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**REREADING JAMES BALDWIN:**  
**STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY**

**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ**

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## INTRODUCTION

In the course of the past twenty years, American history has been remade. Inspired initially by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s – which shattered the “consensus” vision that had dominated historical writing [...]. (Foner vii)

1950s and 1960s are among the most important decades in the history of the United States of America. During these two decades, American social and political life suffered from great unrest and upheaval against the traditional values which had not been discussed till then. After the World War II, people living in the States started to feel unsafe because of the unrest caused by the lasting conflict between Soviet Russia and America. The level of the fear that shaped the society increased dramatically with the role of the government in Vietnam. With these active roles of the government in Vietnam and against the expansion of communism, it became obvious that the United States of America left the isolationist policy. The unrest around the society reached its peak in 1960s. In the previous decade, the signs of isolationism could have been seen in American politics. In the society the idea of affluence during the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower was replaced with the frustration in 1960s.

As a result of the unrest in the society, different groups, forming the “counter culture,” started to appear. The common goal of these groups is to resist against the traditional values which had been seen unquestionable. They formed a collective resistance towards the American politics of the era. In addition to the politics, the groups began to gather to stop the inequality. Thus, 1960s became an era that minorities protest for the equality. With the Civil Rights Movement of 1960s, minorities gained power over the dominant American culture.

The civil rights were gained at first by black American, but soon they started to be applied to all Americans. Although the process to grant these rights to the minorities was slow, the movement had a great effect on all minorities. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Native Americans were forced to live an isolated life without any political and social rights. Although they are known to be the owner of the continent,

they survived in poverty dependent on the national government. As a part of the assimilation process, the use of native languages and religious rituals were banned. As a result of the Civil Rights Movement, Native Americans organized a riot against the national government in 1969 by seizing Alcatraz Island. Upon this riot, the government granted some fund to them in the 70s. Apart from the Native Americans, Hispanic-Americans also lived in poverty for a long time. Like the other minority groups, they were also hit by the Depression. To get a better pay, Cesar Chavez led a strike in California, which resulted in better working conditions. It is obvious that civil rights legislation affected them in a positive way. In addition to the minority groups, women also benefited from the feeling of change in the 60s' America. Protectionism, representing the traditional idea that women should be protected, was still in action till 1970. To subvert this stereotype, some activists led by Susan B. Anthony organized a great protest. That soon resulted in the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment of 1920 that gave women right to vote. Upon this amendment, the movement advanced a step with the Equal Pay Act of 1963. That act provided women with equal pay for men and women doing the same work. It is apparent that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was led by the black Americans, but affected all minority groups. The level of the suffering that the African-Americans had survived during the years of slavery made the blacks a leading group in this movement. Their ambition to get the equal rights set an example for the other minorities and created a hope for change in American society.

This movement did not only affect the social and political area, but they also affected the literary works of the decade. Inequality, sexism, and racism became the most common words among the society. The importance of the terms is written in the preface of *Cultural Politics*;

Many books on culture and politics have a tendency to academicize issues. In the process the bitter experiences of structural inequality, sexism and racism –their effects on people's sense of self and their opportunities in life – are diffused. Class, gender and race became academic issues freed of passion, anger and pain. (Jordan xi)



The importance of history and culture to define our identity cannot be disregarded. Thus, the answer to who we are cannot be answered without referring to the historical incidents and cultural changes of the era. The changes in the cultural products directly affect the identity formation. With the instruments that the culture produces, one can see who he/she is and where he/she comes from.

One of the issues discussed in this thesis is the construction of American identity. In the first chapter, identity politics is going to be discussed by conceptualizing the term. This process is really hard as the States includes different ethnic groups. In this part, America is referred as a country of immigrants and settlers. As a result of this diversity, forming an American identity is a troubling process. In this process, gender identity and race identity are going to be defined by referring to different opinions on these categories. To begin with, the idea of gender identity is going to be defined by the help of two influential philosophers: Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. While defining the term, Butler's idea that gender is a result of repeated performative acts will be the primary source. At the end of this part of the chapter, identity is defined as a flexible concept, which can be changed depending on the acts of the subject. Therefore, essentialist point of view on the identity formation is going to be disregarded. Another important issue discussed in the first part is the construction of race identity. Firstly, the appearance of the term in the United States is going to be explained with the use of American history. Secondly, it is essential to mention the assimilation process to understand the importance of racial identity in the States. The importance of the idea of the assimilation in a founded society will be emphasized. The second part of the first chapter includes the construction of American identity, called as "American Creed." This part points out the importance of immigrants and settlers in forming American history and identity. At the end of the second part, some challenges to the creed especially after the twentieth century are going to be suggested.

The second chapter focuses on the Civil Rights Movement and James Baldwin as a provoking figure of the era. The first part points out brief information till the 1950s and 1960s. This information helps one understand the unrest and upheaval in the upcoming era, and also figure out the ongoing cultural changes. This historical

background is going to be followed by the important events of the 50s and 60s; this part of the chapter is named as “The Crewcut Era and the Era of Frustration.” In this part, the significance of the period is going to be pointed out by referring to the cultural changes. While analyzing these two decades, cultural politics will be the main issue and social effects of the changes will be shown rather than the historical incidents of the era. The last part of the chapter introduces James Baldwin to the reader as a “colorless American writer” of the era. It is necessary to write about his childhood and literary career before going on with the novels of his. The writer is going to be considered as an activist of human rights, not only of the black rights in the States. Therefore, his life away from the States is going to be discussed in a detailed way.

The main purpose of this paper is to reread the “African-American” writer James Baldwin as an activist for the human rights, not only for the rights of black people in the States. Many critics analyze his works with references to his racial background; however, his sexual orientation has more effect on his novels than his background. In order to attain the aim of the paper, in the last chapter of the thesis, James Baldwin is going to be discussed as a “colorless” writer. On that purpose, two novels of the author are going to be analyzed in terms of identity politics. While these novels are discussed, Baldwin’s attempts to create another country without any borders are going to be underlined. For this purpose, *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country* have been chosen as primary sources. The former tells the life of an American David in Paris. The protagonist of the novel is homosexual and he suffers from a great dilemma in his mind. Throughout the novel, he searches for his own identity. The latter picks up on the life of an African-American musician Rufus. He commits a suicide at the very beginning of the novel. Many think that he has committed a suicide because of the racial oppression he has suffered from. However, it becomes obvious in the latter parts of the novel that he also, like David in *Giovanni’s Room*, tries to understand who he is. In this novel also, Baldwin creates a protagonist who has experienced homosexual/bisexual acts. As the title suggest, by referring to these novels, the struggle for identity in 1950s’ and 1960s’ America is going to be studied.

The purpose is to reach a conclusion that James Baldwin is an influential author, essayist, playwright of the twentieth century in terms of human right. His writings cannot be limited only to the racial oppression as many critics have done for a long time. In contrast to the view of these critics, he should be read disregarding his national background, like he did while creating his characters. To sum up, he can be said to aim at creating “another country” or another “room” to live peacefully without any borders.

