Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY, CLASS AND COLORISM IN THE WORKS OF JESSIE R. FAUSET

Büşra FİDELİ

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2023

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The jury finds that Büşra FİDELİ has on the date of 24/04/23 successfully passed the defense examination and approves her master's thesis titled "African American Female Subjectivity, Class and Colorism in the Works of Jessie R. Fauset".

Prof. Dr. Ufuk Özdağ (Jury President)

Asst. Prof. Dr. Özge Özbek Akıman (Main Adviser)

Asst. Prof. Dr. Ayça Germen

Asst. Prof. Dr. Merve Özman

Asst. Prof. Dr. Seda Şen

I agree that the signatures above belong to the faculty members listed.

Prof. Dr. Uğur ÖMÜRGÖNÜLŞEN
Graduate School Director

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Büşra FİDELİ

To my little mouse, Defne...

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ABSTRACT

Fideli, Büşra. *African American Female Subjectivity, Class and Colorism in the Works of Jessie R. Fauset*. Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2023.

Centered around the notions of double consciousness, passing, colorism and social class, this thesis examines Jessie R. Fauset's *There Is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life* (1931) and *Comedy: American Style* (1933), as works shedding light on distinctive African American women figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Theorized by W.E.B. Du Bois, double consciousness is considered as an experience of "twoness," which refers to the internal conflict of African Americans between the identities of "African" and "American." As an oppressed people, African Americans are conditioned to see themselves from the eyes of the white society. In the case of African American women, the damaged sense of self becomes even more problematic because of racial and sexual discrimination. Some of the experiences peculiar to the mixed-heritage middle class women were passing, colorism and social inequality. Harlem Renaissance provided women artists with a chance to express themselves and explore their subjectivity. Fauset has long been dismissed as being imitative of white, upper-middle class values in her works. Going against this negative reception of her fiction, this thesis studies the nuanced subjectivities of her female characters, focusing on their self-realization as fully-developed individuals, artists and activists, who are able to transcend the colorism and the upper-class emulation of the period. Much as the process is agonizing, the experiences of double consciousness and passing prove themselves as supporting elements in the formation of one's self in the end. Therefore, the use of these concepts enriches the creation of Black female subjectivity in the Harlem Renaissance. Their experiences lend color to the constitution or denial of the intersectionality of race, social status and gender convictions.

Key Words

Double Consciousness, Passing, Colorism, Social Class, Black Female Subjectivity, Jessie Redmon Fauset

ÖZET

Fideli, Büşra. *Jessie R. Fauset'in Eserlerinde Afrikalı Amerikalı Kadın Öznelliği, Toplumsal Sınıf ve Irk Sorunu*. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2023.

Bu tez, Jessie R. Fauset'in *There Is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life* (1931) and *Comedy: American Style* (1933) adlı eserlerinde yansıtılan Afrikalı Amerikalı kadın deneyimini Harlem Rönesans döneminin çift bilinçlilik, beyaz kimliğe geçiş, renkçilik ve toplumsal sınıf kavramları çerçevesinde incemektedir. W.E.B. Du Bois tarafından kuramlaştırılmış olan çift bilinçlilik, Afrikalı Amerikalıların "Afrikalı" ve "Amerikalı" kimliklerinin arasında yaşadığı iç çatışmayı ifade eden "ikilik" deneyimi olarak nitelendirilir. Afrikalı Amerikalılar baskılanarak beyaz toplum tarafından "insandışılaştırma" gibi muamelelere maruz kalmış ve kendilerini baskıcı beyaz toplumun gözünden görmeye mecbur bırakılmışlardır. Beyaz toplum tarafından ırkçı ayrımcılığa ve siyahi erkekler tarafından da cinsiyet ayrımcılığına uğrayan siyahi kadınlar, zarar görmüş benlik algısını daha yoğun deneyimlemişlerdir. Harlem Rönesans dönemi, siyahi kadın aydınlar için kendilerini ifade etmekte ve öznelliklerini keşfetmekte bir dönüm noktası olmuştur. Bu sanatçılardan biri olan Fauset, her ne kadar beyaz dünyaya özenme ve üst sınıf savunuculuğu yapmakla eleştirilse de, eserlerinde kendini gerçekleştirme mücadelesinde olan ve sonunda renkçilik ve sınıfçılık gibi engelleri aşan kadın bireyleri, sanatçıları ve aktivistleri resmeder. Kendini gerçekleştirme süreci beraberinde siyahi kadın öznelliğinin oluşumunu getirir. Bu tez, bu sürecin ve temaların Jessie R. Fauset'in eserlerinde nasıl ele alındığını incelemektedir. Fauset'in eserleri aynı zamanda Afrikalı Amerikalı edebi geleneğinin ve ortak kimliğinin anlaşılmasında oldukça önemlidir. Çift bilinçlilik ve beyaz kimliğe geçiş gibi deneyimler siyahilerin kendi kimliklerini yeniden inşa etme süreçlerinde engelleyici faktörler olarak görünse de, aslında destekleyici olmuşlardır. Bu bağlamda, Afrikalı Amerikalı kadınların bakış açısıyla ortaya konan Harlem Rönesansı eserlerindeki deneyimler çift bilinçlilik kavramının anlaşılmasına ışık tutar ve kadın öznelliğinin kazanılmasını yansıtır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Çift Bilinçlilik, Beyaz Kimliğe Geçiş, Renkçilik, Toplumsal Sınıf, Siyahi Kadın Öznelliği, Jessie Redmon Fauset

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INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is home to many culturally different groups. One of them is the African American society with its long history and struggle for freedom and developing a new identity. Among them, African American women constitute another minority group that tackles with both external and internal oppression. The period known as the Harlem Renaissance, during the 1920s, became a historical milestone for African Americans in general, and African American women in particular, in that the period provided the climate for recognizing themselves as independent individual human beings with creative potentials and redefining their identity as the "New Negro" themselves. Black women found the opportunity to gain their own subjectivity which is entangled with critical concepts and experiences such as "double consciousness" and "passing." Although she was credited as being one of the "midwives" of the Harlem Renaissance by Langston Hughes, and described as "the potential Jane Austen of Negro literature" by William Stanley Braithwaite, Jessie Redmon Fauset has long been dismissed as being imitative of white, upper-middle class values in her works. Going against this negative reception of her fiction, this thesis will study the nuanced subjectivities of her female characters, focusing on their self-realization as fully-developed individuals, artists and activists, who are able to transcend the colorism and the upper-class emulation of the period.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois introduces the term double consciousness to theorize the psychological effects of the physical and mental colonization of African American people. With the term, he means an internal conflict experienced by an African American individual between the "African" and the "American" aspects of their collective identity (*The Souls* 8). The relatable subject to the concept of double consciousness is "passing as white." Passing is acting to be white performed by light-complexioned people with Black heritage. It has been a common idea both in real life and in American literature in the 19th and 20th centuries. The act of passing by Black women is mostly motivated by an attempt to get rid of the oppression of male-dominated white society in which they are excluded from privileges belonging to whites. However, their estrangement from the Black society

and witnessing the treatment of the white society toward Blacks turns out to be a much more problematic experience.

Jessie Fauset explores the psychological impact of colorism, classism and racism in her novels to convey the authentic experiences of African American women and underscore the necessity of integrity among Black community to create a collective identity. In the seventeenth century, the slave owners upheld the one-drop rule, which meant that one drop of Black blood makes the individual Black, which was used to claim the progeny of African American female slaves and white slave owners as Black and consequently categorized as slaves. Sexual involvement, almost always coercive, of white slaveholders in Black female slaves resulted in miscegenation, and produced a social stratification in which certain economic privileges were provided to the lighter-complexioned African Americans. In this context, the issue of colorism divides the lighter and darker-complexioned African Americans and bestows a privilege on people with lighter skin since they resemble white Americans' features. With the intent of sustaining their privileged status in the community as upper-middle-class and more favored, the light-skinned Blacks framed their own asunder social fields. Besides the fact that the white society discriminated against Blacks, African Americans also segregated dark-complexioned members in their own society. In this sense, the color and class discrimination in American society generated a gap among Blacks. These concepts are meticulously interwoven and challenged in Fauset's novels to assert the necessity of unity and togetherness of African American community for independence and a collective identity.

The aim of this thesis is to clarify the dynamic between the issues of passing, colorism and classism associated with double consciousness and Black female subjectivity as portrayed in Fauset's novels to demonstrate how they are interdependent and contribute to the racist structure. In accordance with this purpose, the critical questions are "how is double consciousness more observable in women compared to men?" and "how are Black women's experiences altered with the creation of Black female subjectivity during the

Harlem Renaissance period?" Black women's experiences with numerous oppression such as "whiteness, maleness, bourgeois culture, heterosexuality, Anglo-centeredness and so on" (Davies 20), differed from men because of their socially disadvantaged position as women in the society. In other words, African American women's experiences differ from men as they struggle with multi-layered oppressions as women because of their experiences of racism, colorism and classism within Black community. The issues of colorism, classism and passing are closely linked to the experiences of African American women writers. The handling of these notions paves the way for the space of autonomy. In this context, these notions allow writers to uncover the "creation or imposition" of identities (Ginsberg 2). Therefore, the authentic experiences of African American women with colorism, classism and passing are interrelated with the formation of Black female subjectivity. Also, literary works which will be analyzed make significant contributions to comprehending African American literary tradition and its relation to creating a collective identity in a period in which people make a choice of passing for upward mobility.

This thesis analyzes the works of Jessie R. Fauset and declares that African Americans and their reflections in the female characters grappling with the notions mentioned above both contribute to and put a new complexion on the creation of Black female subjectivity during the Harlem Renaissance Period. By putting forward the difficulties of women in her works, Fauset creates an awareness for the emancipation of African Americans from the traumatic and tragic events faced in real life. Through her mentality and sentiment, she aids her audience to comprehend the construction of a purposeful life at the heart of disorder and restrictions by constructing self-assured Black women in the pursuit of their education and independence rather than as domestic servants. Fauset's treatment of the notions above in African American community throws light on the experiences of African American women as artists and businesswomen and how their quests influence the formation of a different and collective Black female subjectivity and consciousness in the Harlem Renaissance. This introduction intends to provide a conceptual frame for passing and double consciousness to discuss Fauset's four novels: *There Is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) and *Comedy:*

American Style (1933) in detail, and refer to her life experience where relevant. It also aims to present the background information of the Harlem Renaissance as it concerns Fauset's involvement.

The historical and cultural backgrounds to the Harlem Renaissance and the "New Negro" literature must be mentioned to comprehend the self-formation process of African Americans out of segregationist conditions in the period. The Harlem Renaissance Period, in which African Americans' literature and art expanded and developed, was mostly known as the Roaring Twenties or the Jazz Age in North America in the 1920s. In *The New Negro,* Locke describes the period as "an unusual outburst of creative expression" (xxvii). The marks of the representation of their cultural values, which was about to anticipate a cultural revolution, were eminent among African Americans in New York City as well as around the world. Clinging to the hope of achieving security and economic stability, African Americans mostly settled in Harlem which was located in the northern part of NYC. With the migrations from the South and the Caribbean, Black people outnumbered white people in Harlem. The increasing number of Blacks in Harlem, resulting in a change in the neighborhood's economic and cultural makeup, led white people to leave the place. In time, the scene in Harlem changed considerably. Rampersad states that "The migration away from the hated South, with its bitter legacy of slavery and segregation, to the greatest city in the nation, and the settlement of Blacks in an excellently located district that boasted the finest housing stock that Blacks had ever been allowed to inhabit, seemed to augur a new day for African Americans" (xiv). In "The Migration of Negroes," W. E. B. Du Bois states that "At any rate, we face here a social change among American Negroes of great moment, and one which needs to be watched with intelligent interest" (66). In an attempt to leave racial issues behind, they moved from the South to the North seeking for new jobs so as to earn their living. Kellogg mentions in "The Negro Pioneers," "By way of the typical American experience, they become for the first time a part of its living tradition" (273). Since they "have come through periods of great and vital social change; emancipation from slavery, migration from South to North, from country to city; changes in income and intelligence" (Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* 373), it was their moment to experience "the American Dream."

African Americans' settlement in Harlem meant more than searching networks or making ground. It was for "finding a new soul" (Locke, *The New Negro* xxvii). Their generation endeavored to fix and recover the wreckage inflicted from slavery throughout history. Locke also describes their previous internal scope as "an attempt to repair a damaged group psychology and reshape a warped social perspective" (*The New Negro* 10). The reconstructed self-esteem and independence, however, gave way to a new phase in which they were able to compensate for the damages from outside. In this phase, they believed that their ideas would establish a reputation and Harlem turned into a place which allowed Black people the freedom to see themselves for who they are and reinvent themselves in creative ways. Throughout history, they were believed to be a part of disparity and ethical discussion and they were not treated as human beings. They were always "something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be 'kept down,' or 'in his place,' or 'helped up,' to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden" (Locke, *The New Negro* 3). In this regard, their large-scale and long-running migration meant so much more. Kellogg remarks that

> Not alone is his a Northward migration within the confines of America, challenging new communities with his presence. Not alone is it a shift from soil to city. Not alone a breaking away from the old inhibitions of a fixed and often adverse social environment. He is readdressing himself to America on a cultural plane; and in arenas where the old inhibitions do not hold. (275)

Their quest for the development of a new identity enabled them to be more than "something to be argued about" (Locke, *The New Negro* 3) in this period.

African Americans created their own identity as independent individuals in Harlem Renaissance in an urban setting, inspired by modernity, barrowing and adopting modernist aesthetics. Du Bois mentions that "But when to earth and brute is added an environment of men and ideas, then the attitude of the imprisoned group may take three main forms, a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group; or, finally, a determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite environing opinion" (*The Souls* 36). The Harlem Renaissance paved

the way for the formation of the third attitude, as Du Bois identifies, of gaining their own identity. As far as the artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance were concerned, "the New Negro" represented this third attitude. In this context, the Harlem Renaissance became the mass movement of the "Negro."

Considering the qualification of the period as "Jazz Age," music was one of the most significant components in the Harlem Renaissance. African American music, including the spirituals, jazz, and the blues, marked the period which encompassed African-derived features along with the rhythms of the dance. Black music also became an inspiration for the other art forms of the period and this consciousness was clear in the works of Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, as well as in the writing style of Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* as it is a constellation of repetitions, evoking the readers that remembering has an utmost importance for African Americans, Alain Locke's expressions in *The New Negro,* and his essay called "The Negro and his Music." The artists favored distinctive styles of the music. For instance, Langston Hughes praised the blues and Jean Toomer was interested in the spirituals and jazz. James Weldon Johnson exposed a "pioneering interest" in the Black sermon in verse in *God's Trombones* (1927) and in folk music in his *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1921) which also influenced his poems (Fabre and Feith 18). Although the music of Harlem came forward as the recitals in concert halls, operas and big orchestras, the music of the folk, especially the blues and jazz, as Fabre and Feith put it, reflected for the predominantly white audiences, the "primitive expression of an uncivilized people" (18). In this sense, folk music was their way of dealing with stereotypes, and it was considered as the representation of independence from oppression that many yearned for fulfilling. Therefore, music became the symbol of their identity and belonging.

The artistic and intellectual achievements of the African Americans were recognized by a larger biracial audience in this period. The scene in Harlem is explained as follows:

> With a network of white supporters, Black publications, and intellectual promotion through the presence of the headquarters for some of the largest Black political organizations in the nation, Harlem became the ultimate place of opportunity for

> creativity and the possibility of recognition, as well as extended opportunities to create. (Bracks and Smith xxi)

In 1920, Mamie Smith recorded "You Can't Keep a Good Man Down" which made her the first Black woman to record a song. African American music and dance styles gained a new image through the Broadway musical called *Shuffle Along* which included Black players at large in 1921. *The World Tomorrow,* an opponent magazine, put forth an excerpt called "Negro" in 1923 which included works by important names of the period such as Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes. The works they created were significant because they involved the "Negro" mannerism and bore the traces of their agony, desire and mirth. Du Bois states their mannerism as, "...the spirit that knows Beauty, that has music in its soul and the color of sunsets in its headkerchiefs; that can dance on a flaming world and make the world dance, too. Such is the soul of the Negro" (*Dusk of Dawn* 316).

The "New Negro" not only created their identity in the new literary field, but also altered the way they are represented by white people. In this way, white people also contributed to the formation of the "Negro" art. They were portraying the "Negro" "grotesque" through their own point of view; they now altered their image as the main characters in the works. Mary White Ovington tackled the taboo of miscegenation in her novel *The Shadow.* T. S. Stribling too, depicted Black characters struggling with double consciousness in his novel *Birthright.* The examples demonstrate that the "Negro" literature also influenced the way Blacks were depicted in the works of white writers. Such developments both pointed the way for the self-recognition of Black people and forced a change in the way white society saw Blacks. As Locke puts it, "where formerly they spoke to others and tried to interpret, they now speak to their own and try to express. They have stopped posing, being nearer the attainment of poise" (*The New Negro* 48). African American intellectuals were pursuing the formation of a new identity, but they were also encircled by a wider range of American experience. Both white and Black assisted each other to define themselves. The generation of Harlem as a ground for a peculiar culture was as much a contribution to white community as it was to African Americans.

As a Harvard graduate himself, Du Bois titled the most successful and upper circle African Americans as the "Talented Tenth" and believed that they would assist create racial enhancement with their skills and accomplishments. In this period, Du Bois concentrated on what African Americans should combat and what they could grow into. The "Talented Tenth," according to him, had the potential to place African Americans in their proper position. In *The Souls of Black People,* he introduced his idea of the concept: "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth" (189). He also suggested that "The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. No others can do this work and Negro colleges must train men for it" (205). He insisted that the authors, poets, and other creatives of the period in the Talented Tenth should center on the idea of racial enhancement and abstain from personal gains. People who supported the perception of art as propaganda and as means of advancing race, were inclined to be the representatives of The Talented Tenth. On the other hand, writers and artists like Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes and Richard Bruce Nugent challenged the elitism of the Talented Tenth as they encouraged the idea of depicting a broader range of African American people, experiences, and societies, especially just as they really were. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Langston Hughes explained his intention:

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too ... If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (4)

They put forward Harlem slang, rural speech, and rhythms borrowed from blues and jazz music and did not refrain from presenting prostitutes, queers, parties, and poverty as their real experiences in their works. Hughes also criticized the manners of elites: "Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand ... [and let] the smug Negro middle class ... turn from their white, respectable, ordinary books and papers to catch a glimmer of their own beauty" (4). The advocators of the

Talented Tenth, as similar to the white perception of Blacks, regarded their style as redundantly savage. They discussed that it would be unnecessary to present African Americans as white people already stereotyped them, that is poor, basic, immoral and criminals.

Despite the abolition of slavery with the Civil War and the Reconstruction that followed, African Americans never enjoyed the full practice of citizenship in that era. As they earned the right to vote, counter preventions came in the name of law by white people. They were prevented from any possible public involvement and forced to take literacy tests that were necessary to keep them under control. There were "two separate worlds" in every fraction of the society such as "church and school, railway and street-car, hotels and theatres, streets and city sections, books and newspapers, asylums and jails and hospitals and graveyards" (Du Bois, *The Souls* 68). Black people's skin color and their Afro hairdo were the reasons they were not able to attain basic rights and privileges of modern civilization. They were not able to get simple services such as "water, sewerage, garbage-removal, street-cleaning, lighting, noise and traffic regulation, schools and hospitalization" (Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* 371-372). A number of protests against lynching pushed for a federal antilynching bill but it was not anywhere near providing congressional endorsement. These obstacles aggravated Black people of attaining the formation of an identity belonging to themselves. This social corruption became stronger through "discrimination; inability to get work, discrimination in pay, improbability of promotion, and more fundamentally, spiritual segregation from contact with manners, customs, incentives to effort despite handicaps" (Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* 370). As it was expected, what abolition of slavery meant for them was the opposite of slavery, that is, independence, liberty and exercise of civil rights. As the period after the abolition failed to satisfy African Americans' expectations, they had to deal with everyday racism. For reasons mentioned above, "he [was] still a slave to the ignorance, the prejudice, the cruelty which were the fate of his forefathers" (Barnes 21). Hope-inspiring developments did not alter the fact that African Americans still suffered from issues like poverty, poor housing and other public services along with repressions in Harlem.

Even though there was a non-negligible amount of suffering in the period, not all African American intellectuals opted to exclaim the matters concerning housing, crime, violence, and hardship. With exceptions like Langston Hughes, most of African American artists desired for high culture in contrast to "ordinary" man. *Opportunity,* "the magazine of the Urban League and social work among Negroes," included issues regarding racial advancement rather than urban problems (Huggins 4). Many intellectuals undervalued jazz music which represented the concerns of the folk. It was the manner of cultural elitism, encouraged by the Talented Tenth, which underscored African American accomplishment rather than their problems. According to them, a favorable self-image would be the suitable beginning for a much better opportunity. Nathan I. Huggins explains the mindset as such: "Inequities due to race might best be removed when reasonable men saw that Black men were thinkers, strivers, doers, and were cultured, like themselves" (5). African American elites, through their reformist attitudes, considered themselves as the people who were capable of making this impression. In other words, they were able to find a middle ground of mutual beauty and aesthetic passion. People like Hughes, on the other hand, decided to put forth the problems of Blacks like their predicaments as artists and increasing racism. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," he uses "the mountain" as a metaphor for the obstacles artists faced on their way to self-expression. In a challenging way, he also suggested a movement upward and a firmness in progress. Just like the much-debated connection between Hughes' "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" and George Schuyler's "The Negro-Art Hokum," which promoted the impossibility of creating a "peculiar" art of Negro since whites and Blacks were living in the "same world," African American intellectuals endeavored to engrave Black culture and artistic expression concerning a shared framework of America and modernism, yet they varied in its demonstration to the world. In *Temples for Tomorrow,* Fabre and Feith define Alain Locke's *The New Negro,* as "an anthology reflects these various trends ... [and] an apt snapshot of the Harlem Renaissance: it renders its vitality, its character of collaborative work between Black and white, older and younger generations, cultural nationalists and integrationists, as well as different artistic fields" (70). It would be wrong to deny that the intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance

met on a common ground for the idea of racial advancement, but while doing that, their stlyes differed from each other.

As much as this period became prominent through its focus on literature and art, the Harlem Renaissance provided the space for Black women's transformation. During the Jim Crow era in the American South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, African American women confronted various struggles and inequalities as they experienced racial discrimination and systemic racism in the community. They encountered intersecting patterns of segregation depending on their race and gender. They were exposed to repressive laws and social norms which limited their rights and freedom. They sustained restricted access to education, employment and political involvement, frequently being confined to low-wage labor and domestic work. They confronted perpetual racial violence, involving the risk of lynching, and experienced constant concern for their protection. Although Black women faced these stimulations, they displayed resilience and power. They took active roles in the civil rights movement, coordinating grassroots movements, advocating for change, and moulding the struggle for racial and gender justice. Their efforts influenced the growing struggle for social justice and equality.

African American women, from past to present, developed their identity through their own endeavors in a suffering process of "objectification" and "dehumanization." In a discreditable history of slavery, Black females, like Black men, were considered as "commodities" or "quantities." In her thoughtful analysis of Black female subjectivity as it was shaped since slavery, Hortense J. Spillers distinguishes between captive and liberated subject positions, African American woman was not a "body," rather a "flesh" to be sold, or not a person but a "property" (67). The enslavers traumatized Black women sexually as they exposed them to a complete objectification which made them targets of rape and torture. Although African American women gave birth to other captive people, their childbearing was not associated with maternity since they were also dispossessed of parental rights and thus were not able to demand their offspring. In this sense, Black women paid a burdensome cost to gain their subjectivity once considered their history of

slavery. From the abolition of slavery, more than fifty years back from the Harlem Renaissance, African American women maintained their cultural ingenuity which upheld their existences against physical and mental colonization. In the Harlem Renaissance, African Americans recognized that segregationist and sexist stereotypes settled in the nation's consciousness and sexism continued as they suffered from the unjust treatment because of their race and gender, yet their striving led to the creation of a space for their own subjectivity. They endeavored to be intellectuals, economically self-sufficient and politically active agents. As Black women's participation increased in the labor force with their changing consciousness, the functions of family and women altered accordingly. While they pursued the possession of their bodies and possibilities to improve their wisdom, the community regarded it as an assault on the traditional perception of family and women. In the process of time, African American women advocated their involvement concerning suffrage movement, equal pay and employment, and took active roles as leaders in religious and community organizations. They were key players in discovering ways to enhance the race and reconstruct their identity. Within the context, African American women came into prominence in a struggle of self-identification history through inclusions as intellectuals, businesswoman, educators, activists, leaders and contributors in all spheres of American community.

