

Discrimination in “the City”: Race, Class, and Gender in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*

Golam Rabbani*

Cultural Studies Program and Dan School of Drama and Music, Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada

Corresponding Author: Golam Rabbani, E-mail: golam.rabbani@queensu.ca

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: July 26, 2019

Accepted: September 11, 2019

Published: October 31, 2019

Volume: 10 Issue: 5

Advance access: October 2019

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: The research is funded by Erasmus Mundus Action II Scholarship provided through European Union and Lund University.

Key words:

Racial Discrimination,
Class Conflict,
Gender Discrimination,
Critical Race Study,
Toni Morrison,
Jazz

ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison, the African American Nobel laureate author, explores the realities where African American women face multiple discriminations in her novel *Jazz* (1992). This article, following the qualitative method on the bibliographic study, examines the discriminations entailing race, class, and gender and presents Harlem as a discriminatory space in the novel. *Jazz* narrates the struggles of African American women who settled in Harlem in the early twentieth-century. Haunted by the memories of slavery, the female African American characters in the novel find themselves subjugated in the society dominated by white Americans and also experience oppression within their black community. Harlem, denoted as “the City” in the novel, identifies itself as the relational space where black women experience the intersecting subjugation and alienation from their race, class, and gender positions.

INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison begins her novel, *Jazz*, with an epigraph from The Nag Hammadi text, “Thunder, Perfect Mind.” The epigraph ends with the words, “the designation of the division,” which seems to summarize Morrison’s motives to write the novel. Apart from the rhythmic alignment of music in the narrative, this novel seems to “designate” the social “divisions” based on race, class, and gender. This study aims to analyze the discrimination based on race, class, and gender in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*. It examines Harlem, frequently referred “the City” in the novel, as a chauvinistic and xenophobic space where African American characters are oppressed and segregated by their race, class, and gender. The novel is about the African Americans who come to “the City” during Great Migration¹ and settle in Harlem. They come to Harlem expecting the future free from their trauma of slavery. Though they seek freedom from the oppression, they seem to have internalized the oppressive norms of the dominating whites. As a result, discrimination occurs within their community.

Jazz is the second novel in Morrison’s trilogy: *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1997). *Jazz* starts at the

point where *Beloved* ends. It is a novel with various narrators explaining the African American experience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America. Unlike *Beloved*, *Jazz* ends with hope. However, some parts of the novel discuss the experiences of trauma, marginalization, and segregation occurring in the lives of African Americans. Morrison does not limit *Jazz* within the fringe of discrimination. In the “Foreword,” she explains the reasons for writing the novel. She is interested “in rendering a period in African American life through a specific lens,” one that will “reflect the content and characteristics of its music, romance, freedom of choice, doom, seduction, anger, and the manner of its expression” (ix). The story of *Jazz* is inspired by the picture of a beautiful girl in the coffin, the picture Morrison sees in James Van Der Zee’s *The Harlem Book of the Dead* (Morrison ix). The story of the dead girl in the picture creates Dorcas, the girl who also dies in the novel. The main characters of the book are influenced by her or by her death, and their experience in Harlem is intertwined with her fate. Through her traumatic experience, Morrison reveals the sufferings of the significant characters caused by the dominant white patriarchy in America.

Harlem of the 1920s does not present the answer to racial equality; instead, the dominant white community denies the social rights of African Americans in Harlem's society. Both Joe and Violet, along with Alice, Malvonne, and Dorcas, face the horror of racial inequality and violence when they attempt to settle in the city. Morrison illustrates the acts of "light skin people" who alienate the dark-skinned African Americans from their social rights. The "internalized" racial alienation, in the form of "colorism," operates within the community of African Americans in Harlem. Harlem also fails to establish equality based on gender. The crisis in the relationships between Joe and Violet, Joe and Dorcas, and Dorcas and Acton represents the chauvinistic behavior of the black men towards black women. Though the narrative of Joe's psyche seems to lessen the gravity of Dorcas's murder, Joe's chauvinist self and denial of Dorcas's independent identity are responsible for the killing. The alienation based on gender is also visible in the novel when Acton becomes more conscious of himself while Dorcas is dying. The narrator(s) of the novel also present(s) Violet's antagonistic behavior and indifference towards Joe. Joe seems to show the submissive masculinity in his conjugal relationship with Violet in Harlem.