## **I. Identity Politics**

### **1. Conceptualization of the Term**

Perhaps, as we say in America, I wanted to find myself. This is an interesting phrase, not current as far as I know in the language of any other people, which certainly does not mean what it says but betrays a nagging suspicion that something has been misplaced. (Baldwin, 21)

This quotation has been taken from James Baldwin's provoking novel *Giovanni's Room* which is based on David's struggle for his *true* identity. The quotation includes just two sentences but it, in some ways, summarizes the human history of which identity is the base. Anyone who studies the history of civilizations can easily face with a lot of changes in the meaning of identity. In other words, throughout the history, the concept of human being has been exposed to too many changes according to the conditions surrounding the people. These changes raised a question that must be answered: What is identity, or in a general sense, who are we? From the first civilization that is mainly formed by the ancient Greeks to the post-modern civilization, maybe the only thing that has not been altered is the humanity's curiosity for his own identity. In this process, one can face with the word "subjectivity" that is commonly used as the synonym of "identity." However, when someone calls the identity as the subjectivity, it refers to the idea how we are constituted as subjects. This process of constitution may be because of society or culture. In this context comes the binary opposition between self identity and social identity. Here come other questions: How do we see ourselves and how do the others see us? Which one is more important in designating our individuality? As a reply to these questions, Kath Woodward mentions in her book "Questioning Identity : Gender, Class, Ethnicity";

Identity provides a link between individuals and the world in which they live. Identity combines how I see myself and how others see me. Identity involves the internal and the subjective, and the external. It is a socially recognized position, recognized by others, not just by me." (Woodward 7)

As can be seen what Woodward puts forward, personal identity may require a matter of choice but this matter is not the only thing that constitutes it. External figures also have a great impact on designating one's identity. Therefore, studies about the process of identity involve not only the quantity of control that we –as a person- have on our own identity but also the quantity of the control that the society in which we live has. So as to designate social identity, these external figures generally use the power of symbolism. By using these symbols, they create stereotypes that they want to see and they, in a way, visualize the personal identity. "In constructing identities we imagine ourselves. We do this by visualizing ourselves, thinking in symbols. Who I am is dependent on how I am seen by others as well as how I see myself" (Woodward 13). To summarize this process, personal identity is believed to include not only the experiences that belongs to the person, but also the conditions that he / she has lived in. In short, self-identity can be said to be what we hold of ourselves while social identity is said to be what the expectations of others are. As the impact of external figures exist in formulating the identity, representation gains importance. Self-identity is expressed via the signs of taste, attitudes, manners, beliefs or lifestyles. For this representation, the meaning of identity is again inquired.

The question is whether identity is something fixed which must be found or something that we are doomed to possess. While looking into the researches on this issue, two classes of ideas can be seen. The first one is called "essentialism" that refers to the opinion that people have a fixed and determined identity which they have to find. That is, we as the people must have a collective identity. For instance, general opinion on the identity of American Identity can be summarized as "WASP." This situation leads to the collective identity of American people and also leads us to ignore the "others" that are neither white nor Anglo-Saxon or Protestant. However, what gives the identity the main base is the opposition between "us" and "them". To make it more clear, the concept of gender identity can be used; "This [Essentialist] viewpoint regards, say, having a Y chromosome as essential to being a male and reduces gender to one factor." (Woodward 52). The second class of thought is "anti-essentialism" that rejects the idea of fixed identity. For the supporters of that idea, "identity is subjected to the

change according to the particular times and places” (Barker 166). Main figures of anti-essentialism point out the importance of “process of becoming” as a result of the “project” that is done by the people themselves.

The personal identity of the named person includes their experience and life story. Continuity is important to our understanding of who we are, but changes suggest that identities are not fixed and constant; they change too. (Woodward 9)

This “project” that people themselves create may reflect both similarities and differences. In other words, what makes person a person is not only the common features but also the distinctive ones. Once again, the emphasis on the external figures can be seen. Not only how we see ourselves but also how we are seen by others. As a result, anti-essentialism ignores the “institutional” idea of normalization and puts forward the “fractured” identity instead of a “unified” one. This fractured identity caused by the project must be seen as a resistance to the stereotypical identities created by the external figures. In “Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Ethnicity”, Kate Woodward emphasizes this project with the following lines:

In contemporary society the body has become a project. People attempt to alter or improve the appearance, size and shape of their bodies in line with their own designs. [...] Body-building and boxing are examples of projects which challenge accepted notions of what is natural, especially when it is women who are involved in the activity. This can be seen as a form of resistance to constraining stereotypes of femininity. (Woodward 36)

To explain this notion of anti-essentialism, another quotation by Kate Woodward is useful. She points out the designation of several identities in one by referring to the ideas of Freud on unconscious:

Freud argued, based on case studies of people he had analysed, that through early development children repress all their anti-social needs and wants, all the things a child is not allowed to do or to have. [...] Who we are is not given in advance, we are not born with an identity, but it emerges in a number of different forms through a series of identifications which combine and emerge in an infinite number of forms so there is never one fixed, coherent identity but several in play. (Woodward 16)

From these different clashes between the philosophers, it can be seen that summarizing all of this process is almost impossible. Therefore, the notion of identity is generally categorized as the politics of gender, of ethnicity, of religion, of sexual orientation etc. In this thesis, this notion is going to be analyzed under the groups of gender and racial identity with references to the component of the American identity. While analyzing these two different kinds of categories, the ideas of thought-provoking philosophers will be used as primary sources.

### **1.1. Gender Identity**

Gender is now considered to be one of the busiest terms of English in almost all fields of academics. As well as being used a lot, it is a changing one. In other words, the meaning of the term has undergone great differences. Not until the beginnings of the twentieth century has gender become a popular term in identifying a person. Before that century, only a few philosophers put a little emphasis on the importance of these two binary structures that designate gender as male and female to understand who or what a person is. In those years, gender was nothing but just a mark of biological differences.

The term used to provide only an emphasis on already-sexually-differentiated body. This emphasis forced the people to act in specifically gendered ways as Giddens suggests (Barker 195). If they behaved different from what their gender required socially, this behavior would have nothing with their identity because it was thought to be a temporary act or perversion. However, now this mode of thinking has survived too many changes, as Michel Foucault puts it these acts become to be an identity and

permanent. Because of these sharp changes throughout the history, it has been almost impossible to define the term, gender, accurately and definitely. Generally speaking, gender is thought to be an attitude and experience of a person determined by his/her biological sex. In fact, the main problem about defining the term appears in this definition too.

Most feminist writing has relied not on biological determinism but on a conceptual division between sex and gender, where the former is the biology of the body and the latter the cultural assumptions and practices which govern the social construction of men, women and their social relations. (Barker 187)

What is the relation (if there is one) between the biological sex and gender? Almost none of the philosophers of the twentieth century agree with each other on the definition of gender, though. Before that century, as mentioned above, gender used to be considered fixed and determined. Therefore, in the process of identity, gender has almost no place as all people are pre-gendered. Therefore, sexual desire used to be ignored because of the “institutionalized and compulsory heterosexuality.” However, with the arrival of the philosophically fruitful twentieth century, gender has become something culturally constructed and open to change. With this age, more and more people realized the existence of performatively construction of gender. In this thesis, while defining what gender is, Judith Butler’s definition will be the primary one. Butler defines gender as the following:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.(Butler 43-4)

Sexual desire, now that, has had a place; it is told that if desire could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with the preliminary marking by sexes. In other words, instead of the social theory of gender, which is one and single for all human being, so cannot be discussed; it has become an individual attribute based on a performance and experience which may point out the mind / body dualism free from the



biological sex. That is, gender has turned into a unique thing from a community one by rescuing itself from the limits of institutionalized heterosexuality which restricts the production of identities. As it has just been said, in this chapter, gender identity is going to be analyzed and on this aim the definition of Judith Butler on what gender is will be used primarily. However, to understand this confusing term main definitions of that term should be explained by underlining the change and differences throughout the ages. To attain this purpose, the ideas of two influential philosophers will be used.