The Harlem Renaissance provided an opening for Black women to demonstrate their uncompromising will to shape their lives. With the Harlem Renaissance, they gained a voice in every aspect of their lives as real-life agents and expressed their wishes much more freely than ever by means of the transformation they experienced in this period. The concept of the "New Negro" identified itself as male-dominated and thus demonstrated how Black women became invisible. Locke explains the matter by saying that "Negro women are of a race which is free neither economically, socially nor spiritually" (*The New Negro* 379). They faced oppression not only from the outside but also from the inside. Displaying the viewpoint of the society toward women, Locke transmits that they were believed to have "lower sex standards" (*The New Negro* 379) both because of their race and gender which caused them to internalize a "self-doubt and a sense of personal inferiority" (McDougald 370). Socio-economic conditions, which was also caused by

double standards between the races, caused the inequalities among genders. In this period, Black women started to multitask both at home and outside working at multiple jobs that were formerly associated only with males owing to World War I. They raised their voice against racial segregation in the streets which had an effect upon the society and beyond African American community. They forced the world to reconsider their position in the society as uneducated and obedient women and faced them as resolute individuals who seek for equality for African Americans in the United States and African American women among their own community.

Black women established organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women and Women's Political Association of Harlem, New York for the purpose of raising their voice in the process of freedom and their struggle became the subject of the significant periodicals of the time. The National Association of Colored Women was devoted to "upgrading the Negro woman's image, offering recreational activities for women and providing social services for the Black community" (Wall 50). The association, mentioned in Fauset's words, was "a great and far-reaching organization with immense possibilities" (Wall 51). Women's Political Association organized conferences concerning birth control in 1918. Black women's marriage age increased and many of them started to have less child. Such organizations provided a positive influence on Black women's efforts to raise their voice. Their struggle was mentioned in the period's prominent Black periodicals such as *Crisis, Opportunity* and *Messenger* (Wall xxi). In the course of time, they pursued to actively participate in fundamental issues to confront and change them such as woman suffrage and sharing and sharing alike in employment conditions and policy. Wall expressed the activism in *Black Women of the Harlem Renaissance Era: "*Their resistance to staying in their socially assigned place encouraged an activism that promised to lift others as they climbed" (xix). Alain Locke also stated that "the wind of the race's destiny stirs more briskly because of her striving" (*The New Negro* 382).

The Harlem Renaissance provided the space for the recognition of women authors such as Jessie R. Fauset, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston. By producing works reflecting the images of their own, Black women contributed to the creation of a collective African American identity and Black female subjectivity. Black female literature manifests that there are a number of literary and social examples revealing how Black people, especially women, managed to empower themselves out of repressing social conditions and to alter consciousness. As African American women experienced the change and empowerment socially, they also took place "in the private, personal space of an individual woman's consciousness" (Collins 118). In this respect, women who were expected to yield to the oppression actually were able to "develop the 'inside' of a changed consciousness as a sphere of freedom" (Collins 118). They contributed to the concept of "the new Negro" and confronted the racist beliefs of the period despite the tightened Jim Crow Laws.

Although she remained underestimated, Fauset was one of the most significant intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. She was born in New Jersey in 1882. As a Black woman herself, she faced discrimination in her life. However, she made a difference since her teenage years being the only African American high school graduate of her class which she recalls as: "I happened to be the only colored girl in my classes at high school and I'll never forget the agony I endured on entrance day when the white girls with whom I had played and studied through the graded schools, refused to acknowledge my greeting" (qtd. in Wall 40). Also, she became the first Black female student in Cornell University where she received a scholarship. She studied Latin, German and English for four years and Greek and French for two years along with such classes as bibliography, psychology, logic, ethics, archaeology and political science. She also had to cope with racism in Cornell since she was not welcomed in the dormitories and she continued staying with one of her professor's family. Though not proven through official documents that she was the first Black woman to accomplish this, she became the member of Phi Beta Kappa which is one of the most prestigious academic honors societies in the United States well-known with its pickiness (Howes 196). She earned a master's degree in Romance Linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania. Fauset's educational and social background was quite consequent to Du Bois' idea of the Talented Tenth.

However, she did not define herself as part of this formation. Considering her works and characters from working-class, Fauset believed that the Talented Tenth had its roots from the rest of African American society rather than the top ten percent of it. She proved that the "folk" was able to give a lesson to African American bourgeoisie and the Talented Tenth. Her sophisticated background, in this sense, proves that both her qualified education and passionate determination enabled her to be one of the highly intellectual Black women of her time.

She was an independent woman from her early ages in the sense that she earned her living by working until she got married at the age of forty-seven to Hubert Harris who was an insurance broker. She contributed to prominent magazines of the Harlem Renaissance Period, providing issues for African American literary world. In 1912, she started to write for *The Crisis,* the official magazine of the NAACP, in which she assisted an important name, W.E.B. Du Bois who convinced Fauset to move to New York City to be the editor of the magazine. Leading up to that point, Du Bois was struggling for a publication for African Americans and he started a magazine called *The Memphis*. They published a weekly paper called *The Moon* which later became the monthly*, The Horizon.* These publications paved the way for *The Crisis* first issued in 1910 and became self-supporting in five years. Its circulation reached to four million and a half copies, and has distributed in the United States, along with Europe, Africa and the South Seas. *The Crisis,* known with its subtitle called "A Record of the Darker Races," had a significant place in the "New Negro" literary and political life. The magazine pursued to point out matters related to race and the potential harm done toward African American people through prejudice. It also aspired to "free African people from the shackles of colonialism" (Wall 49). Du Bois explained the frame of mind in the premier issue of *The Crisis* as: "its editorial page will stand for the rights of men, irrespective of color or race, for the highest ideals of American democracy, and for reasonable but earnest and persistent attempts to gain these rights and realize these ideals" (*History of the Crisis).* Fauset's contributions to *The Crisis* with numerous essays, poems and reviews led to her becoming the literary editor from 1919 to 1926. To demonstrate Fauset's influence on the magazine, Wall compares the impact of *The Crisis* and *Opportunity,* another prominent periodical of the period in terms

of giving voice to Black culture*:* "*Opportunity* would surpass *The Crisis* in literary influence only after Fauset resigned" ("Traveling" 36).

She continued working as an editor in the magazine called *The Brownies' Book: A Monthly Magazine for the Children of the Sun* which promoted Black legacy to children between the years 1920 and 1921. The magazine was established for the sake of all the children, yet, its editors stated that it was especially for "our children." In the first issue Fauset dedicated the magazine

"To Children, who with eager look
Scanned vainly library shelf and nook,
For History or Song or Story
That told of Colored Peoples' glory,
We dedicate THE BROWNIES BOOK" ("Dedication" 32).

Just like she gave wings to young writers, especially women, in *The Crisis,* she encouraged them to take part in *The Brownies' Book* as poets, illustrators and writers. In this sense, she exerted an influence on other women writers and played a part in integrating them into the literary canon of the period.

As a woman of the Harlem Renaissance, she became model for other people through her success and works. Her impact was significant in the sense that she introduced prolific writers of the Harlem Renaissance period into literary world such as Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay and Anne Spencer and provided them with a chance to make contributions to the formation of "New Negro" Literature. She became the first publisher of Langston Hughes. The Talented Tenth considered Hughes' works as vulgar and savage, forming a wrong impression on white people. However, Fauset believed in Hughes and his gift more than most of other poets in Harlem. When she first read Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and accepted it for publication, she turned towards Du Bois and stated: "What colored person is there, do you suppose, in the United States who writes like that and yet is unknown to us?" (qtd. in Wall 63). Also, Nella Larsen published her first article "Scandinavian Games" upon Fauset's

encouragement. Poet and playwright Georgia Douglas Johnson, too, mentions Fauset as quite a mentor putting together the necessary materials for her work called *Caroling Dusk.* In this sense, Fauset served the formation of "New Negro" Literature with her wisdom by identifying talented writers.

As she helped establish the intellectual and artistic climate by guiding others, she continued to improve herself. She was quite active in the literary and cultural life of the city. She performed as a dancer in *Shuffle Along,* worked voluntarily at the Street Library where she also organized readings and lectures and turned her house into a meeting place for the writers and intellectuals coming to New York. Furthermore, she frequently traveled to Europe and North Africa which informed her perspective on life and enabled her to reflect the overtones in her literary works. In one of her visits to Africa, she mentions her experience as "All the strangeness and difference of that life, which starting far, far in the interior of Africa yet breaks off so abruptly at the southern edge of the Mediterranean, rose instantly to meet us" (qtd. in Wall 33). Such an experience of being a widely-traveled woman, especially to African countries, also made her a particular woman of her time because visiting Africa was most African Americans' wish. Wall states in "Jessie Redmon Fauset—Traveling in Place" that "in an age when the idea of Africa enthralled the imaginations of many Black American intellectuals, Jessie Fauset was one of a handful (along with W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay) who actually saw the continent face to face" (33-34). She was a talented and ambitious woman who questioned the cultural dictates of her time. To exemplify, in an attempt to be closely acquainted with "her people," she asked for a chance to work in the South and achieved her purpose by working as an English teacher at Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee, with which Du Bois has also affiliated. Appreciating Du Bois for lending his assistance at being taken to the job, she stated enthusiastically: "I liked the work—frankly I suppose no work will ever have about it again for me the glamor which this summer's work wore. It was my first attempt at being useful, you see—that is a wonderful feeling is it not?" (Wall, 41). As her works reveal, she invested herself to be influential in the formation of the "New Negro" Literature.

Though a well-educated and intelligent person, Fauset still suffered from the approaches of her contemporaries who underestimated her works. As a matter of fact, the dinner which was assumed to be the start of the Harlem Renaissance in 1924 was fundamentally organized in Fauset's honor and her recently published novel, *There Is Confusion*. Biographer Arnold Rampersad explains the details of that night:

> … the most aggrieved contributor was Jessie Fauset. The pivotal Civic Club dinner in 1924 had been arranged to mark the publication of her first novel, *There Is Confusion*. However, she had seen her achievement glossed over, and Locke hailed as the dean of the movement although she had done far more, as literary editor of *The Crisis*, than he to discover and nurture the younger writers. And the commission to edit the special number had gone to him. (xxii)

Significant writers, publishers, editors and playwrights of the period such as Countee Cullen, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Allen, Paul Kellogg and Eugene O'Neill attended the dinner. All the names were presented to the audience and the speakers did not mention Fauset's name in whose honor the event was organized. They appreciated names and promoted books except Fauset's first novel. Charles Johnsons' comment on Fauset at the end of the night was considered as ironic: "Miss Jessie Fauset was given a place of distinction on the program" (qtd. in Wall 70). As Hazel V. Carby put it, Fauset actually became "mere background to a major event" (79). Susan Levison indicated that "Much like her colleagues, who were ostensibly honoring Fauset that night, many scholars have either neglected careful examination of her work, especially her use of form, or have depended heavily on earlier criticism that is retrograde in its theoretical approach both to her oeuvre and to the Harlem Renaissance in general" (826). Although Fauset delicately expressed her gratitude toward her friends for being there that night, years later, in a letter to Locke, she subtly reproached him: "I still remember the consummate cleverness with which you that night as toastmaster strove to keep speech and comment away from the person for whom the occasion was meant" (qtd. in Wall 70). The organization which meant to honor Fauset failed at its purpose and it became emblematic for the under-representation of her first and following works.

Fauset was criticized for advocating white supremacist views and upper-class respectability, though she confronted against these ideas in her works. As she portrayed light-complexioned Black women in her novels, some critics believed that her approach and characters were not "Negro" enough. Fauset emphasized the experiences of mulatto characters since she often found herself in that condition. Like her characters in the novel, she was aware of being Black in an environment dominantly white. As Benjamin Brawley explained it in *The Negro Genius:* "In school she was for several terms the only student in her class identified with the Negro, and this fact may partly account for the self-conscious air in her works" (222). She was criticized for her "middle-class outlook, shaped by her early experiences among old Philadelphians and her education at Cornell" (A. Johnson 145). She was also harshly critiqued for her middle-class depictions that she was believed to produce only "uniformly sophomoric, trivial and dull novels" (qtd. in A. Johnson 145). The critics stressed her bourgeois qualities and labeled her position as conservative and traditional in ideology and aesthetics. Fauset employed her middle-class heritage as the ground for her works for demonstrating audiences that African Americans were more diverse than their representations as "primitives." Her mentality and the core meanings of her works were better discovered through feminist scholars' works like Carolyn Wedin Sylvander's *Jessie Redmon Fauset, Black American Writer* (1981) and Deborah McDowell's article "The Neglected Dimension of Jessie Redmon Fauset" (1985). "Jessie Fauset: A Modern Apostle of Black Racial Pride" (1986) by Wilbert Jenkins, also reevaluates Fauset's works to manifest her consciousness of Black traditional history and also her way of honoring African American identity. They explored that Fauset's significant aspects were disregarded since they complied with women's issues. Through scholars mentioned above, she started to be recognized as one of the first African American female intellectuals. As will be discussed in further discussion in the chapters, Fauset was in fact a big defender of Blackness and a critique of classism, and her novels carry the traces of the collusion of the both concepts.

There were people who believed that she deserved a better treatment considering the success she achieved under the given circumstances of her time. Despite the injustices, she became the most published writer of the period with her novels, poetry, interviews,

reviews, novellas and translations. Braithwaite referred to her as "the Jane Austen of Black letters" (Schenck 103) when her first novel, *There Is Confusion,* was published in 1924. Langston Hughes spoke highly of her along with Charles Johnson and Alain Locke in his memoir called *The Big Sea* in which he referred to them as those "who midwifed the so-called New Negro literature into being. Kind and critical—but not too critical for the young—they nursed us along until our books were born" (173). Schenck, in her article named "Jessie Fauset: The Politics of Fulfillment vs. the Lost Generation," stroke on the issue by saying "Fauset, who is credited with being midwife to the movement in her capacity as literary editor of *Crisis* magazine from 1919 through 1926, has been neglected but deserves to be better known along with her contemporaries Hurston, Toomer and Hughes" (102). In *Women of the Harlem Renaissance,* Wall remarks that "...she published four novels in less than ten years. In so doing, Jessie Fauset became one of the most prolific writers of the Renaissance, male or female. She is now among the least respected" (36). Although her name and works have mostly been neglected because of her sex and subject treatment which were considered as "women's issues" (Jerkins), she achieved phenomenal success during the Harlem Renaissance.

In his article "Strivings of the Negro People" published in *The Atlantic* in 1897, Du Bois introduced double consciousness as a theory for African Americans' psychological conflicts because of their "African" and "American" identities. He also explained the notion as an "affliction" to psychologists in *Dusk of Dawn* (24). In this sense, the history of African Americans was believed to be "the history of this strife ... to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (Du Bois, *The Souls* 9). Also, Du Bois explained Black people's wishes in his lines in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. (9)

He supported the idea that the true success of American civilization was accomplishable exclusively through the ideas of both Blacks and whites. His statement above proves that he felt sorrow because of disunity and strived for becoming a nation which embraced everyone. As Du Bois develops and distills his views in his later autobiographical work, *Dusk of Dawn* he arrives at the opinion that the term "double consciousness" seemed to be relatable only to Blacks, this twoness was also a particular concern for white people. According to Du Bois, it would be a fallacy to suppose that only "the Negro was an American" (27). He defends the opinion that "the American was, inevitably and inescapably, a Negro" (*Dusk of Dawn* 27). This reasoning leads to the view that one involves the other within. In 2007 version of *Dusk of Dawn,*

James Baldwin refers to it by saying "Each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black, black in white" (qtd. 27).

African Americans' process of self-formation is influenced by double consciousness which leads them to the conflict between the oppressive community and their own community in which they embraced indorsement and a certain representation. In this sense, double consciousness indicates the dual identity of "unrecognized minority subjectivities and their transformative potential, alongside the conditions of impaired civic status that are allocated to racial minorities" (Meer 13). In other words, Black people experienced difficulty in unifying their African American culture with their total American identity. It is explained through Emerson's words as "the worst feature of this double consciousness is that the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul, which we lead, really show very little relation to each other" (qtd. in *Dusk of Dawn* 24).

Du Bois' conceptualization of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* makes a significant contribution to comprehend the transformation processes of African Americans:

> ... the Negro is ... born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-

> consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (8)

In the significant paragraph above, Du Bois introduces three critical elements to the notion of double consciousness: the veil, twoness, and second sight. The concepts also crystalize the symbolic experiences of African Americans between their own community and the white society. The veil stands for the separation between the races which is referred as the color line. In this sense, the element is influential in the experience of the subjects behind and beyond the veil in their social communities. The subject behind the veil is not recognized by the other beyond the veil. The invisibility of the subject behind the veil produces the sense of unaccomplished self as they take "the role of others in the community toward the self, and [take] the role of those on the other side of the veil toward the self" (Rawls 244). It indicates that in their self-construction process, African Americans have to confront the perspectives of the whites on the veil which Du Bois explains above as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." The inner conflict arising from the exterior view develops the second element, doubleness which represents the subject experiencing the two different spheres of the veil. The world behind the veil corresponds to the Black world in which they "intersubjectively" form the self. The white world beyond the veil, on the other hand, "dehumanizes" them through debarred recognition of their humanity (Itzigsohn and Brown 235).

Du Bois underscores that the true self-representation of African Americans does not suffice for recognition since the people beyond the veil are prone to misrecognition. In this sense, the presence of the veil defined as "the central structural element of racialized modernity" (Itzigsohn and Brown 237) among African Americans forecloses their full identification. According to Stephen Nathan Haymes, it is "Du Bois' way of theoretically formulating a distinctively African American experience of modernity, if you will a "Black modernity" (285). In this sense, double consciousness differentiates African Americans from other "cultural groups" (Haymes 285). According to Judith R. Blau and

Eric S. Brown, Du Bois "rejected the modernist convention that race is a social or biological category and instead proposed a conception that anticipated the current formulation that imagined worlds simultaneously unite and transform a diasporic community" (221). In this case, the veil provides the space for African American self-formation and emancipation. Then, it provides African Americans with an opportunity to be involved in "the project of civilization" (Haymes 285).

The "twoness" allows its subjects to possess a "second sight" which enables them to perceive the world beyond the veil. Bruce Jr. refers to the second sight as "third sense":

> It was in terms of this third sense that the figurative background to "double consciousness" gave the term its most obvious support because for Du Bois the essence of a distinctive African consciousness was its spirituality, a spirituality based in Africa but revealed among African Americans in their folklore, their history of patient suffering and their faith. (301)

This "gift" both requires a constant struggle against their "dehumanization" and also allows for the acknowledgement of the white world which generates "the possibility of neutralizing the mirroring effects of the veil" (Itzigsohn and Brown 236). The issue is the sense of twoness between the different sides of the veil that accounts for the incompleteness of the self. This sense endows Blacks with a second sight which creates the possibility of recognizing the white world. The notions of the veil, twoness and the second sight are significant metaphorical expressions for Blacks and their relationships with the oppressive white community.

The union of African and American identities aided African Americans to form a third self which prophesied their exploration of self-identity. In this sense, double consciousness, which Kirkland describes as "a conflicted psychological disposition or state of mind of African Americans as a whole to their aims, pursuits and fulfillment of

them" (137), actually paved the way for "a feeling of revolt and revenge [along with] a determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite environing opinion" (Du Bois, *The Souls* 36), resulting in "any sense of self beyond the problematic sense conveyed in the dilemma" (Bruce 306). In this case, although double consciousness was destructive in many aspects, it also held the sources for its remedy.

"Passing as white" is an interrelating concept to double consciousness since it is about identities: "their creation or imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties" (Ginsberg 2). They are also related since both concepts assist Blacks in their exploration of self-identity and the formation of Black female subjectivity. The process underscores the significance of being attached to one's heritage in the end. The experience of double consciousness prompted light-skinned Black people to pass as white. According to Du Bois, this dichotomy in life, thoughts, tasks and social classes would lead to double worlds and ideals to "pretense or to revolt" (*The Souls,* 136). The act of passing involved "a paradoxical ability to both register and look beyond what *is* and look beyond what is in order to conceive what *might* be" (Harper 395). This desire is motivated by the urge to benefit from the privileges possessed by white people.

The psychological influences of such experiences compelled African American women to live through whatever was confirmed as white standards. They had to adapt themselves to white expectations and evaluate themselves through the eyes of the dominant race. Correspondingly, people who passed also had to comply with systematic oppression and closely witness the perception of whites toward African Americans. Colored people explored this avenue as a way to keep themselves clear of the hardships due to the racism of the period. However, it also compelled them to have limitations in their choices and lives as they had to obey the rules of the white society. Therefore, the sensation of dignity and freedom came with cost: obedience to the norms designated by whites.

When a person passed for white, it meant that they left behind their immediate social surroundings including families, friends, community, and the whole ancestry, yet their Black tradition and culture perpetuated in their consciousness due to their double identity. However, the motive behind passing was not to reject their Black identity but as James W. Johnson put it, "shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals" (108). So, some Black people decided to pass for white for a long period or permanently. When considered from this point of view, African Americans abstained from the practice of passing because of their distrust and fear of the negative impression of white people toward Blacks.

Despite the heavy emotional burden of passing, on a critical level, it is also considered a strategic and transgressive act. As the line between what is Black and white is blurred, the act of passing challenges the firmness of the identity and questions its essentialism. This transgression, "exist[ing] on a variety of levels ranging from the physical to psychological" (Davies, 110), is believed to be intimidating for the so-called superior group, in this case, white supremacy. Concordantly,

> both the process and the discourse of passing interrogate the ontology of identity categories and their construction [since they] challenge the essentialism that is often the foundation of identity politics, a challenge that may be seen as either threatening or liberating but in either instance discloses the truth that identities are not singularly true or false but multiple and contingent (Ginsberg 4).

The idea suggested that passing was to be avoided because the "inferior" race could not be confused with the "superior" one. White people were not content with the fact that passing proved the racial identity as something not rigid.

As double consciousness provides people with two views which are the Black perception of identity and white perception of Black identity, passing enables them to question both. The concepts claim to support in the formation of the "New Negro" despite their negative representation. Gallego propounds a "passing discourse" which "radical[ly] critique[s] ... European ideology and provide[s] the necessary basis for the reconfiguration of an

alternative concept of the African American self, whose importance pervades even contemporary rewritings of the topic" (qtd. in Garcia 149). Embodied in the "New Negro," mixed-race people with peculiar voices experienced the discrepancies of race, authenticity, sexuality and freedom.

Passing was a common topic used in African American literature in the 1920s and 1930s, especially by Black women writers. The search for identity made its way into literature, exploring the traces of double consciousness. Passing for white was a widespread practice in the Harlem Renaissance period for African Americans because it became an avenue for securing the social and economic opportunities of whiteness in a time when the racial discrimination was at the peak. African American passing subjects were condemned through antimiscegenation laws, and their experiences became the literary portraits of racist ideology and law. Therefore, the use of passing in narratives functioned as a theoretical account for either an authentic portrayal of African American experience, or an analysis of the restrictions of the idea of race itself. Therefore, the relevance of racial passing to double consciousness was discussed in the novels of the period such as Jessie R. Fauset's *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1928), Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), and George S. Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931) as a work which satirized the supremacist ideas of the 1920s and 1930s. The passing narratives raised questions about the concept of racialized identity—including its practical outcomes and its theoretical predicaments—and enabled an understanding of self, presented in its transformations and becomings. In this sense, the figure of the "mulatto" led writers to challenge the dominant racial attitudes of the time and to put forward "modes of agency and subjectivity that could not be entirely described through discourses of uplift or the conventions of sensationalism" (Sherrard-Johnson, *The Portraits* 16). The pages in passing narratives displayed both the "other" side of the veil, and also those who spoke the language of the veil itself.

