

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN KOPANO

MATLWA'S *COCONUT* AND TONY MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

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ABSTRACT

The arguments presented in this study deal with the complicated factors associated with the formation of new identities in post-apartheid South Africa and Anglo-Saxon Protestant American communities. This study provides a comparative analysis of identity and belonging as portrayed in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007). Furthermore, the study explores how identity and belonging relate to issues of standards of white beauty, self-loathing and racial discrimination.

This study is based on a desktop research as no field work was carried out. The two novels were selected using purposive sampling for their emphasis on the themes of identity and belonging. The Du Bois' Double Consciousness concept and Post-colonial theory were used as literary theories to support the study.

This study reveals that most of Toni Morrison's and Kopano Matlwa's black characters aspire to change circumstances by either accepting and adopting the white culture that surrounds them or by outrightly rejecting it as unacceptable. The findings of this study point to several factors as responsible for the loss of identity and belonging and these include various forms of racial segregation, cultural and linguistic differences. This is more pronounced and evident in racially divided communities where people tend to judge one another based on skin colour and language differences.

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Furthermore, I express my sincere appreciation to my colleagues, for their support throughout the year.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, parents, brothers and friends, I love you all!

DECLARATION

I, Penelope Midzi, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any institution of higher education.

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Date

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study by defining the background of the study, the statement of the problem and research questions of the study. It also explains the significance of the study, limitations of the study as well as the delimitations of the study. The chapter further provides a description of the chapters. The background broadly defines the area of interest of the thesis. The research questions guiding the thesis are stated. The significance of the study explains the importance or the relevance of the study to literary scholars and society at large. The study was only restricted to the analysis of identity and belonging in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Also, the outline of the chapters is highlighted in this chapter since it is equally important as it guides the readers on what to expect in the thesis.

1.2 Background

Cultural identity and belonging have been approached from different lenses depending on what the researcher is after or what assumptions he or she has on the nature of cultural identity and belonging. Despite the number of studies that have been conducted, most researchers have come down to the conclusion that cultural identity and belonging are umbrella terms that encompass group identities such as nationality, race, ethnicity, age, regional identity, and ethnolinguistic identity (Gilmartin, 2008; Jackson, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

From a literary perspective, the purpose of the study is to determine how different authors present and develop these themes in the context of the different cultural settings as well as the different periods in which they occurred. The aim of this study is to comparatively analyse how

Kopano Matlwa (2007) presents South African characters in *Coconut* and how Toni Morrison (1970) presents African American characters in *The Bluest Eye* respectively.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The problem that was investigated in this study is how the two novels comparatively represent the common themes of identity and belonging. The focus of this study was to analyse and compare how people from different backgrounds are affected by living lives marked by feelings of double consciousness. Anthias (2013) focused on how belonging and identity are embedded in political discourses, mainly those concerning integration, however, the study only focused on Britain. Madsen and von Naerssen (2003) focused on how identity and belonging is related to processes of identity formation. Nonetheless, identity and belonging go beyond just a geographical location, race, nationality, language and ethnicity. It is not just who one is, it is a process one must be active in, and it is more than just understanding oneself, so you become oneself. Identity and belonging are issues that are widely researched, but this study attempts to fill the gap regarding the relationship between identity and culture by comparing novels set in different continents.

1.4 Research questions

The study answers the following questions:

- 1.4.1 How are identity and belonging presented through the characters by Matlwa and Morrison?
- 1.4.2 In what ways do both authors present the changes in the characters' identities in the selected novels?
- 1.4.3 What are the effects of losing identities and the need to belong in a society as presented in the selected novels?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study might contribute to a better understanding of Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) in terms of the themes of identity and belonging to societies. Moreover, the study may contribute to the body of literature on identity and belonging. It might also elucidate the concerns in our society which are related to identity and culture relations and could also contribute to postcolonial literature.

1.6 Limitations of the study

This study was limited to a comparative analysis of two novels only, Kopano Matlwa's (2007) *Coconut* and Toni Morrison's (1970) *The Bluest Eye* so the findings may not be generalised to other novels by the same authors. Whilst there are numerous novels on the subject, the researcher only considers the two novels; one from South African literature as it presents the same themes of identity and belonging as the other from African American literature, this was done as to allow research manageability. Another limitation was that, only novels written in English were explored, thus some novels not written in English were not explored as they fall out of the scope of this study.

1.7 Delimitations

The study is only confined to the analysis of two novels *Coconut* and *The Bluest Eye* as this small sample can allow for in- depth analyses in relation to the limited scope of the study. The study examines identity and belonging issues in two selected novels set in different continents but share same themes. Only the Du Bois' Double Consciousness concept and the Post- colonial theory were used to form the theoretical boundary; hence the comparative analysis was restricted to the framing of these paradigms. The theories are consistent with the issues of identity and belonging.

1.8 Outline of chapters

The study comprises five chapters that are subdivided into subtitles. Chapter One is the introduction and gives a general overview of the study. It defines the background of the study and spells out the statement of the problem, significance of the study, limitations of the study and delimitations of the study.

Chapter Two provides a literature review that facilitates an understanding of loss of identity and belonging in the selected novels. The chapter also explains the theories that inform this study. The theories employed are Du Bois' Double Consciousness concept and the Post-colonial theory. Chapter Three presents the research methodology used for the study.

Chapter Four discusses the loss of identity and belonging in *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Lastly, Chapter Five concludes the study by highlighting the findings of the study and also presents the recommendations.

1.9 Chapter Summary

Chapter One provided an introduction of the thesis on identity and belonging in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). The chapter contains the introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study. The next chapter reviews the literature related to identity and belonging as presented in other studies already conducted.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a broad knowledge of literature that has been produced on the topic under research. It may be established, though, that there is a vast amount of work done on the topic under study, but one would use a literature review to identify the gaps that may have been overlooked by previous studies.

Creswell (2003) posits that a literature review provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study, as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings. The Post-colonial theory was considered to be the most appropriate theory of this study. Applying post-colonialism to the analysis of a text calls for the inclusion and consideration of a number of themes such as race, class, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, religion, identity, double consciousness, hybridity, rootlessness, trauma and relationships (master-servant). Also, it unearths how the coloniser's culture devalues and degrades the colonised and their space. Thus, *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) as both post-colonial and environmental literature, communicate and redirect an understanding of the degradation of African people's culture and their environment at the exposure of colonialism. In addition, Du Bois' double consciousness concept also informed this study as it helps demonstrate how the characters in the selected novels have trouble in trying to reconcile their African heritage with an upbringing in a Euro-centered society.

2.2 Previous studies on identity and belonging

According to Marger (2000, p. 132), colonisation begins with a forced, involuntary entry, followed by the colonising power altering or destroying the indigenous culture, then the members of the colonised group tend to be governed by representatives of the dominant group and finally, the system of dominant- subordinate relationship is supported by a racist ideology.

This is also presented in the selected novels, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007).

This process has created the identities of both the colonised and the coloniser with pathological effects. One then loses his or her identity and ends up not belonging anywhere. The way a person sees the world, both geographically and culturally, is dictated by how one understands the world. In *Coconut* (2007), a young woman, who grew up black in a white community struggles to find her own identity. She is neither accepted in black or white communities. In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the story centres on a young African-American girl who is taunted as a result of her skin colour, there is beauty in "whiteness" and this fuels up her desire to have blue eyes. The issue of lost cultural identity and belonging manifests in these two characters. They lead double lives and yet they crave to belong to one.

2.2.1 Defining identity

James (2005) defines identity as the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and or expressions that make a person or a group. Erik Erikson views identity as something that is not given by birth and is not independent from biological processes of the human body either (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003).

Erikson defines identity as a constant reproduction of images of self, experienced and put together by an individual (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). In contrast, cultural identity includes the person's self-perception, it is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion and generation. Therefore, cultural identity is the feeling or identity of belonging to a certain group of people (Nielsen, 1987). Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist believes that people are social beings who need to belong to a group, to love others and to be loved (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003).

According to Weinberg (as cited in Bauder, 2012, p. 185), the debate of identity has become a heated discussion in the current interconnected world, and that "identity is multifaceted," in that "an individual can identify with more than one group in multiple levels." Smith (2008) argues that the process of identification usually produces differentiation, assimilation or hybridisation among ethnic groups.

When one talks of differentiation, they are referring to the process of excluding certain individuals because they have fewer similarities with the dominant group (Valle, Schwartz & Darknell, 1957). Whereas assimilation emphasizes on the diminution of distinct characteristics of individuals, which make them conform to the dominant values of the majority group (Verkuyten, 2011), hybridisation refers to the separation from existing practices to embrace new practices that create new cultures and consequently, new identities (Iyall Smith, 2008).

In addition, Smith (2008, p. 5) states that "hybrid identity might allow the globe to unite in its differences and become a truly multicultural society that is able to recognize and reconcile diversity." This mixing of multiple cultural groups causes new hybrid identities to emerge. There are many hybrid identities that can be used to explore how people identify themselves, such as "third space," "duality," "borderless," and "gender" identities (Smith, 2008). However, the

researcher made use of three terms namely: monocultural, bicultural and multicultural identities, from the works of Taylor (2006) and Yampolsky, Almiot and de la Sablonniere (2013), that helped in examining the concept of cultural identity as there are concise and distinct definitions.

Monocultural identity overvalues its own cultural beliefs and practices, while it invalidates other cultural worldviews (Taylor, 2006), whereas, bicultural identity is shared by those individuals who hold strong cultural identification with two cultures anticipating the result of being accepted by the cultural group that is not seen as their own (Fearn, 2006; Smith, 2008). The word “anticipating” is a feeling, an expectation, a wish that something happens according to the individual’s emotion, this anticipated conflict may or may not happen. People who are bicultural also develop strategies to use in response to cultural conflicts between two sets of cultural norms, values, or practices (David, 2006).

Multicultural identity is shared by people who “often need to navigate the different norms and values associated with their multiple cultural identities” (Yampolsky et al., 2013, p.364). The word “need” implies a necessity, a compulsion, a must, and the word “navigate,” suggests that a constant movement from one place to another. Multicultural identity is manifested amongst people who are actively involved in both mainstream and heritage cultural groups (Yampolsky et al., 2013).

A sense of identity, belonging and being part of a group or community have always existed. These images were constructed against the “other” – those who were different from the group and therefore did not belong. This separation between them and us helped create a sense of shared values and identity within the perceived group or community (Hall, 1990). These boundaries have always existed and have been created to protect, include and exclude, and continue to be used as now as they were in the past.

Stigmatised identity is a category which includes particularly negative representations of a group and its members. To rectify and reproduce meanings, the members of this category may talk back against the representations. Categories are always present despite being invisible, and they are the organising principles which help us understand the information (Juhila, 2004). As differences are often defined by terms of the privileged group, differentiation can be viewed as a source of power. These differences then become the yardstick against which the other group is defined, measured and categorised. This other group then comes to be seen as somehow lacking or deviant and the member of this group comes to be viewed as unnatural in their behaviour or customs, constituting a stigmatised identity. Hall (1999) notes the “The Western World” category has been produced in the historical setting where different people met each other for the first time, for example during the times of the crusades, imperialism, colonialism and the Westward migration of people. However, this category is not a geographical fact, but rather, a produced category, the main purpose of which is to highlight racial difference. It enables us to think of them and us in terms of “The West and The Rest” (Hall, 1999, pp. 78-79).

Situating somebody or placing oneself in a certain category has consequences, as this produces social identities which have certain attached features or behavioral expectations. Often, it is enough for a category to be mentioned for us to draw certain conclusions (Juhila, 2004). This is also a way of controlling, of keeping people in their own place. An example related to this study can be drawn from the novel *Coconut*; it depicts the attitudes that the white people had of the black South Africans during the Apartheid era and how they lived in different areas (Matlwa, 2007).

When one feels this negative social identity being attached to oneself, the stigmatised identity is reproduced (Juhila, 2004). Furthermore, Juhila (2004) contends that despite the emphasis on

ourselves in self- evaluation and the choices we have made in the late modern period, there is no total freedom in choosing an identity or identities. This lack of freedom is constrained by our historical knowledge base. We try to describe ourselves based on what others assume of us and what we assume the others to understand about us.

The situation is made more complicated if the identity offered to us by others is a stigmatised one. It requires challenging the negative notions. Since identities are constructions of the imagination, it is impossible to fix them permanently, even though stereotypes and their usage try to do this. It is possible to negotiate new meaning to these constructions, which is precisely what is at stake when talking back from a stigmatised identity. Talking back always occurs against culturally founded categories: without categories talking back could not exist, as identities would then be freely defined.

2.2.2 Belonging

A sense of belonging involves “the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 10). When people feel accepted, they can make statements such as “it is my group,” which indicates that they identify themselves with the group and is “one of them” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). There are many groups that people can identify with and, therefore, develop a sense of belonging, for example, they could be part of a family, school, a profession, a nation, a religious lifestyle, and so forth, since all have an identity. This is extremely important for living in a society because it gives a sense of affiliation and loyalty, it is necessary to understand what identity people refer to when they are claiming their identification (Sen, 2006). When this identification is not clear, people can be ambiguous in their answer about it.

The sense of belonging is a component of connectedness and relatedness that was identified by Abraham Maslow as one of the fundamental human needs of survival in a social sense (Kune, 1992). As such, a sense of belonging is important to the individual, family and community (Hill, 2006). Miller (2006) identifies belonging in relation to three senses of connection: the sense of belonging that refers to social connections, that is, community of people; the sense of belonging that refers to historical connections, such as the past or traditions; and the sense of belonging referring to physical connections like a particular locality or dwelling place.

The definitions of belonging in its social designation might be closely associated with others; and to be accepted as part of a particular social group or to identify with others (Miller, 2006). Considered thus, belonging is taken to have certain positive consequences, one concerning the establishment of shared identity, and the other concerning the positive experiences derived from being so connected or identified (Miller, 2006). Belonging as a social designation defines not only who we are in a collective or individual sense, but who “we” are as human beings per se (Miller, 2006). There is less doubt that our understanding of ourselves is derived from past actions, events and connections. It is generally accepted that the past, whether individual or collective, is frequently utilised as an explanatory mode where identity and belonging are connected (Miller, 2006). Traditional stories passed down through generations in a community or country act as a device of self-disclosure. Therefore, the story-telling practiced is strongly related to the sense of collective identity.