To begin with, Michel Foucault is, for most of the people interested in literature or philosophy, the most influential thinker. His studies did not only affect his own period but also today's intellectual landscape. During his life, he wrote lots of articles on the issues of cultural studies, gender, and the process of identity.

He was born in France and got his university degree there. He was born into a middle-class family in 1926. His father was thought to have a bad impact on Foucault; therefore, French philosopher left his family to keep his education life in Paris. There, he experienced a lot of movements and thoughts on literature, medicine, arts etc. He majored in psychology, although his parents insisted him to study medicine. During his education life at university, he started to show interest to communism. The result of this interest can easily be seen almost all of his works. To illustrate, his first success came with *The Birth of Clinic* which is an attack on the institutions. Many of his works have the similar theme, and he generally criticizes the existence of administration over people. However, one quotation from his *The Birth of the Prison* leads to an ambiguity whether the ideas of Foucault can be used for today's conditions. In this work, he thinks about the reason why he has written in such a theme and he answers as follows:

Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of present. (Foucault 30-1)

As can be seen, many thinkers still use the ideas of his but he just wrote about the situations occurred in his own period. His idea here, unfortunately, raises a great question. Although he strongly resisted the idea that he was writing about the *past*, he

never gave up writing about *history*. Foucault is believed to produce a “genealogy” of the modern subject. With this genealogy, he has historicized the modern subject. From *The History of the Prison*, he turned to the history of sexuality. In addition to history, Foucault mainly focuses on the idea of power and knowledge. *What is an Author?* is an essay that mostly refers to the literary power. In this essay, he criticizes the common opinion that author has a power to understand the text. According to his point of view, it is not necessary for the readers to search for author’s biography or psychology to understand the texts. Again in the same essay, he mainly attacks the literary critics that categorize “literature” by just using the authors, or by just using the name of the writer. For Foucault, real literary criticism must destroy the boundaries of formal analyses of the text and the biography of the writer. With this essay, he puts forward his idea of “subject” which he mainly uses instead of “self.” It is highly necessary to keep what Foucault means with the word “subject” in mind while reading all works of his. The importance of this word becomes obvious when mentioning about power and knowledge. Here the question is that “does power create the subject or vice versa?” For Foucault, modern subject (meaning individual) is created by power (that is institution). To explain power, Foucault prefers to say power is exercised, rather than possessed. With this quotation, we can refer to his ideas in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault points out the existence of various sexual desires. These desires preexist the categories and individuals; however, “modern power” -as he coins- determines these desires in categories and actions, also determines as right and wrong and separates the person who desires the wrong objects from the one that desires the right objects. Therefore, Foucault claims that sexuality is a modern production. With this production, the number of desires has increased and it has formed “peripheral sexualities” which are formed by the acts that are “contrary to nature.” Again in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault emphasizes the responsibility of “modern power” in the increase in various sexual desires. To him, state divides the actions as wrong and right, so in a way it produces these desires. With this practice of the institution, language gains importance. Each desire and each action get their own specific name. The aim here is to leave nothing unknown. However, this just leads to state interventions.

Through language various bodies are assigned to various categories (race, gender, IQ, etc.), and various actions are designated in relation to norms as praiseworthy, deviant, punishable, or criminal. (Foucault 42)

Each vocabulary produces a new subject, and each subject means a new kind of individual. Hence, the number of categories in gender increases because of the strict labels of institution. By giving specific names to the actions, people just make them individualized. The main example for this process is written in *The History of Sexuality* on the issue of homosexuality. Foucault comments on the formation of homosexual character as in the following:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy to a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual now was a species. (Foucault 42)

It is clear in this quotation that before the nineteenth century categories of sexual desires were formed according to the acts not the actors. Thus, it had nothing about the process of identity.

This new pursuit of marginal sexualities entails an incorporation of perversities and a new specification of individuals. Sodomy—that of the old civil or canonic laws—was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was only their juridical subject. The homosexual of the nineteenth century has become a personage: a past, a history, a childhood, a character, a form of life; a morphology as well, with an indiscrete anatomy and perhaps a mysterious physiology. (Foucault 42-3)

However, in a society that we live, each action becomes a persistent identity, not the temporary one. In other words, the act determines identity, so we are what we do. In modern society, as Foucault criticizes, the main process is normalization, so “sexuality” is far away from the practices of “body” and results of “pleasure.” Sexual desire is just a mechanism that is formed by the modern power which includes the institution and state.

To sum up, as a critical thinker of the second half of twentieth century, Foucault failed to name himself with one of the movements. At first, he was said to be structuralist; then he was associated with post-structuralism and postmodernism. However, he rejected all of these categories and called his works as the “critical history of modernity.” Also in one of the interviews, he told that he was a Nietzschean. In 1984 when he died of AIDS – which was declared by his partner Daniel Defert two years after his death- he had a lot of literary works mainly on the social institutions, on the history of human sexuality, on the power and knowledge. In terms of gender identity, he claims that gender is a social construction which is caused by power. With this opinion, he shows his opposition to the charge of biological essentialism clearly.

The second philosopher that we must mention about is Judith Butler. Born in Ohio in 1956, American post-structuralist Judith Butler is regarded as one of the most influential figure in the fields of feminist philosophy and queer theory. She is best known for her work *Gender Trouble* which will be one of the primary sources of this section. Her first steps towards this provoking book can be her thesis in the Yale University. This dissertation, named *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in the Twentieth Century*, includes a lot from Lacan and Foucault. During her career she has been opposed to the idea of marriage and in her works she tries to point out the ways to break the rules of marriage by supporting the unproductive activities. As she points out in *Gender Trouble*, the society tries hard to ignore the “peripheral sexualities” by reducing the sexuality to the couple and by using the force of marital obligation. In this part of the chapter, Judith Butler’s ideas on gender will be explained by referring to her two important works: “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” and *Gender Trouble*.

When Butler released her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” in 1988, she of course did not wait for so many questions aroused as a result of her ideas on gender. In that essay, Butler clearly claims that gender is performative. That’s why; she believes that gender cannot be formed by the innate or biological elements, but directly as a result of the repetitive acts done by the subject. By thinking that gender is a matter of “acting,” she also claims that it is something shifting as the subject performs

different acts through time. To explain this process, she also uses the famous saying of Simone de Beauvoir “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman.” Beauvoir also underlines the importance of “history” in the process of gender.

In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity, instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. (Butler “Performative Acts” 1)

As she emphasizes the importance of repetitive acts doing the gender, she also ignores the idea of essence in forming one’s gender. Judith Butler is apparently against all the assumptions that gender is constituted by the innate choice of the subject. By opposing this idea, she underlines that gender is not an “essential” part of body.

As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual, as some post-structuralist displacements of the subject would contend. The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. (Butler “Performative Acts” 5)

Through the essay Butler constantly criticizes the heterosexualization of the idea. She clearly points out what the normalization process requires: “reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes” (5). Her opposition to “compulsory heterosexualization” becomes more apparent in *Gender Trouble*. As it is clear, in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” Butler explains what gender means. She makes her suggestion to the definition of term clear by saying that “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (4).

Judith Butler puts her ideas forward in a more concrete way in her well-known book *Gender Trouble* which was written in 1990. The book has quickly got its place as a canonical work in the studies of queer theory and feminist philosophy. It has four chapters. In this dissertation, the first chapter of the book – “Subjects of Sex / Gender /

Desire” -- will be analyzed. This chapter is mainly about the problems of women in their quest for identity. For Butler, “power” tries to determine a static identity for woman and in that way for all human beings. As she points out the importance of power, she also refers to the ideas of Foucault in his “Discipline and Power.” The main problem of women, Butler thinks, to form their identity is that they cannot free themselves from the system the power constitutes. Judith Butler’s highly-provoking and influential book *Gender Trouble* also regards gender in a revolutionary way by pointing it out as a result of performance, just she has done in her essay on performative acts.