In the Harlem Renaissance, the writers involved the depiction of mixed-race characters to present multidimensional theories which assisted people to comprehend interrelations

and individuality. The mixture of races is not a new occasion. Considering the history of humanity with intersection of races, there is no such thing as a "pure race," let alone the critical challenge in recent scholarship of the concept of "race" itself. The position of a specific mixed-race group could be considered as a part of the bigger race issue concerning matters such as social assimilation and biological amalgamation. The United States is home to many racially mixed groups throughout history. From colonial times to 1967, interracial marriage was prohibited through legal powers. Especially the 1920s presented strict opposition to the concept in the decade since the existence of these groups challenged social structures built on race, obscured racial and ethnic lines, and confronted normally recognized prohibitions and instructions concerning intergroup relations. Moreover, the presence of mixed-race groups challenged ingrained understandings of biological, ethical, and social substance of the race concept. Because Blacks and whites have been regarded as opposites, Americans had confusions regarding the result of their intermixing, and race became a way of subjugation by the oppressive and powerful groups. Blacks, however, determined to make use of race for their emancipation through collective identity and unified communal and political action. This mentality, which came forward in the 1920s with the "New Negro" movement, led dark-complexioned and light-skinned Blacks to meet on the common ground. However, mixed-race people experienced repression "*as* people of color and *by* people of color" (Root 144). Blacks who embraced the idea of oppression in turn implemented strict controls of belonging or creating "proper" membership. In this context, the works of the Harlem Renaissance present the portrayal of mixed-race characters to crystalize the intermixing situation in the United States and the strategic way of oppression through the concept of race.

In *There Is Confusion* (1924)*, Plum Bun* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), *Comedy: American Style* (1933), and in many other novels of Black women writing in the Harlem Renaissance Period, the mulatto character passes for white. First of all, passing brought forward questions such as "Is not race biological?" People became acquainted with the characters who pass in the books and their experiences enabled readers to question the issue of race and its perception as something biological. Defining the term "race" and establishing racial norms are controversial because, above all, "the races are mixed"

(Locke, *The New Negro* 358) and, in more contemporary critical terms, it is not "a fixed characteristic over an individual's lifetime ... it is fluid" (Nix and Qian 37). Nella Larsen points at the conflictual nature of the experience in *Passing*, "We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it" (112). In the context of Fauset's fiction, African Americans had inner conflicts on this subject and such people and characters in books were pointedly influential in creating Black subjectivity.

The works of Jessie R. Fauset include the significant concepts of the period such as passing, colorism, socio-economic class and their various influences on characters' psychologies. In her works, she articulates the ways in which "race, gender, and class construct and constrain identity" (Wall "Traveling" 38). Fauset portrays her characters as middle-class to which she also belongs and incorporates the "realistic insights" (Schenck 106) of African Americans endeavoring with upward mobility in her works. She believes that it should be the African Americans who give critical insights into their experiences: "Here is an audience waiting to hear the truth about us. Let us who are better qualified to present that truth than any white writer, try to do so" (A. Johnson 151). She believed that their experience was particular to them and that an inaccurate depiction would damage their formation of a new identity. The experiences of artistic fulfillment provided her with the self-realization that the development of their society was accomplishable through acknowledging the importance of their roots.

Fauset's works bear a resemblance to her people and are drawn from her own experiences. Her novels provide an authentic experience of women's passing and double consciousness. As she does not get the attention she deserves during the period as a writer in her works, she depicts Black women who undergo similar injustices. Especially young characters with a passion to become artists in the novels also reflect Fauset's own desire to be one. She abstains from the depiction of stereotypical Black female characters such as submissive or domestic women which makes her unique in her time. Instead, she

presents them as well-set-up, complicated and confused, and eventually empowered middle-class women who fight against the damages rooted in racism.

There Is Confusion, as the title suggests, presents conflicted identities and race relations through the experience of double consciousness. Fauset emphasizes the limitations based on race and the ways to resist those restraints. The novel gives critical insights into the veil, twoness, and second sight concepts of Du Bois as the characters encounter the color line while struggling with their personal ambitions. The veil divides Blacks into two worlds—the white society which dehumanizes them and the African American community that symbolizes a sphere of autonomy—influences their self-construction. Fauset explains that the invisibility of African Americans for the oppressive white society is the consequence of being exposed to racialization rather than being an intrinsic feature. The characters' resistance against this imposition is their gift of transcending the world beyond the veil and it emancipates them. Fauset stresses the formation of subjectivity through the resources of African American community. The idea advocates that the self improves the community as much as society reinforces the individual. Specific experiences of the characters in the novel enable them to explore their inner selves perpetuating the significance of interrelationships in Black community.

Plum Bun presents a passing protagonist who struggles for being a part of "respectable" middle-class to increase her living standards, which, according to her, is not likely to happen as a Black person. Fauset deals with the notions of colorism, classism, and passing with the experiences of the protagonist and the minor characters. Through the depiction of a family consisting of two light-skinned and two dark-complexioned members, Fauset extends the treatment of colorism to a perspective to reveal its influence among Black society themselves. The character's choice of passing results in self-alienation at the first stage yet it also provides a space for the journey necessary for the construction of self-esteem. In this sense, Fauset also underscores the requirement of self-sufficiency for Black women. With the portrayal of a white man who is unaware of the protagonist's Black heritage, Fauset presents class as a significant element in the construction of the

society as he rejects her because of her financial status. She creates an American community constituted by the ideologies predicated on racism and classism. In this manner, Fauset criticizes the deeply-rooted classism and racism within the community and remarks the necessity of possessing class consciousness by African American society. She does not only expose the truth of American society, she also calls attention to the potentiality of racial uplift because of the inner resources of Blacks.

The Chinaberry Tree, on the other hand, is about the class distinctions and relationships among Blacks themselves. The novel focuses on two women named Laurentine Strange and Melissa Paul, who are obsessed with the idea of "marrying up." Nevertheless, their interracially entangled family history has the potential of shaping their futures. Fauset depicts the relationships of women to manifest and criticize racism and classism which was the real-life experience of the Blacks in the 1920s. She highlights the necessity for gaining self-acquaintance in order to accomplish an autonomy. She also challenges the conventional notions about illegitimacy, sexual morality, and transgression and rehandles the conceptions with the depiction of women and their relationships. Fauset stresses the different experiences of men and women as she is conscious of the community's limitations with regard to gender stereotyping and race problem. The challenging of the ideals in the story gains significance with the particular experiences of women and their perspective against the relation between someone's "blood" and individuality. The challenging of the essentialism and the empowerment of Black female's communities stands for the characterization in personal identity.

Comedy: American Style includes characterization depending on the idea of colorism and its detrimental consequences on the characters. Fauset ironically titles the novel as comedy while it involves tragedy, satire, and is only bitterly comic. It centers around the color obsession within the Black community. The light-complexioned character, Olivia Cary, scorns the family members with dark skins and longs to be white for upward mobility through which she expects to attain wealth and status. She leads her daughter to live as alienated in a different country and her dark-complexioned son to suicide because

he is devoid of his mother's affection. Through the depiction of Olivia, Fauset manages to criticize white supremacist mentality and racial self-hatred. As Wall coins the term as "anti-race" in *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (81), Fauset creates an anti-race woman and unloving mother figure which is quite new, and warn its audience against a dangerous side of racial passing. The novel functions as a cautionary narrative about the possible tragedy arising from the entire rejection of one's own Black heritage and the brutal nature of colorism and classism which is present among Black community. Fauset underscores the arbitrariness of what constitutes race and the absurdity of class/color hegemony based on biological elements. As Fauset observes, the image of emerging artist and its death represent the obstacles African American artists face and their desperate situation in the Harlem Renaissance.

These four novels, as Varlack points out, "attempt to complicate the portrait of the African American experience, moving beyond the simple tragic mulatto or gin-chasing primitive explored in other Harlem Renaissance works" (78). The female characters in these novels are confused about their lighter skin which functions as their pass into the white world and they carry the heavy burden of the overpowering white mindset. All the characters long for a better position in life while sacrificing their identities, traditions, culture or ancestry. In this respect, Zhou states, "[the protagonists'] revolt ... is expressed through [their] search for a sense of the self and through the embodiment of an alternative identity for African American women, an identity of double double consciousness" (722). The characters with confusions give insight to the experience of African Americans creating a "New Negro" identity during the Harlem Renaissance. Much as the process is agonizing, the experiences of double consciousness and passing prove themselves as supporting elements in the formation of one's self in the end. Therefore, the use of these concepts enriches the creation of Black female subjectivity in the Harlem Renaissance.

In the light of all the discussions and arguments mentioned above, it will be observed that the struggles of Black people since the abolition of slavery mostly confute the idea of them as weak and ineffective. However, Du Bois' concept of double consciousness

proved that African American people's inaccurate representation is due to the white gaze rather than their inherent characteristics. Black women, as another minority group, suffered from injustices and their resistance paved the way for the possibility of expressing their own subjectivity as well. Therefore, African American women writers created works in the Harlem Renaissance which enlightened the altering process of females from oppressive social conditions to empowered individuals. The reason for this is that Black women embraced the idea of liberty and self-reliance. They supported each other so as to cherish the idea of womanhood. The subjects discussed in Fauset's works have evidential values of such ideas. Their experiences lend color to the constitution or denial of the intersectionality of race, social status and gender convictions.

CHAPTER 1. *THERE IS CONFUSION*

Published in 1924, *There Is Confusion* has the historical significance of making Fauset the central attraction in the Civic Club dinner originally organized to celebrate the publication. Despite the fact that Fauset was the guest of honor, the event turned out to be a general celebration of Black writers in Harlem, slighting Fauset's success as a Black woman fiction writer. Some of the significant names of the "New Negro" literature were less hesitant in praising the work of Fauset. Alain Locke defined "the novel [as a work] the Negro intelligentsia have been clamoring for," and announced that it "throbs with some of the latest reactions of the race situation in this country upon the psychology and relations of the colored and white American of the more intelligent classes" ("The Younger Literary Movement" 162-163). Dramatist, social philosopher and educator, Montgomery Gregory, praising Fauset as the modern Phillis Wheatley, stated that the "great value" of her work was discovered in "interpreting the better elements of our life to those who know us only as domestic servants, 'uncles,' or criminals" (181). According to him, the novel represented "a sincere effort to view the life of the race objectively" (181). George Schuyler viewed the novel as authentic in its focus on racism and discrimination, which, for him meant, "returning to familiar scenes" (145). The encouraging reviews of Fauset's contemporaries contributed to the intellectual world of African Americans as the novel offered the representation of themselves.

Fauset did not make her final decision to publish the book for a long time after she has written it. The publication of *Birthright* (1922) by T. S. Stribling, a best-selling white Southern author who fictionalized African Americans' struggle in stereotypical terms, provoked her to present a more authentic account of African American experience as a Black woman writer (A. Johnson 151). Eva Federmayer claims that the novel serves as the "earliest protesting response to white writer T. S. Stribling's novel" (93). *Birthright* promote the idea that educated Black people are bound to tragic endings because they grapple with "twoness" in their lives. He portrayed a stereotypical tragic mulatto protagonist, Peter Siner, who is grateful for his "Caucasian blood" (Federmayer 93). Fauset considered Stribling's work to be racist and misrepresenting. Displeased by the biased approach of Stribling, she aimed to correct and restructure the distorted depiction

of African Americans within the context of different social classes, genders, principles and beliefs, having various nuances. She engendered a converse portrayal of African Americans who possess the potential to uplift themselves and their society. In this regard, *There Is Confusion* displays a distinctive side of Black experience with which Fauset is closely acquainted: middle-class African Americans striving for upward mobility.

There Is Confusion is considered as bildungsroman in the sense that it tells of male and female characters on their way to spiritual development through confusing and challenging experiences. Bildungsroman provides African American women writers of the period with "racializing the problems of sexual and class oppression and fictionalizing their own experiences as Black women writers who often face tripartite oppression of race, class and gender" (Jones 23-24). In this sense, the novel presents the protagonists as they change radically, and the minor characters as they grow and derive lessons from their experiences. Carolyn Wedin Sylvander explains in her study of Fauset that in "bildungsroman ... characters grow and learn through a process that moves from disorder and confusion of values to a revelation of true differences" (155). Fauset made use of this pattern to give insight into the relation between race, gender, and class and the "New Negro" Woman who is characterized as struggling for mobility in a changing consciousness.

The story takes place in Philadelphia and New York in the early 1900s and in Europe during World War I, which presents a crucial era for African American people experiencing racial discrimination in the coinciding years. The setting is realistic in the sense that it reveals the racist practices in the North which is generally identified as "free" when compared to the Jim Crow South. It also sheds light on the discrimination Black people confront as they endeavor to "fight for their country" during World War I. The unrestrained racial prejudice the Black society faces in every part of the United States forced them to strive for fulfillment and acceptance which Fauset puts forward, as the title suggests, through the "confusions" of the protagonist Joanna Marshall. She struggles for acclamation as a prominent Black dancer and singer. Maggie Ellersley, on the other

hand, desires to gain recognition in the middle-class through marriage, and Peter Bye, confronts discrimination as he attempts to be a successful doctor. In this context, the novel's aim to represent true-to-life characters can easily be seen.

The beautiful, ambitious and competent Joanna Marshall struggles for wider acclaim as a dancer and singer. She possesses the idea of being "great" from her early childhood years through the impact of her father.[1] Joanna's father, Joel Marshall, is a man who wants to be an inspiring person for colored people someday; yet, his mother's illness prevents him from achieving this ideal. Still, he becomes a wealthy caterer recognized by the white society yet the idea of a person creating a tremendous impression upon others remains within him. For this reason, he realizes a spark in his daughter with "solemn earnest eyes and an infinite capacity for spending long hours in thought" (*There Is Confusion* 4). Joel prompts his daughter through the examples of Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth whose stories reinforce the idea that "if there's anything that will break down prejudice it will be equality or perhaps even superiority on the part of colored people in the arts" (*There Is Confusion* 88). However, her determination collides with the prejudiced white society against her color. The belief in herself comes from her assurance of being exceedingly accomplished yet she must still prove herself as a Black performer. She comes forward as a hubristic and self-righteous person and these features of her influence the relationships with her friends and family as they find her bitter. The story mostly centers around her endeavors to triumph over racial obstacles which prevent her from being acclaimed in the New York artistic world, though she is from a respectable upper-middle-class family which is recognized by the white society because of her father's catering business.

[1] Such information serves as autobiographical because Joanna and her father are reminiscent of Jessie Fauset and her father, Reverend Redmon Fauset, "an African Methodist Episcopal minister unafraid of addressing racial inequities in his community outside Philadelphia" (Davis xii). Jessie Fauset, like Joanna, "becomes simultaneously a 'little living echo' of her father and a positive, reverberating signal of African American's emergent future" (Davis, xi).

Peter Bye, the male protagonist and eventually Joanna's husband, also has confusions about his purposes. He comes from an old Philadelphia Black family which serves the white Byes through long ages and Peter becomes conscious of his family history with white blood at the end of the novel. His knowledge of anatomy leads him to study medicine and Joanna approves of his preference as she assumes a doctor would be a proper partner beside a famous artist, namely herself. He decides to give up university and pursue a career as a jazz accompanist. Joanna, passionate about being "a great woman" (*There Is Confusion* 6) as she promises herself in her childhood, refuses to be with a man who demonstrates weakness and has a lower status than herself. Peter, intimidated by the image of Joanna who has self-assurance in the face of a man, feels at peace with a former friend, Maggie Ellersley, whose only ambition is to find a wealthy man bringing her recognition by middle-class people. Growing up poor, she is determined to disentangle herself and her mother from the "unprivileged" section of the community. Besides several subplots and secondary characters, "Joanna, the ostensible heroine, is dogmatic and snobby; Peter is lazy and flighty; Maggie is dependent on social respectability and male validation" (Harker 74). The reader detects not only a small part of African Americans but also "old-money white Americans, upper-middle-class Blacks, lower-class Blacks, theater owners, medical students, [and] musicians" (Harker 74). Fauset's diffusively woven characters, which confutes the idea that she only praises white middle-class in her novels, represent a large segment of the American society. Through the experiences of the characters, Fauset manifests the impact of racism in the American community.

Fauset also depicts African Americans as patriotic figures in the European setting of World War I who fight for their country as much as white Americans, though Black soldiers do not receive as much appreciation for their actions. In the novel, the war represents reconcilement, decline in racial tension and the reunion of lovers. Peter and Philip, Joanna's brother, go to France to fight in the war. Peter meets white Meriwether there, one of the great-grandchildren of Aaron Bye, who dies at war. They form an intimate friendship which their ancestors cannot accomplish, suggesting that things have changed between generations. Through Meriwether's embarrassment because of the

treatment of his great-grandfather against Peter's, he reconciles with his feeling of hatred for white people. He recognizes that his value is not designated by them. This enlightenment enables him to make a medical career. Maggie goes to lend assistance to Black troops and encounters Peter and Philip. Because of the psychological impact of the war, the characters resolve their confused relationships and strengthen their interconnection. The episode displays as the transformation of Peter and Maggie. They are able to feel attached to their love (with Joanna and Philip) and discover their sentimental bulwark against agonizing racism and war. They return to America with the hope of freedom, pleasure, career and family.

Fauset presents a subplot of passing with a minor character named Vera Manning. A highschool friend of Joanna, she is a light-complexioned character who temporarily passes for white to distance herself from the turmoil of her family and neighborhood. The family belongs to upper middle-class African Americans and her mother disallows Vera's marriage to a man who is darker than herself. This experience provokes Vera to pass for white and work in a white society filled with people who have prejudice toward colored people. She witnesses the severe racist attitudes of whites. Her experience with prejudiced whites opens the eyes of Vera to comprehend the significance of commitment to African American community.

Fauset's depiction of the characters and their experiences in *There Is Confusion* closely relate to Du Bois' notion of double consciousness. He stresses that "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, —this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (*The Souls* 9). This statement corresponds to Joanna, Maggie, and Vera who have to cope with the racial boundaries to achieve their personal potential. Du Bois also argues that "He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (*The Souls* 9). In this context, the reader discovers the struggles of the characters for recognition and acceptance. Throughout the story, the characters

experience the presence of the veil, twoness and second sight in their psychological world.

1.1. LIFE BEHIND THE VEIL

Although Joanna struggles for fulfillment in the art world in which she is disadvantaged because of her skin color, she is not recognized by the white and male dominated circles. She is not allowed to be in a qualified tutor's dance class as the French man says "I'm sorry, Mees, but the white Americans like not to study with the brown Americans. Vair seely, but so. I am a poor man, I must follow the weeshes of my clients!" (*There Is Confusion* 86). However, she forms a new class for colored people only and convinces her teacher upon giving dance lessons to them. After the completion of the class, she takes her chances in the professional dance world and confronts the line drawn by the existence of the veil. She is debarred from the American stages by the managers. The first visit to the manager Mr. Abrams fails as he states that "I'm sure of your ability, my dear girl, and you ought to go ... but the white American public ain't ready for you yet, they won't have you" (*There Is Confusion* 138). Another manager, David Kohler, makes it more explicit: "Couldn't make any money out of you. America doesn't want to see a colored dancer in the rôle of a premiére danseuse" (*There Is Confusion* 138). One of the directors refuses her presence on stage by expressing, "We'll try a colored man in a white company but we won't have any colored women" (*There Is Confusion* 258) and she experiences injustice because of her gender besides her color. Joanna's denials in the performance world, repelling her more behind the veil, leads to her loss of self-confidence.

Joanna's systematized rejection by the white society is well-defined in Du Bois' analogy between Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and the experience of African Americans behind the veil in *Dusk of Dawn*:

> It is as though one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it; speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world. One talks on evenly and

> logically in this way, but notices that the passing throng does not even turn its head, or if it does, glances curiously and walks on. It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that some thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. (289-290)

This metaphor epitomizes the situation of Joanna as she confronts the systematized disregard by the white people beyond the veil or, in this case, outside the cave. Du Bois adds that "the people within may become hysterical. They may scream and hurl themselves against the barriers, hardly realizing in their bewilderment that they are screaming in a vacuum unheard and that their antics may actually seem funny to those outside looking in" (290). Joanna disappointingly loses her hope as she experiences refusals of the performance world. No matter how disciplined and talented she is, Joanna is ridiculed for seeking her future in the performance world dominated by the whites.

At the moment Joanna feels that she is completely out of luck, she is offered to perform "America" in the *Dance of the Nations* produced by the liberal Greenwich Village theatre. In her audition, she performs a dance game called "Barn" from her childhood. The fact that she uses "real children ... colored children" (*There Is Confusion* 215) in her dance adds an ironic twist to the tradition of "Negro" dances performed by "blackfaces, Black minstrels and 'modern' vaudeville comedians" (Federmayer 98). In this way, Fauset parodies minstrelsy, the racist American theatrical convention that centers on a simplistic understanding of cultural expressions. She upholds that the Black culture makes a significant contribution to American art which represents a source of "authenticity, innocence and purity of form" (Calloway 78). With her performance of the children's dance, she impresses the directors and manages to take the part. Ironically, her skin color must be "erased" on the stage before the white audience to represent the "America" of Blacks and Indians. The directors resolve issue by putting a white mask on Joanna, which physically and psychologically confines her behind the veil.

On the stage and behind the veil, Joanna is exposed to the white spectator's gaze. The criticisms and her excitement for being on stage point out her will to be accepted rather than to pursue her art. Fauset's depiction of the audience who "speak[s] of her as if [Joanna] cannot hear them, as if she does not exist as an individual but as an entity to be regarded on stage and therefore freely critiqued" (Levison 829-830) figures the "dehumanization" of Blacks as a racialized object. In her own native Harlem, she is singled out as an anomaly in the world of emptied-out cultural signs, "as she walks down the street some young girls passing turned and stared. 'That's Joanna Marshall. You know, the dancer.' A dark colored girl wearing Russian boots with a hat and with three feathers sticking up straight, Indian fashion, came along. Lenox Avenue stared, pointed, laughed and enjoyed itself ..." (*There Is Confusion* 257-258). According to Levison, "Joanna's color ... will ultimately render her a passive object, subject to the stares of others; in this way race and performance share discomforting similarities" (831). Although she strives to be an inspirational artist through her hard work, she becomes the object of the gaze. Joanna's aspiration, which is devoid of solid ground, entails her ultimate collapse raising in her the awareness of the "thick plate glass" between her and the white world.

Joanna's removal of the white mask in her stage persona signifies and symbolizes a new phase for her as she becomes conscious of the two worlds between the veil. In one of her performances, the curious audience insists her to remove the mask: "Pull off your mask, America ... Let's see your face, America" (*There Is Confusion* 217). She takes her mask off as a Black woman who deserves to be regarded as a true American and expresses herself with reference to military patriotism: "I hardly need to tell you that there is no one in the audience more American than I am. My great-grandfather fought in the Revolution, my uncle fought in the Civil War and my brother is 'over there' now" (*There Is Confusion* 217). Her expression supported the "New Negro" principle which advocates the idea that Blacks fight against the foreign enemy as their compatriots for their country. On their way back home, Joanna asks her father: "Is this really what you wanted me to be? ... Is this your idea of real greatness?" and her father whose "voice half glad, half sorry, told her that he, too, had hoped for something different" (*There Is Confusion* 221). Joanna's

symbolic removal of the white mask represents her awakening to the worlds between the veil and the stimulation for self-construction.

Fauset stresses that Joanna's idea of performance, as seen by the white gaze, should not serve as a model since Fauset values the self-constructed public presentation which does not rely on the audience to declare its significance. She also highlights the significance of an autonomous Black female subjectivity "where neither a pastiche of dominant culture's metanarratives nor a naive faith in the transcendence of 'art' or 'individual' will do" (McCoy 114). Du Bois clarifies the experience of Joanna in "Criteria of Negro Art" masterfully:

> There is in New York tonight a Black woman molding clay by herself in a little bare room, because there is not a single school of sculpture in New York where she is welcome. Surely, there are doors she might burst through, but when God makes a sculptor, He does not always make the pushing sort of person who beats his way through doors thrust in his face. (294)

Joanna's symbolic removal of the white mask foreshadows her ability to transcend the veil and make her own choices through the second sight provided by her sense of twoness. As she gets rid of the white mask, she recognizes everything more clearly like the necessity of the self-construction as a Black woman, carving a redefinition for herself and the deconstruction[2] of nationalism, race, and gender imposed upon her (McCoy 111-112). Such experience generates a new path for Joanna in which she could reconstruct her subjectivity against interference from the people beyond the veil.

Joanna's confusions in her romantic life with Peter serve as another enlightenment about interpersonal relationships. Despite all the refusals in her career before the *Dance of the Nations*, she is still committed to the struggle to be a great performer someday: "If you're

[2] The term "deconstruction" is used throughout this thesis as a process which Patricia Hill Collins explains in *Black Feminist Thought*: "… exposing a concept as ideological or culturally constructed rather than as natural or a simple reflection of reality" (15).

