In *Black Boy*, Richard points out the significance of education for eradicating the so called white notions which is imposed on Afrikans. He has given more importance to the identity of self by acquiring education. In *The Sell Out*, though the novel seeks out answers for the question, "Who am I" and "how may I become myself" in the initial stage by finding out an identity of geographical setting, the concept is soon changed finally, and declared that individual has the complete freedom to decide what is right and what is wrong. The white oriented society might set a picture on Afrikan. But it is the Afrikan's responsibility to make self-identity irrespective of society notions. All his education and scientific experiments on Afrikans finally reach into a solution that

it is neither community, nor the family that makes individual identity, but rather the individual himself should build his own identity.

Being able to reflect upon past traumas of oppression allowed the community and the individual to make a move towards a less traumatic future. Vryy's past traumas of repression is released, when Randall Ware and Innis Brown saw her terribly scarred back. Sethe's past traumas of oppression is cured when she lived with Beloved and finally exorcized. Me's traumas ended up with his efforts to find out an Afrikan motto and achieved his identity. Richard derived out his self-identity from his past experience and Kunta Kinte, by recreating his past, and African values in the future generations. All these novelists' ideas concerning the "veil", memory of trauma, and the portrayal of communal and familial support exemplify the notion that the key to Afrikan identity and societal progression apart from other factors is the recognition of the past.

Almost every Afrikan in America has experienced the sting of duality on the basis of being black. An unbiased racism is still present in America and in the face of these realities, Afrikans are managing themselves, by learning and sharing the hidden rules of white Americans. While American society purposefully becomes open and egalitarian, the everyday discriminations leave Afrikans to see whites doubtfully and stay away from them. Assimilation is not possible in America, since Afrikans fail to accept whites and vice versa. For Afrikans,

experience from their first school where they acquire knowledge which is based largely on the experience of living in a white-dominated society. And they affirm and reaffirm these central lessons and, out of a sense of duty, try to pass to their next generation. Therefore, this cultural knowledge is inaccessible to white people.

On the otherside, white Americans are also unable to see Afrikans as humans with a rich cultural heritage. *The Myth of the Negro Past* and their chimpanzee- like appearance bring together the notion that Afrikans are naturally less human with more ape-like features and their brains are almost equated with that of apes. Consequently, they are considered less human. It is true that slavery has effectively established Afrikans at the bottom of the American racial order. But now they are everywhere in the American society. Still, their position in the past or the present allows every whites to feel superior to any Afrikan.

Being a part of African blood, Afrikans are also exposed to double jeopardy. The world, till a few years back, has often considered Africa as a primitive world where people live side by side with animals. A number of novelists highlight this aspect of Africa in their novels. So Afrikans have first to prove their African blood as culturally rich in order to eliminate racial segregation. The first part of *Roots* is clearly depicted a well-structured communal and family

life in Africa before slavery. And all the other novels of study show the real African background of Afrikans.

To conclude, it's a high time for Americans to change their opinions and concepts on Afrikans based on the man-made myths. Only when Americans can open their eyes to see the real glory of Afrikan and African culture, the racial equality will light up in America. Then, the Afrikans can lift up their veil to see the world ahead of them.