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between feminine and masculine, where these are understood as expressive attributes of male and female. (Butler 23)

Apart from performative acts of doing gender, she touches on the strict rules of society regarding sex in terms of heterosexual identity as Butler refers it “compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler 35).

Foucault points out that juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent. [...] But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures. (Butler 4)

While developing her “performative theory of gender” she also criticizes the idea that sex and gender are the results of essence that comes from innate feelings. She clearly suggests that “gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex.” (Butler 11). For Butler, sex and gender identity must follow a process that requires repetitive act to constitute the identity. Thus, she is strictly against stable identity. Identity, especially gender identity, is subjected to change through the performances. She goes further in her sayings about gender in his influential work *Undoing Gender* by referring to the fact of being recognized.

The Hegelian tradition links desire with recognition, claiming that desire is always a desire for recognition and that it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings. That view has its allure and its truth, but it also misses a couple of important points. The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable. [...] This means that to the extent that desire is implicated in social norms, it is bound up with the question of power and with the problem of who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not. (*Undoing Gender* 2)

On this way to define the idea of gender, she criticizes all the opinions that are related to biological sex. In a society, when someone is born, the sex of this person is determined by having or not having a penis and with this biological factor, the gender is also formed by this social norms which is the power. For this view of gender, the person must have a sexual desire towards the one that is in the opposite sex. However, Butler puts forward the idea of shifting gender and shifting sexual desire as a result of the shifting performances.

In this part of the chapter, gender identity has been defined by using the ideas of two provoking philosophers: Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. The first points out the importance of power in forming an identity and also the importance of language which is formed by this power to categorize the identities. The main subject of French philosopher can be summed in that the power creates the subjects that it criticizes and by giving them different names it determines what is good and what is bad. As a result, the number of so-called different identities have been formed. The latter, on the other hand, mentions about the performative acts forming one's gender identity. Due to the changing performances that a person experiences, Butler suggests that gender is also subjected to shift. Therefore, Judith Butler opposes to the idea of stable identity and the idea of essence in the process of identity.

Feminism is a plural movement. In the early 1970s, a predominantly White, middle-class movement began by questioning the White male subjects of

liberalism and Marxism. At the same time lesbians challenged heterosexism. More recently, particularly during the 1980s, Black and 'Third World' feminisms have raised the issues of racism and colonialism, challenging the narrow, Eurocentric perspectives of Western women's movements. (Jordan 183)

To conclude, it can be said that gender is not an essential part of one's identity for these two important philosophers because one cannot have a fixed gender identity. In the twentieth century, especially, it becomes quite difficult to talk about one kind of fixed gender identity as the poststructuralist point of view appears. As a result, different claims and beliefs suggest by different groups with the same aim.

## **1.2. Race and Ethnicity**

### **1.2.1. Conceptualization of the Term in America**

In the process of forming the identity, two terms – race and ethnicity – have a great importance. The meaning of each term must be clearly presented in order to delete all misunderstanding about them. In this sense, race is a term that carries the signs of biological signs and is something related to Social Darwinism as it creates different types of people. Throughout the history, the term has been used as a constitution to the hierarchical social structure. People have ranked those "racialized" groups and pointed out their superiority over those groups. However, neither the idea nor the ideologies about racial status existed before the arrival of seventeenth century. As a general definition of race, it is easy to say that race is completely a social construction and cultural invention instead of being an essential part of identity. Audrey Smedley defines the term as a "form of social identification and stratification that seemingly grounded in the physical differences of populations interacting with one each other in the New World" (Smedley 694). However, ethnicity is a cultural concept which is based on the experience of lifestyles, beliefs, manners, values. Ethnic groups have always appeared through the way of societies. Ethnicity bears nothing about politics; however, racism



does. Generally speaking, ethnicity is a contested term. In *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Chris Barker refers to the ideas of Hall as follows:

If the black subject and black experience are not stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally and politically – the concept which refers to this is ‘ethnicity’. The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual. (Barker 195)

Racial identity has a great importance in forming an identity especially in the United States of America where there are a lot of different groups, so the process of racial identity can be very troublesome as it creates both individual and collective identity. This process cannot be only in a good way by forming one’s traditional values and culture but it can also be in a bad way by being externalized by the society. In the process of collective ethnic identity, the existence of “standard identity” is very important. Being out of this standard makes the life really tough for the “others.” In *Race and Ethnic Relations* by Martin N. Marger, the importance of racial identity as a term in America is underlined in the first sentence of the book:

The study of race and ethnic relations has traditionally reflected conditions and processes in the United States and, consequently, has often discounted or seriously neglected comparable patterns in other societies (Marger, v).

It has been written that defining what gender is is a challenging process and it can be considered that defining what race identity is is also very troublesome. It is obvious that race is one of the most misused and dangerous terms of modern era. Being such a complex term causes it to be a popular topic in different fields like literature, psychology and philosophy. The biological meaning of race in *Race and Ethnic Relations* is “a population of humans classified on the basis of certain hereditary characteristics that differentiate them from other human groups” (Marger 11). The base of this chapter is how race is socially constructed and in that way it “refers to a sense of

group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms 3). For American society, racial identity means categorizing people as "others" because of their skin color, which is similar to the idea of essentialists. In America, creating otherness requires strict rules such as skin color. These rules are necessary for essentialism. These fixed similarities and differences that have been considered to be pre-given leads the society to have rigid views of culture. In that society, the term race has become a prevalent issue with the outcome of the idea "melting pot," or later it has turned into an "American salad." From the previous examples, it can be clearly understood that in American society the term "race" has been exposed to lots of changes. These changes have generally appeared in order to change the presupposed status of the individuals.

Through defining the identity of African-American, several processes have been suggested. Most of these ideas have caused a clash as they lead African-Americans to become unaware of their base identity and accept American identity. Cross's model is a typical example of the model that has not been accepted by the "blacks." He suggests the steps towards the construction of identity and advocates the experience "in which a healthy black progresses from a non-Afrocentric to an Afrocentric to a multicultural identity" (Chavez 41). The high number of models that have been supposed to be followed by African-Americans has led to the great changes in the idea of race in America. American history contains different terms that have been used to define the existence and sometimes inferiority of the "other" ethnic groups. To illustrate, Kath Woodward's *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Ethnicity* points out this change by referring to another text written by Henry Louis Gates, an African American professor of literature. In his autobiography "The 'Personal Statement' for my Yale [university]" he underlined the change by writing "My grandfather was colored, my father was Negro, and I am black" (Woodward 201)." In order to explain the reason of this kind of changes in the meaning of "black," Social Identity Theory puts forward the idea which underlines the struggle of "inferior" groups to improve their social position. It is easy to see the reflections of this theory in many elements of popular culture. With the twentieth century, which witnesses great movements by African-Americans, "black

identity” has become an essential part of the popular culture, especially the movies. Till that time, the characters who have black roots are generally presented as “inferior” ones. However, since 1900s, they have been presented in a way that they experience great changes during the setting. The same process can also be seen in literature. In other words, black voice has started to be added in popular culture in a powerful way. Matthew Guterl points out the importance of this concept in literature with his nonfiction *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940*. James Baldwin in Guterl states that “Color is not a human or personal reality; it is a political reality” (Guterl 1). Martin Luther King Jr clearly explains what “being a Negro in America” means as follows:

Being a Negro in America means trying to smile when you want to cry. It means trying to hold on to physical life amid psychological death. [...] It means the ache and anguish of living in so many situations where hopes unborn have died. (Jordan 248)

Racism in America is not just a matter of politics; it is a matter of identity. The term defines what the person is. It creates all its subjects. It does not only create the one that is different from the social expectations but it also creates these expectations.