Harlem also operates as a setting for status conflict. Apart from the class conflict between black and white communities, Alice Manfred seems to present a class consciousness which she acquires from the ideology of the dominating white society. Her attitude towards jazz music and perspectives on black people in Harlem demonstrate the class conflict and alienation within the black community. While considering these discriminating factors, this study will manifest an in-depth analysis of race, class, and gender and demonstrate Harlem as an intersectional space in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*.

HARLEM AS "THE CITY"

In critical studies, the interpretative notions of race, class, and gender are intellectually correlated. Michlin and Rocchi, in *Black Intersectionalities: A Critique for the 21st Century*, explain that in the "psychological and cultural reality" of "African American fiction, race merges with sex and class at the fundamental point of intersection represented by origin and generation" (3). They argue that race is "biologically insignificant and cannot be defined empirically," and sex is often used "as a subject of repression" (3). It is not easy to define sex, except when "rendered manifest with sexual differentiation and ascribing with gender" (3). The authors of both the books agree that "racialized spaces" operates an ethical shift "towards a greater articulation of discourses and social movements" (Taylor, Hines and Casey 12 and Michlin and Rocchi 3). The "interrelatedness" of race, class, and gender presents a "space that discriminates" (Taylor, Hines, and Casey 7). Within this discriminatory space, debates on "intersections" of race, class, and gender present an awareness of the "social divisions" that are thought of "as enduring, as against those that are seen as simply old and settled, variously casting inequalities as added extras, with constituent parts of class, gender, sexuality, and racial identities" (Taylor, Hines, and Casey 2). The authors point out that a discriminatory space manifests the "inequality," "division,"

"discrimination," "marginalization," and "segregation" on the basis of race, class, and gender (Taylor, Hines and Casey 9 and Michlin and Rocchi 5).

Weston argues that spaces of "inequality" identify the "discriminating traits" while discussing the "reality in a fiction" (21). She indicates that the discriminating factors by race, class, and gender can occur "through many phases and levels" (23). Raynaud further explains that in African American feminist literature, the "conflicts and crisis," the consequences of discrimination in African American feminist literature, occur not only between "blacks and whites" but also "among the blacks" (132). She clarifies that African Americans acquire the "tendencies" of discrimination from the "dominant white patriarchy" (132). The acquired "tendencies" create alienation and segregation within their community. The division between lighter and darker skins, alienation between black male and female characters, and class conflict between rich and poor are the examples of discrimination within the community of African Americans. These discriminating traits present the discriminatory space not only in reality but also in fictional realities of African American literature.

Harlem, in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, becomes the space of discrimination based on the race, class, and gender of the characters in the early twentieth-century. The following sections of this paper present the analysis that manifests Harlem as a discriminatory space presenting the class consciousness and chauvinism in the African American community. The sections will focus on the discriminations, occurring in Harlem or "the City," based on race, class, and gender. They will also show the segregation and alienation of African Americans in early twentieth-century America.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN HARLEM

Harlem was and still is creating histories of segregation based on race and skin color in America. Racial discrimination is a crucial factor in all fictions of Toni Morrison. The trauma of racialized men and women becomes prominent in the city space of Harlem in *Jazz*. Almost all the black characters in the novel are victims of racial discrimination. However, they are not always oppressed by whites. The male-dominated white society imposes many discriminating tendencies on the African American community, and the community internalizes them in the process of survival in Harlem. As a result, in many cases, the black characters in Harlem are marginalized within their community. As the victims of racial discrimination, they live in a constant state of fear and create racial conflicts in Harlem.

Morrison's portrayal of blackness presents the survival of her characters through the history of racial conflicts in America. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison says, "I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive othering of people and language" (xii). McKee, in her book *Producing American Races*, comments, "the common identity of black Americans in the works of Morrison depends on the consistency of public political behavior and individual consciousness" (1). She

insists that the identities of whiteness are “in circulation,” and the circulation operates in the space “between any individual white person and the irremediably ‘other,’ massed identity of blackness” (13).