2.2.3 Previous Studies

There have been multiple studies on identity in relation to the selected topic of identity and belonging, and all the researchers focused on different areas related to the topic. Madsen and von Naerssen (2003) focused on the cross-border migration and how it is related to processes of

identity formation. In their study, they considered cross-border migration as a movement across the borders of (nation-) states, regardless of whether it occurred over a long distance or nearby. It differs from commuting in the sense that the individuals concerned, settle in a place, in an environment that is different from the region or place they originated from. Throughout their study, Madsen and von Naerssen's (2003) focus was based on the consideration of the disconnection between the political and cultural borders and what this meant for where and how one "belongs."

Madsen and von Naerssen (2003) started off by considering the quandary of how making a new home and identity just a short distance away can be complicated when one crosses an international boundary in the process. Therefore, they considered the impact of larger migration flows through the border regions on local identities and how this can be viewed quite differently depending on one's geographically scale-based perspective. As they shifted more to a more global point of view, they investigated the cross-border connections manifestations in today's transnational identities, as well as the misgivings many have as cultures increasingly breach the political boundaries of countries.

Kohler (2006) also conducted a study on the realisations of black aesthetic in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. This study is of the political, stylistic and structural features of Toni Morrison's novel. It also illustrates the novel's qualities as black arts literature. According to Kohler (2006), Morrison's novel discusses the experiences of the oppressed black minorities in isolated black communities. The dominant white culture disables the development of healthy African-American self-image.

Stylistically, Morrison's (1970) novel complements her political message. Morrison makes use of narrative styles that can be traced back to African-American story telling tradition. The

aesthetics of language, nature, and personal experience filter through her work that thrives to be distinctively black.

Kohler's (2006) research aims to answer the question of what makes the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, black arts literature. This study combined the political and stylistic perspectives of the novel in a multi-dimensional analysis, and this perspective offers a holistic study of the novel.

According to Madsen and von Naerssen, (2003) borders are an integral part of identities. Von Houtum and von Naerssen (2002) add that because identities are not static but continuously being (de- and re-) constructed, processes of identity construction require ongoing processes of bordering and "othering" of us or them. People participate in social networks with diverse structures and varying degrees of hierarchy and equality: families, local communities, institutions of regions, and so on. These social networks of parents, friends, and colleagues are important agencies for identity construction.

Territorial identity has multiple manifestations and goes through many stages and national identity is always significant, but its importance varies at different stages of a country's history (Hudson, 2000). The answer to the question of whether people are really at home across the border, even if they live near what they have traditionally called their country, is indeed complex.

Goulahsen's (2015) study on understanding the complexity of identity and belonging presented results of a case study that aimed at highlighting the processes that French female migrants in London and Manchester attempt to de/re -construct identities to negotiate the challenges of the cultural and social structures in England. This research centred on 15 semi-structured interviews with French female residents of diverse backgrounds. The interviews that were conducted

represented the counter-narratives to existing studies that focused only on highly skilled French migrants in London and defined them as free movers and “invisible migrants.”

The study exemplified how migrants’ identities are ground of negotiation, contestation, deconstruction and reconstruction. The patterns that emerged from this study first highlighted the high heterogeneity among women’s strategies of self-identification and definition and sense of belonging in a changing Europe.

Another study was conducted on engagement, identity and belonging in a connected world (Ellison, 2013). This study examined the changing modalities of citizenship in a fast-moving, informationalised and connected world. The argument here, is that, in an increasingly globalised economic, social and cultural environment, forms and practices of citizenship inevitably and increasingly fragment across space and time. While this tendency for citizenship to “shape-shift” politically and socially is not new. While the spatial fragmentation of belonging has been frequently commented upon, particularly in relation to the claimed decline of the bordered nation-state, the dimension of time in relationship to citizenship has been rather less well explored.

According to Ellison (2013), examining the interplay of space and time in contemporary citizenship, in terms of civic and political engagement, identity and belonging, becomes possible to understand how citizenship practices operate differently according to degrees of spatial embeddedness, on the one hand, and degrees of temporal “thickness” on the other.

Australia experienced a period of mass migration from Italy in the immediate post-Second World War period. Glenn (2013) conducted a study on Campanian lives, considering transnational identity and belonging. The researcher obtained findings from oral narratives that presented a

cohort of first- generation Italians who migrated from the region of Campania, in southern Italy, to the city of Adelaide, in the state of South Australia, in the 1950s and 1960s. The study also examined the effects of cultural dislocation over a broad arc of time and formation, belonging, the loss of home and cultural maintenance on a group of migrants who are now senior citizens.

Glenn's (2013) study revealed that in order to cope with the assimilation pressures being exerted by the dominant culture, people should refine their survival strategies in order to facilitate the identity formation and successful integration of subsequent generations.

Anthias (2015) focused on the interconnecting boundaries of identity and belonging and hierarchy-making within transnational mobility framing inequalities. The researcher explored the collision and collusion between inequalities with a focus on transnational mobilities. Anthias (2015) engaged critically with the notions of identity and belonging before exploring racism and integration; and diversity and practices as ways in which non-belongings become shaped and reinforced. According to Anthias (2015) belonging and identity simultaneously raise the question about boundaries of "difference" and "identity" and how they are contested over but also relate to how people are placed hierarchically within societal systems of resource allocation and inequality. Struggles about membership, entitlements and belonging become ever more politicised where there is competition over resources in the translocational and transnational spaces of today's world.

Racisms forge and reconstruct forms of non-belonging which are central inequalities and as forms of boundary- and hierarchy- making, mark the boundaries in particularly violent and dehumanising ways. Diversity and integration discourses are discussed in relation to European developments in the management of migration, with a particular focus on the UK. They are

regarded as being underpinned by hierarchisation, culturalisation and essentialisation of difference (Anthias, 2015).

Moreover, in relation to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Khan (2014) focused on the framework of racism through a psychosocial interpretation. Khan (2014) notes that Toni Morrison presents a community in which a racist ideology is internalised in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Those who suffer from racial abuse in this community endure and resist in a complex inverse interrelationship between the two actions. It is this countering of the internalised and the rising of racial abuse that is one of the characteristics of this community, which is better understood if looked at from both the Marxist and a psychoanalytic point of view. The objective of Khan's (2014) paper was to look at the politics of postmodern consumer culture of capitalism in a racist community. At the same time, the paper (Khan, 2014), aimed at investigating the cruel attitude of the characters in this framework of internalised racism in the African-American community of *The Bluest Eye*.

Khan (2014) adds that the nature of interrelations among ethnocentrism, racism, and sexism in the novel become obvious if investigated from both a Marxist and a psychoanalytic viewpoint. This study also attempted to trace the manner from the above-mentioned point of view, in which the subjects of racial bias in *The Bluest Eye* both endure and resist at the same time.

In the framework of racism, the middle class African-Americans accept the represented associations between blackness and excessive sexuality (Khan, 2014). Baudry (1986) reports that one of the primary manifestations of developing "obsessive neurosis" is the desire to repress the irrepressible sexuality through sophistication and differentiation. Khan (2014) then links this obsessive neurosis with a character presented by Toni Morrison in the novel as Geraldine.

Geraldine makes an effort to keep up with the predominant social “other.” It is found in Geraldine’s obsessive attempt to turn the skin of her son white:

In the winter his mother put Jergens Lotion on his face to keep the skin from becoming ashen. Even though he was light skinned, it was possible to ash. The line between colour and nigger was not always clear, subtle and tell-tale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant (Morrison, 1970, p.87).

Khan (2014) concludes that *The Bluest Eye* shows how the framework of an internalised racism, all its components affect each other to produce a set of prejudices in which those who suffer from it endure and resist simultaneously, and also that these people also desire to identify with the inconceivable, idealised whiteness.

Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2017) focused on a study on imagining “non-nationality” with cosmopolitanism as a source of identity and belonging. The researchers allude that the current literature tends to see cosmopolitan identity formation as an individual endeavour of developing a stance of openness, transcending identities. This study challenged the essentialism inherent in this model by proposing a different framing of cosmopolitan identity formation that shifts the focus to how people collectively mobilise cosmopolitanism as a resource of cultural identity construction. The study was based on an anthropological study of transnational professionals who are part of diverse expatriate community in Amsterdam. The study also argued that cosmopolitan identities are socially accomplished as particular modes of collective belonging that are part of not beyond a global discursive sphere of identity politics.

Moreover, Bennett (2015) published an article on narrating family histories and negotiating identity and belonging through tropes of nostalgia and authenticity. Bennett (2015) notes that

studying change is at the heart of any investigation into social life, whilst continuity is seen as central to a stable identity over time. Change is and unsettling, but inevitable, part of everyday life, continuity speaks of repetition over time, unity and discomfort of belonging. Bennett (2015) examined how themes of nostalgia and authenticity are evoked in telling family histories in order to negotiate change and create both authentic identities and authentic selves belonging to the wider community. Through using nostalgia, to form both a sense of loss and sometimes a shared past, authenticity, and to create a sense of continuity within an overall arc of change. Bennett (2015) shows how family histories can work to maintain identities over time, retaining a sense of ontological security and belonging in place.

Another study was on ethnicity, belonging and identity among the Eastern Gurage of Ethiopia (Woldeselassie, 2015). The researcher analysed a case of ethnic transformation in post-1991 Ethiopia based on an ethnographic study of the Eastern Gurage. The case represented an ethnic setting where the conventional conceptualisation of ethnicity in terms of a notion of origin undermines the diversities expressed in various forms of category and boundary formations. The ethnic setting does not also fall into, but combines, the commonplace dichotomisation of primordialist versus constructivist notion of ethnicity.

Woldeselassie (2015) accounted for the various forms of ethnicities particularly those based on clanship, locality, Islam and state's categorisation. A distinction between the concepts of identity and belonging were introduced so as to explain forms of social and political classifications, ideologies and power relationships that are often treated as implying a single phenomenon, for example identity formation.

Another research was conducted by Murray (2012), who explored the racial and gendered politics that shape contemporary understandings of beauty by considering how appearance

features in the identity construction of Kopano Matlwa's characters in the novel *Coconut*. In Murray's (2012) study, "*Pain is beauty*," the "pain" that is mentioned in the phrase from *Coconut*, refers to more than just the physical pain, but rather to the pain that women experience when they are forced to change their identities in a social environment that is hostile towards them.

According to Murray (2012) the female body is always inscribed by gender, race, class, geographical location and sexual orientation. Murray (2012) used both established and contemporary feminist research to expose the ways in which Matlwa's (2007) female characters shape or create their identities in a contemporary South African society. Perry (as cited in Murray, 2012) demonstrated that the racialised and gendered beauty ideal is so sanitised and distant that even white females in *Coconut* are also shown to engage in certain "preparations" to alter their appearance. For example, the owner of Silver Spoon, Miss Becky, "clicks her gel-tipped French painted nails" as she orders her black staff members around (Matlwa, 2007, p. 149).

Kiely, Bechhofer and McCrone (2005) carried out a study on birth, blood, and belonging and identity claim in post-devolution Scotland. Additionally, Kiely et al. (2005) observe that Scotland is often seen as a good example of civic/ territorial rather than an ethnic or cultural form of nationalism. Moreover, the assumptions that were from the 1970s that the campaign for a Scottish parliament stressed an indecisive, residence based, civic sense of being Scottish, and more recently, Scotland's political elites have seen the new parliament as an endorsement of territorial belonging (Kiely et al., 2005). Therefore, the Kiely et al.'s (2005) study questioned how valid these assumptions were and to what extent the political ideology is at odds with people's sense of their national identity.

Through the use of a qualitative approach, Kiely et al. (2005) explored the different identity claims that were being made in a post-devolution Scotland, those based on blood, birth and belonging. The data that was used came from the Scottish part of a study in England and Scotland, and the focus were the three sets of respondents (English migrants to Scotland making blood or birth claims to Englishness and/ or Britishness; English migrants making belonging claims to Scottishness; and Scottish nationals making claims for themselves as well as assessing migrant claims).

More so, Sugiharti (2001) concentrated on racialised and gendered identities presented in *The Bluest Eye*. The study analysed how these identities are constructed and explored in fiction by using a feminist post-colonial approach. According to Sugiharti (2001), Morrison challenges the Western standards of beauty and demonstrates that the concept of beauty is socially constructed. Furthermore, Morrison also acknowledges that if whiteness is used as a standard of beauty or anything else, then the value of blackness is diminished and this novel works to erase that tendency. In demonstrating pride in being black this writer does not simply portray positive images of blackness. Instead, Morrison focuses on the damage that the black women characters endure through the construction of femininity in a racialised society (Matus, 1998).

Sugiharti (2001) considered the creation of femininity and then suggested how Morrison's fictive black people react differently to Western standards of beauty. In the novel, Pauline Breedlove, Geraldine, Maureen, Peal and Pecola are black characters who try to conform to an imposed ideal of femininity. They are absorbed and marginalised by the cultural icons portraying physical beauty from movies, billboards, magazines, books, newspapers, window signs, dolls and drinking cups. For example, Pauline Breedlove learns about physical beauty from movies. In Morrison's words:

Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity and ended in delusion. (Morrison, 1970, p. 98).

Spencer's (2009) study focused on identity politics in young, black females in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Spencer (2009) there is a new kind of woman who occupies a distinctive subject position, who is emerging in South African literature. This young black female is growing up between cultures, trying on different identities and evaluating new forms of affiliation. Spencer (2009) identified the author of *Coconut*, Kopano Matlwa, as a representative of the new generation of female writers who focus on issues of young black femininity in post-apartheid South Africa.