### **1.2.2. Race and Ethnicity in Forming the American Identity: Assimilation Process**

The main topic that dominated the American history is definitely the race and ethnic group identity. History of the nation apparently shows the black-white relations from the colonial period to the contemporary one. However, other racial and ethnic identities have also played a crucial role in forming the American identity.

Race has been important for the history of the States because of the increasing population of the African-Americans, and ethnicity has been significant because of the immigration of the foreign peoples. In order to decrease the effect of these groups, several methods have been used. According to the assimilationist doctrine, those racial and ethnic groups are supposed to leave their own identity and accept American way of life.

According to the assimilationist doctrine and its melting pot analogy, people of different races, creeds, and national origins were assumed to work their way into American society, eventually to become indistinguishable from the general society. In this manner, the melting pot also served as an ideal symbol for the American democratic ethos; all individuals became equals in the United States. (Yin xi)

When the first immigrants arrived at the New World, it was not untouched. American Indians had been living there for a long time and formed their well-established cultural values. Therefore, this group of people created great trouble for the settlers and the Americans to designate American values.

American Indian culture had well-established, highly structured systems long before the coming of the Europeans. There is a record of several hundred languages spoken by native peoples engaged in hunting, gathering, or agrarian way of life. (Rico 76)

The new comers' desire for land and the American frontier experience which was justified by the Manifest Destiny caused problems with the Natives. The federal government tried to take some precautions to prevent serious fights with those people. In 1830, the government amended The Indian Removal Act, which gave the federal government the right to move the natives living in the east of the Mississippi River to the West. In addition to enforcing them to change their hometowns, they were forced to abandon their cultural values and accept American values. For that purpose, their children were often taken and given to the foster parents who were supposed to teach them American way of life. After a long time full of attempts, Indians were granted citizenship in 1924, and started to be recognized by the government.

Assimilation in America generally refers to the process of "Anglo-conformity" which means to create an English-oriented culture. This process later turns into the Americanization, especially because of the results of World War I in Europe. However,

the Second World War causes a fear in the society and this fear leads to the legal restriction of immigration.

The first wave of immigration to the New World included the European immigrants, who succeeded in settling into the continent and keeping their values. As a result of this success, the concept of American identity was formed similar to the European values. However; when the immigrants from other countries and civilizations started to get there, cultural values of the American identity began to be threatened. In order to fade the threat away, Americanization process was accelerated especially after the First World War, which caused the collapse of important European economic powers. Since then, the target of the assimilationist doctrine turned into creating a unique American identity linked to the certain universal concepts like freedom and equality. Many U.S. citizens and the immigrants who had settled into the America long years ago believed that Americanization was the best way to integrate the new comers into the mainstream American culture. The educational system contributed to the process to a great amount as the immigrants, especially their children, were taken to the boarding schools where they were required to speak English and to learn American values. In short, having founded by too many diverse ethnic and religious groups, American identity has never linked directly to the concepts of ethnicity or religion. Therefore, the second wave of immigration, occurring at the beginning of the twentieth century, generally included the Catholics and Jews fleeing from the religious persecution. Being an American just requires to accept some political and social set of ideas which was called the American Creed.

Immigrants had not created serious problems for the society especially until 1960s because the assimilation process had been successful till then. The success of the process lies on the background of those immigrants of pre-1960s. They generally migrated from different European countries, so no culture dominated the territory and their cultures were similar to the American culture. More importantly, they were willing to be an American. Another significant reason of the success must be the wars. The immigrants had fought in the wars supporting the American forces. However,

assimilation process came to a halt after the sixties because of the change in the kinds of immigrants.

## **2. Components of American Identity**

### **2.1. The American Creed**

Quest for identity has always been a global problem; however, the quest of Americans is unique as it is a “founded society.”

As founded societies, settler societies also have a clear beginning at a specific time and place. Their founders hence feel the need to define their institutions with characters, compacts, and constitutions and lay out plans for development. (Huntington 43)

All over the world, people consider and question their similarities to and differences from the others living in the same society, and so do the people in America. When the first settlers arrived America in the beginning of the seventeenth century, they brought their values, culture, and tradition to the New World. These values constituted the base of American identity at that time, as well as having helped shaping the future identity of the nation.

Having founded by the settlers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, lots of immigrants from Europe arrived at the New World. The number of immigrants, in a short time, ousted the number of settlers. Since the settlers and the first immigrants had European origins, no clashes appeared in terms of race, ethnicity and religion. However, those people started to feel obliged to define themselves apart from their European origins ideologically on their way to independence. It can be said that this desire of being different is the root of creating the American Creed.

Thinking about American identity has involved the wide acceptance of two propositions that are true but only partially true and yet often are accepted as

the whole truth. These are the claims, first, that America is a nation of immigrants, and second, that American identity is defined solely by a set of political principles, the American Creed. (Huntington 37)

“The American Creed” as a term was coined by Gunnar Myrdal in *The American Dilemma* in 1944. He suggested that Americans definitely have a lot in common. The features of the creed have remained same over the time and were accepted by all the Americans, especially by the Protestants.

Several reasons can be pointed out why the American Creed was created. Firstly, when the British government started its attempts to levy taxes on the colonies, the necessity of creating a unique identity was realized. In order to avoid paying these taxes and to set a financially independent country, some important steps would have to be taken. Second, the Americans experienced lots of wars in the seventeenth century and these wars taught them how to develop military forces. Military power is still known to be the most essential requirement to set a free country and to protect the land from the enemies. After the experiences having gained, American society believed themselves to be enough power to protect their land, which led them to the separation from the Mother Land. Thirdly, and the most importantly, the Great Awakening which was taken place in 1730s and 1740s triggered a social and religious change in American society.

## **2.2. Immigrants and the American Identity**

The United States of America has always been called as “the nation of immigrants.” The history of the people who immigrated to the New World formed the history of the States. James Truslow Adams summarizes this experience with the following lines:

We have seen the strivings and conflicts of French and English and Spanish. We have seen the rise of our nation from a handful of starving Englishmen

in Virginia to a people of 120.000.000 made up of all the races of the world. (Rico, 14)

Immediately after the first immigrants got to the America which had just been founded by the settlers, they told their opinions about the fruitful land and encouraged others to immigrate there, too. The reasons why high number of people started to settle into the New World changed from time to time. Firstly, many Europeans moved there in search of better economic conditions. However, the reason, then, changed to a religious one.

The high number of immigrants led the government to put some laws into the action to restrict the number. This attempt, however, caused a dispute among the settled-immigrants of the States. Many employers were strongly pro-immigration because of the cheap labor. Some others, on the other hand, had a nativist position as they considered the immigrants as a threat to the cultural values. The opinion of those people was told in *Immigrants and Family Values* by Francis Fukuyama:

[...] immigration worked in the past in America only because earlier waves of nativist backlash succeeded in limiting it to a level that could be successfully assimilated into the dominant Anglo-Saxon American culture. Brimelow criticizes pro-immigration free-marketers like Julian Simon for ignoring the issue of the skill levels of the immigrant labor force, and their likely impact on blacks and others at the bottom end of the economic ladder. (Rico 51)

The importance of immigrants on creating the Creed cannot be disregarded. However, the difference between the settlers and immigrants must be presented clearly. The former is a group of people who leave their own place, society, or country so as to create a new one, to settle a new community, mainly because they have suffered at home. With the contribution of these two groups, the first attempts to create a unique American identity were made, which is now known as American creed. The credial concept of American identity includes equality, liberty, private property and individualism, all of which were underlined in the “Declaration of Independence.”