“The City” in *Jazz* seems to provide the space where “racial superiority” and “dismissive othering” operate in the early twentieth-century USA. The white Americans in the Harlem of 1920s cannot go beyond treating African Americans as slaves though they have gained their independence. Heinert explains that the conventions of racism are matters of “privilege” for whites, and these conventions are “taught and passed on” (63). When African Americans migrate to Harlem from the different parts of the country, the whites cannot accept their arrival. In one of the letters which Malvonne reads, a black character name Winsome says, “how come so many colored people dying where whites doing great stuff” (43). The “great stuff,” meaning the hierarchy and privilege of white Americans in Harlem, is only possible when “colored people” die serving them. Morrison signals the oppression of people of color by the whites in this section. Morrison’s narrator says that the whites are “terrified” seeing “the southern Negroes flooding the towns” and occupying their city space (57). No doubt, the white Americans are not ready to see the blacks independent. The white Americans try to chase away the blacks from their neighborhood in Harlem when both Joe and Violet look for a place to live. Thus, Joe and Violet become the victims of segregation at the very beginning of their lives in Harlem.

Nowlin comments, “*Jazz* is the racial unconscious of American literature; Morrison is not only reconfiguring the national literature but calling for a new American reader open to the possibilities this literature affords when one confronts its investment in the category of race” (156). The unrelenting and destructive influence of racism and oppression of the black family is manifested in *Jazz*. Almost all the characters in and outside Harlem are victims of racial discrimination. Harlem regenerates the race victims, and the racially marked setting of Harlem narrates what is possible and impossible for racialized persons in a given plot.

According to Kubitschek, race riots, since the late 1960s in the United States, have been understood as outbursts of violence within black communities in the impoverished inner cities (140). The resulting deaths, injuries, and property damage have been almost “entirely inflicted by and limited to the black inner-city residents” (140). However, in the early twentieth-century, race riot presents an utterly different phenomenon. Then, “armed gangs of whites invade African American communities,” which are mostly shut out from “police protection or legal recourse” (140). *Jazz* depicts one of these violent episodes, the East St. Louis Riot of 1917², as an off-stage occurrence, affecting two significant characters, Alice Manfred and her niece, Dorcas. Dorcas’s parents are murdered in the riot. Her father is dragged from a streetcar and beaten to death, and her mother burnt to death when their house is torched.

Dorcas is one of the prominent victims of race riots in the novel. She is the only survivor of the tragedy. We find Dorcas unable to forget the tragedy. In Harlem, she faces

psychological disorientation and “cries” (38) and “covers her mouth with the palm” (40) when she remembers the massacre. The riot leaves a stain on her psyche. To seek refuge from her trauma, she involves in a complicated relationship with Joe. Throughout the novel, we find Dorcas emotionally vulnerable and indecisive in her relationships. Her childhood tragedy of racial violence is responsible for her disorienting behavior.

Racial violence also creates a constant fear among black characters and causes the absence of confidence in their behavior. We do not find any act of protest against racism from the major characters of the novel. We see Malvonne pretty content while doing the lowest category of city jobs. Alice Manfred, who seems to be quite articulate in her choices, does not react when white women and children “moved away from her” (54) just because she is black. She teaches Dorcas to be “deaf and blind” (54) among the whites, to be almost non-existent because she believes that Dorcas is “vulnerable” (55) in the company of white women. Thus, Alice cherishes the racial fear imposed on her by the white Americans in Harlem. She tries to instill that fear into Dorcas’s psyche.

Morrison presents the identity crisis in which the black characters align themselves with the white ideology, which confirms the racial inferiority of the black community. The two ends of black identity, understanding the authenticity acquired from the connection to the ancestors and the self-dignity in a racially conflicting reality, are invisible among the characters residing in Harlem. They are busy in accommodating themselves under the domination of white patriarchy. Though they come to the city to have a sense of freedom, they seem to cherish the very ideas they are supposed to protest.

Identity crisis is also presented in Felice’s narration at the end of the novel. Felice comments on the ring that Dorcas wears on the night when she is killed. Stolen from Tiffany’s by Felice’s mother in revenge and compensation for an insulting exchange with a white salesman. Although the ring can be seen as a symbol of protest against discrimination, at the same time, it represents a confirmation of white values. The ring represents the wealth and status symbol of the whites. By stealing the ring, Felice’s mother tries to experience an illusion of privileged status. She fails to understand that the ring does not give her any consolation, except the sense of revenge. She steals a valuable object, but the object cannot bring her any satisfaction. Felice comes to see that although the ring is beautiful, “there’s a trick in it, and I have to agree to the trick to say it’s mine. Reminds me of the tricky blond kid living inside Mrs. Trace’s head” (211). Felice comes to detach the object from her mother’s act of daring, to reject the object while admiring the action. She decides to keep it with Dorcas because it matches her bracelet “and the house where the party” (215) takes place. In Felice’s opinion, the glittering lure fashioned as a symbol of white prestige is a fitting ornament for her shallow companion, Dorcas. It is evident that the act of stealing is a reaction against the accusation by the white salesman at Tiffany’s. Both Felice and her mother are filled with rage when the salesman defines Felice’s mother as a thief. However, she

turns into a thief by stealing the ring. Thus, she confirms the oppressive perspectives of the whites by being a thief, an inferior entity in the society.