Black in America, you have to renounce. But that's life, too, Peter. You've got to renounce something—always" (*There Is Confusion* 268). In this sense, she supports Peter as he is discouraged by the discrimination he has to endure as a medical student. She does not value the frailty of Peter as equal to her self-assuredness. She cannot bear to think about the idea of him dropping out and becoming a jazz accompanist and expresses herself: "I don't want a coward and a shirker for a husband. As though that weren't the thing those white people ... Buck up, Peter, be a man. You've got to be one if you're going to marry me" (*There Is Confusion* 147). For Joanna, their marriage is possible only when Peter is as determined as her. She cannot reconcile her aspiration and their future together, so Joanna returns her engagement ring to Peter, though she still longs for a future with him. "Love,—the desire to give it and receive it was tugging persistently at the cords of her being, but she had been too long the slave of Ambition to listen consciously to that" (*There Is Confusion* 151). She answers Peter's love letter as being driven by her ambition: "I don't love you as you are. The man I marry must be a man worthwhile ... I couldn't stand the thought of spending my life with someone ordinary" (*There Is Confusion* 154). Such a letter, Joanna considers, would encourage him to take a step but instead it ends their affair leading to Peter's engagement to Maggie.

Their separation becomes one of the milestones in Joanna's life as she reassesses her confused judgement regarding personal success and communality and acknowledges the significance of community support for self-formation behind the veil. She becomes more courageous in acknowledging her feelings: "I'd rather have had him exactly as he was, faults and all, than to lose him altogether" (*There Is Confusion* 164). Such inner turmoil leads to Joanna's second breakthrough in the sense that she acknowledges the significance of relationships, love and the community: "For the first time in her life she saw the importance of human relationships. What did a knowledge of singing, dancing, of any of the arts amount to without people, without parents, brothers, sisters, lovers to share one's failures, one's triumphs" (*There Is Confusion* 165). By presenting Joanna's inner world after her breakup with Peter, Fauset underscores the significance of attachment to Black community for exploring the depth of self-consciousness. Anne W. Rawls explains Du

Bois' perspective on the matter, which is especially complementary to Joanna's development after she pulls down the mask:

> It is in order to permit the full development of self-consciousness within the veil, a self-consciousness that transcends the conflict between the two sides, that Du Bois advocates the formation of, and commitment to, a Black community, or nation in its own right. This Black nation is not formed to create separation between races, but rather, in order to enable the Black self to transcend an already existing separation. Within this Black nation the Black consciousness can aspire to full development. (245)

This turning point is of capital importance in Joanna's life in comprehending the requirement of communal sources for the development of self behind the veil.

Maggie Ellersley is another warrior behind the veil who is more vulnerable to colorism and class oppression than Joanna and Peter as she is both working-class and a Black woman. In other words, she confronts all the possible difficulties on the road to the American Dream. She is raised by her mother, a laundress, and without a father. While Peter and Joanna encounter the problems caused by their skin color, Maggie also has to engender her own possibilities for upward mobility because of the class obstacle. Calloway advocates that "Maggie's self-actuated drive, ambition, and initiative are consistently represented as admirable traits" (50). As the daughter of a "spare hard-working woman to whom life had meant nothing but poverty and confusion" (*There Is Confusion* 47), she sets her mind on escaping the "sordidness" of their district for a place in a decent neighborhood. Her escape leads her to think of the "first insight into the workings of life. If you wanted things, you thought and thought about them, and when an opportunity offered, there you were with your mind made up to jump at it" (*There Is Confusion* 53). The depiction of Maggie underscores the influence of uplift for the working-classes.

Maggie is confused about the path of struggle—should she "marry up" and "pass" or should she turn to herself and cherish her resources yet her approach lacks of solid ground

for the self-formation as it is the case with Peter and Joanna. Maggie's purpose of finding a middle-class man for upward mobility portrays her as dependent and her quest for its own sake leads to her tragic denouement. Her first intention with Philip Marshall, Joanna's brother, becomes a failure since Joanna does not find the relationship acceptable because of the financial gap between them. This experience drags her to marry the twenty-years older Henderson Neal who promises to take care of her. She believes that their marriage provides "security, a home for herself and for mother, freedom from all the little nagging worries that beset the woman who fights her own way through the world" (*There Is Confusion* 81). However, Maggie's desire for "a respectable life" fails to satisfy her as Neal's secret career turns out to be professional gambling. Marriage becomes emotionally and physically oppressive for Maggie (she is stabbed by him after the divorce), and she seeks comfort in the arms of a former friend, Peter who reciprocates her only to forget about Joanna and her contemptuous behaviors.

The unfortunate experiences do not give the necessary perspective to Maggie since she continues to subordinate her own subjectivity with Peter as well. He mentions her behavior: "When I have dinner at Maggie 'Sit still, Peter,' she says, 'this isn't a man's work'" (*There Is Confusion* 141). Maggie's behavior repulses Peter and he notices that he genuinely respects Joanna, his former lover. Maggie's turning inward and self-recognition processes will also be discussed in the latter part yet only after her relationship with Peter she recognizes the necessity of making her own way not for acceptance but for self-satisfaction. She gains satisfaction by working for the good of her own people thus the awareness brings her closer to her Black roots. Her dependence on people other than herself for respectability, in this sense, results in the thickening of the color line and confinement behind the veil.

One of the minor characters, Vera Manning, must be mentioned to indicate the consequences of the removal of one (Black) identity through "passing" beyond the veil without the formation of self with which Du Bois does not hold. Vera, who is a school friend of Joanna, falls in love with a darker man. Her "color-struck" (*There Is* Confusion

186) Black mother from upper-middle class reprobates this relationship as she thinks it would bring unhappiness to her and their offspring. Thereupon, Vera passes for white to "get away from everybody and everything [she]'d ever known" (*There Is Confusion* 185) and it leads to her alienation from her immediate surrounding. She is pleased to have "unlimited opportunities ... for work, for pleasure, for anything, ... sights and places" (*There Is Confusion* 187) but she also expresses her frustration about the absence of meaningful emotional relations. "Colored people" she mentions, "when they're let alone long enough to have a good time, know how to enjoy themselves better than any other people in the world. It's a gift" (*There Is Confusion* 187). Her mention of "gift" alludes to the positive effect of the veil signifying African Americans' potential to transcend whites' definition about them. She no longer has to be concerned about racial discrimination, yet she is overwhelmed as she witnesses whites' cruel attitudes against African Americans. Vera's experience highlights the criticism of color and class prejudice existing among upper-middle class Blacks in the story. Calloway advocates that "Passing is decisively rejected in the Vera Manning subplot of *There Is Confusion* as an endeavor of complete self-indulgence and self-fragmentation when ostensibly practiced for one's own convenience" (71). The removal of her "passing" identity rewards her with the opportunity to develop an autonomous individuality behind the veil free of the white gaze. In this perspective, Vera is doomed to look at herself through the eyes of the other by submitting to their standards through passing.

The experiences of Fauset's characters discussed in the first part of this chapter put forward the impacts and the consequences of their invisibility by the oppressive community. However, as "the struggle of a healthy mind forced to confront and inhabit a perverse world; pathology finally resides not in an African American brain but in the American social body" (qtd. in Itzigsohn and Brown 238), Fauset does not portray the desperation as inherent in African Americans but as a source of being subjected to racialization and dehumanization. The sense of twoness is observed in the characters' struggles between the oppressiveness of the veil and the representation of their racialized community. In this sense, the presence of the veil between the two worlds generates several dichotomies for Joanna, Maggie and Vera: a dichotomy of agency in the

repressive regime, a dichotomy in the construction of the self, and a dichotomy in the comprehension of life. Therefore, their self-formation is influenced by the two worlds to which they are attached—the oppressive world that dehumanizes them and their own Black community representing a domain of agency. With the "crystallization of the culture elements among colored people into their own groups for social and cultural contact" (*Dusk of Dawn* 379), Fauset forms a basis for self-respect and affirmation for her characters, especially the female ones.

1.2. THE VEIL AS PRIVILEGE AND GIFT

Fauset brings forward the stories of the characters in the novel to emphasize the experiences of African Americans and the subjects in the wake of their development. The gift of the veil, in other words, the second sight, makes possible the recognition of the world beyond the veil for what it is. Du Bois explains this process from the perspective of a fictional academic: "He had left his queer thought-world and come back to a world of motion and men. He looked now for the first time sharply about him, and wondered how he had seen so little before. He grew slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world; he first noticed now the oppression that had not seemed oppression before" (*The Souls* 157). Fauset's characters gain such awareness as a privilege and gift as they make contact with their Black roots through challenging experiences in their private and public lives. According to Nina Miller, "this group of young people stands at the threshold of a new era for the race, an era whose racial triumphs and failures will be triumphs and failures of publicity" (208). In this regard, the defacement of the veil provides the characters with different shapes of subjectivity and awareness.

Joanna, ambitious and contemptuous at first, reconciles with her dissatisfactions and becomes in search of happiness in motherhood and domesticity. The second sight of Joanna provides her with the consciousness that the personal success necessarily should lead to communal ones for racial uplift. She lacks such accomplishment which is essential for the full emancipation. Joanna, "having come to understand the nothingness of that inordinate craving for sheer success, surprised herself by the pleasure which came to her

out of what she had always considered the ordinary things of life. Realizing how nearly she had lost the essentials in grasping after the trimmings of existence, she experienced a deep, almost holy joy in the routine of the day" (*There Is Confusion* 273). With such awareness, she ends her career on stage, marries Peter and gives birth to their child. The statement of "Her desire for greatness had been a sort of superimposed structure which, having been taken off, left her true self ... Joanna was free" (*There Is Confusion* 274) indicates that Joanna's own choice to be a mother and a wife emancipates her from the enslavement of her ambition. In this sense, Joanna fulfills her father's expectations only by remolding them. Fauset stresses that struggling for gaining acclaim for its own sake has its own problematic consequences as she ironically portrays Joanna as a domestic figure at home in the end. It also demonstrates that Fauset contributes to the literature of Black women with various kinds of figures which are all influential in the formation of Black female subjectivity.

Joanna realizes the fact of striving for recognition as a Black person in America from the very beginning. However, her perspective alters from "striving for acceptance" to striving for the success of her husband through her recognition of the bondage of the veil. The gift of the veil, in her case, takes the form of love:

> ... nothing in the world is so hard to face as this problem of being colored in America ... it takes courage to fight against it, Peter, to keep it from choking us, submerging us. But now that we have love, Peter, we have a pattern to guide us out of the confusion ... I learned that nothing in the world is worth as much as love. For people like us, people who can and must suffer—Love is our refuge, and strength. (*There Is Confusion* 267)

The reconstruction of their relationship represents African Americans rebuilding their race. Fauset also underscores the significance of "female interference" for racial uplift as Joanna diverts her aspiration from herself to Peter and their child symbolizing the future free from internalized inferiority. She becomes "the arbiter of her own and her child's destiny" (*There Is* Confusion 275).

Peter's "white blood" and the confrontation between him and one of the white Byes display as Fauset's exposé of the idea of "race" as a cultural construction, and that it does not have a solid ground. He finds out his kinship to white Byes from his great-great-uncle, Meriwether Bye. He explains his intention of making Joanna and Peter's dark-skinned son the heir of Bye family with hesitation: "How would you like me to take him and educate him, bring him up away from all he'd have to go through in this country ... And probably, probably, I say, I should make him my heir" (*There Is Confusion* 277). He does not agree with the idea of proclaiming the affinity publicly, however. In this case, Peter declines the fortune offered to him. Peter's statement, "Funny, isn't it, Joanna; those two families, the Black and the white Byes, lived so long together that they developed similar characteristics, like husbands and wives, you know. And they say white and colored people are fathoms apart" (*There Is* Confusion 264) predicates the simplicity of the notion of equality and serves as a critique of the artificiality of the distinction between colors.

Peter's "white blood" functions both as a redefinition of "tragic mulatto" and a correction to the white Southern best-selling author T. S. Stribling's depiction of mulatto protagonists which reflect the general racist understanding. Harker explains that "In traditional formulations, mulattoes suffer because they are both rational, from their 'white' blood, and corrupt, from their 'Black' blood" (78). In an ironic sense, Peter states that "See, dear, there is the source of all I used to be. My ingratitude, my inability to adopt responsibility, my very irresoluteness come from that strain of white Bye blood" (*There Is Confusion* 280). The stereotype of "one drop of Black blood would devastate a man" is reversed by Fauset through the degenerative infusion of white heritage. Her criticism against the one drop rule of white supremacists proves that she does not advocate "whiteness" in her works as critiqued. She also criticizes Stribling's tragic mulatto who detests his Black blood by depicting Peter as experiencing the contrary. Peter, in recognition of the veil, transcends the white gaze and explores the possibilities of his inner resources through the gift of the veil. In the light of these, Peter's refusal of the acclamation of white Bye heritage represents African Americans' rejection to be approved by white people and form their self through the resources of their own society.

The story propounds Maggie's "gifted" self-recognition phase in the depiction of her change from a dependent woman to a self-governing businesswoman, representing the possibility of self-invention in spite of the color line and class impediments. After a series of difficult events like her divorce, sexual and physical abuse by her former husband, engagement to Peter and later abandonment, she reshapes her life through the remorse of her self-centeredness and goes to Europe as an army nurse to serve the Black troops. This setting provides Philip and Maggie's union and their second chance as a couple. Calloway states that "When Maggie is finally able to appreciate love for its own sake and renounce her effort to use a man as a substitute ... she is enabled to find happiness" (45). She is able to demonstrate earnest feelings as she now respects him for the person he is rather than the class to which he belongs. Their uniting and Maggie's connection to Blacks in the war set the basis for her emancipation and self-empowerment as they spark a feeling of satisfaction and integrity. She opens distinguished beauty parlors in different cities on the East coast after her return. As Jones puts it, "She grows from a young woman of folk origins with aspirations of entering the bourgeois class through marriage into a self-sufficient businesswoman" (32). She achieves her self-development, forms a relationship involving mutual love and respect, and sets up her own business. Maggie's portrayal as a self-contained businesswoman corresponds to American women's involvement in labor force as essential subjects at the turn of the century. Fauset highlights the possibility of self-formation despite the presence of the veil thickened both by color and class prejudices through the account of Maggie. With the resolution of Maggie's story, Fauset advocates the significance of the contributions of all levels of society, working-class, middle and middle-upper-classes, for a possible racial uplift of Black community.

Similar to Maggie's transformation, Vera Manning succeeds in regarding the community's concerns rather than her personal aspirations. She changes her consciousness toward the uplift of her people and takes advantage of her lighter complexion by working as an undercover in the South to investigate the lynchings and the crimes based on racial hatred. Like the concept of "tragic mulatto," Fauset also

remolds the general characteristics of "passing" through Vera's portrayal. As a light-skinned character, her depiction reinforces the idea that all classes in the society is influential for uplift. Vera, "represent[ing] a shift from bourgeois aspirations to a concern with the folk and consequently becom[ing] more concerned about the African American community as a whole than about her own aspirations" (Jones 29), becomes capable of merging her two identities, which provides her with an autonomous subjectivity and emancipation from the perception of the white society.

Fauset makes use of the secondary characters to present model figures who discover the significance of communality and contribute to the uplift of African American people. Although Maggie is from working-class, she transcends the obstacle of class and becomes Fauset's "exemplary" figure, suggesting that Fauset opts her model figures from common people. Vera is a light-complexioned woman, yet she strategically uses her skin color to serve for African American community. The masterfully depicted characters have evidential values for refuting the criticisms against Fauset about her class and color advocacy. Vera and Maggie continue their quest for self-actualization and contribution to Black society. Joanna, on the other hand, is limited by her choice of domesticity. In other words, Joanna finds the solution in individuality while Vera and Maggie achieve communality. Fauset masterfully plays with the notions of "passing" and "confusion" through her reverse depiction of characters and incidents. There is a strategic transcendence between the characters and the confusion is resolved with their final positions.

In the novel, Fauset constructs the depths of the characters through the use of Du Bois' theory of double consciousness and the concepts of the veil, twoness and second sight. She explains how the confrontation of the characters with a constant racialization influences their comprehension of the world around them and how their resistance against the veil flourishes the second sight. The gift allows the subjects to transcend the world beyond the veil through recognizing it. Fauset exposes a distinctive experience of African American modernity. She refuses the strict color lines drawn by the Anglo-American

designs of modernity. Supporting the ideas of Du Bois, she presents the concept of veil as the building of Black self-construction. The veil is not something to be removed or destroyed since it is a social construct. Yet, it must be transcended for freedom. In Du Bois' words, "The better and truer self" (*The Souls* 9) of the characters is not for "Africaniz[ing] America" nor "bleach[ing] his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism" but for individual freedom to develop a culture together. It also unleashes the characters' self-formation from the perspective of the whites. The reconstruction of the self becomes possible only through social development which excites Black society's members to serve to and love their community. This perspective advocates that one's individuality and the community are an indivisible whole in African American society.

CHAPTER 2. *PLUM BUN: A NOVEL WITHOUT A MORAL*

Fauset's second novel, *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, published in 1929, serves as another bildungsroman which deals with an African American female artist's self-realization and self-construction. Through the adoption of this form, Fauset puts forward the experiences of light-complexioned Angela Murray as she passes for white to be accomplished as an artist and break free of the discrimination due to her Black heritage. Fauset makes use of the bildungsroman to reflect the impact racial identity, class and gender have on the lives of Black female artists. As Angela reconciles with her roots and herself, the journey of self-invention is accomplished.

The setting has a transcontinental reach, connecting Philadelphia, New York/Harlem and Paris, the places which shape the physical and psychological development of the character. The setting is interwoven with the psychological growth of change of the protagonist. Philadelphia is Angela's hometown and is depicted as a city having institutional prejudice against African Americans: "... deliberate insult could be offered to colored people without causing the smallest ripple of condemnation or even consternation in the complacent commonwealth" (*Plum Bun* 152). The racial discrimination in Philadelphia leads her to decide to pass for white in New York which submits the plight of Black artists, patronage and the gap between the artistic and literary worlds of uptown and downtown. The events in New York and Harlem also serve as the authentic representation of the Harlem Renaissance artistic world. Angela's final destination, Paris, represents as coming to terms with her Black heritage and the ability to make any place her home. The narrative form and the setting support each other through the protagonist's psychological and physical explorations.

Although the most obvious theme of the novel is racial passing, it includes various underlying topics and subplots like the dependence on marriage for economic stability, physical and psychological exploration of subjectivity, and how racism and classism influence the Black artist's struggle to form an identity. Fauset presents the picture of an affectionate and supporting family scene in Philadelphia in the late 1920s. The family

members consist of Junius, the father, Mattie, the mother, and the female siblings Angela and Virginia, also called Jinny. The loving and supportive family is separated through an invisible color line into halves. The dark-skinned (Junius and Virginia) and the light-complexioned (Mattie and Angela). The sisters have markedly distinctive involvements, skin colors and tendencies. Jinny is not able to pass for white like Angela. She fancies singing, playing the piano and helping her mother with domestic chores. Art is a means of personal pleasure rather than an avenue into white bourgeois society for her. She dreams of becoming a music teacher and cultivate a new method of piano teaching. Her dark skin compels her to spend more time with Junius in her daily life while shopping or joining an event. Mattie and Angela, on the other hand, enjoys passing temporarily in the places African Americans are not allowed to enter. By these means, they attend fancy tea rooms, window-shop in white neighborhoods, eat in white-only restaurants and visit luxurious hotels. Though she enjoys "passing" excursions in white neighborhoods, the desire for "passing" is not at the center of her life. She just takes advantage of her light skin in daily life as a compensation for her earlier times as a poor person. In contrast, Angela reckons being white is essential for economic stability and fulfillment and depends on her ability of painting. For Angela, art functions as a means of access to reputation, resources and freedom.

The death of Angela's parents and the racial discrimination in the art school of Philadelphia leads Angela's decision to pass for white in New York. One of the students, Mary Hastings, becomes the representative of the class and chooses Angela as her assistant. Another student, Esther Bayliss, reveals Angela's Black identity through her statement: "I don't know how it is with the rest of you, but I should have to think twice before I'd trust my subscription money to a colored girl" (*Plum Bun* 25). Fauset demonstrates that racial discrimination is omnipresent as Angela experiences it in a governmental institution. She leaves Jinny behind in Philadelphia and changes her name to Angele Mory. She dreams of becoming an artist and marrying a white man to secure herself. Months later, Jinny comes to New York for an exam and moves to Harlem. Angela avoids being seen with her in public and they live separate lives there. Angela becomes an art student at New York's Cooper Union and is ironically surrounded by

Black people there. She meets Anthony Cross who is also passing but neither is aware of the situation. He has a tragic family story which is revealed through flashbacks only at the end of the novel. Their family is made up of his father John Hall and her mother Maria Cruz who is "apparently white and Brazilian [yet] with the blood of many races in her veins" (*Plum Bun* 166). Anthony's grandfather, Anthony Hall, becomes a prosperous farmer at the time of Reconstruction. The white inhabitants begrudge his achievements and the marriage between his child and a white woman. Then, they murder the grandfather and take his body parts as trophies. Maria Cruz becomes a "madwoman [who] has gone all the rest of her life haunted by a terrible fear" (*Plum Bun* 168). These tragic incidents lead Anthony to escape to the South to pass for white in the North by altering his last name with her mother's. He clearly shows interest in Angela yet she avoids him because of his poverty even if she feels the same way. She makes another Black friend, Rachel Powell, with a dark skin. They remain distant from each other for two reasons. First, Miss Powell is used to be remote from all the other students because of the segregationist system in every part of the society. The fact that she is addressed as "Miss" throughout the story confirms her detachment from the others. Secondly, Angela does not want to risk her "passing" secret by being seen together. Miss Powell is a diligent and talented person. She wins an award and earns a scholarship in Paris which is taken away from her on the grounds that she would make the other students uncomfortable.[3]

Angela's search for a wealthy white husband takes precedence over her artistic aspirations. She believes that the only way to secure herself as a white privileged woman is the agency of a prosperous white man, in this case, a man called Roger Fielding. He is not aware of her Black heritage but knows that her economic status is not equal to his. He clearly refuses to marry her due to her economic situation but implies a relationship in which Angela becomes a mistress for him. She continues her relationship with him after this offer. Angela's inner turmoil and questioning her choice of passing start when Roger

[3] The story that develops around the character Miss Powell is based on the Harlem Renaissance sculptor, Augusta Savage's experience. Savage applies to an art scholarship in France and is accepted. As the donors learns that she is Black, they revoke the fellowship on account of the fact that a Black person would make the white students feel indisposed. Fauset fictionalizes the incident to take notice of how racial discrimination influences Black artists.

leaves her. She realizes that there is a limit to her desires. Abandoned, she finds solace in art and gets closer to Jinny. Due to her awakened consciousness, she refuses Roger's marriage proposal later. Ultimately, she proclaims her racial identity as she earns the same scholarship with Miss Powell. She makes a point by refusing the grant that was denied Miss Powell, and manages to support herself in Paris. There, she reunites with Anthony. In this sense, the story reveals the inner and outer confusions of Angela as she struggles for financial stability and for embracing her racial identity. Her quest brings out the influence the notions of colorism, classism and racism have on the characters.

Fauset, as she uses children's song in her first book, also creates an awareness through the epigraph of the novel which is again taken from a children's rhyme: "To Market, to Market / To buy a Plum bun; / Home again, Home again, / Market is done," suggesting the theme of a journey, a departure-and-return narrative. The rhyme serves as the titles for the five sections of the novel: "Home" represents the happy family times of Angela in Philadelphia with her parents and sister. "Market" stands for the cosmopolitan New York setting where she passes for white. "Plum Bun," used as an innocent pleasure of a child in the rhyme, is a metaphor for Angela's desire to find a wealthy white husband and her relationship with Roger through its ups and downs. "Home Again" section largely presents the reconciliation of the siblings and the journey through which she comes to terms with her roots. Lastly, "Market Is Done" reveals the resolution of everything as she proclaims her racial identity, moves to Paris and is reunited with her lover. Angela tackles with the issues of identity, femininity and class to achieve psychological fulfillment in the story. The use of the rhyme exposes that the most basic wishes of Black people, likened to the simple pleasures of children, require whiteness. It indicates the hardships of being African American in America through the disenchantment of childhood expectations. In this sense, Fauset makes use of children rhymes and songs to give insights into the experiences of Black people.