The seventeenth- and eighteenth- century settlers came to America because it was a *tabula rasa*. Apart from Indian tribes, which could be killed off or pushed westward, no society was there; and they came in order to create societies that embodied and would reinforce the culture and values they brought with them from their origin country. Immigrants came later because they wanted to become part of the society the settlers had created. (Huntington 40)

The need for creating the American Creed can be understood from what Frederick Jackson Turner meant in 1892 when he said “up to our own day, American history has been in a large degree the history of colonization of the Great West.” Later it was understood that he was mentioning about the “frontier line” which turned into a commitment for the American identity. This frontier experience caused a sharp increase in the population in almost each year. The number of immigrants arrived in America between 1820 and 2000 is said to be nearly 66 million. Those people, of course, had different origins and contributed to the heterogeneous structure of the continent in terms of ethnicity and religion. The main outcome of the frontier was the high number of people turned into an American when the Americans conquered Puerto Rica, Hawaii, and Texas. Another outcome the frontier experience on American identity is the term of mobility. This kind of experience as a core of the identity leads the Americans to be weak in creating territorial links to their self. Therefore, the term “America” used to describe a territory but not the society, which shows the lack of national identity.

[...] territorial identity have been weak or missing in America. Individual Americans have from the first generally not developed intense attachments to particular localities. This reflects their consistently high level of geographical mobility, a phenomenon that has been commented on by foreign and native observers throughout American history. (Huntington 50)

As it can be understood, in addition to the settlers, immigrants also played a crucial role in farming an American identity.

In fact, the immigration factor has been so prominent in American history that Oscar Handlin has written, 'Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.' (Huntington x)

Although they brought their values to the continent, they almost gave up them and created unique American ones. "America's core culture has been and, at the moment, is still primarily the culture of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century settlers who founded American society" (Huntington 41). The importance of immigrants in American history and politics were suggested by the President F. Roosevelt. He once addressed in a meeting by saying "Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially are descended from immigrants and revolutionists." He successfully points out the importance of immigrants; however, he seems to ignore the existence of settlers.

How has the society benefited from the creed? It certainly led the Americans to the American exceptionalism, as it is the single country, in which the identity is defined by principle. "Identifying America with the ideology of the Creed enables Americans to claim that they have a 'civic' national identity [...]" (Huntington 48). Therefore, the creed has always been the indispensable element of American identity. However, this identity which has been based on creed also created some dilemmas in the society which had enslaved and massacred the minority groups in it.

Whatever else the literature tells us, it is apparent that the history of the impact of ethnicity and immigration on the United States is far from complete. The debate over whether ethnicity is good or bad is likely to continue; that it remains important is a given. The ultimate test is whether the ongoing ingathering of people of incredibly diverse origins can continue the successful balance between assimilation and pluralism. Perhaps the underlying constant is that we are the children

drawn from another history learning what it is to be an American – an incomplete identity. (Shenton 266).

The quotation clearly summarizes that the dilemmas that creating unique American Identity has seem to last forever.

### **2.3. Challenges to the American Creed: Deconstructionists**

Having been a home for the immigrants from different parts of the world, American society started to face problems due to the high number of differences in terms of social life, politics, education and cultural life. However hard the Anglo society tried to create a unique American identity, it is still impossible to mention a national identity for the States. This kind of identity remains an imagined one, but nevertheless, national consciousness can be said to be very high in American society. This is generally because of the unity, especially during the times of war; it is well-known that America is a nation of wars.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the increase in the number of protests against the American core culture. The deconstructionists appeared to enhance the life standards of subnational groups. While trying to attain their aim, they also started to weaken the Creed which had unified the society for a long time. Although the credial identity was being weakened, the subnational identities were being strengthened.

Attempts to assimilate the newcomers also started to fail, as the diversity increased. That is why, American society turned into a “mosaic” rather than a “melting pot.” In 1997, President Clinton pointed out the importance of multiculturalism in American culture by mentioning the necessity of “third great revolution” to separate America from a dominant European culture (Huntington 173).

Multiculturalism suggests a challenge to the national identity. It proposes the importance of other ethnic and racial groups living in America, and also that these groups have distinctive cultural values. Therefore, multiculturalists protests against the

dominance of white Anglo Americans, and against their attempts to assimilate the others.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, Americanization of the immigrants was a successful process. However, some factors caused the process fail. Firstly, new immigrants were totally different from the previous ones, so it was almost impossible to Americanize them. This is generally because of their cultural and educational background. Mexican immigrants of the era, for example, triggered the problems about immigration in the twentieth-century America. Secondly, the deconstructionists supported the idea of multiculturalism which ended the process of Americanization which was believed to be “un-American” because of the diversity in the American society. Instead of the single national identity, multiculturalists’ view of point underlined the existence of subnational identities. Last, but not the least, Cold War ended in 1989 leaving the America without an enemy. If there was no enemy, American exceptionalism would have nothing to do. That is why, domestic affairs gained importance. The protests, which had already started against the Anglo-conformity began to be publicize and to be strengthened.

Although American people still insist on remaining patriotic, challenges to the Creed continues. The latest example for this issue is the attack to the World Trade Center on September 11. After the incident, xenophobia reappeared in the society and surprisingly strengthened the nationalism among all the Americans coming from diverse backgrounds. “Wal-Mart reportedly sold 116.000 flags on September 1 and 250.000 the next day” (Huntington 4). To sum up, no matter how many challenges the society have faced and is going to face, it seems impossible to replace the American Creed with something else.

## **II. James Baldwin: No-Colored Activist in Civil Rights Movement**

### **1. Backgrounds of the Civil Rights Movement**

In the States, history of African-Americans started in 1619 when the first African slaves were brought to Virginia. At first they were treated as indentured servants and therefore were released after a certain time period. However, it soon turned into a race-based slavery. The main reason behind this practice was the competition for the limited resources. In 1641, Massachusetts became the first state where slavery was legalized. In a few years, the number of black slaves increased a lot because they were not paid, which was better than the white servants.

Eighteenth century brought several politic issues about the African-American life in America. At the beginning of the century, ten percent of the population was formed by the slaves. According to the laws practiced since the seventeenth century, they and their children were destined to be slaves for life. The number of slaves caused a great difference between the northern and southern states. Statistics apparently figured out the high number of slaves in south. The turning point of the century was the American Revolutionary War which resulted in an independent country. Although they had the lowest rank in America, thousands of black men fought in the war to help the colonists. However, the result of the war was a bit humorous for them as Thomas Jefferson who was a slaveholder wrote the Declaration of Independence and promised liberty. In 1787 the Constitutional Convention gathered to determine the constitution of the new nation. Despite their eagerness for freedom, they approved the continuation of slavery. However, it was made illegal in the Northwest Territory, which was expanded with the Missouri Compromise in 1820. Although slavery began to be abolished in northern states, the number of slaves in south got higher. The cotton gin which was invented by Eli Whitney in 1793 was the main reason for this high number as it increased the demand for labor. Upon this increasing demand, congress abolished the international slave trade in 1808. Because of the differences in the patterns of economy, North and South became different and could not agree with each other on the topics about slavery. Therefore, in 1820 with the practice of Missouri Compromise, states

were asked to be admitted to the union as one slave and one free state. This compromise created a little peaceful environment for the States; however, it lasted just until 1861 when the Civil War began.