Heinze points out the "institutionalized racism" (97) which also causes divisions within the black community in Harlem. Russel, Wilson, and Hall, in their book *The Color Complex*, explain that African American feminist fictions vividly interpret the representation of "colorism," the outcome of "internalized racism" (73). They locate "some deracinated blacks with light enough skin and keen enough features" (73) who abandon their heritage altogether. In *Jazz*, the "de-racinated" mulattos in Harlem create obstacles and make insulting comments when they ask the "light-skinned" for a house to rent. Heinze identifies the "ghost of Golden Gray the mythic figure, the cherished mulatto child" (33) whom Violet's grandmother True Belle cherishes. Violet becomes obsessed with this child's story and fantasizes about light skin. Joe and Violet's marriage becomes antagonistic and tragic because of Violet's affection towards the lighter skin. Violet loses her mother at a young age, and True Belle raises her. She transfers her love and sense of identity to Golden Gray, the ideal western beauty with golden skin and hair. He, in Violet's mind, represents the "miscegenation as the avenue of assimilation and acceptance" (Heinze 33). Though Violet is considered an attractive woman, she expresses her desire to shed her black skin and become white. There is hardly any family member to boost her self-esteem which is not involved in being white. She is raised by a grandmother who also cherishes lighter skin. As a hair-dresser involved in the business of beautification, she appreciates the standard of beauty which means being white. Violet believes that Joe chooses Dorcas because she has lighter skin and long hair. She questions what Joe sees in her, "[A] young me with high yellow skin instead of black? A young me with long wavy hair instead of short?" (90).

However, she admits that she has mistaken her desires for Joe's. She confesses that she "loved Golden Gray better than anybody" and wishes Joe was his "golden boy" (90). Violet realizes that Gray "lives inside her mind" like a "mole," and she needs "to get rid of it" (203). Violet also attempts to kidnap a child with "honey-sweet, butter-colored" (17) skin. She seems to see the reflection of Golden Gray on the face of that child. Her desire to possess lighter skin also influences her desire of having a child. As she cannot have lighter skin on her own, she tries to possess the child with lighter skin and fulfill her desire. Violet has a parrot with a "green and blond head" which repeatedly tells her "love you" (93), and it is another symbol representing Violet's fondness for whiteness. The dominant white culture influences Violet and True Belle's concept of standard beauty. Joe does not have lighter skin that Violet desires, so she alienates Joe in their conjugal lives and replaces Joe with a parrot which has a "green and blond head." The parrot's meaningless uttering, "love you," seems to satisfy Violet. Even after being independent in Harlem, Violet is entangled in the trap of the concept of beauty derived from the white culture. She fails to acquire the dignity and confidence which are supposed to make her comfortable with her skin. She acquires the

concept of "colorism" from the dominant whites and fails to appreciate her skin color and her racial identity.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN HARLEM

Morrison's narrator starts the story by explaining why Joe kills Dorcas, with whom he is having "those deepdown spooky loves" (3). According to the narrator, Joe is both "sad and happy" while he is with her, and he shoots her "just to keep the feeling going" (3). The narration of the shooting seems to present the narcissistic behavior of African American men when they are in a relationship with black women. Morrison depicts a general reaction of a black woman, the narrator, accusing a black man of killing a girl. Though Joe's community identifies Joe as a neighborly kind man, he is also turned into a violent "bad nigger," the stereotyped black man prone to criminal acts. His affair with Dorcas gives him the pride to dominate the girl, and he feels a sense of pride as a man. Eventually, the pride allows Joe to think that he is "free to do something wild" (4) and leads him to her eventual murder. Thus, modest and amiable Joe transforms into a killer.