Passing is a prominent theme in the novel. The desire to reap the benefits of being white prompts the character to pass for white. Also, the extreme obsession with the idea of color

and how it prevents one from any possibility in life push the light-complexioned character to take advantage of it. However, passing comes with its psychological influences. It compels the subject to obey the standards designated by the whites and "most of them pay a high price or are punished for this 'transgression'" (Rottenberg 443). They are punished for the dissimulation of Black identity and complying with whites who "dehumanize" Blacks. In the story, the punishment becomes loneliness. The fact that the subject leaves the family roots behind and cannot form any intimate relationship with others result in solitude before she gains her racial pride and comes to terms with being Black.

Nevertheless, the passing challenges the notions of race, identities and essentialism. Elaine K. Ginsberg asserts that "Whatever the rationale, both the process and the discourse of passing interrogate the ontology of identity categories and their construction" (4). Some of the family members are allowed to benefit from the same facilities with whites while the others cannot obtain them. This portrayal becomes the proof that the rules designated by oppressive society have no rationale. In its challenging of the construction of racial identities, passing offers a possibility for self-construction. As Marcia A. Dawkins puts it, "We fail to see that every act of passing presents an opportunity for reconciliation, expresses a desire for social change, and calls for the freedom to be who we are" (158). The concept represents that the discriminative rules are designated by the whites without any basis but the light-complexioned character benefits from the opportunities although she has Black heritage. The deconstruction of race as a natural or biological concept paves the way for a social change. Through the process of passing, Fauset questions the oppressions placed upon Black female artist and puts forward the quest for self-determination in the novel.

2.1. LEAVING HOME

The incidents Fauset depicts in the novel demonstrate the omnipresence of discrimination, which exists in every part of society like institutions, art world and public areas, based on skin color by the oppressive group for their own benefits. In this way, she creates awareness of the artificial practices imposed upon African American people

through colorism. During the stroll around the city, the family members are separated into lighter and darker complexioned groups with Angela and her mother spending time together and Jinny and her father accompanying each other. Jacquelyn McLendon states that "... color division in the Murray family is arbitrarily imposed by Fauset who suggests that it is a division symptomatic of the parents' and society's attitudes about color" (33) and adds, "it is not color itself that is responsible for the division but the construction put on color" (33). The society clearly measures people through their skin color. Angela and Mattie are able to attain anything they wish due to their light skin. However, the Black blood in their veins would prevent it if known. Fauset reflects the sense of secrecy they felt, "No one could tell, no one would have thought for a moment that she and her mother had come from tiny Opal Street; no one could have dreamed of their racial connections" (*Plum Bun* 34). Despite the fact that she benefits from the secret truth her skin conceals, Mattie is also aware of the irrationality of the situation: "... rules that are unnatural and unjust, because the world was made for everybody, wasn't it, Junius?" (*Plum Bun* 18). The depiction of distinctive treatment toward the same family members proves the artificiality of the racialized categories.

The absurdity of colorism is also reflected in the relationship between Angela and her darker friend Matthew Hanson. When they decide to go to the theatre together with the expectation of having a pleasant time, the authorized person exposes the cruel discrimination in social surroundings: "'Well, you won't sit in there tonight; the management's changed hands since then, and we're not selling tickets to colored people ... the young lady can come in'" (*Plum Bun* 45). The rules that recognize the skin pigmentation shape the couple's social life, dictating each to stand on the different sides of the color line. Such thoughts occupy Angela's mind, and she concludes that being Black is equivalent to struggle and agony and whiteness opens the ways for pleasure and force since the influence of colorism is explicitly imposed upon even a simple pleasure of watching a play in the society.

Although Angela learns passing from her mother, they have different perspectives on its implementations. According to Mattie, her ultimate goal is not to benefit from the privileges in the white society. She loves her husband and does not consider leaving her family roots permanently because she has fair skin. In this sense, she uses passing more strategically as it means taking advantage of white privileges through the light skin; yet, this does not prevent her from embracing her Black identity. In other words, "Passing is not supposed to be a rejection of the practices, values, and networks that hold together communal interconnections ... instead, passing is supposed to be another practice *within* these interconnections" (Phipps 121) as Mattie comprehends them. Fauset lays the foundation of Mattie's passing and bourgeois pleasures through her former experience of financial privation and partaking in the workforce in the beginning of the twentieth century with a flashback: "She was old enough to remember a day when poverty for a coloured girl connoted one of three things: going out to service, working as a ladies' maid, or taking a genteel but poorly paid position as seamstress ... in one of the numerous impeccable, aristocratic suburbs of Philadelphia" (*Plum Bun* 16).

Angela, on the other hand, considers the idea of passing as her ultimate rescue from the burdens of racial discrimination. She views being white as fundamental in venturing the broader possibilities. She believes what Dawkins states: "the power of passing may not necessarily be comforting, although its outcomes [such as] personal liberty, expression and class mobility often prove personally worthwhile [which leads one to] the sensation of value" (155). As she observes the hardships of her parents to form a middle-class life as Black people, her mindset is anchored on the idea of living as a white person from a quite early age:

> The stories which Junius and Mattie told of difficulties overcome, of the arduous learning of trades, of the pitiful scraping together of infinitesimal savings, would have made a latter-day Iliad, but to Angela they were merely a description of a life which she at any cost would avoid living [because she believes that] somewhere in the world were paths which lead to broad thoroughfares, large, bright houses, delicate niceties of existence. Those paths Angela meant to find and frequent. At a very early age she had observed that the good things of life are unevenly distributed; merit is not always rewarded; hard labour does not necessarily entail adequate recompense. Certain fortuitous endowments, great

> physical beauty, unusual strength, a certain unswerving singleness of mind, gifts bestowed quite blindly and disproportionately by the forces which control life, these were the qualities which contributed toward a glowing and pleasant existence. (*Plum Bun* 7-8)

It is clear that the idea and practice of passing convinces Angela to confirm the standards indoctrinated by the white society. Gregory Phipps remarks that

> By imparting the secrets of passing to her daughter, Mattie lays the groundwork for Angela's subversions of racist laws as well as the expansion of new experiences. Yet the opportunities for growth quickly move outside of the matrilineal network … Her mother cultivates Angela's pragmatic approach to experience and beauty, but by doing so, she also arms Angela with the desire and means to abandon the heritage that has made this approach possible. (121)

Even if she enjoys daily passing with her mother, she rejects to walk through the same path with her parents and considers passing as means of escape. Angela's passing brings about "assum[ing] a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other" (Ginsberg 3).

The idea of colorism and depreciation of Blacks is penetrated into the society so profoundly that the same family members are forced to regulate their lives based on these standards. In this sense, Fauset does not only portray the unjust discriminative treatment toward African Americans but also displays the predicament of Black community, especially those with the light-complexion. The tenseness of such environment is depicted in a scene where the two separate groups of the family encounter:

> Angela had put on her gloves and was waiting for her mother, who was drawing on her own with great care, when she glimpsed in the laughing, hurrying Saturday throng the figures of her father and of Virginia. They were close enough for her mother, who saw them too, to touch them by merely descending a few steps and stretching out her arm. In a second the pair had vanished. Angela saw her mother's face change with trepidation she thought. She remarked: "It's a good thing Papa didn't see us, you'd have had to speak to him, wouldn't you?" But her mother, giving her a distracted glance, made no reply. (*Plum Bun* 11)

Angela's remark and her mother's unresponsiveness also shed light on their perspectives on the idea of passing. It is obvious that the ingrained colorism damages even the most intimate and private relationships. Kristin K. Czarnecki argues that "The Murray household seems placid enough on the surface, yet the family's color-specific weekend activities disclose the means by which America's race obsession disrupts familial bonds" (120). The color obsession of the community also shapes the mentality of Angela which become clear in her statement: "Colour or rather the lack of it seemed to the child the one absolute prerequisite to the life of which she was always dreaming. One might break loose from a too hampering sense of duty; poverty could be overcome; physicians conquered weakness; but colour, the mere possession of a Black or a white skin, that was clearly one of those fortuitous endowments of the gods" (*Plum Bun* 8). Her discontent results from her experience of double consciousness and consequently living in two distinct worlds. She is conscious of both the restrictions disposed on her as a Black female and the opportunities awaiting if she opts to pass the other side of the line. In the light of these, it can be argued that Fauset's approach to the notion of colorism underscores how African American community suffers from it on its own merits.

2.2. OUT INTO THE WORLD, TO THE NEW YORK "MARKET"

Angela's motive in passing is to dispose herself of the heavy burden of racial discrimination. It is not the contempt of her Black identity but rather "the rejection of a Black identification that brings too much pain to be tolerated" (Piper 13). Disillusioned by the cruel attitude she confronts at art school, she settles to actualize the plan which is always in her mind. She passes for white and moves to New York, to "market" representing New York as the commercial center where she assumes she can achieve her aim. She hopes for enhancing her financial and social opportunities. She justifies her decision to Jinny: "'Why should I shut myself off from all the things I want most,—clever people, people who do things, Art,—' her voice spelt it with a capital,—'travel and a lot of things which are in the world for everybody really but which only white people, as far as I can see, get their hands on. I mean scholarships and special funds, patronage'" (*Plum Bun* 47). Her longing for fulfillment as an artist and obtaining access to social status, force and affluence crystalize the controversial condition of the artists. Crutcher Lewis asserts that "A substantial element of Fauset's verisimilitude lies in her portrayal of women who in passing inform the readers of the depth of the personal animosity of whites toward

Blacks" (380). Angela, in this sense, does not detest her skin color but is grieved by the mistreatment she has hitherto received and is likely to receive in the future. For this reason, she questions whether "a patent insistence on the fact of colour [is more significant] or an acceptance of the good things of life which could come to you in America if either you were not coloured or the fact of your racial connection was not made known" (*Plum Bun* 27). Her incentive becomes to disentangle herself from the shackles of racial prejudice.

Passing leads to Angela's self-estrangement in the first stage yet it also creates the sphere for the progress paving the way for building self-worth. Her alienation gives rise to her coercive subservience to white society. Passing provides Angela with various opportunities and experiences based on enjoyment and power. She finds chances of accessing several communities. In an ironic way, however, she encounters Black people in her social environment. She avoids Anthony's advances not because he is Black, since she is not conscious of his racial identity, but because of his financial status. Her relationship with Miss Powell, on the other hand, has to proceed discreetly since she cannot risk her status in a dominantly white circle. She disclaims to be publicly seen with her sister, Jinny, for the same reason. The fact that she cannot even choose her friends makes her realize that passing does not provide the freedom she thought it would. The act of passing prevents Angela from making her own choices and uproots her from her own sources even if it introduces a new range of experiences. In this way, Fauset stresses the burdens and fallacies of racial passing.

In addition to her desire for pleasure and independence through passing, Angela also becomes intent on finding a wealthy white man to marry. She is aware of the power scale in the society and a white man is a provider of haven and power for her: "She knew that men had a better time of it than women, coloured men than coloured women, white men than white women. Not that she envied them. Only it would be fun, great fun to capture power and protection in addition to the freedom and independence which she had so long coveted and which now lay in her hand" (*Plum Bun* 51). During a discussion with her

friend Martha about men and love, Angela defines love as a "subtle game" and Martha responds: "It is a game, and the hardest game in the world for a woman, but the most fascinating; the hardest in which to strike a happy medium. You see, you have to be careful not to withhold too much and yet to give very little. If we don't give enough we lose them. If we give too much we lose ourselves. Oh, Angele, God doesn't like women" (*Plum Bun* 84). She decides to play the game to buy plum bun from the market, in this case from New York which is inclusive of wealthy white men representing power of which Angela is in search.

Angela does not have any difficulty in finding a candidate yet it turns out that they play different games, and that they are in it for different purposes. She lays her eyes on Roger Fielding who seems to possess everything Angela desires for. As they date, she dreams of how prosperous their future would be together and starts to brush aside her art career. Her dreams become waste once she receives a "paramour" proposal instead of a wedding proposal. He promises to finance and support her yet he strongly objects the idea "of marrying her or any other woman so far removed from his father's ideas and requirements" (*Plum Bun* 132). Clinging to the expectation of a real proposal one day, Angela endures the sexual exploitation. It leads Roger to become disinterested and end their relationship. As Deborah McDowell stresses in her introduction of the 1985 version of the novel, "Angela's and Roger's trips to the market are for two different plum buns. For her the plum bun is power and influence attainable only through marriage to a wealthy white man. For him, the plum bun is ... consumable to be bought, used up, and expended" (xiv). Even if she easily discovers her wealthy white man, he plans to play the game according to his own rules.

Through the relationship of Angela and Roger, Fauset highlights the fact that class sometimes transcends the problem of race. In other words, class distinction weighs against women as much as race. Roger is not conscious of Angela's Black heritage yet because she does not have the necessary social background, he is willing to acknowledge her only as his mistress. In this sense, her whiteness remains incapable of increasing her

social standing. Sharon L. Jones advocates that "In the portrayal of Angela and Roger's relationship, Fauset reveals how class distinctions and bourgeois attitudes influence the choice of a sutiable mate even when race is not a factor" (42-43). Fauset considers class as one of the most significant components in the structure of the society and illustrates this truth in her novel. She depicts a society in which connections are dominated by the notions of class and race. She puts forward an American society fabricated through ideologies based on racism and classism and it generates the idea that the society is compelled to experience ill-shaped relationships. From this perspective, Fauset both criticizes classism rooted in the society and draws attention to the necessity of possessing class consciousness on the part of the Black community. The depiction of the relationship between Angela and Roger becomes essential to comprehend the power of class relations as well as racial identity in the society.

Fauset interrelates the experiences of passing and double consciousness through her presentation of the inner turmoil of Angela because of that affair. The experience with double consciousness carrying with it the white gaze toward African Americans strengthens her inner confusions. She confronts Roger's behavior toward African Americans and how he has the management dismiss a group of Blacks from the restaurant. The occasion haunts Angela for the entire evening and for days. She also has to keep Miss Powell away: "She heard footsteps hurrying behind her, heard her name and turned to see Miss Powell, pleased and excited. She laid her hand on Angela's arm but the latter shook her off. Roger must not see her on familiar terms like this with a colored girl for she felt that the afternoon portended something and she wanted no side issues" (*Plum Bun* 86). The last incident, that she pretends not to recognize her sister at the train station in New York, becomes the milestone of her realization about how she is alienated from herself. In this sense, she is once again shackled by the limitations. As a person who has relationship both with whites and Blacks, she is bound to experience twoness in her life. She performs whiteness to gain possibilities and pleasures because as an African American female, she is certain of the impossibility of having those opportunities. In addition to and as a consequence of these, her inner turmoil gets beyond endurance as she is incapable of drifting apart her racial connections. Fauset underscores the strong

influence racial connections have on the Black individuals who experience passing. It reinforces the idea that passing and double consciousness are interrelated concepts as both are about identities.

Apart from her loneliness, Angela does not suffer from an unhealthy relationship as it becomes only a phase in her journey to self-worth, self-reliance and self-esteem. Fauset underscores the vitality of self-sufficiency for women. She defines the ending of the relationship as "Angela's brief episode with Roger had left no trace on her moral nature; she was ashamed now of the affair with a healthy shame at its unworthiness but beyond that she suffered from no morbidness" (*Plum Bun* 142). The novel "without a moral" deciphers itself at this point as Angela places her own morality, earned as a result of her interpersonal relationships, above the constructed and artificial doctrines of the white society. She considers her identity as the only solid foundation which aids to construct her subjectivity. Fauset is aware of the injustices inflicted on African American women: "Indeed, most women must be able to say as did men, "You are mine," not merely, "I am yours"" (*Plum Bun* 159). The message given is that Black women must be self-assured and self-sufficient to refuse the constructed social systems.

2.3. "HOME AGAIN" TRANSFORMED

Angela's end of relationship and longing for her familial roots lead her to question the choice of passing. The sense of solitariness closes the gap between Angela and her community. She is now sure that she desires for a life without secrets and games. When Roger turns back to marry her, she rejects his proposal: "Oh Roger, Roger! I wouldn't consider it. No, when I marry I want a man, a man, a real one, someone not afraid to go on his own! Some people might revive dead ashes, but not you and I, ... I'd never be able to trust you again and I'm sick of secrets and playing games with human relationships" (*Plum Bun* 188). In this sense, Angela reaches a critical threshold in which she is able to say "you are mine" rather than "I am yours." Additionally, she starts to discover her sense of racial pride and does not abstain from the discussions regarding race and identities. She finds herself meditating on whether it is "worthwhile to throw away the benefits of casual whiteness in America when no great issue was at stake? Would it indeed be

worthwhile to forfeit them when a great issue was involved?" (*Plum Bun* 194). Her conversation with Martha creates the awareness of her longing for her roots:

> How marvelous to go back to parents, relatives, friends with whom one had never lost touch! The peace, the security, the companionableness of it! This was a relationship which she had forfeited with everyone, even with Jinny. And as for her other acquaintances in Philadelphia, Henson, Butler, Kate and Agnes Hollowell, so completely, so casually, without even a ripple had she dropped out of their lives that it would have been impossible for her to re-establish their old easy footing even had she so desired. (*Plum Bun* 140)

Angela undergoes an explicit transformation once her relationship with Roger ends and she begins to gain autonomy over her own choices. As Hobbs declares, she experiences "the agony of losing one's sense of self and one's family" (176). This experience enables her to come to terms with her Black roots.

Angela feels the sense of contentment and racial pride more as she gets closer to art, her sister and her former friend Anthony. She becomes more involved in her painting and earning a living. Her recognition and commitment to reconstructing her attachment with Jinny turns a new page in her life.

> For deep in her heart she realized the longing to cast in her lot once more with Virginia ... And as for colour; when it seemed best to be coloured she would be coloured; when it was best to be white she would be that. The main thing was, she would know once more the joys of ordinary living, home, companionship, loyalty, security, the bliss of possessing and being possessed. (*Plum Bun* 147)

She also strives for rebuilding her relationship with Anthony with the expectation of establishing a true intimate love affair. Anthony proclaims his identity to Angela and states his Black blood as a reason not to be with her. Fauset presents another irony here as both characters are Black but their racial passing keeps them apart. Anthony also feels racial pride after his passing experience and discloses himself to Angela: "I'm not ashamed of my blood. Sometimes I think it's the leaven that will purify this Nordic people

of their cruelty and their savage lust of power" (*Plum Bun* 169) indicating that having racial pride and self-respect are essential for Black community to gain emancipation and equality they are longing for. Anthony's unraveling enlightens Angela in the sense that "she thought then of Black people, of the race of her parents and of all the odds against living which a cruel, relentless fate had called on them to endure. And she saw them as a people powerfully, almost overwhelmingly endowed with the essence of life. They had to persist, had to survive because they did not know how to die" (*Plum Bun* 181)**.** Fauset reunites Angela with Jinny, Anthony, and her art to exhibit the reinforcement of her sense of self-esteem and communal pride.

Angela's declaration of her Black heritage to reporters functions as a milestone in her quest for self-esteem and as an embracement of her racial identity. Angela's and Miss Powell's well-received painting and sculpting provides them with the chance of award and fellowship from Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in France. Angela finds out that the board revokes its passage money on the grounds that Powell would make the white students uncomfortable. As reporters ask Angela about her feelings, she says: "... 'Miss Powell isn't going to France on the American Committee Fund and I'm not going either ... And for the same reason ... I mean that if Miss Powell isn't wanted, I'm not wanted either. You imply that she's not wanted because she's coloured. Well, I'm coloured too'" (*Plum Bun* 202). Angela embraces the rights of Miss Powell representing the rights of African Americans. She comprehends that concealing her racial identity elicits and encourages the power structure of the white society promoting racial hierarchy. She also loses her passage money yet gains the sense of contentment and dignity. By her own means and with the support of her sister, she still goes to France which serves as the setting reuniting Anthony and Angela and demonstrating her ability to make any place her home, this time through racial acknowledgement. Having said that, social interconnections among Black people enable Angela to disengage herself from the artificial and constructed laws of the oppressive society. Phipps indicates that "Angela's revelation of her background in Miss Powell's room serves as a defining moment in the growth of her creative democracy" (130). Fauset places the transformation of Angela into

the foreground as she reconciles with her racial connections representing the affirmation of her identity.

Angela's experience of passing turns out to be a more expansive process of transformation which deconstructs essentialism and engenders new facts that reshape her sense of autonomy, her racial connections and her subjectivity as a Black female artist. In her journey of self-integrity she encounters various obstacles yet she ultimately settles on the idea of racial pride. Her transformation is the result of several individual experiences from pleasure to embracing racial identity. Phipps suggests that "growth is a self-perpetuating and never-ending process ... [it] involves culture-generating practices within Black women's communities and the externalization of their influence on society" (131). Angela's experience of growth enables her to recognize her roots and identity as a Black woman in the course of passing process. In this sense, by ensuring "a beginning and an invitation for ... interrogat[ing] innermost selves, motives, movements and meanings" (Dawkins 153), passing "has the potential to create a space for creative self-determination and agency: the opportunity to construct new identities, to experiment with multiple subject positions, and to cross social and economic boundaries that exclude or oppress" (Ginsberg 16). In the final analysis, it would not be wrong to suggest that Fauset does not only unfold the realities of the biased community, she also assures the readers of the possibility of emancipation from repression. Thus, she highlights the necessity of social development possible only with African Americans' own resources.

CHAPTER 3. *THE CHINABERRY TREE: A NOVEL OF AMERICAN LIFE*

The Chinaberry Tree is Jessie R. Fauset's third novel published in 1931. Fauset had difficulty in compromising with a company to publish her book since the companies considered her work as distanced from the actual experiences of African Americans. The Frederick A. Stokes publishing company refused to publish the book on the grounds that the novel was an "inaccurate portrayal of African Americans due to the absence of primitivistic and exotic images" as portrayed by the novels of the period like *Nigger Heaven* (1926) by Carl Van Vechten and *Home to Harlem* (1928) by Claude McKay (Jones 44-45). Fauset's discussion on race, class and gender including a middle-class Black family confronted the recent expectations of the period. This experience compelled her to find a white female author, Zona Gale, to authenticate the book with an introduction part. Jones states that Fauset's experience calls attention to "underlying prejudices against the African American individual's status as a literate and creative individual as well as assumptions about the definition of authentic African American life, culture, and experience" (45). This situation points out the hardships of Black writers (male or female) who struggle to raise their voice in literature.

The novel gives critical insights to the realities of Black women's struggles, though it was widely criticized in the 1930s because of Fauset's "bourgeois perspective" (Phipps 137). Critics thought that such mannerism did not contribute to the literature of the period. David Littlejohn labeled her novels as "lace-curtain romances" (51). Although the book includes significant characters from working-class and psychological collapse of women because of marginalization, Littlejohn criticized the work as being advocator of middle-class and as a simple love affair. *The Chinaberry Tree* was similarly condemned for being a "novel about the first colored woman in New Jersey to wear lounging pajamas" (102) by Robert Bone. He attracts attention to the renewed representation of colored women which was not portrayed in African American literature before and also fails to notice that Fauset endeavored to redefine the image of Black women which previously depicted as "not virtuous" or "worthless." Amrijit Singh thought that Fauset did not embrace a critical attitude toward "the complexities of intraracial class problems" and created "a

brown-skinned replica of the white American world" (63). Even if they presented authentic experiences of African American women, the issues Fauset dealt with in her novel received criticism by males. It demonstrates that Black males abstained from giving priority to women's issues, suggesting that the formation of the "New Negro" identity was influenced by male-dominated ideas.

Throughout history, male-oriented approach harmed the achievements of women writers in literary criticism. The influence of the rising feminist movement in the 1970s, however, challenged the perspective on the novels of women writers. According to Marcia Holly, feminist criticism challenging the males' approach "has emerged from a radical perspective about literature and sex roles, and is a tentative beginning in the development of a feminist literary aesthetic –one that is fundamentally at odds with masculinist value standards, measuring literature against an understanding of authentic female life" (46). The emergence of this field enabled women to reevaluate the criticisms toward the books of women writers in the past. Rita Dandridge, for instance, criticized Bone's "chauvinistic" remark on *The Chinaberry Tree* mentioned above, "Armed with unreasonable devotion to writers of his own sex and preconceived ideas about the female writer's inferiority as a person, this critic attacks the Black women's novel by showing contempt for the writer" (5). Mary Jane Lupton also reassessed their approach on feminist perspective,

> Such matters, such spaces, do not tend to excite male critics; too frequently they measure fictional behavior in terms of shooting a bear or stalking a whale or pushing a woman's body down an elevator shaft. The majority of critics who have written about *The Chinaberry Tree* disparage its "primness" or ridicule its "sentimentality" without placing these judgments within the context of women's culture. (388)

When evaluated from this perspective, *The Chinaberry Tree* does come forward as a novel which presents a backdrop for the experiences of African American women. Lupton stressed that "Jessie Fauset does create, in each of her four novels, authentic female lives, lives which reflect woman's struggle against racial, economic and sexual barriers. She also gives us lives which are fulfilled, even, in the end, happy. A recognition of this achievement seems crucial, I would think, to any comprehensive evaluation of her work

(392). In this sense, the increase of the feminist approaches toward the novels of women writers challenged the male-oriented point of view.