Furthermore, Spencer (2009) alludes that *Coconut* features two black teenage female protagonists in a new multiracial society, who find themselves in an in-between space where they are either "too black to be white" or "too white to be black." These two girls are in a world filled with ambiguity and conflict which forces them to experience tension between various ethnic African ideals and global western values of whiteness, between life in the township and the cosmopolitan promises of the city and between a traditional prioritising of family and community and the allure of self-invention. The young girls fail to resolve dilemmas of identity involving language cultural rituals and aesthetics of beauty.

Spencer's (2009) study investigated the politics of representation in *Coconut*, focusing on the ways in which the two young protagonists featured in the novel struggle in post-apartheid South Africa to construct their identities out of contradictory demands and conflicting desires.

"And you, Fikile, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

“White, Teacher Zola. I want to be white.” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 135).

In an article, Anthias (2002) argues that the concept of “identity” is of limited heuristic value and proposes that it may instead be more useful to deploy the notion of narratives of location and positionality for addressing the range of issues normally thought to be about collective identity. Location and positionality (and translocational positionality) are more useful concepts for investigating processes and outcomes of collective identification. That is, the claims and attributions that individuals make about their positions in the social order of things, their views of where and what they belong (and to what they do not belong) as well as understanding of the broader social relations that constitute and are constituted in this process. This enables a complete abandonment of residual elements of essentialisation retained even within the idea of fragmented and multiple identities so favored by critics of unitary notions of identity.

Drawing on empirical research with young refugees and asylum seekers (aged 11-18) now living in Sheffield, UK and Aarhus, Denmark, respectively, this research explored some of the relationships between identity, belonging and place (Valentine, Sporton & Nielsen, 2009). In the first place, Valentine et al. (2009) started by reflecting on the young people’s sense of identity as Somali in the context of periods of forced and voluntary mobility. They also considered what it means to be Muslim in the context of the different communities of practice in Aarhus and Sheffield. Lastly, they also considered the extent to which the interviewees self-identify as Danish or British. Using these different dimensions of identification and belonging, Valentine et al. (2009) concluded by highlighting the importance of being “in place” for attachment and security and identify implications of the findings for integration and cohesion policies.

Hlongwane (2013) investigated the power of whiteness in South Africa despite the efforts that are being made in in the growing field of whiteness studies to deconstruct whiteness and white

privilege. Hlongwane (2013) argued that Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* provides a timely investigation of the power of whiteness, even in South Africa where the black majority now governs. Raditlhalo (as cited in Hlongwane, 2013) asserts that it is a society of people suffering from a debilitating sickness of white ache, in which they do not wish to "pass" for white but to "be white."

According to Hlongwane (2013), Matlwa's characters are not only culturally lost and painfully ashamed of their blackness, but they also live in a country where it seems they are not allowed to be black. And as a result, the black children of South Africa are dying every day in classrooms where their history and their blackness are not accepted. Therefore, Matlwa uses her characters to urge lost South Africans to return home to themselves and their cultures.

Rodgers (2013) conducted a study that explored the complex position that African women face as a result of the prejudicial effects of colonisation and its impact and heritage as it acculturates with traditional patriarchal structures. Rodgers (2013) made use of two aspects, which are education and identity, to analyse the works of the authors Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions*) and Kopano Matlwa (*Coconut*). This study examined how black women struggle to evolve their identities in these freshly independent nations as presented in the novels. Rodgers (2013) examines these women's struggles through inter-cultural relations and the role of education for young African women.

Rodgers linked the word "*coconut*" to the word "*kaffir*" as noted by Khumalo (2011) in Times LIVE. According to Khumalo (2011), the word "*coconut*" is compared to "*kaffir*" which goes back to the history of apartheid in South Africa; white people used the word as a belittling term for black people. The word "*coconut*" drew a line along racial line. However, the available

literature does not answer the question of the relationship between identity and belonging, thus demonstrating a gap for the present study.

In contrast, Hiruy (2009) concentrated on the resettlement experiences of former African refugees in Hobart. Hiruy's (2009) study provided an insight on how these individuals' lived experiences and conceptualises displacement, place attachment, identity, belonging, place making and resettlement in the life of a refugee. To develop an account of the lived experiences of refugees and understanding of the ways in which they create places, negotiate identity and belonging in the resettlement process, Hiruy (2009) used phenomenology and discourse analysis.

Moreover, Hiruy's (2009) study provided a significant platform for further research and debate by highlighting alternative arguments in relation to attitudes towards refugees, identity, belonging and resettlement. It also provided insight to the lived experiences of African refugees in Hobart, but not the relationship between identity and belonging as proposed by my study.

Another study was conducted by Ceginiskas (2015), who focused on exploring multicultural belonging in individuals across cultures, languages and places. In this research, Ceginiskas (2015) made use of adult individuals in Western societies who were born into multicultural and multilingual families and also have parents of different nationalities. The study's participants grew up outside their parents' countries of origin and relate to a multitude of bonds that link them across various places, cultures and languages. To add on, Ceginiskas' (2015) study explored the social dimension of cultural belonging and examined diverse approaches that enabled the participants to create notions of belonging and identification despite possessing at times contradictory transnational allegiances.

The social dimension of cultural identities affects both participants' identification with their multiple attachments and language use in everyday life. Ceginskas' (2015) findings presented that interrelated discussions of the participants' notion of being a mixture, the importance of family bonds and multilingualism, a specific mixed family lifestyle, the notion of non-belonging and the study of participants' sense of otherness as a means of creating communality with others. The study also discussed the various life strategies of flexible relativising, juggling with multiple affiliations, and the approach of "blending in" and the sense of ironic nation-ness for constructing a coherent sense of belonging that these individuals go through.

Ceginskas (2015) argues that multicultural belonging is inextricably connected to an association with multiple languages, cultures and places. Multicultural belonging is relational and depends on the context, social relationships and locations. The researcher proposed that multicultural belonging creates a tolerant understanding of membership and enables experiences of cosmopolitanism and selected notions of allegiance. There is evidently no study that has been carried out as a comparative analysis of identity and belonging in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The study was framed by two theories, namely the Du Bois' Double Consciousness concept and the Post-colonial theory. The Double Consciousness concept designates an individual feeling that one's identity is divided into numerous parts, which makes it problematic to have one unified identity or to develop a sense of self (Edles & Applerouth, 2010). The Post-colonial theory examines the problems which were feigned by Europe's colonisation of various regions of the world throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and the cultural, political and social effects of such (Thieme, 2003). Thus, both theories are consistent with the issues of identity and belonging.

2.3.1 Du Bois's double consciousness concept

The Double Consciousness Theory highlights how one goes through the challenge of “always looking at oneself through the eyes” of a racist society and “measuring oneself by means of a nation that looked back in contempt” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 11).

Double consciousness describes the individual feeling that one's identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult to have one unified identity or to develop a sense of self. According to Edles and Applerouth (2010), Du Bois asserted that double consciousness forces blacks not to only see themselves from their own unique perspectives, but to also view themselves as they might be perceived by the outside (white) world. This results in blacks suffering from damaged self-images that are shaped by the perceptions and treatment of white people. Black lives will eventually be easily shaped by stereotypes and perpetuated by mainstream culture.

According to Du Bois, the prejudices that white people evoke “self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals among black people (Edles & Applerouth, 2010, p.354). This theory is suitable as it helps demonstrate how the characters in the novel have trouble trying to reconcile their African heritage with an upbringing in a Euro-centered society. As Du Bois (1903, p. 11) grapples with how one “ever feels his two-ness, an American, a negro: two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder,” and these are tenets in this concept which are applied in an attempt to do a character analysis of the selected novels.

2.3.2 Post-colonial theory

The post-colonial theory speaks about the human consequences of external control. It sheds light to the power of the imperial regimes (social and cultural) of the coloniser and the colonised, and this relates to the concerns about identity and belonging. The theory also focuses on the

issues pertaining to power, religion, and culture, and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (Brize, Tompkins, Chernouski & Boyle, 2015). Post-colonialism as a theory provides both a historical and theoretical framework and for that it best suits this study.

Thieme (2003, p. 45) says that post-colonial theory “examines the problems which were posed by Europe’s colonisation of various regions of the world throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and the cultural, political and social effects of such.” The situation in South Africa during apartheid as presented in Toni Morrison and Kopano Matlwa’s writings was that different races could not mix with one another or live in one community peacefully. Post-colonial theory thus examines the origins, effects, both immediate and long-term political, cultural and social results of European’s colonisation of different cultures and different regions of the world through the study of various literary texts which depict, sometimes celebrate, and critique and disparage the act of colonisation (Stringer, 1996,). The tenets of post-colonialism were used to do a character and thematic examination of the selected two novels. The study therefore attempts to demonstrate how the post-colonial theory and double consciousness theory can be used to analyse the selected texts.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed some of the studies that were conducted by other researchers on identity and belonging using the two selected novels, Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. This chapter has also discussed the Du Bois double consciousness concept and post-colonial theory. The next chapter dissembles the methods that have been employed in carrying out this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology in order to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One. Details regarding the research approach and design, the research population and sample, research instruments, procedure, data analysis and the researcher's stand on research ethics are also covered in this chapter.

3.2. Research design

This study was carried out from a qualitative research approach point of view and a desktop comparative research method was also used to analyse the novels, *Coconut* by Matlwa (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison (1970). A qualitative approach is the type of approach in which researchers do not primarily focus on quantification or the statistical and numerical perspectives of the phenomenon being investigated, but dwell on carrying out some in-depth analysis of the problem being investigated. According to Crossman (2017, p. 312), “qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help us understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places.”

The qualitative approach was considered to be the most appropriate approach for this study as the intrinsic relationship that exists between identity and belonging in different social lives may not be easily reduced to numbers. The qualitative approach was used on the merits that it is interpretative and aims at understanding the qualities of social life, and its ability to give an in-

depth textual description in the social context of the human or environment interaction in literary texts.

No field work was done for this study as it was confined to a desktop design because of the qualitative nature of the study. In a desktop type of study, the researcher does not need to conduct field work, but makes use of available sources at hand, such as books, the internet and other publications. This study was guided by the themes from the novels *Coconut* by Matlwa (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison (1970), which were critically analysed so as to understand the central phenomenon of identity and belonging as portrayed in the novels.

3.3 Population

Creswell (2014) defines population as a group of individuals with the same characteristics. Qualitative researchers draw their data from many sources, not only from a variety of people, but perhaps also from objects, textual materials, and audio visual and electronic records (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The population of the study at hand was not drawn from one source; it comprised all the novels written by Kopano Matlwa and Toni Morrison. These two novels, *Coconut* and *The Bluest Eye* were selected as they are mainly based on identity and belonging in different social settings. The population consisted of all novels on identity and belonging.

However, the analysed novels were chosen based on the themes emerging from the literature review.

3.4 Sample

Creswell (2014, p. 160) defines a sample as “a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population.” Populations are very large groups of people or items. It is almost impossible for researchers to study the entire population of

interest; instead, researchers select a subset or sample of that population. The novels were selected from other English novels as they present the various elements of identity and belonging. In this study, the two novels, *Coconut* (2007) by Kopano Matlwa and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Tony Morrison were used as the sample.

There are different approaches to sampling which fall into two main categories: probability sampling and nonprobability sampling. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), probability sampling encompasses simple random sampling, proportional stratified sampling, cluster sampling and systematic sampling, whereas nonprobability sampling comprises convenience sampling, quota sampling and purposive sampling, amongst others.

Purposive sampling was used for this study as the researcher intentionally selected *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) from the total population for the reason that the texts are bound by common features of being postcolonial texts and sharing the same setting as well as Du Bois' double consciousness concept also featuring as a prominent theme.

The critical concepts of double consciousness and post-colonialism are common in both texts; thus the chosen texts are similar from a thematic perspective, and in a way the study was able to meet the proposed research objectives.

3.5 Procedure

The proposed study was a desktop study where data were collected through an intense reading and critical analysis of the chosen texts, *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970). The researcher considered relevant secondary sources including works by literary critics, journals, scholars' research paper, as well as relevant sources on double consciousness, identity and post colonialism. These sources facilitated a close and critical analysis and

provided a spine on which the study was hinged upon. The data was then coded according to thematic concerns and the mode of characterisation in the novels.

Creswell (2009) notes that “research methods involve the forms of data collection, analysis and interpretation that the researcher employs in their study” (p. 233). The chosen texts were analysed by applying the double consciousness concept and postcolonial theories that form the theoretical framework of the study, and they were also informed by the reviewed literature, culminating in informed findings and judgements for the conclusions.

3.6 Data analysis

According to Creswell (2003),

the process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (p. 195).

Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 29) describes qualitative analysis as the analysis of data which is “heavily dependent on the researcher’s analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where the data is collected.” Bhattacharjee (2012) further posits that in qualitative analysis, instead of making explanations or making predictions, the researcher must put emphasis on making sense in order to have a full understanding of the experiences being explained in what they are analysing, explaining or predicting.

The data were analyzed using the content analysis method. The researcher made use of character analysis and narrative exploration to determine which characters were affected and or lost their identities and noting the reasons why they got entangled in this phenomenon,

how they reacted and the consequences they faced. The data was interpreted through the implementation of the post-colonial literary theory and Du Bois' double consciousness concept. Conclusions were then being drawn from the interpretation and analysis, and they were presented in a narrative form.

3.7 Research ethics

Research ethics encompasses those principles that guide researchers on how to carry out research without causing any harm to the entities involved. Through research ethics, researchers are warned against deception, invasion of privacy, violating rights or being biased. Awareness of research ethics is needed so that researchers can make informed decisions.