Morrison characterizes Joe at the beginning to reaffirm that the man may seem amicable, but at some point, he is bound to disclose the chauvinist in him. Bouson, in her book on Morrison's novels, explains that *Jazz* describes the expansive pride and power felt by the black men living in Harlem in the 1920s (167). Harlem offers freedom for black men who are ex-slaves. The dominant chauvinist patriarchy is passed onto them by the white supremacy, and they tend to cherish it within their African American community. Loris examines, Dorcas is a kind of a girl "who submits to domination" and who seeks a "father figure" out of her desire for "freedom, recognition, personal identity, and agency" (58). Joe becomes not only her lover but also "father figure," and he takes the advantage by dominating her. His practice of power over Dorcas is challenged when she chooses Acton over him. Joe's possessive self cannot allow Dorcas's absence because he is afraid of loneliness. His insecurity leads him to kill her. Loris's analysis stresses on Joe's dominating psyche as she says, "Dorcas's aunt understands the murder of all brutalizing men who can kill unarmed black women — just because they can" (59). Joe pretends to provide Dorcas with the freedom and recognition that she desired, but in reality, he could not recognize and respect her choices. By killing her, he discloses the extreme form of his chauvinist personality.

Similarly, Acton's narcissism is prominent in the relationship between Dorcas and Acton. Dorcas submits to male domination when she reshapes herself according to his desires. He seems to present the typical black male youth in the Harlem of 1920s, the male youth that internalized the chauvinism of white patriarchy and cherishes white male's masculinity and narcissism by dominating black women. The lack of his compassion for Dorcas is reflected in his narcissist behavior. The narrative of Dorcas shows that she refuses to acknowledge Acton's narcissism and lack of empathy for her. She tries to do her hair "the way he likes," and she changes the way she laughs "to one he likes better" (192).

However, nothing seems to satisfy Acton as he is engrossed in himself in the party, and Dorcas is just another girl for him who wishes to receive more attention in the crowd of the party. Acton exposes his narcissist and chauvinist behavior after Joe shot Dorcas at the party. Dorcas's "blood is on his (Acton's) coat, and he is dabbing at it with a white handkerchief" (190). He does not care about Dorcas while she is dying. Acton lacks kindness; therefore, he is far away from the sense of respecting the presence and personality of Dorcas. He is busy with his coat. Morrison represents the inhuman behavior of African American men by Acton. Though we cannot say that all male characters of Morrison's fiction oppress black women, we observe that both Joe and Acton demonstrate the chauvinist and narcissist behavior of some black men residing in Harlem.

Harding and Martin locate the disposition of Violet and Dorcas's identity which is threatened by black men's chauvinism and narcissism. They point out that the black women in Harlem "mirrors the black men's assigned status of the Other" (55). The "Other" reflects on the inferior state of black women through the spectacle of black men, and the women seem to accept their predestined inferior state in the community. They tend to submit to the black patriarchy and fail to reclaim or repossess their identity as free individuals. Though we see Violet trying to avoid the patriarchal shadow of Joe, we do not see her successful in understanding her individualism. She ignores Joe in most parts of the plot, but Joe's choices and activities seem to influence her all the time. Some women even confirm the chauvinist behavior of the black men. Alice Manfred confesses that she has "passed" the patriarchal values of black men "on to her baby sister's only child," Dorcas (77). She believes that she is responsible for Dorcas's fascination towards black men. When Dorcas's blood soiled Acton's coat, the hostess is bothered because the incident of shooting ruins her party. She does not tend to Dorcas while she is bleeding; rather, she is annoyed. A woman cleans Acton's coat and brings it back, and "it is not clean the way it was before and the way he likes it" (192). Both the woman and the hostess do not show any concern or compassion for Dorcas. They are more concerned about satisfying the needs of Acton, the narcissist black man. Therefore, they confirm the patriarchal domination and voluntarily turn themselves into the victims of power.

Malvonne acts in such a way that we can define her as a victim of male domination. She is submissive, and her work is to examine the trash of "powerful white men" (41). Her duties are similar to the works of her female ancestors who were slaves. So, it is obvious that she will possess the slave-like submissiveness in her personality, especially when men approach her. Joe takes advantage of her submissiveness and persuades her to let him rent her nephew's room. When Joe meets her, Malvonne instantly understands that her nephew Sweetness's room will be used as Joe's pleasure-den for his extra-marital affair. Malvonne refuses the offer at first because she knows Violet and cannot accept such illicit relationships. However, Malvonne fails to resist when Joe offers her an adequate amount of money.