Fauset's work was not well received because her characters did not conform to the much-promoted profile of African American women and she challenged the presumptions about race, class and gender. At the time *The Chinaberry Tree* was published, African American women were portrayed as uneducated without interests or pursuits in fictions. However, as Gale mentions, Fauset tells the stories of "women carry[ing] on their lives, educat[ing] their children, and fill[ing] their times with interests social, domestic, and philanthropic ..." (vii). Fauset deliberately portrays middle-class women to redefine assumptions as colored people do not speak proper English or are not self-supporting. She analyzes the Black bourgeoisie in her book to sabotage the mistaken beliefs about race, class and gender. In this sense, she does not neglect the oppressed conditions of African Americans and stresses that even those who are in the "fortunate side" are affected by the prejudices and discrimination. Her works, contrary to the beliefs of male critics mentioned above, enrich the literary world as readers comprehend that "Blacks were more varied than the Harlem primitives then in vogue" (Feeney 365).

The Chinaberry Tree is set in Red Brook, New Jersey. The Red Brook society is fictional and in a sense is utopian because the races are gathered together in every aspect of life. Blacks and whites live together in peace in Red Brook at a time when a mutual neighborhood does not exist. The setting of the book offers an environment in which an African-American doctor can deliver white women's babies. The public areas are not separated as in real life because the offspring of both races could go to same schools. Fauset opts to portray a slightly utopian setting to exhibit an alternative experience for both societies and criticize Jim Crow Laws which seperate African Americans in public fields.

The concept of passing does not exist in the story as the fictional setting provides an atmosphere in which Black and white people could benefit from the facilities equally. One of the characters named Laurentine with a white blood and light skin has features necessary for passing yet she cannot perform it as the community is aware of her heritage from an African American mother. However, she never considers leaving her hometown to be able to pass in another place. The imaginary town depiction that mixes the races together removes the necessity of passing which the characters usually prefer for avoiding racial discrimination and possessing the privileges present for whites.

The novel exposes the stories of three Black women whose names are Sarah Strange (Aunt Sal), her daughter Laurentine and Laurentine's cousin Melissa. Fauset names the book after the tree which is given to Sarah Strange by his white lover, Colonel Halloway. The chinaberry tree represents the family roots and its fruits, known as poisonous, which symbolize Laurentine and Melissa cursed by the illegitimate affair between Sarah and Halloway. Gregory Phipps states that "*The Chinaberry Tree* portrays two young African American women who craft self-definitions in opposition to local paradigms that deploy racist essentialisms structured around the concept of "blood" (158). There are issues of common ground for Laurentine and Melissa to cope with throughout the book such as race, gender and class which bring them an awakening towards the end of the novel.

Laurentine is the daughter of Sarah Sal Strange and white Colonel Francis Halloway. The relationship between the two leads to Laurentine's long-lasting sadness and her burdensome childhood estrangement from the neighborhood which demonstrates a rigid disapproval of the indiscreet affair. She confronts the judgmental treatment as she is believed to have the "bad blood" in her veins. Laurentine makes new friendships owing to Judy, Sal's sister who is more extrovert, until Judy's secret affair with Sylvester Forten who is married to someone else emerges. They have a baby named Melissa Paul. The community never leaves behind the turmoil produced by such actions. However, as Patricia A. Milanes expresses, "sternest disapproval was of Laurentine [because she] embodied unmarried race-mixing" (176). Judy's leaving from the city provokes

Laurentine to be alienated from the community again and she spends most of her time contemplating under the Chinaberry Tree. Judy's illegitimate child, Melissa moves to Red Brook and secretly engages to her half-sibling (of which she is not aware), Malory Forten. Her appearance prompts lies, mysteries, gossips, and intrigues that recreate Laurentine's stifled upheavals. The past, present, and future intertangle as the behaviors of Sarah Strange, Colonel Halloway, Judy and Sylvester Forten influence their progeny.

Laurentine possesses the attributes of the archetypal tragic mulatto with her background of an African American mother and a rich white father. Her heritage results in ostracism as she is considered to have "bad blood." The "unwarrantable" affair between the parents makes her experience rejection in various aspects of her daily life by Black and white people in the town. She cultivates a "pragmatic understanding" of virtue since she is victimized by the presumptions predicated on "essentialist interpretations of morality" (Phipps 146). Laurentine endeavors to deconstruct the categorization which affiliates her identity with blood. Throughout the story, she prioritizes possessing an ideal of upper-class and feminine reputability to be disentangled from her illegitimate heritage.

Melissa, on the other hand, struggles to break free of the condemning approach of the society through "experimental orientation" (Phipps 140) in the community. She chases romantic encounters with Asshur Lane and Malory Forten because she considers that a respectable colored man is the path for associative experiences beyond the conventional Red Brook society. Before her quest is collapsed by the truth of her kinship with Forten, Melissa assumes that such interconnectedness could guide her to the community "where African American women lead glamorous and mobile lives" (Phipps 140).

Fauset puts forward the struggles of both women as they pursue to determine whether their identity is grounded upon an essential morality or is distinguished by an autonomous experience. Laurentine and Melissa take steps to reclaim their identities which challenge the essentialist mentality of the community. According to Phipps, for the most part, "the

rigid conventions and standards of Red Brook support essentialism" (139). Therefore, Laurentine and Melissa associate leaving the mindset of the traditional society with possibilities to produce reassuring diversifications of experience. Laurentine thinks that "some day, somehow she would get away from Red Brook. There must be other people, other places" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 9). She deconstructs the association between her illegitimate background and conventional standards as she transcends the idea of virtue designated by the commmunity for the sake of a unity developed through the ideals of femininity, purity and upper-class respectability. Her autonomous experience gains strength through her love affair with Dr. Stephen Denleigh. Likewise, Melissa's determination is clear as she says "Asshur's the only beau I have ... but I'll have others, lots more. Wait and see—oh wait and see! For one thing I won't stick around here all my life ..." (*The Chinaberry Tree* 81). Phipps suggests that their approaches to ideals like "virtue, love, beauty, and security" reveal their desire to reconstruct "intersectional constellations of identity" (139). Their endeavors to regenerate a sense of identity are allied with the opportunities for self-reliance within African American women's communities.

The features of the chinaberry tree after which Fauset names the book bring out significant qualities regarding the three women and their inner circles. Lupton notes that "The chinaberry tree, given to Sal Strange by her rich, white lover, Colonel Halloway, represents, at various times in the novel, freedom, protection, secrecy, exposure, intimacy, openness, and endurance" (384). The tree stands for the roots of the family through its strong trunks which are capable of readily sprouting. The color of the fruit, known as light-colored when they are ripen, stands for the light skin of Laurentine which is the most recognizable feature of her illegitimate background. She possesses the indoctrinated mindset of the community which promotes the idea of beauty coming from a fair skin, which in this case is poisonous. By naming the book "the chinaberry tree," which is known as resistant to native insects and enduring unlike local trees, making it difficult to uproot through biological controls ("Chinaberry Tree"), Fauset challenges the conventional understanding of the society that identity is related to one's race or blood. This suggests that one does not deserve to be ostracized because of their heritage as the

race is not "a fixed characteristic over an individual's lifetime ... it is fluid" (Nix and Qian 37). Also, she foreshadows the deconstruction of the essentialist mindset of the community through the title since the tree is able to take roots through its underground storage organs which makes it unmanageable to restrain by mechanical means ("Chinaberry Tree"), in this case by the society's artificial doctrines. In other words, the women suffering from the condemnation of the community are still able to redefine their subjectivity and the sense of morality. Fauset makes a purposeful choice with the name of the tree recognized as ready to thrive through its sprouts and create rich thickets which render possible environment in which it can generate "monocultures and lower biodiversity amongst native ecosystems" ("Chinaberry Tree"). The characteristics of the tree give critical insights to the mindsets of Fauset and Du Bois who advocate creating a collective identity. They both support the idea that collective consciousness and community support, which will be discussed further in the third part of this chapter, are fundamental in gaining their identity as African Americans. All the overtones of the title mentioned above crystalize Fauset's perspective with respect to African Americans' psychological conflicts in the process of self-formation.

3.1. CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Fauset uncovers how working-class and bourgeois notions enrich each other in the community through the romantic encounters of Laurentine and Melissa. In the community of Red Brook, belonging to a bourgeois class and possessing a respectable status play significant roles. Laurentine desires to be accepted by the Red Brook society. To some extent, she imposes ostracism upon herself since she internalizes the system of rules that blame the victim and deem the descendant responsible for the wrong of the parents. Ann DuCille suggests that "she has bought the myth of her own bad mixed blood" (433). She is possessed by the idea of being decent as she exclaims: "Oh God, you know all I want is a chance to show them how decent I am" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 36). According to her, the only way to demonstrate her decency is a legitimate marriage to a suitable colored man, namely the exact opposite of her mother's. Her decent life, thriving business which serves for white women to a great extent, and her economic freedom for gaining acceptance do not satisfy her. She specifically prays for "peace and security, a home life like other women, a name, protection" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 21). She believes

that the right path for the recognition in the society is a distinguished marriage. DuCille states that "As she assesses her own particular human condition, her only hope for legitimacy, respectability, acceptance, and safety is through marriage to the right colored man" (433). She considers marriage as an avenue into that respectable society as she suffers from her illegitimate heritage. Melissa also wishes to partake in the bourgeois Black community as she struggles to get rid of the shadow of the chinaberry tree, signifying the relationship between Sarah and Halloway. Phipps explains that "her initial enthusiasm for the town is tempered when she faces ostracism for sharing Aunt Sal's 'bad blood'" (154). She seeks for the suitable partner who would provide her the opportunities necessary for avoiding the mindset of the community. Both women's experiences give crucial insights to the different layers of African American community.

The novel highlights the role inheritance and social standing play in the experience of African American women. The relationship between Laurentine and Phil Hackett illustrates the significance of class in the story. Hackett acquires a respected position in the society with his material possessions to which Laurentine holds on for acceptance. He desires to be a well-respected politician as he and Laurentine start to date. He takes a call from a "pure-minded" family friend that she might not be appropriate partner because of her family history, especially for a person who aspires to make ground in politics. Thereupon, he breaks up with her. Beverly A. Bunch-Lyons remarks that "In order for a woman to marry into the 'proper' family, she must be of similar standing, in addition to possessing physical beauty, which translates into light skin, 'good' hair, petite body, and European features" (1703). Laurentine believes that she complies with the standards to be involved in the "proper family" with her physical features, with good straight hair, and light skin except the "blameless family life": "... poor colored people, they had so much to attain to in America ... looks, education, morals, ambition, a blameless family life! "I have all of them except the last," she thought wincing a little" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 59). Laurentine's first attempt to be a part of the respected middle-class society falls through because Hackett does not want to risk his political career with a woman of illegitimate background. The instance emphasizes the significant impact of the heritage and social conditions in the experience of Black women of the time.

Fauset stresses the permeability of social standing and challenges the categorization of people based on their heritage through the latter relationship of Laurentine with Dr. Denleigh as distinct from the first one. Dr. Denleigh, who possesses a southern background, makes Laurentine question her own submissive attitude toward the judgements of the society. She forms friendship with The Ismay family belonging to the upper-class of the society. Mrs. Ismay introduces Laurentine to Dr. Denleigh who shows an interest in her. Dr. Denleigh possesses a respectable status in the society yet he never forgets his roots with a history of misfortunate childhood and economic struggle. As she feels desperate about making a respectable ground in society, and afraid of not being accepted once again, Laurentine explains her illegitimate background. She finds acceptance, however, when she is hopeless. Their relationship opens Laurentine's horizon as Dr. Denleigh exhibits an open-minded approach to her background, "the facts of life, birth and death are more important than the rules of living, marriage, law, the sanction of the church or of man" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 121).

Contrary to Hackett, Denleigh provides qualities other than material possessions which exposes his affection and commitment to his roots. Laurentine is enlightened about the concept of love through his stance, "And suddenly, she who knew nothing about men, knew completely the difference between the love of a man like Denleigh and that of a man like Hackett" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 152). Phipps comments on the issue saying that "Laurentine discovers that the meaning of love is not couched in social or religious absolutes; rather, it develops in relation to her emotions and experiences" (147). His refusal to be judgmental like Hackett and the rest of the society enables Laurentine to be transformed from seeking for gaining acceptance to gaining autonomy. She says that "You restored me; you made me respect myself. You made me alive to my own inner resources. No matter what fate may spring on me, Stephen, I can never be that wretched, diffident, submissive girl again" (204). Licia M. Calloway claims that "within the Black community social class barriers are highly permeable and that one can elevate one's class status in any number of ways irrespective of the socioeconomic classification one inherits

at birth" (47). Fauset's portrayal of the relationship between Laurentine and Dr. Denleigh challenges the assumptions about race and class.

Melissa's experience is similar to Laurentine's in that she also views marriage as a means of economic and social security and ends up with a man who measures one's respectability through their inner attributes rather than social status. She keeps company with Asshur Lane whose future plan is to be a farmer. Melissa removes the chances for a relationship because she thinks she must marry someone with a more respectable profession like medicine or law. She refuses Asshur for Malory Forten who seems more suitable for Melissa with his engineering education. She and Malory find out that they are half-siblings when they are about to elope. She is devastated by the truth and reunites with Asshur. Asshur shares a similar background with Dr. Denleigh as he is the son of a southern minister from Alabama. He still feels attachted to the South although he has had a qualified education in the North. He has racial consciousness and never judges Melissa because of her background. Jones states that "Asshur represents a resolution of the folk and bourgeois in his quest for racial uplift, material acquisitions and his devotion and respect for the land and other individuals" (50). Fauset gives Melissa a new perspective through Asshur who values racial pride and embraces different layers of the community.

Fauset portrays the relationships of African American women to illustrate and criticize racial and class prejudice in the 1920s. Unlike the critical evaluations against her works, Fauset depicts characters from working-class and puts them in a significant position for the resolution of the events in the story. She indicates that individuals must gain self-knowledge to achieve autonomy even if the process is agonizing. The outcomes of the process gather the family together. Sarah, Laurentine and Dr. Denleigh give special interest to Melissa who is devastated by the truth of her kinship with Forten. "As a symbol of reconciliation between the bourgeois and the folk" (Jones 53), Asshur is also quite gentle and thoughtful toward Melissa and her family. Jones states that "both Dr. Denleigh and Asshur share an affinity with one another's values and beliefs because of their connections with the South, the folk, service, uplift and a belief in communalism over

elitism" (53). Their love transforms Laurentine and Melissa to individuals with the recognition that racial pride is more significant than middle-class aspirations. The women become aware of such values as "honesty, companionship, integrity, and respect for all individuals regardless of background or socioeconomic status" through their experiences (Jones 53). Fauset introduces multiple accounts of the African American experience and exhibits how the concepts of middle-class and common people enhance rather than collide with each other.

3.2. REDEFINING MISCEGENATION

The affair between Halloway and Sal could be defined as "miscegenation." The term refers to the marriage between two people who belong to different races. The concept was a taboo for a number of places throughout history including South Africa and the United States which legally prohibited such ingathering. Peggy Pascoe renders the term as the "rhetorical means of channeling the belief that interracial marriage was unnatural into the foundation of post-Civil War white supremacy" (1). The idea that people opposed to interracial marriage because it is out of the ordinary enabled white supremacy to justify their politics. In other words, "the more natural opposition to interracial marriage seemed, the easier it was for it to serve as the bottom line of white supremacy and the most commonsense justification for all other forms of race discrimination" (Pascoe 1). Although a lot of states were opposed to miscegenation and made mandatory decisions against it, the Supreme Court declared it as unconstitutional in 1967.

At the time miscegenation is still forbidden and frowned upon, Fauset radically centralizes the issue and its influence on the characters in her book. However, she redefines the subject by discussing it as a fact and not an unfortunate impediment. Marcy Jane Knopf indicates that in Fauset's world "miscegenation ... means freedom for Black women to make choices about their sexual and/or life partners" (xvii). Fauset approaches the relationship between Halloway and Sal as a love story rather than a tragic incident. "Sal and Halloway's relationship is not presented as one of exploitation or abuse, but one of love that racial taboos prevented from flourishing" (Jones 55). Miscegenation is not a

taboo in Fauset's perspective and it is radical for her to portray self-ordained women at that time.

Fauset's depiction of the liaison displays her point of view which differs from conventional view of miscegenation. She keeps her supportive manner to unconventional relationships throughout the story. Sarah Strange is portrayed as "slender, comely and upstanding" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 1) and also an "intelligent girl, a lady, decent, loyal and amazingly clear of vision" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 2). Her image demonstrates that she is not having an affair with Colonel Halloway because she is inferior or needs material possessions but because they fall in love with each other. Phipps states that "Sal takes an active role in the relationship, with her beauty, intelligence, and integrity carrying more weight for the Colonel than his 'mother's dismay, his wife's disgust'" (145). She does not certify their relationship through marriage because Fauset chooses to officialize their love with the intensity of their feelings. Calloway suggests that "Fauset defiantly opts to validate the love they shared not through the socially sanctioned vehicle of marriage, but through various signs of intimacy demonstrating the depth and mutuality of their emotion" (56). Sarah mentions her experience with Halloway as "a special kind of happiness which many other people would have mistaken for suffering, pain, and disgrace. 'But it suited me,' she thought, smiling impenitently within her wayward heart" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 168). When Halloway is on his deathbed, he wants his wife to bring Sarah to say good bye which shows his commitment to her until his death. He takes care of her even after he dies by leaving the house and giving percentage from his properties to Sarah. The chinaberry tree transported to the porch of the house is a present from Halloway to Sarah as a reminiscent of her homeplace, Alabama. The tree symbolizes the eternal reminder of the intensity, endurance and vitality of their attachment. The intense feelings they share challenge the conventional understanding of affairs between white landowners and their Black servants. They are commonly portrayed as "sexual" affairs not including such thoughtful acts. By putting forward the experience of African American woman with a lover who is self-assured about his feelings, Fauset puts a new complexion on the "improper" relationship through the depth of their emotions and

creates a difference at a time when miscegenation is discussed as proliferated under slavery.

Fauset deconstructs traditional concepts of "legitimacy/illegitimacy, chastity/sexual experience, and sin/atonement" (Jones 55) and underscores the redefinition of the term through her characterizations of the women and their relationships. She reassesses society's sense of morality through the mindset of the characters toward the affair between Sarah and Halloway. Although Laurentine and Melissa are affected by racism in Red Brook at first, they gain self-assurance and become more spirited toward the end. Melissa considers the condemnation of the relationship between Aunt Sal and Halloway as without merit. Her enlightenment about the issue is given as follows: "For the first time in her life she was able to see how purely artificial, how man-made such a barrier was" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 261). Dr. Denleigh, who puts logic first as man of science, thinks that the only reason they become together and hide their relationship from nobody is nothing but the mutual love they share. He remarks that "the two of them must have loved each other devotedly ... he let the world know that your mother was his woman" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 122-123) and adds, "She wasn't a slave—she didn't have to yield to him. He loved her in spite of her being Black and she loved him in spite of his being white. I don't advocate their line of action and yet there is something awe-inspiring" (160). His consideration of the relationship as an ordinary instance challenges the traditional concepts like legitimacy and chastity. He justifies their relationship by suggesting to Laurentine, "... there's bad blood and bad blood ... There's nothing the matter with yours or with your mother's. As I see it, the two of them were defying, not the laws of God, nor the laws of man speaking universally. Simply the laws of a certain section of America" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 160). Asshur also stresses that their affair is the indication of Sarah's freedom to choose her sexuality and family through his statement, "... she must have found something tremendously satisfying in their life together ... She could have gone away and married. But look, did you ever think, ... she's remained here to be his living monument?" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 72-73). His point of view provides an account of "how integrity is the result of individual actions, not bloodlines or inherited social standards" (Phipps 156). Sarah is also utterly insusceptible

to the condemnation of the public as she sits under the tree with "the complete acceptance which always made their lack of conformity of absolutely no moment" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 340). In this context, the story presents Laurentine's background not as the consequence of improper relationship but of a woman's beliefs, passions and actions. As Marcy Jane Knopf underscores in the Foreword of the book, Fauset "masters the conventions of the sentimental novel and disrupts them by examining the intersection of race and sex" (xi). She extinguishes the pejorative comprehension of the concept with the inner world of the characters, especially Melissa and Laurentine who are empoisoned by the occasion.

3.3. THE 'SELF' THROUGH THE 'COMMUNAL'

Fauset's portrayal of female characters and their struggles sheds light on the authentic experiences of African American women of the time. Milanes stresses the fact by referring to a recent scholarship which posits that "there is a causal relationship between social isolation and a variety of emotional, mental and cognitive symptoms within the African American community" (176). Through an elaborate examination of characters' emotional anguish, the novel displays Black women's complicated psychological struggles evolving out of the idea of "bad blood." Lupton explains that "in the fictional world of ... Fauset there are noticeable constrictions, constrictions which reflect the restraints historically placed on women's lives" (383-384). Fauset presents this psychological process and the outcomes with the experiences of the fictional characters, which reflect historical facts. Milanes declares that "Fauset introduces and humanizes Black women's complex psychology by sympathetically exposing its range of expression, including reactions to historic slights, to misunderstandings, to jealousy and disappointment, to frustration and to very real psychological pain" (175). The psychological conflicts of female characters in the book present a genuine experience regarding the development of a collective Black female subjectivity.

The family living in the "cursed" house of Strange is condemned both by whites and Blacks throughout the novel because of their "bad blood." The cruel attitude gives serious psychological harm to women and causes them to internalize their inferiority. Fauset

prefers to use the word "strange" as women's surname for certain reasons. It indicates the community's perspective to the women and their estrangement from society as is the struggle of African American women in a white, male-oriented society. The denunciation of women echoes through the pages of the book as "Strange blood" (25), "bad Strange blood" (292) and "rotten Strange blood" (331) which seriously wounds the "victims of interracial love" (Lupton 384). Laurentine, who spends most of her time in isolation, confronts the situation in her early childhood. Her friend Lucy ends their friendship and says, "my mumma ... say you got bad blood in your veins. Don't you want me to cut yo' arm and let it out?" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 8). The society's standpoint against Strange women damages their psychology and daily life.

The idea of women's "bad blood" has different grounds. The first is the illegitimate relationship between Sarah and Halloway which signifies "the mixture of white and Black 'blood' resulting in denunciation by both communities" (Lupton 385). The other is the "immoral" behaviors of Sarah and her sister, Judy which are reflected upon their daughters. The Red Brook community believes that the women lack morality. The most tragic connotation of the "bad blood" is the elopement of half-siblings. Lupton states that "the incest motif ... adds a special horror to the plot and ... it further amplifies the Greek tragic patterns of the novel" (385). The reasons mentioned above bring forth the ostracism of the women, which damage their psychology in regard to their race and gender.

Fauset gives insights into African American women's experiences through centralized characters and their inner world. Fauset decides to portray African American women as she is quite aware of the society's restrictions based on gender roles and race roles. Therefore, the novel makes a distinction between the lives of men and women. In the eyes of the society, the "curse of bad blood" is spared only for women; no male character suffers from it. Lupton clarifies the issue as she says "its author was a woman whose attitudes towards race and class reflect, quite naturally, such womanly concerns as motherhood, children, family, dress, security, the home, social acceptance, and so forth"

(388). The reader detects racial and social experiences through women as Fauset's female characters explore the roles, reject most of them, and develop their own.

The novel also presents the healing process of the damaged psychology of women and the nurturing nature of Black female characters, which promote community support, as social and racial phenomena. Laurentine and Melissa cope differently with their emotional distress yet they similarly regain their inner peace through the process of self-realization and the support of community. Their recovery from "different manifestations of depression (one chronic, the other sudden)," becomes possible through a "combination of their own efforts bolstered by caring community members" (Milanes 175). The concepts of fighting with and overcoming emotional turmoil associate African American women with social inferiority, self-doubt and incomplete desires. Fauset makes community support accessible to her characters which emphasizes African Americans' dependence on their own resources.