Against the above background, the researcher considered research ethics, and thus the data collected in this study were used purely for academic purposes and not for the researcher's personal benefit or economic reason

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the methodology that was employed for this study. A discussion on the research approach and design that were used for this study was presented covering reasons why the qualitative approach as well as the case design were the most appropriate choices for the study at hand. Information about the population as well as the sample that was generated from the chosen population was shared. Bearing in mind that it is impossible for researchers to study the entire population of interest, the researcher explained why the sampling method as well as the sample chosen were the best for this study. In addition, the procedure that was used to select the themes from both novels that were analysed in this study was also clearly stipulated. The next chapter presents the discussion on identity and belonging as presented in the selected novels.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION ON IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN *COCONUT* AND *THE BLUEST*

EYE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the exploration and comparison of identity and belonging in the novels *Coconut* by Matlwa (2007), and *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison (1970). The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the depictions of identity and belonging in *Coconut*, and the second section examines the portrayal of identity and belonging in *The Bluest Eye*, and the last section is the discussion.

4.2 Summary of *Coconut*

The novel *Coconut* (2007) tells the story of two young girls living on far and opposite ends of the world. The two girls maybe distant and inverse closes of the world, but they are somehow connected by reality, in a way trying to discover their places in a South Africa, which suggests that they somehow do not fit in. The novel is divided into two parts, the first part focuses on the rich Ofilwe and the second part on the poverty stricken Fikile. By depicting the lives of these two girls, *Coconut* addresses prejudice, the loss of one's culture and identity and colonised consciousness. Kopano Matlwa uncovered the lives of South Africa's children and the false notion of "Rainbow Nation."

After Ofilwe's father has a break through, he moves his family to a "better" (gated) community and his daughter to a private school. Her father thought this was the best move to make for his family and most importantly for his daughter, but Ofilwe had to deal with the fact of being one of the only two black girls to attend school at a private school. Ofilwe not only felt guilty of

being a black privileged child but also felt unwelcome in the new environment. She felt like she did not belong in that place.

On the other hand, Fikile, a very ambitious township girl believes she does not belong in the township but a better place and distastes everything and everyone from the township. She wants no association with the township. Every single day, she wakes up with a goal of getting as far away as possible from “blackness” that she blames for its own predicament, towards the “whiteness” that she so admires.

Matlwa makes use of Ofilwe and Fikile to explore identity and belonging, and racism in the novel, *Coconut*.

4.3 Identity and belonging in *Coconut*

This section examines the depiction of identity and belonging as interpreted by the researcher. The discussion focuses on two aspects: identity, belonging and race, and language.

4.3.1 Identity, belonging and race

In *Coconut* (2007), the issue of identity is about comprehension and questioning which race is better than the other. Matlwa’s (2007) novel deals heavily with the issues of identity, belonging and race at the beginning of the 21st century. The most important feature of the novel is the loss of one’s identity as a result of confusion of everything that is occurring around the characters. The novel presents a close connection between the two black girls, which allows a direct comparison of their wants, desires and identities. *Coconut* (2007) goes back and forth between the points of view of the two characters, Fikile and Ofilwe, who struggle with their identities in South Africa. Fikile does not have an immediate family, so she lives with her uncle. She also has

a job which allows her to provide for herself and somewhat also provide some money for her uncle although she feels the job she has is beneath her.

Fikile only wants two things in the whole world, and that is to move up and be of a higher class. Ofilwe is the direct opposite, she has a family that is doing well in society, and they can move between the white and black societies relatively easily because of the money the parents make. However, she is still very unhappy with all she has in her life. Ofilwe is aware that her skin makes her stand out as an undesirable acquaintance in their society.

Fikile, who would rather be called Fiks, is determined to move up in the world and does not want to identify with her own race. After spending her summer looking at gossip and entertainment magazines from the United States featuring mainly white people, Fiks realises something very important about herself:

“It was like I was a puzzle piece, pulled out of the puzzle and bent and now I could never fit back in. I’d seen pictures of another life, a better life, and I wanted” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 168).

Fiks sees herself as no longer fitting in with who she used to be and even the person she was at one time supposed to be. Because of her experiences from reading she feels like the basic core structure of who she is has been altered and she will not fit where she used to. Fikile believes she belongs somewhere better now. All the people she has read about are white upper-class people, and it seems to her like they are what she believes she deserves. But, what Fiks does not realise is that being wealthy, which is what Ofilwe already has, will not give her the ‘white’ identity and acceptance she craves for.

Ofilwe excludes herself from the individuals who do not fit her expectations in society. When she was younger, she was told that:

You will find Ofilwe, that the people you strive so hard to be like will one day reject you because as much as you pretend you are not one of their own. Then you will turn back, but there too, you will find no acceptance, for those you once rejected will no longer recognise the thing you have become. So far, too far to return. So much, too much you have changed. Stuck between two worlds, shunned by both. (Matlwa, 2007, p. 93)

Ofilwe's aunt pointed it out to her that she was attempting to do something that was not going to work. Her aunt is one person who cared and wanted her to be happy. The aunt realised that the path that her niece was taking, was never going to lead her to her coveted destination, which was being white because she was not white, but by the time Ofilwe would realise that, it would be too late, and people of her own colour will reject her. Ofilwe's struggle is deeper than Fiks' struggle. This is because Fiks is concerned about her race and wants to be better, but Ofilwe is black and rich too, but still is not satisfied. Ofilwe keeps striving to be what society has told her is better and is unable to form an image of herself because she cannot detach who she is from who she is "supposed" to be. The two characters' Fikile and Ofilwe's identity crisis comes down to the desire to be white.

This perception of "white is better" moves from the subconscious to conscious when Fiks must make decisions about her life and future. During class time, when her teacher asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, Fikile replied:

"I will be white if I want to be white. I don't care what anybody thinks."

"But why would you want to do that, dear?"

"What makes you think that, Fikile?"

"Everything" (Matlwa, 2007, p. 136.)

Fikile is of the perception that white is better. She acknowledges this and does not hide from it. Her view that white is better is being based off her childhood experiences, and not even real experiences, but what she read from magazines. The people she considers to be better off in life are white, and she wants to assume their identity. The only issue with what she is doing is, in the process she is losing her own identity, and is being captured by the image she has of white people that she completely disregards any identity she could have as a black woman. The loss of identity by Fikile and Ofilwe is of their own doing, they do not want to identify as black and are not actually white, so they end up being caught in limbo, not really fitting their own world, neither the other's.

Fikile and Ofilwe both have issues with their identities which is caused by their understanding of their surroundings. The two girls are trying to adopt someone else's identity as their own. Identity is not something that can simply happen, the way they are struggling to find it, identity is something that is developed from acceptance of what one is. A person cannot adopt an identity from someone else, they must find their own identities through the fires of their own experiences.

Coconut's inner life and human identity are more represented because it is a work of fiction. Fiks who refuses to be called Fikile is so determined to move up the world and refuses to be identified by her own black race and wants to be white. While going to work one day, Fikile looked around her and thought to herself that:

I am not one of you, I want to tell them. Some day you will see me drive past here in a sleek air-conditioned car, and I will roll up my windows if you try to come near me, because I am not one of you. You are poor and black, and I am rich and brown. (Matlwa, 2007, p. 140.)

Fikile refuses to identify and relate with the people that are like her. She does treatments, buys things and is employed at a place where she can pretend to be who she is not but wants to be. Even her identification of her skin colour shows her deep desire to be someone else, “she is not black, she is brown.” In her mind, if she does enough, and if she distances herself from “these people,” these black people, enough, she will no longer be black. She is of the belief that she can make herself white.

Much of Fikile’s identity is tied up in her denial of who she is. After making a mistake at work and being scolded at in front of a customer, she thinks:

“I am tired of waiting, waiting for the day when it will all be different, when it will be my turn, my story, my rose” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 181).

This young girl believes that if she denies everything that happens by waiting for what she wants to happen, she will miraculously get everything, and it will magically change her. Her embarrassment over what transpired causes her to distance herself even further from her identity as a waitress and a black woman because that is not going to get her where she wants to be. Fikile also finds no problem in telling lies about her past:

“The pretend stories of my life serve the purpose they are required to fulfil, ‘fake it till you make it.’ I feel no shame at my slight stretch of the truth” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 147).

Fikile does not feel any kind of guilt for the tales she tells, they seem to be serving a purpose, and in this case the purpose they serve is creating an identity that suits her. She thinks by pretending to be someone she is not, she will fit in, and she wants to fit in, because of what white people have, and those people who have lived adventurous lives, have better than what she already has.

During her mathematics class, Fikile learns of the concept of infinity, she thinks:

“I would leave this life of blackness and embark on something larger than large and greater than great, something immeasurable and everlasting” (Matlwa,2007, p. 171.)

Fikile wants an identity that does not tie her to whom she was born as, because she does not like who she was born as. She does not entertain the idea or the fact that she is black and not white. Her dream is to be in a place where her black skin is as good as someone else’s white skin.

Whereas, Ofilwe has no sense of identity and attempts to fit herself to her parents, expectations. While she was sitting in church, Ofilwe admitted to herself that:

“I come here because I feel I belong. That is all. The traditions of the church are my own. I do not have any others” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 10).

Ofilwe has issues thinking of herself, she knows the church, and because she attends that church, she is of the belief that whatever she knows, is her own, even though she only feels she belongs, she does not know she belongs. Ofilwe lacks a sense of identity. Ironically, the only place Ofilwe seems to only feel like and belongs in this novel, is the church. A person cannot know their own inner life or identity. Unlike the rest, Ofilwe’s identity seems to be all over the place, it is constantly changing as she tries to form and shape it into someone else’s who she can stand to be. Her identity was not removed from her possession, but rather she just does not understand who she is because the society she identifies with has not made it easy for her to form a solidarity identity.

Ofilwe is lost and is not anywhere near the end of her journey towards her identity. That one time that she finally gets tired of trying to please everyone, she thinks to herself that:

“Right there, I would sit and not take another step. That would be OK too. I do not know where I am going anyway” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 62)

Her journey on discovering who she is, is still ongoing, she has not reached the point where she can stop and think “this is it, I know who I am.” Her journey is still being shaped and she has not thrown off the youth that she used to know. Ofilwe is still caught up in in her I need to please everyone, she wants to fit into the mould they have made for her which results in her being lost. This young girl never finds herself.

4.3.2 Language

In *Coconut*, Matlwa stresses on the problems of language in South Africa and how the English language is continuing to bring about identity problems. The author of the novel *Coconut* does this by showing how the metaphor “Coconut” creates dichotomies of alienation and detachment for most of the people in the country. Matlwa talks about the lessons that the young women lose out on while they embrace the European culture. It is the lessons like grooming, values, norms and morals that are learnt from home, that these young women are losing. It is these lessons that define them within their societies and identify them with their cultural groups or tribes.

In the novel under discussion, the English language is depicted as the breeding ground for the change the young girls imagine is attainable through education or work place. Both girls find themselves holding onto the language dearly. They are drawn to it and they are willing to lose everything to acquire it. This is reflected through Ofilwe who developed an obsession for everything white, from the way they speak, eat, dress and live. Because English is a language of instruction at school and the language of her aspirations, Ofilwe decides to master the language and speak it better than the white people. However, she does not understand why people shun her and her dilemma is reflected in the lines below:

It is because I am smart and speak perfect English. That is why people treat me differently I knew from a very young age that Sepedi won't take me far. Not a chance! I observed my surroundings and noted that all those who were lawyers, doctors and accountants, all movie stars that wore beautiful dresses, all the singers that drove fancy cars, and all my friends who owned the latest clothing, did not speak the language that bounced berserkly from Koko to Tshepo to Malome Arthur to Mama and back to Koko again. I did not care if I could not catch it... I spoke the Tv language the one that spoke of sweet success... What has Sepedi ever done for me? (Matlwa,2007)

As for Fikile, she would rather be called "FIKS" than her real name because her white employer calls her Fiks.

"Fikile"

"Don't call me that here!"

"Call me, FIKS." (Matlwa, 2007, p. 142)

Ofilwe clearly shows what it means to be a "Coconut" black on the outside and white inside, shunning her own language in favour of an alien one. Just like many other people, she views English as the language of development, a language that can open doors for her in the future. This young girl's weakness lies in the obsession with English at the expense of her language. Ofilwe is losing her culture and identity because language, culture and identity are irrevocably intertwined. Her brother, Tshepo, even warned her at one point that she was not careful in her eagerness to adopt the English language, she would find herself at a place too far to return, (Matlwa, 2007). Ofilwe's inability to speak her own mother tongue results in a conflict not only in her family, but also her society as she cannot associate with her own people. Her desire to get

rid of her mother tongue robs her of her people's past, her history, her aspirations, her dreams and her future.

Ofilwe represents a number of Africans who cast away their languages and choose foreign languages just, so they feel important. Matlwa (2007) demonstrates that the issue of adopting the English language as a home language is a choice made by people who do not want to associate themselves with their cultures, like Ofilwe. Therefore, when the men who came to Ofilwe's school believed that Ofilwe speaking English at home was a lie, in spite of her African skin. Because of her African skin, she is expected to speak one of the African languages, but she cannot speak any. Ofilwe insisted that her mother tongue was English, (Matlwa, 2007). This prompted the men who were doing statistics in languages in the school to tick her under the Zulu speaking individuals, even when she did not speak a single word of Zulu. The men could not believe that it was possible for an African girl to speak English as her mother tongue or home language rather than a second language. Ofilwe was denied her right to freely choose her language and this made her realise once again that all the hope she had of choosing who and what she wanted to be in society was never going to be as simple as she thought it was going to be.

“My own tongue escaped me completely? That cannot be. Mama and Daddy speak it all the time, although not to me nor to each other, but surely my eardrums filters some of that” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 57).

Ofilwe depicts a dislocation at an intellectual level which forces another physical dislocation as she can no longer communicate with her parents and her other relatives. This sense of displacement raises questions about her role in relation to her family and mostly to her society. Although she chose to alienate herself from her people through the language she chose to speak,

her brother soaks in everything he can learn about his language, Sepedi, and this demonstrates a strong sense of self.