Moreover, Joe continues to insist that he is unhappy. He complains that Violet takes "better care of the parrot than she

does me" (49). Malvonne is unable to stay strong and abide by her moral standpoint against Joe's affair. Her submissive personality lets the black men, like Joe, exploit black women and violate the sacred bond of marriage. White men subjugate and oppress black men and women in early nineteenth-century Harlem. They also passed on their power of manipulating women to the African American men. So, it is easy for Joe to manipulate Malvonne. Malvonne turns into an accomplice and helps Joe continue his affair with Dorcas. She turns into the very person whom she hates. Joe manages to manipulate her, and use her according to his requirements. To locate the submissive characteristics of black women in early Harlem, Morrison creates Malvonne who seems to have moral standpoints but fails to act upon them. The manipulative behavior of Joe prompts her submissiveness, and he dominates her to fulfill his intentions.

Unlike Malvonne, Alice Manfred, Dorcas's aunt, is a black woman with a bold and robust personality. She is quite articulate when it comes to the upbringing of Dorcas. However, she is quite traumatized throughout the novel. We find her driven by a fear of losing which starts when she loses her husband. Like Violet, Alice is also a victim of an unfaithful husband. Her husband, Louis Manfred, has an affair with another woman who comes to his funeral wearing an inappropriate white dress. Morrison explains Alice's anger and says that she is "starving for blood" for "seven months" (88). Though her husband leaves her and dies long before her arrival in Harlem, the trauma caused by her husband's unfaithfulness still haunts her. Her traumatized mind enforces rules on Dorcas. Alice thinks that such enforcement can be the cause of Dorcas's instability in her personality and relationships. However, it seems clear that the chauvinist and deceiving black men with their dominating tendencies are responsible for the traumatized lives of African American women in the novel.

Violet, as a victim of domination, turns violent on Dorcas's corpse; hence, she gains the name "Violent" (5). Her past and present relationships with her parents and husband create oddities in her mind. She cannot stand the idea of her husband having an affair. Instead of confronting Joe, she knifes Dorcas's corpse at the funeral. Kubitschek explains that Violet's act of violence is the result of her trying "out some standard reactions to her husband's affair" (149). Apart from Violet's past, Joe is mostly responsible for Violet's unstable personality. When Violet remains aloof in her marital life and tries to replace Joe with a parrot, Joe does not take any initiative to regain the intensity of their relationship. Instead, he starts to have an affair with Dorcas. Joe lacks the intention to reform his relationship with Violet. He becomes selfish and fails to show any compassion for Violet. Therefore, it is Joe who is responsible for the violent act at Dorcas's funeral. His chauvinism and narcissism instigate the instability in Violet's personality.

However, Violet is also responsible for making Joe submissive and unresponsive in their marriage. Though in the early twentieth-century Harlem masculinity is hardly submissive, Matus points out that it is visible in a few literary fictions (44). After learning about the affair between her husband and Dorcas, Violet extends the distance in their

relationship. To irritate Joe, Violet puts a picture of Dorcas on the living room mantle. Violet tries to hurt Joe in every way she can. She is also furious because she cannot stand the idea that Joe is mourning for Dorcas. No doubt, Joe does not react to Violet's acts, because he is responsible for having an affair. Violet is partly responsible for the failure of their relationship. She consumed herself with her intense desire for a child, and she replaces the existence of Joe with a parrot. Joe is not able to bridge the gap in their relationship. Joe seems to be a black man with submissive characteristics. His job needs less interaction with other people. That is why he says that "he never push," and he enjoys his job at "the Windemere" when he "waits tables" (122). Violet's manners alienate Joe from her. There is no strong presence of Joe in the relationship. Violet forces him to remain aloof in their married lives. Therefore, he is forced to treat Violet "like a piece of furniture" (123). Thus, Morrison seems to present the submissive masculinity through the narration of Joe.

CLASS CONFLICT AND DISCRIMINATION IN HARLEM

"The City" or Harlem identifies itself as the communal space where discrimination based on class operates. The class consciousness of the dominant white culture questions the existence of black migrants in the novel. When the ex-slaves, like Joe, Violet, Dorcas, and Alice, migrate to Harlem for independence, the white Americans create a rivalry between the two races. Naturally, the dominant white class cannot accept the fact that the blacks, who were once their slaves, can try to live in "the City" with financial and social independence. Their very existence of superiority is jeopardized in this process. The idea of material possessions for blacks threatens the white communities who prefer to be the superior social class. So, it is hard for Joe and Violet to have a dwelling place. The whites deny recognizing the blacks who can struggle independently and become economically solvent. Therefore, blacks are marginalized within the economically solvent white community in Harlem.