Laurentine endures the sense of depression throughout the novel. She spends her time contemplating under the chinaberry tree or engages herself with dressmaking business which keeps her in isolation. She is approached by Phil Hackett whom she views as an avenue to gain status in the society. The fact that she is not relieved by his intimacy indicates that she needs her own resources for recovery. The feelings of entrapment and depression intensify as her relationship with Hackett fails due to her "bad blood." She does not leave the house and "a week, two weeks, three weeks ... she went to church one Sunday to still the madness creeping on her from her monotonous thoughts" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 62). Hackett's approach severely damages her psychology and leaves her in the state of hopelessness which undermines her own subjectivity. According to Milanes, Laurentine "subordinates her agency in pursuit of legitimation, which she can secure through a marriage that will appear to be perfect even if love and self-determination play no part in its foundation" (184). In this sense, Laurentine struggles with a configuration of emotional distress resulting in a state of isolation in the novel. Later, her meaningful relationship with Dr. Denleigh gives Laurentine a new perspective

because of his open-minded attitude toward her background. He says that she has "too much sense to think that even if there is such a thing as bad or good blood, marriage would affect it" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 122). He implies that her own stance in life is sufficient to resist associating "bad blood" with somebody's personality. These developments enable Laurentine to take a step for her healing process.

Melissa, on the other hand, copes with the feeling of loneliness in a different manner. She makes superficial friendships with the young people of Red Brook. She manages to disregard the community's judgmental attitude for a while as she enjoys social popularity. Her assurance that she is going to leave the town with Forten gives her comfort. As Milanes points out, "she finds refuge in her relationship with Malory in much the same way Laurentine relies on the chinaberry tree, for security and comfort" (183). Her psychological conflicts start to unfold as she feels confused about her emotional sharing and intimacy with Forten. Melissa's emotional and physical health deteriorate as she finds out that they are half brothers and sisters.

The recovery process leads the women to emphasizing community support in which Black women form their own independence. The psychological conflicts of these women result from external forces and remain beyond their control "—for Laurentine cumulative and weighty, for Melissa immediate and explosive" (Milanes 188). However, these struggles are significant for Laurentine and Melissa because they enable them to make a stride for recovery as they confront agonizing facts. The recovery process is significant in the sense that it underlines the importance of African American community support in a critical time. Laurentine and Dr. Denleigh endeavor to stop the young couple before their elopment yet they find Melissa unspirited as she finds out the truth that "[her] mother with that rotten Strange blood in her ... was [Malory's] father's mistress ... and [she is] his child and [Malory's] sister!" (*The Chinaberry Tree* 331). Thereafter, Melissa gets stuck on her bed in a state in which she loses herself. She remains unable to maintain control over her body and fails to acknowledge the nurturing presence of Laurentine. Sarah and Laurentine gently take care of Melissa assisting "broken body and fractured

spirit" to heal (Milanes 188). Fauset demonstrates that it is their own community who come to Melissa's rescue to prevent the elopement and the same community provide perpetual consolation and care. In this sense, "Fauset's women provide healing nurture and steady support" (Milanes 189). The novel submits the exposure of African Americans' strivings: "living with illness, managing treatment, maintaining recovery and seeking support" (Milanes 176). The experiences of female characters in the novel confront the categorization of their people as "inherently inferior" and their struggles offer an authentic confirmation of African American endurability and resourcefulness.

The novel's conclusion presents a scene in which Laurentine, Melissa, Dr. Denleigh and Asshur gather together under the chinaberry tree,

> all happy, all talking, all enjoying a brief span in the tragic disorder of their lives [and] Laurentine and Melissa ... caught up in an immense tide of feeling, they were unable to focus their minds on home, children, their men ... Rather like spent swimmers, who had given up the hope of rescue and then had suddenly met with it, they were sensing with all their being, the feel of the solid ground beneath their feet, [and] the grateful monotony of the skies above their heads. (*The Chinaberry Tree* 339-340)

Like the chinaberry tree which rooted and thrived through its sprouts, they generated their own "biodiversity" enduring against the native understanding of essentialism. Like the understorage organs of the tree, African American community offers its own resources which gather them together against the "extirpating" manner of the white society. The ending indicates that Laurentine and Melissa explore the significance of communal association for the process of self-formation. In this sense, each sprout contributes to the construction of their own "monoculture."

Phipps suggests that "the backgrounds and identities of the people within communities are less important than the overall ideal of individualism" (151). African American women's communities provide possibilities for individual development through psychological struggles. Their endeavors form an ideal of collective consciousness helping reciprocal potentials to unfold the self-governing individual. In this sense, Phipps suggests that Fauset presents African American women as "reservoirs of culture, art, and

mobility that form within U.S. society" (152). The challenge of the ideals in the novel gains substance through the individual experience of female characters and their mindset resisting the affiliation between "blood" and identity. The scene proves that they manage to "grow" despite the artificial controlling means of the society. In other words, the deconstruction of the essentialist notions and the reinforcement of African American women's communities represent the development of individual experience.

CHAPTER 4. *COMEDY: AMERICAN STYLE*

In 1933, Fauset published her last, and arguably the most complicated novel, *Comedy: American Style.* The novel tells the story of the tragic consequences of racial self-hatred and colorism within African American community. Although Fauset titles the book as "comedy," there is nothing comedic about the narrative. In contrast to its title, Fauset strongly suggests that intraracial relationships in the United States, as it was practiced then, was tragedy-bound. As it does not include comic elements, it is interwoven with satiric and tragic concepts. In her article "The Gift of Laughter" published in *The New Negro* by Alain Locke, she explains her perception of comedy and tragedy as "sisters and twins, the capacity for one argues the capacity for the other" (167). This "American" style comedy alludes to the times when Blacks were anything yet only "funny" through minstrel shows. Fauset, by portraying the "Negro" artist in a serious drama, has freed the figure on the American stage because "he was sad with the sadness of hopeless frustration. The gift of laughter in his case had its source in a wounded heart and in bleeding sensibilities" ("The Gift" 165). The image behind "American" style comedy is full of tragedy and tears and Fauset liberalizes the gift of African Americans' laughter through her own writing. In this sense, the tragical frame of the story contradicts with the assumptions evoked by the title. Albert Sergio Laguna explains the relation of the concept of race to comedy referring to Fauset's work: "For Fauset, then, race is not simply a topic *for* comedy but comic unto itself on the level of form. Race is a kind of 'American style' of comedy at its core" (104). Fauset prompts her audience to muse over a tragic story abound with household distress, alienation and suicide as an American "comedy."

The novel addresses the issues of racism, classism, colorism, passing and gender issues in a remarkably contemporary manner. It touches upon petit-bourgeois, middle-class and working-class matters with regard to how colorism influences a Black family. In the introduction part of the novel's 2009 published version, Cherene-Sherrard Johnson explains that "In *Comedy*, Fauset ... provides an analysis of self-hatred and points out how adherence to the strict behavioral codes of respectability constrains male and female relationships" (xxii). Fauset's three other novels mostly include racial segregation of whites against Blacks. Yet, *Comedy: American Style* concerns with color prejudice

among African Americans. She explains it in one of her letters to Hughes: "*Comedy: American Style* is a strong limning of the psychological and pathological effect of color prejudice on colored people themselves. Not too much of that has been done, I think, in films, plays or novels." She remarks that she makes a difference. Also, she underscores the possible destructive consequences to which colored people might expose each other through colorism and, in this way, reminds the significance of communality. Lewis mentions that "In this work, Fauset alerts the reader to the tragedy that results from complete denial of one's African ancestry and to the cruel nature of color/class hegemony that can exist in Black families" (381). Accordingly, Fauset's biographer Carolyn W. Sylvander suggests that "In its picture of American race discrimination *Comedy: American Style* is thorough in showing a certain kind of Black prejudice against Black" (215). She puts forward the experiences of racism and classism in America as the story demonstrates intraracial conflicts.

Although Fauset had been criticized because of her treatment of the subjects in a "sentimentalist" manner in her previous three novels, *Comedy: American Style* proved that she depicted Black experience in a challenging and modernist approach. The publication of the novel became influential in regarding Fauset's style and her contribution to modernism from a different standpoint. Once the book was published in 1995, reviewers started to object to Locke's judgment of Fauset's style as "mid-Victorian." In the introduction to the 1995 edition, Thadious Davis asserted that readers overlooked her depiction of "progressive critiques of race, gender and class ideologies [and] her message of female emancipation, development, autonomy and empowerment" (x). Critics claimed that the sentimentalism of her stories settled her as distant from modernism while Fauset deliberately incorporated former traditions like romance and marriage into her texts. According to Marcy J. Knopf, "By writing novels that many readers and/or critics perceive to be sentimental, Fauset masks her revolutionary, and modernist, consideration of miscegenation and Black female independence" (xiii). Her modernist approach was also recognizable in her use of race as a performative act. In this regard, although her contemporaries placed Fauset in "New Negro" literature as a

sentimental novelist, her fiction ranked among more broad discourse of American women writers.

The novel differs from the works of the 1920s Harlem as it coincides with the years of the Great Depression, and deals with the life of New York and Harlem only tangentially. Fauset uses the setting strategically in the novel to portray the characters' relations to their families, community, and country. In this way, she touches upon interracial relationships and social class mobility. The characters are on the move as they traverse from community to individual and from urban to domestic places which broadens the setting's scope to Philadelphia, New England, Chicago, Michigan, California, Mexico, Paris, and Toulouse. As the story revolves around these places, the reader discovers how social stratification peculiarly undergoes dramatic changes. The novel also differs from Fauset's other three works with its tragic ending of doom and failure. The literary scene was altering through the influence of the Great Depression and it led to the writing of the period.

The novel consists of six parts including tragic heroes to illuminate racial relations in the United States. Considering her educational background in Cornell with four years of Latin and two of Greek, she undoubtedly has comprehensive knowledge of Greek drama. She makes use of a number of conventions from Greek tragedy to draw attention to the tragic nature of colorism and racial self-hatred. The first two parts of the book are "The Plot" and "The Characters," pursued by "Teresa's Act," "Oliver's Act," "Phebe's Act," and "Curtain." The formation of the titles as "act" and "curtain" highlights the "theatrical production of a tragedy" (Myers 117). The protagonist of the novel and her husband, Olivia Cary and Christopher Cary, are mixed-race characters with light complexions, who have three children named Teresa, Christopher and Oliver. Olivia comes forward as the tragic heroine who is full of hubris and hamartia. Each act tells the story of one of the siblings. Act I narrates the experience of Teresa as her mother forces her to pass for white. Act II tells the story of Oliver, the only dark-complexioned member of the family. Fauset also presents the image of a tragic hero through his character who kills himself because

of his mother's color obsession, because his color is the only thing he cannot change. Act III presents the narrative of Phebe who is Christopher's wife. The "Curtain" exhibits a final look at Olivia. Jones asserts that "the narrative form of drama heightens the tragedy of Olivia Cary's color complex and the havoc it wreaks upon the psychological, spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of all those in her family and circle of acquaintances" (58, 59). Fauset contains Greek tragedy elements in the story and it allows her to underscore the tragic consequences of racial hatred and how it is likely to endanger familial relations.

The novel focuses on the tragic consequences of Olivia's detrimental acts toward her offspring. She is a light-complexioned middle-class woman. As a child, she is labeled as "nigger" and realizes her own marginalization in the society. After moving to a Massachusetts town, her teacher supposes that she is Italian. Olivia becomes aware of her opportunity to be white as a way to disentangle herself from the hardships of being colored. From this point on, she is stuck with the belief that whiteness guarantees an uncritical idea of freedom, opportunity and respectability. She decides to marry Christopher Cary, a light-complexioned mixed-race physician, in preference to a white man who belongs to a lower class. She also wants to make sure that her children act and live as white so that they could be freed from any obstacles stemming from racism or classism. She comes forward as the "anti-race" figure, as introduced by Wall in *Women of the Harlem Renaissance,* which means detesting one's own heritage and embracing the inferiority exposed by oppressors.

Her first two children are Teresa and Christopher. She is proud of their light skin colors. Teresa is thrilled with her Black heritage and falls in love with a dark-complexioned man. Olivia is strictly against their affair and states her decision to "rather see her dead" (*Comedy* 106). Yielding to her mother's imposition, Teresa marries a French man who is a college lecturer and does not speak English. She lives in Toulouse as a depressed white woman, and is debarred from her language and culture. Olivia decides to have another child because, her other two children yearn over their Black heritage and form

relationships with dark-skinned people. In other words, Olivia cannot raise them as "white" as she wants. She intends to raise her last-born child apart from her immediate environment to make sure that he passes as white, assuming that his skin-color will be like the previous siblings. However, she is frustrated to see that Oliver is born bronze. To Olivia, he becomes the reminder of their "reproachable" heritage. As it is seen in the similarity of their names as Oliver and Olivia, he is Olivia's doppelganger, her spiritual foil. She disregards him because of his obvious Blackness.

Olivia occasionally convinces her son that they are playing a game and makes him her butler in front of the white guests. Against his mother's designs for him, Oliver is the potential artist in the story. With his dark skin, he is the "beauty" in the story possessing an excessive gift of music, intelligence, and modesty. He has an artistic vision and sees beauty in everything, especially in common things and people. Against all the heartfelt beauty that he is associated with, the terms of his relation to his mother are only repulsion and self-loathing. He blames himself for failing to earn his mother's love. Through a letter, he finally recognizes that the problem is his "tell-tale" color and commits suicide at the age of sixteen. In the end, Olivia, through her obsessive behaviors, leads to Teresa's estrangement, makes her husband's and Christopher's lives miserable and causes the self-destruction of Oliver. She moves to Paris on her own and leads an economically and spiritually poor, lonely, yet a "white" life.

4.1. ABSURDITY: AMERICAN STYLE

Fauset puts forward the absurdity of color and class prejudice within American system through humor and irony in the novel. She portrays these prejudices in intraracial relationships and displays the color, class and gender gaps within the United States as the central character, Olivia, damages herself and her family psychologically because of her color and class obsession. Teresa, for instance, mistaken for a white woman, is condemned for overstepping racial boundaries when she dates a dark-complexioned man. A white suitor, on the other hand, refuses her when he learns that she is Black. Fauset ascertains the absurdity of color prejudice through such scenes and also refers to the arbitrariness of intraracial classification. In this sense, Wall suggestst that "much of the

comedy in her novel relies on the inability to determine, by looking, whether a character is Black or white" (82). One's color, or the abscence of it, becomes the reason for suffering and death in the novel. Jones mentions that "Fauset deconstructs the politics of race, class, and gender in her exposition of the folk, bourgeois, and proletarian aesthetics in this powerful morality tale" (58). Fauset opts to transmit the absurdity of class relations and colorism in an ironic way in the novel.

Fauset highlights the arbitrariness of what establishes race and the absurdity of colorism by implying that it is a consequence of any combination of biological elements. In one of the scenes in the book, a little child, Nicholas Campbell, cannot make sense of the Blackness of blonde and colored-eyed Phebe, and it becomes an empty sign:

> But, Ma, how can that be her mother? She's white, ain't she?
> No, son. She's colored.
> But Ma, how can she be?
> Well, she just is. Lots of colored people look like that. But they're colored right on.
> But if she ain't white, why ain't she white? She's whiter than lots of those white girls at our school. What makes her colored and makes those white girls white?
> Well, son, I can't tell you that. You'll have to wait till you're grown up. (*Comedy* 40)

By portraying the questioning of one's skin color and race relations through childish talk, Fauset meticulously exposes the absurdity of the system which oppresses people with color. She suggests that the system might deceive only children. In "Phebe's Act," Fauset also depicts the absurdity of race relations: "She was a colored woman loving a colored man. But her skin was too white for him. So he had given her up ... She was a white woman, deeply interested in a white man. But for him her blood was too Black. So he offered her insult" (*Comedy* 212). Through these scenes, Fauset underscores the concept of race as socially constructed and questions the cruel effects of it on colored people. She points out to the fallacy of comprehending race based upon physical appearance and "the color of blood." Fauset transcends the understanding of race as strictly separated and embraces a more nonrigid perceptive toward it. Stuart Hall, in his description of race as a "floating signifier" explains that "... those things gain their meaning, not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference, which they

establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field. Their meaning, because it is relational, and not essential, can never be finally fixed, but is subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation" (8). Prince Brown, Jr. discusses the racial politics in America, presents how its perception has altered from an essentialist mindset to the mentality of race as "a social and legal construction" (136). In this context, Fauset has a challenging approach toward the understanding of race. She remolds the stereotypical discussions on it and challenges the traditional representations.

Fauset's subplot of passing also serves to challenge and question the color line. The act of passing confronts the idea of essentialism by unmasking race as socially constructed. Fauset makes use of this narrative and presents the experience of the doubleness of the subjects. In the novel, the concept broadens its scope through class and race mobility within the nationwide and international limitations. Alongside its ability to challenge the settled traditional understandings of race and class, passing ironically sustains how transition to the "dominant" race remains incapable of gaining "respectability." Phebe and Teresa have light-complexions and could easily pass for white and gain acclamation in the community. However, their light skin does not upgrade their social status and it becomes inadequate for them to lead a pleasant and respectable life in the story. The subplot emphasizes the insufficiency of "respectability" as the right path for social mobility. Fauset indicates that the system which promotes racial discrimination fails at appreciating Black people, even if they are educated and good-looking.

Fauset adverts the absurdity of white supremacy through Olivia's portrayal as the advocator of one drop rule. Through depictions as "strain of Black blood" (32), "dominant race" (34), and "one perfect race ... the Caucasians" (150) in the novel, Olivia upholds the white supremacist understanding. When she is proud of her son's light skin, she states that "He had, she felt, a look of 'race,' by which she meant of course the only race which God, or Nature, for hidden, inscrutable purposes, meant should rule" (*Comedy* 32). Fauset also ironically gives place to Olivia's theory as the manifestation of her farfetchedness: "As enough water in a vessel absorbs and dissolves a stain, so that eventually one thinks

there is nothing there but the liquid itself, so she had been positive that all her Negro blood had been wrought by her white blood to a consistency as pure, as limpid as that which flowed through the heart of the whitest woman she knew" (*Comedy* 150). The novel lampoons the permanent effects of the supremacist perception on African Americans in America. Fauset highlights the problem and constantly questions the white society's priority for political legitimacy. George Hutchinson indicates that "... insofar as Negro comedy is a compensatory response to oppression, it suggests the potential for tragic drama. If Fauset had anything to do with it, the standards of American art would be Negro standards" (421). The portrayal of Olivia as a white supremacist allows Fauset to satirize the absurdity of Anglo Saxon superiority in the United States. Fauset underscores the duplicity of monochromatic pattern for cultural nationalism.

4.2. AN ANTI-RACE MOTHER: OLIVIA BLANCHARD CARY

Fauset portrays the embodiment of an anti-race woman through Olivia. She is an affectionless and indifferent mother figure who expends her energy more on the obsession of being white than the tranquility of their house. Jacqueline McLendon refers to her obsession as "color mania" and describes the character as "the most scathing indictment of a Black mother written by a Black woman up to this time" (70). Cheryl Wall champions her as "what is new and promising ... the novel's antiheroine ... a self-hating woman, a conniver, a shameless traitor to the race, and, most shockingly, an unloving mother, ... a new character in African-American literature" (81). Sherrard-Johnson also mentions her as a "fascinating enigma" ("Introduction" xvii). Indeed, Olivia differs from Fauset's other passing mixed-race characters in the sense that she never longs for her Black traditions and culture. Fauset introduces a destructive and miserable representation of an anti-race woman who is possessed by "mulatto hegemony."

Olivia's "damaged" image and self-hatred proceed from her childhood, this time not because of racial discrimination. Her mother, Janet, acts as if Olivia is a changeling and a corrupted person because of her remoteness from her father whose skin color is darker. Unlike Olivia, Janet does not attribute any privilege to whiteness and decides to pass for white as a worker in the white company. Fauset narrates her longing for living in Black community: "[she dreams] of going again to a colored church, of playing a quiet game of

whist in a decent colored parlor ... gradually working one's way into membership of small committees, of receiving the polished, if not always grammatical, gallantries of colored men" (*Comedy* 15). She shares an intimate love with her husband and considers Olivia as a distraction. Fauset depicts the distant relationship scene in their family whom once Janet witnesses a little child rushing to her mother and says "Oh, Moth!" and imagines: "Suppose Olivia should greet her like that! ... the sweet intimacy of the little abbreviation had almost brought the tears to Janet's eyes" (*Comedy* 11). The familial relations of Olivia as a child also demonstrate that she does not grow up in a loving environment. Fauset presents a number of normative ideologies of Blacks' childhood and womanhood experiences and displays their influence on Olivia.

Fauset features the image of Olivia as an unloving mother to satirize the "New Negro" conviction of Black motherhood as the cornerstone for racial uplift. Fauset is ahead of her time in the sense that she makes a difference through the portrayal of a different kind of mother at the time only males make conventional analyses in the matter. In this sense, rather than Olivia's character, it is her characterization which presents the challenging nuance of the story. The image of Black women and mothers has changed throughout years with the rise of feminist approaches especially in the 1960s. Before these developments, the idea of sanctification was so deeply settled in the image of Black maternity that they were believed to "live lives of sacrifice ... as the norm" (Christian 234). However, Fauset discusses and criticizes such self-sacrificing image of Black mother even in the 1920s, forty years before feminist ideas. Collins also indicates that "Black mothers were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters, and of retarding their children's academic achievement" (qtd. 173), and adds, "The controlling images of the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother and the practices they justify are designed to oppress" (176). Within this context, Black people were prone to canonize Black motherhood and overlooked their situations as mothers "came back to the frequently thankless chores of their own loneliness, their own families" (Jordan 105). Olivia comes forward as the altering figure of Black motherhood in African American fiction. Her portrayal of a self-centered and ambitious woman contradicts with the traditional perception of a selfless,

submissive, and asexual "mammy." It is ironic that Olivia's daughter, Teresa, experiences not being "a part of a component whole" (*Comedy* 69) not because of double consciousness but because she is devoid of her mother's affection. In the "Introduction," Sherrard-Johnson suggests that "Through her attempts to sever her daughter from her Black heritage, Olivia performs an acquisitive femininity 'unburdened' by racial allegiance" (xxiii). Fauset asserts her discontentment with the cultural perception of Black motherhood through Olivia in the novel. She challenges the efforts of Black men to repress African American female sexuality. She intentionally depicts an anti-race mother to draw attention to the image of Black women in racial uplift philosophy and its relevance to "idealized motherhood and Victorian modes of respectability" (Sherrard-Johnson, "Introduction" xxiii).

Fauset criticizes class and color obsession and highlights its damaging effects through the depiction of Olivia as a tragic heroine. She represents the destructive consequences of colorism in the novel. Her color and class obsession prevent her from acting sanely and it directly influences the other characters and eventually leads to her downfall in the story. As Teresa's marriage fails to satisfy her expectations, it brings only misery and distress to her. Her mother-in-law humiliates her and her husband remains indifferent. In an ironic way, the forces which urge Olivia to push Teresa to marry him become a waste of time. Oliver's suicide succumbs the other members of the family, Christopher and Christopher junior, to depression. Nadine Frassetto confirms that "though seen clearest in Olivia's case, the thread of her destructive decision can be traced through almost every single character's personal miseries" (4). She ultimately becomes isolated and lives in a hostel in France. Her insatiability, materialism, pretension, and obsession result in her alienation from everyone who at once attach importance to her. Lewis explains her poor condition:

> By the end of the novel, she is psychologically broken and spends her days sitting by the window of her lonely Paris room, watching and waiting for an Anglo Saxon woman and her son, who sit in a courtyard reading and laughing together. The scene reminds the reader, if not Olivia, of the past—of the lost years when Olivia's dark-skinned son had sought out his mother to confide in, and when he desperately needed her attention. (385)

Olivia's depiction exposes Fauset's criticism of colorism and her perception of its unwholesome nature. It functions as a cautionary characterization against racism and classism among Black society.