Fikile also suffers from an identity crisis, this is reflected in her choice of language too. Fikile does not want to speak her mother tongue, which is Zulu, and chooses English instead. Just like Ofilwe, she believes English means success and achievement and Zulu means the complete opposite. Fikile strongly believes that she is better than other black people, and even goes through so much trouble of making up a story that she is not black but white. She insists that:

Many people think that I am foreign, from the UK or somewhere there. I think it is because my accent is so refined. Yes, I have always been different. I could never relate to other black South Africans. We've just never clicked. So, I give them their space and they generally give me mine" (Matlwa, 2007, p. 146).

Fikile believes that English makes her better than all those around her and that her refined accent makes her European. She creates a project for her transformation, Project Infinity (Matlwa, 2007, p. 171).

4.3.3 Conclusion

Coconut (2007) is made up of two girls who never actually finish their journey of discovering their identity. Both girls are stuck in limbo, between the people they are and the people they want to be. Fikile's story is unfinished, she has not reached the end of her journey yet, but is still trying to find herself and figure out who she is. Fikile is not mature and may never be mature because she is so tied up with the idea of who is better and who she should be.

Ofilwe and Fikile were impacted by their desire to identify with something, or rather anything in a world that was also trying to find its own footing. This was a close investigation on how South

Africa's identity was affected in post-apartheid, but really, this is a question of how any country's identity was affected after a revolutionary event. Apartheid in South Africa was a government movement that declared white as the superior race and passed a number of discriminatory laws. Apartheid only ended after thirty years and still its scars remain fresh and visible. Every country has a moment similar to this, from their past, whether it is the United States' Revolutionary War or the series of wars that ripped through Europe in the 1990s. It is a question of whether identity has been or was affected.

4.4 Summary of *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye (1970) is a novel that brings out themes such as identity, belonging, race and class. Morrison explored all these themes through the characters in the novel. The novel is based on the life of the Breedlove family which resides in Lorain, Ohio, in the late 1930s. The family consists of the mother, Pauline; the father, Cholly; the son, Sammy; and the daughter, Pecola. The novel's focal point is the daughter, an eleven-year-old black girl who is trying to conquer about with self-hatred. Every single day of her life she has to deal with racism, not just from white people but mostly from her own race. They consider her to be too dark, and the darkness of her skin in a way implies that she is inferior, and everyone else thinks that her skin colour makes her even "uglier." The answer to this problem of hers of self-hatred is by getting blue eyes, but not just any blue eyes but the bluest of eyes. She attributes her so called ugliness to her lack of blue eyes, which she thinks that she can find sanctuary from her parents' cruelty, her neighbours' indifferences, her friends' and schoolmates ridicule, but mostly the rejection from her community and society.

Morrison displays the evil that is caused by a society that is brainwashed by the deep-rooted goodness and beauty of whiteness and the ugliness of blackness. The author makes use of many tools that depict how “white” beliefs have taken over American and African-American culture.

4.5 Identity and belonging in *The Bluest Eye*

This section discusses identity and belonging in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) as interpreted by the researcher. The discussion will focus on the following:

- Identity, belonging and race
- The retaining of identities

4.5.1 Identity, belonging and race

Morrison (1970) uses the psychological outcomes of the physical, emotional and spiritual isolation that result from racial discrimination to mould her characters’ senses of the self through their direct experiences of discrimination and white oppression. Moreover, Morrison’s (1970) male and female characters are unable to form senses of identity in the novel and this can be tied to the cultural trauma they all experience which makes it impossible to shape a sense of the self. *The Bluest Eye* exposes the outcome of white presence in an African- American society and how this presence imposes difficulty on the individual to form or create an identity. Morrison (1970) made use of this reality to structure the novel and also the bonds between the characters, their society, and themselves. Through the allowance or denial of relationships in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison (1970) demonstrates how the presence of whiteness in the society changes her characters’ ability to create or form their own sense of identity. The alienation these African-Americans go through reaches future generations by disabling any hope of forming relationships after acquiring a sense of belonging and this will create psychological obstacles African-Americans must face and defeat in the future.

The title of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, calls to the attention of whiteness and how that presence can affect not only a collective group, but also an individual. The noun “eye” in the title is singular, which suggests that perhaps the damage inflicted upon the individual by the society’s white lens is in relation to beauty and acceptance. Also, by making use of the word “eye” and giving it a double meaning of “I” Morrison (1970) might have been emphasising on the importance of vision. The novel also has a dash of cultural trauma to it, the way in which trauma affects an individual is different from how it affects a certain culture. As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through the various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory. There are three characters in this novel, Cholly Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove, who not only deal with the struggle to form or create personal identities, but also suffer with the presence of whiteness in the society and the pressure to meet society’s white standards.

Cholly Breedlove is one of the male characters in *The Bluest Eye* whose life is negatively affected by his inability to identify with his ancestral past. Cholly was abandoned by his father before he was born and was rescued and brought up by his grandmother who also never missed a chance to remind him that he owed her his life. A portion of Cholly’s difficulty with the formation of his own identity is all because he lacks an ancestral past and also his failure to progress during the early stages of Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory. According to Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, there are eight stages that one must go through and each stage is marked by a conflict or crisis between the person and his or her environment. During each of these conflicts the individual is “vulnerable and moving towards increased potential; (each conflict is) a moment to decide between progress and regression,” (Vadeboncoeur, 2001). The first of Erikson’s stages is referred to as Trust Versus Mistrust, and this stage is

characterised by the development or lack of development of trust for others and the self, or a sense of confidence in infancy, (Vadeboncoeur, 2001). Therefore, Cholly does not experience any confidence during intimacy because he is unable to bond with his parents, and his grandmother, even though she takes it upon herself to save and bring up Cholly, he still remains at an emotional distance. It is not only the failure to move from the first stage that is to blame for Cholly's fractured identity, but Cholly was also disturbed by the fact that he does not share the same name as his father, Cholly asked his grandmother why he was not named after his own father, and this was his grandmother's response:

He wasn't nowhere around when you was born. Your mama didn't name you nothing. The nine days wasn't up before she throwed you on the junk heap. When I got you, I named you myself on the ninth day. You named after my dead brother. Charles Breedlove. A good man. Ain't no Samson never come to no good end. (Morrison, 1970, p. 133)

Cholly's formation of self-identity is delayed not only by the abandonment of his birth parents but also by the origin of his name. Cholly was not happy because he had not been named after his father, but he was instead the namesake of a distant relative who was deceased before he was even born. The origin of one's self is very important in identity formation. Because Cholly could not identify with anyone he was related to, he lacked any resemblance of a sense of self and belonging, and his maturation was stunted, which also made it easier for Cholly to internalise the society's racism.

Cholly is one character who experiences dehumanisation in *The Bluest Eye* (1970). His first encounter with sex, which is natural human experience, is perverted by two white hunters. During the reception after Aunt Jimmy's funeral, Cholly and Darlene ran off to a field where

their flirtations in no time turned into sexual relations. While they were in the middle of intercourse, Cholly and his partner were interrupted by two white hunters.

“There was no mistake about their being white” (Morrison, 1970, p. 147)

When Cholly was standing up to dress himself, the hunters shined their flashlights on the young couple and ordered Cholly to finish.

“With a violence born of total helplessness, he pulled her dress up, lowered his trousers and underwear” (Morrison, 1970, p. 147).

The white hunters repeatedly referred to him as a “coon” and ordered him to mate with Darlene like crude animals. The ease that these white hunters demanded Cholly to continue intercourse with Darlene is reminiscent of the systematic mating strategies slave owners practised with only “breeding” in their minds. This humiliating and dehumanising experience created a hatred for women within Cholly, and this is demonstrated in the novel by domestic violence towards his wife and the molestation of his daughter.

Another of the female character in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is Pauline Breedlove, who is affected by the white standard society that was placed on her. Pauline had a deformity on her foot that prevented her having a nickname among her peers when she was younger. As a result of not having a nickname, Pauline was unable to relate herself to her peers and this also disrupted her ability to form an identity for herself at a young age. Also, as a result of her deformity, it was her extreme concern about her physical appearance.

“Her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot” (Morrison, 1970, p. 111).

Pauline internalised society's love of white-beauty to such a degree that she viewed herself as worthless unless she could attain that standard. Because she could not relate to any of the women in the North, Pauline frequented the movie theatre where, "along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another" physical beauty. Maybe the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in delusion, (Morrison, 1970, p. 122). These were the days Pauline's life changed and she learned that beauty was equal to virtue.

"She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was absorbed in full from the silver screen" (Morrison, 1970, p. 122).

Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), was either seen as worthless by everyone around her (except the MacTeers) or was not seen at all. She also internalised society's racism the most out of all the characters in the novel. Because of the abuse she went through from her father, mother, strangers, and other children, she was of the belief that everything would change for the better if she somehow got blue eyes. It is the construction of white womanhood that Pecola's desire to have blue eyes was born, since both her mother and her longed for white-middle class conception of beauty and grace that was communicated to them through the portrayal of white women in the movies. In the eleven years of Pecola's life, she was raped and impregnated by her father, she lost the baby she was carrying and was driven into madness from the persistent abuse, but she continued to search for blue eyes to cure her ugliness and societal rejection. At the end of the novel, Pecola began to talk to her imaginary friend, in other words, her double. Ironically, Pecola had been denied a sense of the self and a voice to articulate her pain, in the end a crazy Pecola found not one, but two voices. She internalised

society's racism and allowed it to reaffirm an already weakened perception of herself, and low self-esteem disabled any ability to form a sense of self. Pecola was unable to experience relationships and to relate to others which was a key element in creating an identity, according to Erikson. Because she was unable to form mature relationships and have positive experiences to integrate and accumulate over her short lifetime, she was forced to create a second identity in order to satisfy her need for human interaction and acceptance.

In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the characters are of the belief that all that is white is beautiful. The novel constantly refers to the white American icons of beauty and innocence such as Greto Garbo, Ginger Rogers and Shirley Temple. During the 1940s the African-American girls were encouraged to aspire to be whiter, all of the female African-American characters in the novel grew up in a society that did not see them as beautiful or even worthy of being looked at. Young Pecola is always identified by her ugliness and she fixated on what the society deemed her to be. Her belief that blue eyes will make her beautiful shows two specific effects of racism on young African-American girls, that is low self-esteem and envy of whiteness.

The way Pecola ends up is all because of her unloving childhood, her abandonment by nearly everyone she encounters and also her complete disintegration of the self is doomed at the very beginning since the Breedloves believe they are ugly. Regardless of whether it is true or not, the Breedloves had internalised the idea that they are ugly.

They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. (Morrison, 1970, p. 1)

Their ugliness was unique, and nothing could be done about it, the Breedloves just had to accept it without question, they took their ugliness into their own hands, wore it on them and went about the world with it, but Pecola hid behind hers. Unfortunately, this issue of appearance is not hers and her family's alone, but it mirrors the misfortune of the whole black community where most of the blacks try to separate themselves in body and mind from all that suggests African origin and defines their African identity.

“She, like a Victorian parody, learned from her husband all that was worth learning- to separate herself in body, mind and in spirit from all that suggested Africa” (Morrison, 1970, p. 7).

Pecola's desire for a pair of blue eyes does not only result from her own awareness of her ugliness by her parents and the black community, but also from false conviction that having a pair of blue eyes, will symbolically as some kind of social norm and judgement, would make her different and anyone would care and love her automatically because of them.

“Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty...A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. His outrage grew and felt like power. For the first time he honestly wished he could work miracles” (Morrison, 1970, p. 21).

Unfortunately, what Pecola finds in the mirror is not really a healthy psyche and complete identity, but a distorted self, accompanied with all the denial and rejection from the mainstream society. Therefore, Pecola is caught by a loss of self and a sense of rootlessness, and also has a mental break down that causes her to have an illusion that she already has blue eyes and has what she dreamt of. This pair of blue eyes symbolises the white mainstream culture which defines beauty and ugliness. With these blue eyes, the whole black community and Pecola will see the world from white people's perspectives.

The little black boys from her community mock Pecola without consideration of the colour of their own skins. At school, the teachers try not to look at Pecola, they actually do not like her as she reminds them of their pasts and origins that they try so hard to escape and forget. They use Pecola as a vehicle through which they can pour their shame and frustration. Maureen, a light in complexion girl, distinguishes between her skin and Pecola's much darker skin, claiming:

“I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly e mos. I am cute!” (Morrison, 1970, p. 35).

Whiteness in this novel is associated with beauty, innocence, goodness, cleanliness and purity. All the characters who have internalised popular and cultural concepts of goodness, beauty and innocence tend to have some kind of covert or overt with whiteness. Race is one of the main themes in *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Cholly is humiliated by the white men because he is black, which causes him to be somehow repulsed by women and family, which also leads to his alcoholism, which also then leads him to rape his daughter, Pecola. In a similar vein, Soaphead Church is raised in a family that marries light-skinned blacks in order to whiten up the family features. This results in an obsession with purity, both racial and otherwise.

Maureen insults Pecola and the two sisters, Claudia and Frieda by using their race. She throws racial insults, the same racially loaded language the little black boys from the community also used to mock Pecola. Maureen does all this without understanding that her depreciation of the dark-skinned blacks represents her devaluation of her own heritage and tradition. In addition, Geraldine also distinguishes other blacks from her own family, calling her family “neat”

“This disrupter of seasons was a new girl in school named Maureen Peal. A high yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich,

at least by our standards, as rich as the richest white girls, swaddled in comfort and care. The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me” (Morrison, 1970, p. 3).

“His mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between coloured people and niggers, they were easily identifiable. Coloured people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud” (Morrison, 1970, p. 14).

Pecola’s condition is with no doubt not only caused by corrosion as well as oppression of the white culture but the identification of blacks themselves in their community, and their inability to sustain their own culture. This is why when they hear about Pecola, they feel disgusted, outraged and for some excited, instead of extending their sympathy to the victim. The whole black community was indifferent.

4.5.2 The retaining of identities

Just like Pecola, Claudia also suffers from oppression of racism and classism, typically the white beauty standards and material insecurity, but she loves and appreciates her black image and her own culture, which makes all the difference to her. Claudia is comfortable in her skin, she admires her dirt and cultivates her scars. She cherishes her blackness. In her eyes, black is beautiful, hence her strong belief that Pecola’s black baby must be beautiful.