However, in *Jazz*, the significant scenarios of class conflict occur within the black community. According to Jill Matus, the "black others" frequently need to "assimilate with the notions of social class" of the dominant white culture for fitting themselves in Harlem and within their community (21). So, the status consciousness is passed on by the dominant whites and internalized by the blacks. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the "freedom" that the city offers with its "ignorance and criminality" (8). The city is supposed to provide the platform where "they can think to do whatever they want and get away with it" (8). However, the narrator remains sarcastic here. Apart from referring to the "criminality," the criminal deeds done by both the blacks and whites, she ironically points to the social "freedom" that the blacks think they have. Afterward, the narrator says, "wealthy whites and plain ones too, pile into mansions decorated and redecorated by black women" (8). The whites are still superior in their social position, and they receive assistance from the black women as if the black women are still their slaves. The dominant whites confirm

their superior social status, and they remain "wealthy" compared to the black community.

The narrator intensifies this class conflict when she/he says, "both are pleased with the spectacle of the other" (8). In this part of the novel, the black women, who are involved in decorating the houses of white Americans, seem satisfied to work for them. They fail to realize that the independence from the white patriarchy is not possible until they stop associating themselves with the white communities who are "terrified" about them and want to "chase away" the blacks (57). The black women seem to be satisfied by associating themselves with white communities who have social status in Harlem. They are not allowed to gain a social position for themselves in Harlem; so, they prefer to remain "pleased" with the "wealthy whites." The dominant whites take the advantage when they see the black women are considering themselves inferior. Some of the black characters also seem to "internalize" the class consciousness imposed by the whites and consider themselves inferior.

The "internalized" status consciousness manifests various issues that instigate class conflict in the black community in Harlem. For instance, Violet goes to one part of Harlem to do the hair of a mother and her daughter who also belong to the black community. The neighbors call them "Dumfrey women" (19). Violet finds them not at home. Their neighbor, another black woman, explains their class consciousness to Violet. She accuses that the Dumfrey family "handles money" and remains "stuck up" (19). The family's obsession for money and social position alienate the family from its neighbors. Therefore, the neighbors dislike the Dumfrey women. Such class consciousness within the black community allows division, and the community splits up as a result of the class conflict. Both the neighbors and the Dumfrey family are from Cottown. However, the Dumfrey family completely denies their roots in Cottown in their new found social status in Harlem. The neighboring black woman, who talks to Violet, is their friend from Cottown, but now the family refuses to recognize her and pretend "to sound like they ain't from Cottown" (19). Dumfrey women are in the process of wiping out any connection with their roots. They think that their history as slaves is a matter of shame for them. Instead of feeling proud of their accomplishment, they try to deny their history which is supposed to give them a sense of struggle and satisfaction. The lack of communal feeling and shared identity in black communities is the result when the dominant authority of white communities manipulates their mind through the illusions of social status and makes them forget their roots. For the sake of assimilating with the pretentious white ideology of social class, the Dumfrey women deny their past identities and seem to fit themselves into an illusionary social status following the footsteps of their previous masters, the dominant American whites.

Alice Manfred, Dorcas's aunt, also seems to be influenced by the sense of social status in the novel. As Peace suggests, she seems to belong to a "class of black women" who has a "specific taste" for clothing and decoration (35). When she meets Violet, she is not happy with Violet's dress. She is "irritated by the thread running loose from her sleeve"

and by the “ripped coat lining in three places” (82). When Alice meets her for the first time, she seems to think that Violet’s dress does not present her as a person with sophistication. She seems to think, Violet, “the embarrassing kind” (79), belongs to a class of women who have a “terrible and nasty closeness” to “red dress,” “yellow shoes, and “race music to urge them on” (79). The concept of sophistication, internalized and embedded in her mind by the dominant white upper class, manipulates Alice’s mind and alienates herself from the women of her community. Though she becomes a good friend of Violet later, her first impression on Violet is influenced by her status consciousness. Her gaze on Violet’s dress alienates her from Violet, the member of her community. It presents the status consciousness that creates division among African Americans.