As the practice of slavery was getting crueler in south, more people began to question this peculiar institution. In 1831, Nat Turner led the most important slave uprising for freedom, which resulted in his own death. In the same year, William Lloyd Garrison began publishing the *Liberator* that supported the abolition of slavery. A few years later, Frederick Douglass also started to publish his own newspaper advocating the abolition. Besides the newspapers published to inform the public about the brutal side of the slavery, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which was based on the life of a slave. Stowe became the first black author invited to the White House. With the secession of the South, the Confederacy was founded and the Civil War began in 1861.

For black Americans the decade following Lee's surrender at Appomatox was one of tremendous change. Not only was slavery destroyed, but freedpeople were granted civil and political rights and gained access to education and other public services denied them in the South. (Holt 218)

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. He promised that all the slaves would gain freedom if the Union won the war. Upon this proclamation several amendments were taken into action. In 1865, slavery was made illegal in the United States with the Thirteenth Amendment, and in 1868 African-Americans got the right to have full U.S. citizenship, and finally black men got a right to vote in 1870.

With the victory of the Union, reconstruction process started in the South. The reconstruction changed the southern states a lot. During this process, African-American men worked in very respectful fields of the government and they had a right to build their own churches and schools. In other words, African-American identity started to be formed. Although everything seemed good to black citizens of the States, it did not last

long. When the Democrats became powerful in the government, they did well to reverse the advances of Reconstruction. After a brief period full with the peaceful atmosphere, violence and massacres started again against the African-Americans. These massacres were later generally admitted by Ku Klux Klan, a group aimed at destroying the Republican Party in the South. With the laws following each other, almost all the rights given to the blacks during Reconstruction was brought back. The most important one was the Jim Crow laws which led to the segregation in all public facilities.

## **2. The Crewcut Era and the Era of Frustration**

One of the distinctive characteristics of American culture is its tendency to divide its existence into short time segments. [...], the American has apparently limited his historical sense to decades. (Horton 520)

1950s and 1960s are among the greatest decades that affected American history in a tremendous way. When the World War II was over, people living in the States expected a peaceful atmosphere. The first years of the 1950s survived a kind of peace in the society. When Dwight D. Eisenhower took the office for the first time in 1952, he was supported by too many people; the slogan “I Like Ike” can be still remembered. During his term in presidency, lots of steps were taken to provide safety in the society. When the World War II was over, American social life changed a lot in a positive way. The country survived an economic boom resulting in prosperity for many citizens. The actions that were taken to stop the negative effects of Cold War on the society also led the citizens to feel in safe. Upon this positive atmosphere, many Americans believed that their country had enough power to maintain world peace. However, the negative effects of the lasting conflict between Soviet Russia and America soon became apparent. American government left its isolationist policy and started to have an active role to prevent the expansion of Soviet Russia and the communism. Besides the effects of Cold War, struggle for equality also started in his term. The president seemed unwilling to take action against racial problems. He preferred not to comment a lot on this problem, even not to interfere with the Supreme Court’s decisions on this issue. His lack of interest in social problems were called as “modern republicanism.” This policy

was known to be the minimum interference of the government in the affairs of states. However, minorities, especially the African-Americans, started to organize demonstrations to get equal rights towards the end of 1950s. Therefore, 1950s and 1960s were full of unrest in the society. Although the former, called the Crewcut Era / the Eisenhower Era, provided the society with incredible affluence and the spirit of fulfillment, the latter – under the presidency of John F. Kennedy, the youngest American president, who was elected in 1960 – was named as the era of protest, rage and resistance against the traditional values. In addition to the feeling of rejection to the tradition, the high number of political figures having been assassinated and the mass destruction of the people in North Vietnam, especially during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson who intensified the war in Vietnam, created the unsafe environment among the Americans. It soon became apparent to many that all of the frustration and the wave of assassination overshadowed the affluence of the fifties, and replaced with the fear that is underlined in *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*: “It is small wonder that most Americans during the 1960s would fear for their very survival and for that of the entire human race” (Horton 522).

In the twentieth century, almost all the studies about the African-American life in the States focus primarily on the resistance to the racial segregation. The high number of black people having immigrated from South to North accelerated the process of urbanization, this dramatic increase led to the cultural changes in the life of African-Americans.

The census taken on the eve of World War II showed just 77 percent of the black population still living in the South. Equally important, the percentage of blacks living in the cities had jumped from 22 percent in 1900 to 34 percent in 1920 to 40 percent in 1930. By 1960 only half of the black population lived in rural areas; less than one in ten still worked on a farm. (Holt 224)

Witnessing the opportunities that white people had in the North, these changes generally affected them in a positive way, as they gained consciousness about their



selves and created a social resistance against the majority. The first and the most important step of this resistance was to organize formal and informal groups to act together. These groups began to have an incredible effect on the political area and started to affect the national politics of the States.

The fast urbanization of the black people in the North resulted in some negative effects, though. It was soon proved that these people were not ready to survive in an urban life, which had been under the control of white majority for a long time. Therefore, the urbanization soon turned into the “ghetto” life for the blacks. They were subjected to harsh discrimination in almost all fields of the city life, especially in the working area. Apart from the experience they survived, the stereotypes of the black ghetto life also appeared. People started to label these places as the base of the crime and diseases. As a result of these problems, the social community that they had been trying to organize began to disperse. Different and opposing ideas began to be suggested by the black leaders. The number of the leaders that advocated the accommodationist philosophy of Booker T. Washington was incredibly high. The common point they supported was the idea of “self-help” that Washington put forward, the importance of education and also the need to get help from the whites that resist to the racial oppression. The opponents of this philosophy claimed that the ghetto life (they preferred to call it as a “community life”) could be turned into an opportunity leading to the cultural rebirth of the blacks.

Apart from the historical concerns of the migration from South to North, one must focus on the entire process that resulted in a great increase in the diverse cultural patterns in the North which had been shaped by the single American culture. Thus, after the immigration, the idea of the American Identity has also been defined again with the introduction of the new culture and lifestyle. The historical studies about the blacks’ mobility during the twentieth century may just refer to the political and juridical concerns; however, the primary focus must be on the changes in the American social life. The United States of the America survived the greatest social resistance since the Reconstruction era, and to be frank, it was not ready for that.

In the history of the United States, the period starting with the last part of the fifties and continuing during the sixties was covered by the African-American Civil Rights Movement. This movement aimed at ending all kinds of discrimination and attaining the rights as an American citizen, not as a minority group. Although starting in the 1950s as a movement, the first sign of it could be seen as far back in American history when Massachusetts outlawed the slavery in 1783.

Fifties and Sixties were just the decades when the aim reached at its peak. During these two decades, African-Americans came together and formed some nonviolent protests. Segregation was the main problem at the beginning of the Fifties; therefore, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) decided to overcome this problem, especially in the schools where African-American children were forced to study away from their white peers. The outcome of the process was seen in the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court for *Brown V. Board of Education*. Linda Brown, an African-American girl, had been forced to attend a school miles away from her home. Her parents took this to the court. The court declared that schools in all states had to be integrated. Refusing to give up her seat on a public bus in Montgomery in 1955, Rosa Parks became an inspirational figure of the Civil Rights Movement. Upon this, she was put in a jail, which made African-Americans gather and start the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which lasted for more than a year. Martin Luther King Jr. remarked about the boycott as saying in his speech “There Comes a Time When the People Get Tired” in Alabama in 1955.

We're here in a general sense because first and foremost, we are American citizens, and we are determined to acquire our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning. We are also here because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth. There comes a time when people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired - tired of being segregated and humiliated; tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression.