This young girl tries to celebrate who she is and refuses to be under the control of the dominant culture and tirelessly rejects a white baby doll, “Shirley Temple.”

“Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, windows signs- all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow haired, pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasured” (Morrison, 1970, p. 39).

Claudia questions the reasoning behind the white cultural domination and its manipulation of power over blacks. As a way of investigating what makes the doll “lovable” and black girls such as Pecola and Frieda, including herself “unlovable.” “She wanted to see what it was made of, and also to discover the dearness, and to find the beauty” (Morrison, 1970, p. 39). Claudia disassembled a white baby doll that her parents gave her as a present for Christmas. She just wanted to:

“examine it to see what it was that the world said was lovable” (Morrison, 1970, p. 40).

Automatically Claudia understood that there was an enormous invisible white cultural force that belittles black presences and insists that:

“Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The Thing to fear was not the Thing that made her beautiful” (Morrison, 1970, p. 74).

On her own she realised that the event that occurred in her community were part of a larger, social structure of violence. While we are not rejecting her own personal responsibility, Claudia blames “the earth, the land...the entire country” (Morrison, 1970, p. 160). When Claudia finds out that Pecola is pregnant, she challenges the invisible power, and wishing all the best for Pecola’s unborn baby:

“More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to just live just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples and Maureen Peals” (Morrison, 1970, p. 190).

Claudia also plants marigold seeds, praying that the health of the seeds will assure the health of the baby. To Claudia this represents the collective survival of her race. When the seeds die the baby also dies, Claudia felt responsible for the death of the baby and she regretted not having planted the seeds deep enough into the earth, but later she realised that:

“the earth itself might have been unyielding” (Morrison, 2007, p. 7).

And that:

“the land of the entire country was hostile to marigold that year. This soil is bad for certain kind of flowers. Certain seeds it will nurture, certain fruit it will not bear” (Morrison, 1970, p. 206).

Claudia is able to articulate the reason which led to Pecola's madness, it was the society's victimisation of a defenceless little girl. Even though it was too late for Pecola, any person who had not planted anything in the unyielding earth, it was not too late for Claudia, who continues to grow through her assessments, actions and choices.

4.5.3 Conclusion

The novel presents three possible family situations: an idealised white family (the Geraldines), a warm black family (the MacTeers), and a self-denial bottom family (the Breedloves), which are actually the true representation of the family models in society. The metamorphosis from the idealised to the bottom is Morrison's criticism of the white mainstream culture for the split-up black community between some blacks who blindly identify themselves into the white mainstream society by abandoning their own tradition and some others who are still holding onto their culture and identity. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) shows how cultural trauma of a cohesive group can lead to the inability of the individuals in a certain group to form identities. The presence of whiteness in the society at that time created an unattainable white standard that African Americans needed to attain for them to get accepted. The results of this attempt and failure in relation to this standard disabled any chance African Americans had to find themselves. According to Du Bois, (1999) the blacks are born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this

American world. They look at themselves through the eyes of the whites. That is the main cause of their blind identification, the same thing that affected Pecola's family.

4.6 Discussion

This section gives a comparative analysis of how Matlwa and Morrison expose identity and belonging in their novels *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) respectively. It is in this section where the questions raised in Chapter 1 of this study are answered: How are identity and belonging presented through the characters by Matlwa and Morrison? In what ways do both authors present the changes in the characters identities in the selected novels? What are the effects of losing identities and the need to belong in a society as presented in the selected novels?

The approach adopted in this chapter is to compare and contrast how the discussed thematic concerns explored and exposed identity and belong in both *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) are similar and different, and thereafter give an analytical discussion. Though the exploration in both novels differ significantly probably due to cultural differences and the period of time the two authors live in, it is of essence to note that literature draws its topics and themes from real life situations.

Literature is typical for documenting life as it happens. Identity is a major issue, especially the questions of one being "born this way". How much of it is really "birth" though, and how much of it is "culture." The world is a place that pressures people to be someone else and to fit in mould, and through literature it is reflected. This close study of the two novels, *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (2007) shows that cultural pressures affect the characters within. There are questions raised and answers searched for because sometimes the characters do not know. Literature shows how to overcome that stumbling block and move forward. Acceptance is the

key, if one cannot accept who they are, that individual will never accept themselves. The identities we have and how we chose to embrace them play a role in our lives. People will question who they are and try to put the missing pieces to an incomplete puzzle. Identity is not cut and dried, it cannot be picked and chosen from a hat. People form identities from experiences and from the people around them. Who they are, creates the person, not who they want to be.

Using Du Bois' double consciousness concept, this theory highlights how one goes through the challenge of "always looking at oneself through the eyes" of a racist society and "measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt." This theory is suitable as it helps demonstrate how the characters in the novel have trouble trying to reconcile their African heritage with an upbringing in a Euro-centered society. The researcher also made use of the post-colonial theory that speaks about the human consequences of external control. It shades light to the power of the imperial regimes (social and cultural) of the coloniser and the colonised, and this relates to the concerns about identity and belonging.

The Harvard University Writing Centre suggests that writing a compare and contrast essay can be done by way of point-by-point discussion or text-by-text discussion. This study adopts the latter approach. In the context of this study it would be said to be novel-by-novel contrasting discussion where the researcher started by elaborating on the findings the study revealed in Matlwa (2007) and thereafter those the study revealed in Morrison (1970) before finally concluding the discussion.

4.6.1 Discussion on how identity and belonging are exposed through characters in *Coconut*

The researcher's particular focus was on how the black and white characters were depicted in the novel and how the multiple identity positions that are emerging in the post-apartheid nation, and the role the society plays in the formation of these identities. Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007)

sets up a double narrative of two black girls, Fikile and Ofilwe, growing up in post-apartheid South Africa, and narrates each girl's struggle to define her own identity in a space where culture is conflated to signify class position.

Coconut's (2007) exploration of the issues of black identity in post-Apartheid South Africa is centered through the two lives of Ofilwe and Fikile, which run parallel to each other and at times intersect. The novel's title comes from a degrading term used to refer to a person who is black on the outside but white on the inside (McKinney, 2007). According to Spencer (2009), the term, "Coconut" refers to one who speaks English most of the time, choosing it over an African language, or who is unable to speak an African language, and who is considered to act white. Matlwa made use of two protagonists and narrators to examine the cultural identity of the present day black South African individuals. For the author, to clearly bring out the identities of the protagonists, Matlwa details the difficult cultural landscapes for the characters. The narrator and protagonist of the first half of the novel is Ofilwe Tlou, (or Fifi) and then the sections follow her and her family in a gated community in Sandton. Fikile, (or Fiks), relates the second half of the book: she is an orphan who lives with her uncle in the Mphe Batho Township.

What is distinctive about the structure of the novel is that it is not chronological, and it also has a break in the middle where a different story is told with a different narrator. The two narrators and protagonists Ofilwe and Fikile, each recount one day in their lives, but the accounts are jumbled up with flashbacks. Ofilwe's story is about not fitting in as a young black child and being inserted into a white world. This young girl's deepest desire is to fit in socially and wants no association with her Sepedi rituals and heritage. Fikile's story is of a young girl who grows up in a township and desperately wants to attain and be like the people she sees in her magazines. The two young ladies meet at the Silver Spoon Café, where Ofilwe and her family are customers and

Fikile is the waitress who does not want to serve them. At this part the author succeeds in giving two different perspectives of the two characters who are separated by a socio-economic fence while struggling to find their self-identities in post-apartheid South Africa, by making use of two narrators.

The novel's structure mirrors Hall's (2011) concept of differences in cultural identity as the unstable points of identification, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Hall (2011) further problematises this notion by noting the occurrence of the idea of otherness as an inner compulsion which changes our conception of 'cultural identity'. In this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. Matlwa manages to show this by using two females from the same nation, race, age, and also struggling with the same identity problems from two different economic and cultural backgrounds

Ofilwe's narrative focuses mainly on her complicated interactions with her community, and her attempts to understand and define what constitutes her community. She points out that at their Sepedi ceremonies she does not interact much, she avoids people and feels left out amongst her own people who know all about the rituals. She is an outsider in the midst of her family and people. Matlwa is careful in the way she articulates Ofilwe's perspective, tempering it to reflect her successful assimilation, as well as her ignorance. Ofilwe stated that "I attend this ancient church because I am comfortable here. I understand nothing of the history of the church. I do not know what the word Anglican means, nor can I explain to you how the church came to arise (Matlwa, 2007, p. 9). The unprompted admittance of ignorance is crucial.

Ofilwe manages to fit into church just fine but struggles to do the same with her peers and as the reader you can see that she is always being rejected and corrected. During a game of spin-the-bottle at a slumber party, a white boy refuses to kiss her, "No ways! Her lips are too dark!"

(Matlwa, 2007, p. 45) it is this phrase that continues to fly around in her thoughts. One of the only other black boys at her school turns her away by declaring that “he only dates white girls” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 24). Her friend, Belinda, also gives her a lesson on how to pronounce words properly, she tries to correct the way she says “oven” “Uh-vin not oh-vin” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 49). Ofilwe looks back on all these moments and the pain, also the toll it takes to explain her parents’ customs, she even mentions that even the other “brown kids” tend to treat her like “the scum that they believe they are” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 49). After she remembers how Belinda was teaching her how to speak, she recalls how “hate sits heavy on my heart. It reeks. I can smell it rotting my insides and I taste it on my tongue” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 49). These are the moments that separate Ofilwe from Fikile, the sense of not wanting to be changed completely. Ofilwe tries to use a few of Sepedi words when speaking to try and reconnect with her culture.

Fikile, on the other hand, wishes not to be associated with anyone in her community. From a young age Fikile is reluctant to associate with her peers. Her grandmother and primary caretaker urges Fiks to play outside:

They are all the same, they are boring, they can’t speak English, they are stupid, they steal my stuff. You always have an excuse, Fikile. I am fed up with you sitting in here all day reading those fashion magazines. I have a good mind to take those magazines away from you. I thought that they would be a fine way for you to practise your reading, but they have taught you nothing but to be a snob. Go outside and play. (Matlwa, 2007, p. 131)

Matlwa continuously demonstrates Fikile’s lack of connectivity to her community, but more than that, her unusual lack of Sapphic relationships. There is even a point where a mother and small child are sitting next to Fiks in a taxi and the sleeping child leans and drools on to Fiks. This is

followed by a loud outburst to the boy's mother and a scathing inner-monologue with the continued wishes to be extracted from her situation:

I am not one of you, I want to tell them. Some day you will see me drive past here in a sleek airconditioned car, and I will roll up my windows if you try to come near me, because I am not one of you. You are poor and black, and I am rich and brown.”
(Matlwa, 2007, p. 140).

Her identity and self-awareness is consistently mediated through race, even to the point of preferring the term “brown” to “black” as shown above. Fikile's waitressing job allows her to mix with the who's who of this country (Matlwa, 2007, p. 41). She attends to every whim and each request from her glamorous, white customers yet refuses outright to wait on black families, declaring that “they're just an annoyance and a waste of my time” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 164). She confirms this feeling upon the Tlous' exit, “of course they go without leaving a tip, what more does one expect from black people?” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 176). Fikile maligning of the entire black race continues when she sides with a white patron who has offended her black co-worker Ayanda by stating:

Don't Ma'am' me, I can read, thank you very much. If it wasn't for us, you wouldn't be able to read so don't you patronise me. Just take it back and bring me a cheese sandwich without dairy products, please! (Matlwa, 2007, p. 150)

In another instance, she is propositioned by one of her regulars, an older white man who consistently over tips and flirts with her. She considers his offer at one point, “Anything worth having comes at a price, a price that isn't always easy to pay... He seems to really like me, and I enjoy his company, what is there to lose?” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 176). This is an obvious contrast to

her revulsion for black men. This categorical refusal to interact with black people is challenged on the train, where a black man tries to speak to her and Fikile is eyeing his briefcase, which she assumes is too fancy for the man, “I do not look at this man, this man who is a thief like all the other men in this train, and probably an alcoholic and a rapist too” (Matlwa, 2007). She met this man again on her way home. It may therefore be argued that that his character functioned as a small beacon of hope for Fikile. It is made aware that his briefcase is a gift from his boss and soon after, he recalls to her an experience that he had had that day at his daughter’s school. This anecdote serves as an allegorical subtext for the story and both protagonists’ struggles for identity and assimilation.

The man relates that he was picking up his daughter at school and was observing the children, “And then suddenly a little chocolate girl walks past me, hand in hand with the cutest half-metre milk bar I have ever seen in my life” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 188). His story takes a turn from its initial positivity to mention that “he had been thinking of home-schooling his daughter. She refuses to speak a word of Xhosa and I know it is the influence of that school” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 188). The man notes that the “children were so joyful, those kids. But, you know, I couldn’t shake the feeling that they were only happy because they didn’t know... And she is just so happy, you know. But, I can’t shake a certain feeling” (Matlwa, 2007, pp. 188-189). He goes on to outline the plight of the new generation, “I just got so confused as I stood there at the edge of that playground, because I knew that they were happy, and I was happy that they were, but listening to all those little black faces yelping away in English, unaware that they have a beautiful language at home that they will one day long for, just broke my heart” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 189). As the man says this, the reader is aware of the complexity of the man’s position: integration is encouraged and preferred to segregation, but with assimilation comes the

consequence of wiping out diversity. The man is standing at a cultural and generational cross-road that Fiks refuses to acknowledge or examine. The man's statement does seem to directly address Fikile's full embrace of Western values, with no interest or even nostalgia for what she is leaving behind. Fikile is uncertain of what she ought to say to this man's pronouncements, which (the reader is aware) implicate her own position as well. He continues:

Standing at the edge of that playground, I watched little spots of amber and auburn become less of what Africa dreamed of and more of what Europe thought we ought to be. Standing at the edge of that playground I saw tiny pieces of America, born of African soil. I saw a dark-skinned people refusing to be associated with the red soil, the mud huts and the glistening stone beads that they once loved. (Matlwa, 2007, pp. 189-190)

This story seems to comment on the future of the country and the dilemmas that assimilation will bring. The novel does not have a clear ending or any indication of what happens to the main characters. Ironically, the man's story of the school children is the closest we get to closure in the girls' stories. All the characters are forced to negotiate a continuous tension between ethnic African ideals and global values of whiteness, life in the black township and the cosmopolitan promises of the city, the traditional prioritizing of family and community and the allure of self-invention

The indications of this are seen best in Fikile's private moments. The one that stands out the most is Fikile's private thoughts about her uncle. Other than the overt molestation that is outlined, one of the most telling instances is one in which Fikile is looking at a photo album of her Uncle with a white family that Gogo had worked for, "White children smiling for Uncle! I remember being filled with such a wild envy and rage that I was unable to understand why that couldn't be me in the photo, why the Kinsleys hadn't thrown such a party for me, why nobody

had ever thrown any kind of party for me” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 123). Fikile’s desire to be accepted is shown by Matlwa to be delusional, based on superficiality rather than reality. There is no wisdom or experience to draw from, as Fikile, as well as Fifi, are in unique positions generationally, moving into inter-racial and inter-cultural spheres. *Coconut* (2007) thus aims to highlight the assimilation process in the new South Africa.