Alice’s class consciousness also leads her to devalue the essence of jazz music. According to Kubitschek, jazz music “developed as part of the Harlem Renaissance³, a creative flowering of African American culture made possible, in part, by the new concentrations of black population in Northern cities” (141). Bauson argues that the dominant whites in early twentieth-century Harlem define jazz music as “race music” (23). According to the whites, the blacks in Harlem belong to an “inferior class” (Bauson 23). In their view, the music of the blacks in Harlem is nothing but “lowly chaos” (Bauson 23). In the novel, we find Alice Manfred also defining the jazz music as “race music” (79). Alice holds jazz music responsible for the “shameless” (58) acts of black people. According to Morrison’s narrator, Alice thinks that jazz is the “dirty get-on-down music” (58). The men and women sing, play, and dance to the music, “close and shameless or apart and wild” (58). Alice fails to appreciate the joy and cheerfulness that the music brings to the black community. In a marginalized social context, jazz music becomes the hope for existence for the African Americans in the novel. It seems that the black community takes refuge in jazz music because the dominant whites keep them in constant fear. Jazz music brings the African Americans together because they sing and dance together with it. The music presents them with a sense of unity, and Alice fails to understand it. Her class consciousness devalues the jazz music which upholds the African American culture. In the novel, jazz music becomes the “essence of African Americanism” (Bauson 23). Alice fails to comprehend the importance of this music because she aligns her ideology with the class consciousness derived from the white supremacy prevailing around her. Therefore, she alienates herself from her own identity as an African American.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Morrison’s Harlem operates as a discriminatory space where oppression and alienation based on race, class, and gender are prominent. “The City” is Morrison’s fictional field where her narrator(s) play(s) as the maker(s) and breaker(s) of lives with the interrelating crisis of race, class, and gender identities. *Jazz* is a novel about love, friendship, freedom, music, motherhood, and sisterhood. The narrator(s) make(s) lives through these definite rhythms of experience. It is a

journey of understanding the African American identity. It is also a novel about trauma, slavery, identity crisis, oppression, and alienation. It is a struggle through the oppressive norms of the dominant white culture. The narrator(s) break(s) the lives through these adverse notes of suffering.

The setting of *Jazz* is not limited to Harlem. There are discriminating factors occurring in the lives of the characters living outside Harlem in the late nineteenth century. Some of the characters are the ancestors of the major characters. Their experiences are mostly centered in Virginia and Baltimore. As these places make them suffer due to the oppression of the dominant white Americans, Virginia and Baltimore can be coined as discriminatory spaces. However, the discriminating traits from race, class, and gender do not operate together in these places.

For Morrison, reading as much as writing influences us heavily with the pain of recognizing the voices of discrimination we never knew. Morrison presents the division of the sound that some can hear and the letter that all can read. In these letters, we find the recapitulation of the trauma turned into racially and sexually marked marginalization. In the end, the novel offers hope. Morrison’s characters start to transform and begin to understand each other. She describes the city that inspires the characters to dream. Morrison provides us with the pleasure of imagining the dream of wholeness. Morrison is waiting for us to discover the selves which recognize our racialized, vulnerable intersectional space and fight to bring equality there.

ENDNOTES

1. According to Kubitschek, the characters of *Jazz* participate in several of the major historical events affecting African Americans from 1880 through 1926 (140). In the novel, Joe and Violet Trace migrate from small country towns in Virginia to New York City in 1906. In history, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, so many African Americans from the rural South settled in the urban North that historians call the Great Migration (140). This migration happened for several factors. Most African Americans in the South had been forced into sharecropping, a system that is in practice little different from slavery. Even aside from the resulting poverty, the social conditions of segregation were harsh. Moreover, racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan grew increasingly powerful, not only murdering individuals but sometimes burning whole towns (140).
2. The race riot took place in May and July 1917 at East St. Louis, Illinois (Kubitschek 142). It is an industrial city on the east bank of the Mississippi river in the USA. It was one of the worst riots in the history of US. The silent march with the drumbeats depicted in Harlem is the protest against this race-riot.
3. According to Kubitschek, Harlem Renaissance lasted roughly from 1910 until the beginning of the Depression in 1930 (142). During these two decades, black writers like Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston published novels

and poetry centered on African American experience. Alain Locke compiled *The New Negro*, an anthology devoted to new African American political and artistic self-definitions. The Harlem Renaissance's best known artistic creation, however, is jazz (142). Jazz is reckoned throughout the world as one of America's most significant cultural contributions, and it originated with African American artists. Jazz evolved from the blues and retained several blues qualities, such as call and response, repetition, and, most importantly, signifying: thoughtful revision and repetition of another's work (142).

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