Olivia's motivation for passing is detrimental for herself and the others since it depends on the notion of "Negrophobia" which is clear in her indictment: "Olivia almost hated them both with a flaring intensity no less violent for the immaturity of the heart which engendered it. How could they—how *could* they have made her colored? How could they lead the merry, careless life that was theirs with this hateful disgrace always upon them?..." (*Comedy* 8). She recognizes that she will never be able to "be white," yet she endeavors at least not to be "colored," a mindset which belittles Black people. As a child, she "was daily cherishing within herself the idea of emerging into a world which knew nothing of color" (*Comedy* 13). To her, a life "which knew nothing of color" means never being despised. Olivia is aware of the power of politics in the United States and her insistance upon a "white" life is affiliated with her desire to be a part of that "power." However, she fails to notice the different power structures and systems in which she is included. In this sense, Fauset underscores the connection between race and social class through Olivia's inability to advance her social class by passing. In her determined approach toward race as the only "obstacle" and not the unequal dealing of hierarchies, she possesses a biased rationale for passing and damages everyone around her because of her self-negation. Frassetto states that "Fauset's goal seems to be to highlight the extent to which the decision to pass is connected to economic security" (5). He suggests that if one's individuality is in danger of destruction because of physical or economic issues, then the act of passing might be a possibility. However, it is never encouraged (5). While other passing characters in Fauset's previous novels transform their experience into a sphere for self-formation, Olivia brings tragedy as she does not "maneuver" but "surrender" because she is an output of the racist system. In this sense, she is a manifestation of double consciousness as a "curse." Fauset stresses the hazardous side of passing and the significance of embracing one's identity.

4.3. AN UNACCOMPLISHED ARTIST: OLIVER CARY

Fauset's use of Greek tragedy elements culminates in the portrayal of a tragic hero in the novel. The book's shortest yet the most intensive act includes the death of the sixteen-year-old Oliver Cary. Of all the characters, either in this novel or in all of Fauset's other novels, his predicament is the most tragic and heart-wrenching. He is the embodiment of Olivia's incapability of living a fully "white" life and the disclosure of her phobia: "To her Oliver meant shame. He meant more than that; he meant the expression of her failure to be truly white. There was some taint in her, she told herself once, not long after Oliver's birth ... For she belonged to that group of Americans which thinks that God or Nature created only one perfect race—the Caucasians" (*Comedy* 150). Oliver represents a kind of curse for her and she ignores him as a son despite his attempts to be "adorable" for his mother. As Jones puts it, "Olivia worships whiteness. Filled with racial self-hatred, her racism colors her perception of others" (62).

Fauset depicts Oliver in the role of the tragic hero and his fatal "flaw" appears to be his dark skin which causes his mother and sister to reject him, affecting his self-love. Oliver confronts a rejection as he reads the letter his mother writes to his father: "*If you and Chris would come and settle down over here we could all be as white as we look ... if it just weren't for Oliver. I know you don't like me to talk about this ... but really, Chris, Oliver and his unfortunate color has certainly been a mill-stone around our necks all our lives"* (*Comedy* 160). Olivia considers his dark complexion as an impediment to her foremost desire which is, as stated above, "to be as white as [they] look." Oliver turns his head to Teresa as a last chance at peace and recognition, yet another letter leads to a disappointing result: "*Oliver, my husband doesn't know I'm colored. Perhaps I might have got around that. But just the other day he talked to me very bitterly about people of mixed blood, especially Americans. So, darling, you see with your tell-tale color ...*He let the letter drop" (*Comedy* 163). Oliver considers himself as "misfit" and "displaced" in his family as he is refused by Olivia and Teresa. After the recognition that his "tell-tale color" is the explanation for his rejection, he glances at himself in the mirror:

> With one chill finger he touched his beautiful, golden skin. No, certainly it wasn't ugly. His eye, trained to the recognition of loveliness, told him that it was much more beautiful than the pinkish, yellowed, grayish or drab skins by which he was usually surrounded.

> Yet it had kept him from the enjoyment of that most ordinary and universal possession, a mother's tenderness... It had separated him from his sister. (*Comedy* 163)

He recognizes that the thing which keeps him away from his family is the one thing he is unable to alter. He commits suicide by shooting himself in the head with a pistol, "the light of the declining day athwart his smiling face" (*Comedy* 164). Olivia's bequest of colorism and Teresa's betrayal represent the extreme influence of color obsession—death. In this sense, as Fauset does not include an act belonging to Olivia in the novel, "Oliver's Act" becomes hers since his tragic loss of life is caused by systematized racism and the consequent refusal by his mother, signifying the "dehumanization" of colored people by the white society.

Despite Oliver's "unfortunate" dark skin, he is frequently mentioned as beautiful: "His eye, ... was much more beautiful than the pinkish, yellowed, grayish or drab skins" (*Comedy* 163). He is inordinately skilled, clever, and modest. Sherrard-Johnson reckons that he is the representative of "the transatlantic figure of the Black dandy as embodied by W. E. B. Du Bois" ("Introduction" xxv). "Oliver's Act" features the idea of an art-lover inundated through his senses. As a sensitive aesthete, he is entranced with poetry: "The beauty of his readings lay about him always. That quite other beauty of people and of places to which he was so receptive carried him by analogy back in his thoughts to this loveliness" (*Comedy* 157). A talented young boy who loves Wordsworth, Oliver is "richly endowed by the fates at birth with beauty, ability, and intellect" (*Comedy* 138). He spends most of his time with his piano and has the perfect pitch. He is able to convert everything "into a thing of beauty" (*Comedy* 148). Except his mother, everyone is "waiting for [him] to do something great" (*Comedy* 147).

Oliver's artistic passion and vision center around the idea of representing the common people in African American community. He contemplates on the image of a musician which one day he intends to be: "He would write, not the kind of music one usually heard, not simply a medley of sweet sounds, he explained in his childish terms, but music that told something, that drew pictures, that would make you see all this. He pointed to the

forms milling about the vicinity in which they happened to be" (*Comedy* 141). Fauset portrays the Cary family as prosperous enough to possess a house in a genteel neighborhood, own a housemaid, travel to Europe, and have piano at home. It is worth mentioning that her aesthete figure yearns to be the voice of common, working-class people and not the bourgeois class. As she depicts the artist figure who is exposed to repression because of his dark-skin, Fauset does not come forward as the advocator of bourgeois aesthetics as critiqued. Oliver's aesthetic perception becomes clearer as he observes people in Philadelphia:

> All this he would translate someday into music ... the song, the rhythm, the grunt of the colored men whom he had seen working one day on Woodland Avenue near the University ... And there was something else too that he must get into melody ... the calmness, the peace, the utter satisfaction that he had glimpsed on early summer mornings on the faces of laborers trudging serenely to work in the cool of the day before the sun had made a fiery furnace of the city ... They seemed so happy. (*Comedy* 144- 145)

Fauset glamorizes common people with the statement "they seemed so happy," and Oliver is inspired by the working class to perform art, to "tell to the ear the vision which his eyes had seen" (*Comedy* 145). It turns out that Fauset creates her rising artist in the novel as someone emboldened by what Hughes would identify as "folk" which "furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations" (2). Oliver favors "all sorts of music and all sorts of people," yet he gets inspired by the "rough working folk [he] saw down on Front Street" (*Comedy* 144). Fauset depicts Oliver as a young, rising aesthete, which reveals itself as a political message. She supports Hughes' understanding of the "folk" as the inspiration for Blacks' future of gifted and autonomous identity with its all subjects and as just the way they are.

The death of the emerging artist underscores the obstacles and the waste many latent Black artists confront in the Harlem Renaissance. Fauset, Du Bois, and a number of other "New Negro" writers believe that art is a substantial means of altering racist beliefs in America. David Levering Lewis defines the logic behind it: "Although the road to the ballot box, the union hall, the decent neighborhood, and the Office was blocked, there were two untried paths that had not been barred, in large part, because of their very

implausibility, as well as irrelevancy to most Americans: arts and letters" (xxiv). Black artists endeavored to alter the prejudiced and discriminative perspectives through the potential of art and letters. In "Criteria of Negro Art," Du Bois underlines that it is the artist's responsibility to tell the truth, to transform the prejudiced culture of the community, and he condemns art which lacks of "propaganda" for racial equality:

> Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of Black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent. (296)

He addresses African Americans to produce their own art and literature. In this context, Oliver's tragic loss of his life functions as a criticism directed to Black people who might accept and internalize the perspective of whites toward themselves and refuse a member of their own community because of the conception of colorism. It is a cautionary plot in the sense that their rejection has the potential of destructing lives. Fauset depicts Oliver as a representative figure for the impediments which the artists of Black community confront in the Harlem Renaissance, and she wishes to warn the readers about possible detrimental effects of intraracial prejudices. Fauset's choice of titling the book as "comedy" comes forward as a satiric and ironic message which underscores the gift of African Americans with its history of tragedy and struggles.

CONCLUSION

The 1920s Harlem in the northern part of NYC became a cultural and racial milestone for African Americans. Their settlement in Harlem to build a decent life after years of oppression opened the way for an extraordinary outburst of literary and artistic revolution. Their reformed self-identity and freedom turned a new page for the possibility of repairing the devastating actions of the oppressors. At the time of high Euro-American modernism African Americans invented a new identity, borrowing from and contributing to modernist aesthetics. In this sense, the "New Negro" represented African Americans' independent identity and their mass movement in the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance also made a considerable influence on African American women's lives. Burdened with racism and sexism, Black women benefited from the artistic and philosophical climate of the period and expressed their experiences. They began to have a voice in matters concerning women and indicated their requests unrestrainedly because of the alteration they experienced. Nevertheless, the movement of the "New Negro" came to the forefront as predominantly male and surpassed the struggles of Black women to some extent. In this context, they confronted oppression both inside and outside of the Black community. Through art and literature and in many other ways at home and on the street, Black women endeavored to be redefined as insubordinate intellectuals who aspired to possess equal rights for Black people in America and African American women within their own community.

African American women writers created works mirroring their own experiences and contributed to the development of Black female subjectivity. Their literature proved that there are many literary and social instances which displayed the oppressive situations, and Black women reinforced themselves out of these conditions. They were involved in the shaping of the "New Negro." Jessie Fauset, whose life and intellectual contributions to the literature of the Harlem Renaissance became subject to this thesis, is one of them. She became one of the most important figures of her time, but was later undervalued. She became editors of the prestigious magazines like *The Crisis* and *The Brownies' Book*

which presented matters concerning African American world. She also became a role model for other significant names such as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Anne Spencer, and Nella Larsen, and introduced them to the literary scene of the Harlem Renaissance. She was a widely-traveled woman writer who had the chance to experience Europe and Northern Africa and her works carried the traces of those visits.

Jessie Fauset critically employs the notions of colorism, classism, racism, passing, and double consciousness in her works to reflect the authentic experiences of Black female subjects, and she stresses the necessity for collectivity within African American community. Black women's experiences vary from men as they have a disadvantaged position within the society through the effects of the concepts mentioned above. The experiences of Black women with the notions mentioned above are interconnected with the creation of Black female subjectivity.

For this reason, Fauset's works including the treatment of these concepts contribute to the acknowledgment of African American women's literary tradition. She enables her readers to achieve an awareness about Black women's liberation from by expressing their hardships in real life with all their nuances. She portrays the formation of a meaningful life by introducing self-reliant African American women. Her treatment of these critical issues in her works, *There Is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) and *Comedy: American Style* (1933) bears a torch on the experiences of Black females as artists and entrepreneurs and the constitution of a distinctive and collective Black female subjectivity and consciousness during the Harlem Renaissance, which still resonate today.

Coined by Du Bois and observed in Fauset's characters, double consciousness comes forward as the duality of identity which represents the inner conflict of African Americans. Their process of self-formation is necessarily influenced by the concept as individuals living between the oppressive white society and Black community. The sense of doubleness becomes a cultural diversity for them and it opens the way for the exploration of their capacity for self-determination. The experience of double

consciousness triggers light-complexioned African Americans to pretend to be white. The motive behind it is to benefit from the economic privileges and social mobility enjoyed by white people. They also want to disentangle themselves from the difficulties caused by the racism of the period. However, this double-dealing damages them psychologically in the sense that they have to comply with white supremacist beliefs and evaluate themselves through the white gaze. As it also blurs the line between black and white, it challenges the rigidness of identity and questions its essentialism. African Americans' experiences of twoness between "Black" and "white" through double consciousness and of passing lead to the questioning of both identities. It opens the way for generating a sphere for an autonomous agency.

The characters and their experiences in *There Is Confusion* (1924), as also the title suggests, closely interrelate with Du Bois' double consciousness. The novel also explores the concept of the veil as an element of racialized modernity because double consciousness differentiates African Americans from other cultural groups and it becomes an experiment for African American self-formation and emancipation as the ground for African American modernity. The concept refuses the traditional perception that race is a biological category. Fauset presents the reason behind the idea of African Americans' desperation not as innate but as source of being exposed to racialization and dehumanization. The presence of the veil generates many dichotomies for African Americans; a duality of representation in the oppressive system; a duality in the formation of the self; and a duality in the understanding of the life. Consequently, their self-construction is affected by the two worlds to which they are related. Fauset also introduces the transcendence of the veil which furnishes Blacks with distinctive forms of subjectivity and consciousness. Her characters do not remove the veil but transcend it, suggesting that it is a significant factor in the process of their self-construction. Fauset exhibits the formation of the self as accomplishable only through social development. In this sense, they are the components of an inseparable whole.

Fauset stresses passing and colorism as prominent themes in *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1928). Passing causes psychological consequences on Blacks as they have to witness the white gaze toward African Americans. It compels them to obey their standards as individuals living among them. Angela Murray's story in the novel, however, proves that passing ensures the space for the progress which is essential for the development of self-respect even if it leads to self-estrangement at first step. Fauset strongly advocates the necessity of self-efficacy for African American women. The concept of colorism makes its mark through the depiction of artificial practices imposed upon African Americans. The same family members who are divided as light- and dark-complexioned cannot obtain the same privileges in the Black community. The portrayal of unequal treatment toward the same family members has evidential value for the superficiality of the racialized categories. It also reveals the damaging influences of colorism within African American community. Fauset exhibits class as another important factor in the construction of the community through the depiction of a white man who refuses the protagonist because of her economic instability without knowing that she is Black. She unmasks and critiques the ideology of American society which is preconceived and predicated on racism and classism and underscores the requirement of class consciousness for Blacks. While revealing the reality of American community, Fauset also draws attention to the possibility of racial uplift through the inner possessions of African Americans. She interrogates the repressions imposed on Black people by challenging the concepts of racism, classism and colorism.

The Chinaberry Tree (1931), as its very name signifies, presents a metaphorical comprehension of the roots of African American familial relations and the empowerment through their own resources. The depiction of the characters offers the predicaments of Black society as they struggle for acknowledging whether their individuality is depended on an essential morality or is identified through an autonomous experience. Fauset depicts the earthliness of generating distinctive experiences by provoking the traditional perspective which connects one's blood with their identity. Through the portrayal of the chinaberry tree which has a feature of being immune to native insects and being resistant to biological controls, she disputes the essentialist mentality of American society,

suggesting that African Americans are “immune” to intraracial obstacles and “resistant” to interracial oppression. Despite the judgment of the white society, Fauset reinforces the idea that African American community is able to redefine their identity and the perception of morality through the support of communality. She also challenges the traditional understandings of illegitimacy, sexual morality, and transgression and remolds the notions through the portrayal of women and their relationships. In this way, she highlights the distinctive experiences of males and females as she is aware of the society’s restrictions concerning gender stereotyping and race predicament.

In *Comedy: American Style* (1933), Fauset draws attention to the casualness of what constitutes race and the absurdity of classism and colorism based upon biological factors. The novel serves to underscore race as a socially constructed concept and question its detrimental influences on African Americans. Fauset suggests that race does not depend on one’s physical appearance and Black or white blood. In this sense, she promotes a nonessential perception toward race and criticizes its comprehension as strictly segregated. The ironic depiction of the Black protagonist as a white supremacist highlights that Fauset satirizes the hypocrisy of hierarchies for political legitimacy and cultural nationalism. She proves her modernist approach through the image of Olivia as an anti-race woman and an unloving mother, refuting the criticisms about her which promote her narratives as “mid-Victorian.” Fauset displays how hazardous class and color hegemony might be through the detrimental effects of Olivia’s obsessions. It is a cautionary tale for African American society in that it demonstrates the damaging nature of colorism and classism. Fauset’s treatment of racial passing brings a new dimension to it as Olivia’s rationale for passing differs from the characters in the other novels. Fauset explains the dangerous side of passing and the importance of embracing one’s heritage while depicting the tragedies as consequences of Olivia’s decision to live as a white person. The image of the rising artist and its death represent the impediments African American artists confront in the Harlem Renaissance as they struggle for changing the prejudiced and discriminating climate with the help of art and letters. Also, the artist’s desire to portray the experiences of common people in the novel lends color to the fallacy of criticizing Fauset as the advocator of bourgeois and middle classes. The tragic death

of the emerging artist is a crucial message to African Americans who might internalize the supremacist beliefs of the white society and reject someone from their own society.

The difficulty in the Fauset novels lies in the subtleties that belie the apparent plotline about light-complexioned confused young women, whose main purpose in life is to marry-up and avoid "the color line." On the surface, the novels seem to function as traditional middle-class romances with happy endings, yet the core meaning presents the disenchantment of childhood dreams, a tragedy, and a bitter comedy. Black characters are happy and self-assured as they succeed in dancing, become qualified doctors, and marry their real lovers. However, during and after the passing experience, they become estranged from the so-called privileges that they desire. Racist practice does not leave them alone; either their scholarships are unfairly taken back, or the families collapse, or in the most extreme form of self-hatred, the dark-complexioned member of the family commits suicide. Just as there are different layers of structures, there are distinctive perspectives of African American experience. Fauset suffered from racism herself and observed that African American artists and intellectuals were constricted because of their color during the twenties. The experience of hardship and anger influenced her works' form and content. In this sense, Blacks' tiredness, their escapeway, their resoluteness, and their determination made marks on the land of anguish and hardship. Fauset's novels unfold the entanglements of race, class, and gender issues, and their experiences and the challenges they confronted as intellectuals all point out the double jeopardy of being African American and women as they proceed in their aspiration to redefine their representation. Although Fauset is criticized as "vapidly genteel" or "sophomoric," and her works are critically labeled as "lace-curtain romances," they prove not conventional at all after a detailed examination.

Fauset was quite conscious of the social conditions and ideological perceptions of the period. While she is criticized for disparaging working-class and advocating middle-class, in fact she criticizes the pretensions of bourgeois-class in her works. She is criticized because she deals with women's issues and presents a more complicated

criticism of an altering community than her contemporaries. With the rise of the feminist movements in and after the 1970s, the analysis on Fauset's works has changed to a great extent. Even if the examination of Fauset's works in African American literature is still not adequate, she is now regarded as one of the first Black women intellectuals. She remolds the racist depiction of African American females as morally "loose" by portraying an image of them as dainty, befitting, and middle-class ladies. Her fiction exhibits the experiences of African American middle-class, yet she also depicts characters from lower socioeconomic classes and values working-class or "the folk" as the source of Black tradition and artistic expression. The treatments of race, class, and gender issues stress the support on the experiences of common people in her works. Fauset intends to display the absurdity of American social class system based upon race and portrays her primary women characters as beautiful according to the ideal Western criteria, but they are still denied social, economic, and academic access to opportunities which teach its readers that apart from insubstantial differences like skin color, middle-class African Americans do not differ from whites belonging to the same classes, and hence are worthy of unbiased treatment. Her works present these historical examinations of the collusion of race and caste and how they function to frame the communal relations in African American society. Fauset believed that in a community in which the color line was drawn very sharply, Black images could only be portrayed by intellectuals who had experienced being one of them. In the light of these, since she has been given little attention in literature, the examination of these questionings and challenges in her works will contribute to the literary canon.

Fauset's novels crystalize not only a wide range of Black experience but also cultural experiences of females through their various secondary characters, plots, and subplots. Fauset discusses one of the most important cultural contradictions of the modern period, concerning the African American women's subjectivity, cultural authenticity, and their racial and sexual image. She illustrates the African American family structure and features the Black woman in a time when they have limited independence. Fauset's leading young women characters are from middle class of the 1920s which formerly were not epitomized in literature. In that period of time, women were supposed to claim

domestic responsibilities or become mothers according to the Victorian mother archetype. Fauset neutralizes these expectations by depicting women who act against the society's principles and confront the Victorian perception of maternity. She portrays African American females as active agents instead of vulnerable victims. She is one of the first African American female artists, who renders accomplished, self-governing, and working-class women whose futures choose not to depend on male-dominated, materialistic marriages. In this sense, Fauset's novels are significant to literary and cultural theory not only due to what they represent about sexual, artistic, cultural and intellectual practices of their time, but because of how our reactions to them can explain us about our own. Their experiences reverberate ours as women since the concepts of race, gender, class, as well as complexion, hair structure, body size, and lots of other elements continue to influence the daily lives of both Black women and all other women today.

Fauset's works include the experience of mixed-race characters to illuminate the intra- and interrelations, and racial identity. Well into the second half of the 20th century, the stance against interracial relations was still common and this approach was promoted by states through legislation, condemning the miscegenation as illegal up to a US Supreme Court verdict in 1967. The history of antimiscegenation led to the internalization of repression which is extant in colored societies. As a consequence of the racial classification systems and designating mixed-race Blacks as monoracially Black, African Americans became the biggest minority group in America toward the end of the 20th century (Spencer 3,4). The states pursued the demographic shifts to determine the racial makeup and produce necessary public policies and federal services in the country. Between 1980 and 1990, the Black population increased from 26.5 million to 29.9 million which enabled the government to arrange civil rights laws—organizing and assessing federal affirmative action plans and integration plans in schools, evaluating workforce involvement and state redistricting plans for the preservation of minority voting rights (Spencer 3). Because of the regulations which protected African Americans which the classification system designated as Black, they came to the forefront as a political presence. As distinct from the situation in the 1920s, the number of defending groups for

interracial relations and mixed-race people has substantially increased. These groups have reinforced the idea of multiracial movement which demands a proper and recognized racial identity for mixed-race individuals. Their presence and endeavors have altered the political view about white supremacy in the country. According to Spencer's observation, a great amount of European Americans refuse the term "white," because of the stereotype which advocates that any people calling themselves through that name are white supremacists (7). The multiracial movement has enabled to blur the color line existed in the country. Even though the mixed-race situation has come a long way, racial discrimination still exists in the United States. Nevertheless, this process is an important progression in the emancipation of mixed-race people from the repressive framework of the racial segregationist system which has forced them to be "in between." In this sense, by putting forward the struggles and authentic experiences of mixed-race characters in her novels, Fauset has contributed to the comprehension of constructing an autonomous identity for multiracial people in a time when people have been oppressed through artificial classifications. She proves to be ahead of her time by her treatment of the concept of race as more than a biological element. Fauset broadens her readers' horizons by interrogating ideologies encompassing race, its relations, and the function of the social sciences in the deconstruction of these concepts.

This thesis has underscored that despite her underrepresentation in the Harlem Renaissance, Fauset challenged the concepts like race and gender stereotypes as a Black woman novelist who is ahead of her time, and contributed to the construction of Black female subjectivity through her various African American women figures with passing experiences, as self-assured businesswomen and from working-class. Her treatment of the subjects in her novels supported African American women's struggles through their history of "dehumanization" and suffering as well as inspiring resistance, and their confrontation against white supremacist and patriarchal oppression. The characters and the narratives in Fauset's novels support this mentality and put forward the authentic experiences of Black women. They have confusions about their light complexion which prompts them to pass as white and bear the heavy burden of the white supremacist view. The characters desire to have a "respectable" and prosperous life as they renounce their

identities, conventions, culture or heritage. Fauset's Black females shed light on the experiences of African American women constructing a "New Negro" identity during the Harlem Renaissance. It is undeniable that their self-formation process is aching, yet the experiences of double consciousness and passing turn out to be the required journey for the self-construction.

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Student No:	N18134929
Department:	AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE
Program:	AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE
Status:	☐ MA ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Combined MA/ Ph.D.

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Tarih: 23/05/2023

Tez Başlığı: JESSIE R. FAUSET'İN ESERLERİNDE AFRİKALI AMERİKALI KADIN ÖZNELLİĞİ, TOPLUMSAL SINIF VE IRK SORUNU

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Programı:	AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI
Statüsü:	☐ Yüksek Lisans ☐ Doktora ☐ Bütünleşik Doktora

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Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Özge Özbek AKIMAN

Detaylı Bilgi: http://www.sosyalbilimler.hacettepe.edu.tr
Telefon: 0-312-2976860 **Faks:** 0-3122992147 E**-posta**: sosyalbilimler@hacettepe.edu.tr

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Student No:	N18134929
Department:	AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE
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