This novel shows how emerging voices are finding cracks in which to foreground, interrogate, engage and address wide-ranging topics which lacked a form of expression in the past (Spencer, 2009). The concept of beauty is defined, moderated and perpetuated by the hegemonic culture in society. Matlwa (2007) goes to lengths, not only to convey the painful processes that need to be endured, but she is also careful to position the act of beautification in the black feminine space. Murray (2012) contends that “in hair we see a powerful example of the well-known feminist insistence that the personal is political and that a rigid separation between the public and private spheres is untenable”. In the mirror of the salon, Fifi observes “a comb with the finest of teeth. In the mirror in front of me sat a girl with the coarsest of hair. That the two could work in harmony, I would never be convinced. Such pain” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 3). What is most revealing here is that the idea of harmony is determined by the pain of straightening and taming her natural curls. Murray (2012) notes that Ofilwe's narrative reveals that she considered attaining beauty to be more important than avoiding physical pain. It can be argued that this is a metaphor that is contributing to the idea throughout *Coconut* (2007) which is an entanglement of often contradictory identities, black/white, traditional/Western. To get through this beauty session, Fifi gives herself a pep-talk drawing on fictionalised wisdom, “Pain is beauty, grandmother used to say. Well, not my grandmother, but I am certain somebody’s grandmother used to say that, and if my grandmother cared for such, I am sure she would say it too” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 3).

Tradition is something that does not need to be real, it is a matter of belief. As the story progresses, Ofilwe makes a concerted effort to assimilate into the world of her white classmates, at one point choosing a slumber party at a friend's over a funeral in the township where her family used to live (Matlwa, 2007, p. 9). In using these signals and metaphors, the text interrogates the various ways in which cultural tensions created by the historical legacies of apartheid, conjoined with American global power, produce a cultural hegemony that privileges whiteness over blackness, and results in whiteness becoming a new form of aspirational identity (Spencer, 2009). This prioritisation of the white culture is frequently brought up in the text. From Ofilwe's realisation that she only had white celebrities covering her walls (Matlwa, 2007, p. 92) to Fiks recollection of answering her teacher's inquiry about what she wanted to be as an adult to which she replied, "White, Teacher Zola. I want to be white (Matlwa, 2007, p. 135). For Ofilwe, her indoctrination to the dominant culture takes her by surprise to an extent, for she only realises there are no faces of colour on the walls of her room when Tshepo points it out to her. Ofilwe is somewhat ashamed at her brother's acknowledgement of her "coconutiness".

"In his eyes I saw what was only to hit me many years from then. I think it was on that day that Tshepo saw me for what I really was. I wish I had then too; maybe things would have worked out differently" (Matlwa, 2007, pp. 92-93).

Fiks, on the other hand, actively seeks an association with whiteness and white people. Most of her narration is focused on her negation of her black identity and disparaging her surroundings and the people around her. As she sorts through her belongings, she tells the readers that "the items serve a dual purpose and that is to serve as a constant reminder to me of what I do not want to be: black, dirty and poor. This bucket can be a daily motivator for me to keep me working

towards where I will someday be: white, rich and happy” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 118). She maintains this sentiment in her descriptions of the people she passes and sits near on her way to work:

The men disgust me. All of them are a bunch of criminals. A bunch of uneducated criminals. They look at me like they want to rape me, and I know they would do it if there weren't so many people around. (Matlwa, 2007, p. 129)

Her self-loathing and outright racist convictions seem to show her conscious alignment with the hegemonic ideas of the white society. Fikile curses, “Black people! Why must they always be so damn destructive? And to think, they have never invented a thing in their squalid lives” (Matlwa, 2007, pp. 134-135). Her words suggest that she holds herself apart from blackness, her alienation from her background is such that she is accused by a black man of being one of the “*abomabebeza*” women who reject black traditional ways, who are always wishing to be something that they ain't never gonna be” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 133). The novel shows that this self-alienation has been present from an early age. In a confrontation with her grandmother, Fikile defends her preference for staying indoors with her fashion magazines by stating that “It's hot outside and my skin will get dark” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 131). Her concern with not appearing black is shaped by contempt for blackness, it is also informed by her life experience, which has shown her that power and privilege are associated with whiteness (Murray, 2012).

It is in the way, as Spencer (2009) notes, that “Matlwa explores the extent to which the body becomes the site where culture and identity encounter the individual in the construction of an identity.”. Ofilwe too puts effort and energy into her appearance, but she displays awareness, albeit a fraught one, of her blackness. Fiks, as Spencer (2009), discusses, is amongst those who do not have access to an alternative world-view that affirms and celebrates blackness, and as such she begins to internalise white supremacist thought and values. She is constantly

surrounded by images that enforce whiteness as the dominant standard of being. The influence of Western culture on the protagonists of *Coconut* is felt in more than just notions of beauty but in the all-encompassing ways in which the young women present themselves, including how they speak.

Matlwa's text sifts through the complicated aspects of pluralistic identities in the new South Africa. Presentational facets from colour to accented speech to level of engagement (or lack thereof) in white culture are crucial to the creation of modern African female identities.

In *Coconut*, the various characters experience issues with their identities because of their socio-historic positioning. The novel takes place in post-1994 South Africa, the girls look to the West for their cultural cues and there is a distinct movement away from and much trepidation about the traditional ways. As Ofilwe notes:

At nuptial and burial ceremonies, at thanksgiving days *ge re phasa* Badimo, I stand in reverence, out of everybody's way, silently taking it all in, feeling most inadequate amongst a group of people who all seem to know exactly what roles they play in the age-old Pedi rituals. As the only female grandchild, I fear that day when my turn comes to run these sacred occasions. Organise, arrange, coordinate, sort out, control, fix... (Matlwa, 2007, p. 8)

This anxiety associated with hybridity happens in other social situations as well. Ofilwe's brother, Tshepo, describes his own fears in dealing with his black co-workers:

“I am afraid of them, I know I am different. I reek of KTV, IEB, MTV and ICC, although I have tried to mask it behind All-Stars sneakers and a free Youth League election T-Shirt. I am certain they will catch me out as soon as I open my mouth.” (Matlwa, 2007, p. 26)

What this novel demonstrates through these depictions is that the formulation of physical identity for these two black female protagonists is beset by the influence of a hegemonic culture that intervenes in how they see and construct themselves. It is one of the novel's recurring preoccupations, and it segues fittingly with what is discussed in the following section, namely the effects of education and language on the protagonists' formulation of identity.

The fractured senses of self are touched on in each of the novels, particularly Kopano Matlwa's. Her novel cannot be categorically labelled as optimistic or pessimistic as they seem to embody both. Coconut ends with Fiks trying to get out of a conversation with a man on a train who has just expressed his nuanced view of assimilation by using an example from his daughter's primary school. Her urgency to get out of the situation and not to listen to the points helps, again, to characterise her as unwilling or unable to critically engage with her own identity. Fifi's narrative, which ends in the middle of the novel, ends on the topic of languages and assimilation; she is being told by her brother that she will be shunned by the white people she is trying to be like, and rejected by the people and identity she has left behind, although Fifi seems to take this more in stride. The author seems to be leaning towards this idea that one cannot successfully hold on to the two worlds of tradition and modernity.

4.6.2 Discussion on how identity and belonging are exposed through characters in *The*

Bluest Eye

Many of the characters in Morrison's novels exist in an in-between state, they are not completely free and also enslaved. The characters in her novels form identities for themselves that are compatible with the standard dominant culture. They construct their homes in the image of the master culture, and they dress themselves in clothes that suit that same culture, but rather than facilitate the characters' growth towards spiritual and emotional freedom, the structures in which

they live and the clothes they choose to wear keep them from becoming emotionally healthy people.

In Morrison's novel the characters want to better themselves socio-economically by acquiring goods and property, but Morrison's novel suggests that the American dream of owning a home and being respectable is a fallacy, that there is nothing inherently valuable about owning a home, or objects because the characters become enslaved to the ideology of consumption. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) also suggest that the dominate white culture forces the characters in the novel to buy objects in order to be accepted in their "dominant culture."

The fact that the characters do not understand their own value is aggravated by the fact that they exist in contiguous relation to the larger culture to which they hope to gain entrance. Rather than being proud of who they are and not requiring outside validation, the characters turn their sights outwards and seek validation from individuals in the larger social context. Her characters move from their subjective inner lives towards their objective external lives, some of them focus almost entirely on the objective world.

Because many of Morrison's characters cannot afford to own property, they are rootless drifters living transitional lives. This transitional, rootless nature is, in part, a result of the fact that many of her characters often deny their own intrinsic, cultural nature while buying into literally and conceptually, the larger white culture. They stifle who they are as African-American's in an effort to fit into the larger cultural context by owning homes that look the same and by dressing in the same fashion and by wearing their hair in the same way. Their desire to be accepted into the dominant culture is understandable, it is a universal human impulse, but Morrison's novel argues that an attempt to fit into the larger cultural context at the expense of her characters' own unique cultural voice is the equivalent of cultural suicide.

Some of these characters who are rootless drifters are outside or beyond all cultures. They are in-between two worlds: the world of white culture and the world of black culture. Being in-between two worlds means that her characters do not necessarily have to identify with any particular cultural set, their options are many and varied. Morrison examined this transitional existence so closely and it promotes the spreading of cultural identity which allows for a more inclusive culture and discourse. If one exists outside of the singularities, the specific gospel truth of white society, one is not limited by its definitions. If one exists outside or in transitional relation to the dominant culture one has a greater opportunity to move disregarding the cultural demands and influence of a particular society. Contrary, however, those living within the culture are, therefore, enslaved by it. By searching through this situation, they are in, the individuals are free to create a new identity for themselves in a new culture of their own making.

By these characters attaching themselves to a certain system or beliefs, these characters are held back from realising their true selves because the structures reflect on the values of the dominant culture (white) rather than their own values, the culture they belong to, one that does not need a huge house, long blonde hair, blue eyes, or lighter skin colour to fit in.

They destroy what is intrinsically African-American about their culture in order to fit into the white culture. In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), one of the characters, Geraldine, did not want her son playing with “niggers” she bathed, cleaned and groomed her son with “orange-coloured Lifebuoy soap, dusted themselves with Cashmere talc, cleaned their teeth with salt on a piece of rag, soften their skin with Jergens Lotion. They smell like wood, newspapers, and vanilla” (Morrison, 1970, p. 83). All this was because they want to fit in a white society.

Morrison’s novel highlights the idea of the ridiculousness of this stringent white/blackness by presenting characters and scenes that are representative of this better culture, a part in Morrison’s

novel reveals this ridiculous philosophy through narrators that state something like the following: “coloured people were neat and quiet’ niggers were dirty and loud” (Morrison, 1970, p. 87), obviously a ridiculous and hateful statement coming from one African-American narrator attacking another African-American character, a rhetorical strategy that essentially amounts to a racial hierarchy. This rhetorical self-loathing is, however, understandable to the reader, as none of the African-American characters want to be labelled as uncivilised, or worse yet, inhuman. Hence the line from *The Bluest Eye* that states “the line between coloured and nigger was not always clear. Subtle and tell-tale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant” (Morrison, 1970, p. 87). Threatened from without and from within, there is little wonder that the black community put so much emphasis on the outward appearances of themselves. The narrative of *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison’s first novel, is interwoven with a Dick and Jane early reader for children that depicts a white family living a harmonious suburban life. “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy...Mother is very nice...See Father. He is big and strong...See the dog. Bow wow goes the dog” (Morrison, 1970, p. 3). The excerpts from this Dick and Jane early reader literally begin the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and are interspersed between the novel’s core narrative about several African-American girls. Thus, the reader of the novel is to assume that this Dick and Jane reader is being read by one of the young black girls in the story. This white children’s narrative of idealised suburban life is nothing like the lives of the young black girls in the novel. In fact, as the beginning of the novel’s core narrative indicates, one of the main characters, a young black girl by the name of Pecola, is “having her father’s baby” (Morrison, 1970, p. 5). This story of Pecola Breedlove and her family is nothing like the narrative of the young white children in suburbia.

Ultimately, Pecola meets with a sad ending because she embraces the cultural values of the white society, her first intimate introduction to that culture being the Dick and Jane early reader. Because Jane has blue eyes, Pecola believes that she should have blue eyes, in order to have value and be relevant to the white society that is in charge of her value assignment. It is the African-American people's "contempt of their own blackness" (Morrison, 1970, p. 65) that makes insult possible, self-loathing inevitable.

Coming home is difficult for Pauline Breedlove, mother of Pecola, in the novel. The only time she is happy is when she is at the movies, immersed in the white world, embracing the iconography of the foreign culture. "White men taking such good care of their women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. The pictures gave me a lot of pleasure" (Morrison, 1970, p. 123). The lives of these fictional and wealthy white characters in the movies are juxtaposed against Pauline's own life, which is decidedly less glamorous. Pauline works as a maid for a white family while the characters in the films she watches have maids.

Pauline's narrative is contrasted against the movie characters' narratives in the same way that the young girl Pecola's narrative is contrasted against that of the affluent young children, Dick and Jane. Through both contrasts, Morrison's novel foregrounds the decidedly less than ideal lives of the African-American characters in her novels. The mother, Pauline Breedlove, has a limp caused by an accident with a nail when she was a child. As a result, she was "restricted, as a child, to the cocoon of her family's spinning, she cultivated quiet and private pleasures, she liked most of all to arrange things" (Morrison, 1970, p. 111). In other words, she is restricted to the imagined safety, or relative safety, of her home. In this relative safety, almost imprisoned within the structure of her home, Pauline seeks to organize and arrange certain objects as a defence

against the emotional strain caused by her confining life. Through this action of organising the “portable plurality,” (Morrison, 1970, p. 111) as the narrator calls the objects in Pauline’s home, the character creates order, structure, and therefore identity. In other words, the ordering and structuring of the objects creates categories, nomenclatures of which they inherently belong. These categories, which are suggestive of social subsets, create context for the objects. The created context of these objects creates a place in which they might have identity because they belong to a collective of like kind, an organised subset of objects. Pauline creates for herself a society of objects, which can be her friends, but they can also exist in objective relationship to her subjective self. Identity is an act of belonging, a process of being named either by the self or other. For Pauline, organisation is an act of naming, an act of creating a society of objects for herself. Because Pauline creates a society for her objects, she vicariously creates society for herself. If she controls the organisation of the cans, she also symbolically controls the chaos impinging upon her. As a result, she is comforted by the control she is able to exert over the objects in her environment. The ruling class in control of the dominant cultural discourse is also in control of the process of value coding. Light skin and affluence might then be coded, for instance, with a higher cultural value than dark skin and poverty. Such is the case *The Bluest Eye*, the novel’s narrator, Claudia, intuitively understands this fact. Claudia destroys a white doll she is given as a gift because she refuses to accept the dominant culture’s negative value coding of her own appearance. She regards the doll disdainfully and is “physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orange worms hair” (Morrison, 1970, p. 20). The doll is a product of the dominant, ruling culture, not only frightens Claudia but also literally resists and scratches her (Morrison, 1970). Rather than passively accepting the dominant culture’s assertion “that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll

was what every girl child” wants and wants to be Claudia actively resists by dissecting and dismantling the white girl doll (Morrison, 1970, p.20). She “poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair...breaks off the tiny fingers, bends the flat feet, loosens the hair, twists the head around...takes off the head, shakes out the sawdust, and cracks the back against the brass bed rail” (Morrison, 1970, p. 20).

Claudia destroys the symbol of the white dominant culture’s superiority and resists the dominant culture’s value coding in the process. In Morrison’s novel the characters are often the personification of a certain will or mind-set. Personification serves as an example of the inverse relationship that exists between objects and subjects. Morrison’s novels imbue objects with human characteristics. Because of this consistent phenomenon, or through this consistent phenomenon, a synergistic relationship is created between character and object, object and character. A character might become, through personification, a season. Pecola’s father in *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly Breedlove, is an example of this phenomenon; he is personified as winter. This process of personification that is present in Morrison’s novels is cyclical in nature. The environment, specifically objects in the environment, act on the characters while the characters act on the environment. One is personified as the other. A person is personified as winter; winter is personified as a person, as moving into a person, inhabiting and becoming that person. Importantly, when objects inhabit people by taking on their human characteristics, they lose their thingness, become something else. The objects metamorphose into something else, something eerily human, and become what could be termed object-subjects. These object-subjects, in turn, assume a superior position in the hierarchy of subject and object.

Because Morrison’s characters are always in the process of becoming, they exist in marginal relation to the larger cultural context. Their cultural identities are never fully formed, and they

are not allowed their own subjective lives. The characters always exist in objective relation to the larger intersubjective culture. Put more simply, the marginalised characters are treated as objects by the dominant culture, and the dominant culture refuses to see the marginalised characters as fully human.

To conclude, Morrison's characters are always caught paradoxically between two worlds, perhaps, in part because that is the condition of the African-American experience, to be caught between. Thrust into a new world, forced into a circumstance, and sold into slavery many of the characters in Morrison's novel do not even own their own bodies. The characters exist merely as owned objects.

4.6.3 Conclusion

The study revealed that in order for one to have an identity, that individual must first belong or at least have a sense of belonging somewhere, this was portrayed in all the characters used by both authors. It is, however, interesting to note that though both authors portrayed their characters in a such a way to expose identity and belonging, both also managed to show that one can never separate culture, identity and language, those three elements form a complete individual.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The study made a comparative analysis of identity and belonging in the novels, *Coconut* (2007) by Kopano Matlwa and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison. The focus of this study was to compare how both authors portray their characters over different cultures, and continents. The study used the Du Bois Double Consciousness concept and Post-colonial theory in analysing the depiction of the characters through content analysis. Thus, this chapter summarises all the concepts and themes addressed in the research and that take place. The study adopted the qualitative, desktop comparative analysis of the two novels, which did not require any field work. This chapter substantiates whether the aim and objectives of thesis were achieved and give a summary of each chapter and also gives the limitations encountered while conducting this study as well as give recommendations.

5.2 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to critically analyse the relationship between identity and belonging as presented by Matlwa (2007) and Morrison (1970). In order to do so, the researcher started by giving the background of cultural identity and belonging as presented through literature. The main purpose of this study was to determine how different authors portrayed and developed these themes in the context of different cultural settings as well as different periods in which they occurred. This led to finding out that identity and belonging cannot be separated. One needs the other for the other to exist. This in a way proves that no matter what race one is, or their geographical location, or age, one need an identity in order for one to have a sense of belonging.

The study also showed the relevance of Matlwa's (2007) and Morrison's (1970) novels in the societies that they are written in as they represent the racial prejudice the characters faced. The first chapter established that the struggle for identity and belonging in societies create a transformation paradox if racial prejudice is embraced. The transformation paradox is that in as much as it creates characters that are preferred or considered better in the European culture, it also creates characters that are dislocated and alienated from African societies.

The problem statement argues that identity and belonging go beyond just a geographical location, race, nationality, language and ethnicity. It is not just who you are, it is a process one must be active in, it is more than just understanding yourself, so you become yourself. Furthermore, the research notes that numerous researches that critically analysed the two novels were done but it appears none looked at the relationship between identity and belonging in relation to culture, by comparing novels set in two different continents. This justified the writing of this thesis.

The thesis used Du Bois' Double Consciousness concept and the Post-colonial theory to analyse the two novels. These theories made it easy to analyse the two novels, by focusing on issues such as racial discrimination, sense of self, stereotypes, identity and belonging. Du Bois' Double Consciousness concept is very important to the study as it helps analyse how the characters go through the challenge of "always looking at oneself through the eyes of a racist society and measuring oneself by means of a nation that looked back in contempt" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 11).

To answer the first question of this research, the research analysed, critiqued and interrogated how identity and belonging were presented through the characters in the two novels. These were done in subsequent chapters which showed how the transformation paradox encountered through

racial prejudice affected the society at large. This thesis synthesised the idea of white is better than black throughout, which implies a journey that is undertaken by the protagonists of the two novels as they grow up as members of their societies. This journey yields transformation as the little girls blossom into adults and assuming that they are not perfect unless they are white. This research argued that in order for them to have identities and a sense of belonging in a society, modelling needed to take place, either from the parents or the members of that specific society.

A comparative analysis of the two novels showed that both Matlwa (2007) and Morrison (1970) present a history that has affected societies and acquisition of identities in their respective continents, and how that in turn has affected individuals of certain societies. Both authors showed how such issues such as tirelessly trying to change who you are in order to fit in are being overlooked and are also starting to be accepted in our societies. Matlwa (2007) also showed how English is perceived as a better language than any other local language, and how speaking it automatically makes an individual better than those who speak their mother tongues. This is related to a historical issue that goes back to the Apartheid era where black students insisted that they did not want to be taught in Afrikaans but in English.

In addition, both writers show how difficult it is to embrace who you are in their novels and it is reflected through their characters' experiences in their societies. They present the characters that find it difficult to embrace their appearances. These two themes are prevalent in the two novels as it has been shown in the analysis of each novel as well as the comparative analysis of both novels. In both novels, the three girls, Pecola, Fikile and Ofilwe, are indifferent towards those around them. The protagonists are heavily influenced by what they see and hear in their societies. Race issues are mainly perpetuated outside their homes, at schools, work place and social places. On the other hand, class issues are also influential in their lives as they determine

who they talk to, who they play with, what languages they speak and how they look. All these issues are influential in the novels with none being better than the other since they are experienced at different levels of their roads to finding themselves.

The study was able to critically analyse both Matlwa's (2007) and Morrison's (1970) novels and how identity and belonging is presented in different societies. It is discovered that they represent characters beset with problems in their struggles to acquire identities and belong somewhere. The other question of this research was in what ways do both authors present the changes in their characters' identities in the novels. The answer to this question lies in the fact that the colonial legacy is still in rife in most societies as presented in both novels. Matlwa presents this by showing that the name "Rainbow Nation" is a myth in Democratic South Africa where schools in the outskirts of town are considered the worst compared to town schools, and also "elite suburbs" are the best in comparison to "ghettos." Fikile would rather be associated with people from the elite suburbs (white people) and would rather be called "Fiks" the name the white people call her. She mistreats her own people as she does not identify with them. Whereas Ofilwe prefers to speak English than her own mother tongue. She is one of the few black girls at her private school. Ofilwe is unhappy about her skin colour as it makes her stand out as an undesirable acquaintance in her social sphere. The young girl wishes to be white, it will make her a person of a higher class in her society. Morrison also showed this by pointing at the difference between black and white people. Morrison made use of a doll, "Shirley Temple" and people in the magazines. The doll encouraged every little African- American girl to aspire to be whiter. It was used as icon of beauty and innocence. The African- American characters in this novel are considered ugly and are not worthy of being looked at. Hence, Pecola fixates on the idea that she is ugly and wants to have the bluest of eyes (what the society considers to be beautiful).

Morrison uses other characters like Cholly and Soaphead to present these identity changes. They all prefer whiteness in their societies. Racial prejudice in the suburbs of both South Africa and America produce coconuts because of their insistence on English and white being better than black.

The last question was what the effects of losing identities and the need to belong in a society were as presented in the novels. The research has shown different ideas of identity and belonging, some characters are embraced by the societies while others are shunned by some. Matlwa and Morrison's younger characters choose the paths where there is no hope. The authors also show older characters who choose the same paths but mostly because of past experiences. Therefore, this representation has shown that the failure to accept who you are, where you are from and where you came from, makes it impossible to have a sense of self and belonging, which makes it impossible to have an identity. By doing so, the questions of this research were answered.

The research's findings are that it is crucial that one has an identity and that our societies all over the world play a very important role in shaping our identities. Therefore, the research concludes that it is necessary to teach and embrace our cultures for they give us identities and a sense of belonging. The two novels were analysed side by side as they deal with similar issues of race, class, belonging, identity, and discrimination. At the beginning of each novel, being white seems to be the answer to the characters' prayers. However, at the end of each narrative, their desire to be white leaves them as individuals that do not fit in their societies. Matlwa's (2007) and Morrison's (1970) novels may have been set in different continents, but they produced similar characters that are eschewed by society. Therefore, Kopano Matlwa and Toni Morrison do well in showing that it does not matter what part of the world one come from, but one's culture is

crucial, nothing is more important than one's identity. In order to have an identity, one needs to first belong somewhere or to a certain group of people. Changing one's appearance will not change who one is, and no one will accept that new "look." One must embrace who they are, and they will always belong somewhere and have an identity.

The writers also showed the effects of losing an identity in a society as both an empowering and disempowering tool. One can conclude that although our societies are changing, they refuse to adjust to the new transformations. Matlwa's (2007) and Morrison's (1970) protagonists at the end of their narratives are hemmed up in societies that they cannot fit in. Their characters arrive at a similar paradox of transformed individuals who undergo the struggle to identify with certain groups of people only to find themselves excluded.

The study highlighted common themes in the two texts such as racism, apartheid, race issues, prejudice and many more subthemes. Studying loss of identity and belonging has become very important, especially for one to understand today's trends in countries that experienced racial segregation. By exploring the two novels, the study established that racial segregation and racism are the major causes of loss of identity and belonging in *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970). This was primarily true as shown by the way the characters struggled to redefine their individual identities in these two novels.

5.3 Recommendations

The study confirms that a relationship exists between identity and belonging. Through literary texts such as *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970), one gets to learn that artificial but powerful forces like colonialism may be detrimental to identities as they are capable of attacking both identities and sense of belonging. Thus, this research found it necessary to focus on the relationship between identity and belonging and how they interact. This can only be possible by

reading texts such as *Coconut* (2007) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970), as they provide a succinct background on how instrumental forces such as colonialism are for the destruction of identity and sense of belonging.

From the findings presented in Chapter Four, several points are suggested for future researchers. This chapter discloses that the loss of identity and belonging are mainly caused by racism, apartheid, and cultural and linguistic differences. The study recommends that in order to curb the paradox that is apparent on the confused individuals looking for their identities, especially the younger generation, should embrace their cultures, heritage, their races, class, and what they learn from home. Writers of different continents, perhaps generations too, have shown how Western culture results in characters that do not fit in a society when they embrace the Western culture over their culture.

In view of the findings from the study, the researcher recommends:

- Comparative studies on how African and European authors portray identity and belonging in poetry or drama.
- A study with a bigger sample on why the light skinned individuals or whites thought they are better off and had supreme power over the black people.
- Future research can be conducted further to pursue this phenomenon of the relationship between identity and belonging.

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