In 1956, the boycott ended when the Supreme Court decided against the segregation in public city buses all around the country. As it can be seen, civil resistance of African-American people spread to all over the states to get the rights they had been asking for many years. The activists performed their protests in almost each place that approves of segregation, such as high schools, universities, buses, and restaurants.

A consensus is emerging among scholars that movements was not merely a creation of the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision of 1954 but had roots in the three previous decades of political and cultural change. (Holt 224)

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s proved the power of minority groups over the majority. The power had its basis from the long history of the troubling experiences starting from the slave trade to the segregation. This resistance to the inequality causes the scholars to change their approach to study American history. They no longer focus on the American experience to understand the African-American life, instead they try to understand the black history as black people experience it.

If anything is characteristic of the recent study of American history, it is attention to the experience of previously neglected groups – not simply as an addition to a preexisting body of knowledge but as a fundamental redefinition of history itself. (Foner viii)

The main result of this movement was to trigger all the minority groups having lived in the States to gain their rights. The importance of the migration to the North can be underlined when the social history of the States is remembered; as it has been mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis, America is the continent of the settlers and the immigrants. That's why; it includes too many minority groups. It soon became apparent that those minority groups were also ready to rise for the achievement of equality.

Herman Melville wrote that the blood of all the world's peoples flowed in the veins of Americans. A vats ingathering from every continent,

Americans have shared the common denominator of being, [...] For all of us there is another history, perhaps forgotten or systematically suppressed but nonetheless an influence on the process of assimilation that has shaped the distinctive American character. (Shenton 251)

With this assimilation process, the attempts to create a unique American identity among all minority groups were in effect for years in the States. However, with the arrival of the 1960s, these groups gained self-consciousness to search for their own identity and make it acceptable by the dominant culture. The Civil Rights Movement of the era started with a protest against racist ideology; however, it continued with a resistance to all other inequalities. The movement of 60s was just a beginning of the minorities' struggle for identity. The upcoming decades also witnessed, and still witness, this struggle among different groups.

### **3. Literary Effects of the Fifties and the Sixties on African-American Literature**

“If” as Frederic R. Jameson states in his neo-Marxist rewriting of Kenneth Burke’s theory of symbolic action, “ [...] narrative is one of the basic categorical forms through which we apprehend realities in time and under which synchronic and analytic thinking is itself subsumed and put in perspective, then we no longer have to be defensive about the role of culture and the importance of its study and analysis.” (Bell xi)

It is clearly marked in what Jameson writes that cultural study has started to gain importance so as to realize and understand the events having happened before. That is what must be done to figure out the African-American history in the United States of America. Narratives must form the primary sources in that process. While analyzing the works written by African-American writers, it becomes apparent to see the richness of the culture that they have. It is written in *Cultural Politics* that “relations of inequality are closely tied to questions of culture. The relative domination of various groups by

other groups is partly secured and reproduced through the practices and products of cultural institutions” (Jordan 5). These cultural products of African-Americans can easily be seen in the literary works, especially in the works of Civil Rights Era when the struggle for identity reaches its peak. In the novels, stories, even in the articles, it is impossible to face with the examples of their culture. For example, the use of music – especially blues – is highly common among these writers. Thanks to this richness, the literary works help a lot to understand who / what African-Americans are.

Culture is said to be a “dynamic and complex process (Bell 4),” which is completely correct as it is subjected to change because of its relation with the historical incidents happening around the group of people. It is regardless to remind that the changes in culture lead to the changes in the concept of identity, which makes the change more important in terms of understanding the self.

Cultural politics are also concerned with subjectivity and identity, since culture plays a central role in constituting our sense of ourselves. Cultural struggles often reflect and / or produce deep emotional feelings – feelings of patriotism, elitism, racism, sexism, anti-racism and so on. In other words, they are necessarily connected to subjectivity. (Jordan 5)

As the aim to be attained is the struggle for identity, the importance of cultural politics cannot be ignored. The changes in the cultural products are known to affect the identity process. These changes can be reflected in the literary works written by the writers of the same group in different eras. From the definition of the culture, it can be easily inferred that each decade in American history results in different themes in the literature. Sixties are one of the richest decades in the States in terms of cultural changes; therefore, literary works of the era are also rich in style and themes.

History and culture are fundamental aspects of the fabric of everyday life. They help to give us our sense of identity, telling us who we are, where we are from and where we are going. In any society the denial or marginalization of histories and

cultures other than those of dominant group has profound implications for subjectivity and identity.  
(Jordan 3)

People of African descent living in the United States create African-American literature to focus on the issues ignored by the mainstream writers. These writings can be defined as the proof of American freedom as they point out the (in)equality in the society. The root of the African-American literary tradition cannot be so far. The first writings of these people root back to the eighteenth century, and are mainly regarded to start with Phillis Wheatley. However, the tradition varies in terms of themes and style.

The first examples of the African-American literature focus on the suffering that has been experienced during the school of slavery. The writers of the period generally include freed slaves. Therefore, this kind of literary works can be defined as autobiographical. An example of this is *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* written by Harriet Ann Jacob. She uses a pen name "Linda Brent." The novel clearly picks up on the accounts that Linda experienced in the plantation. Linda is born in a happy family and she survives a contented life for a few years till her mother's mistress dies. The woman teaches Linda how to read, which is really important for a slave girl as it is considered as the first step through the freedom. When the woman dies, Linda is sent to her new master, Dr. Flint. By him Linda is forced to have a sexual relation. The rest of the novel is based on this sexual abuse towards the slave women, and the struggle of Linda for her freedom.

Slave narratives have a significant place in African-American literary tradition, and it brings out the importance of memoir in the literature. Almost all the works written as an example of this kind of narrative have a root in the past. In other words, the themes and subjects are all the results of "cultural trauma" as Ron Eyerman defines the slavery. Although the tradition begins with the slave narratives based on the autobiographical experiences, the following century brings new styles and themes to the African-American literature. When the slavery abolished, the writers of the African descent living in the States started to write about the unequal conditions of African-Americans in American society. This tradition continues in the twentieth century. The

writers of the century bases their writings on the African-Americans' struggle for identity.

In contrast to almost all the African-American writers who have been written only about black identity and slavery during the era of Civil Rights Movement, James Baldwin focuses his writing not only on the issue of racism but also on the issue of sexual orientation, which was really rare and challenging in that era. Therefore, he has a completely different place compared to the other writers in African-American literature.

James Baldwin was an African-American novelist, essayist and playwright. He was born in 1924. When he was an infant, his mother got divorced and took Baldwin to Harlem where he spent most of his life. Throughout his school years, Baldwin attended lots of literary meetings and joined in a literary community. As a teenager, he realized that he was homosexual. After this realization, he decided to leave America where people were prejudiced against blacks and homosexuals. He escaped to Paris which became the major setting of *Giovanni's Room*.

He started his literary career with a semi-autobiographical novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain* which was published in 1953 and was followed by *The Amen Corner* (1954) and one year later *Notes of a Native Son* which is the collection of his essays. Till 1987 when he died, he has written tens of works including novels, essays and plays. However, *Giovanni's Room* became his major work due to the topic it includes. When it was first published in 1956, it took a great number of criticisms because it includes homoerotic lines. This novel includes just white characters. After the success of *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin published *Another Country* which became a best-seller. The novel courageously touches to the experiences of black and white characters, their relationships and also the experiences of characters about their sexuality. In *Another Country*, almost all male characters experiences homosexual and bisexual affairs.

Theme of identity is generally included in James Baldwin's works. For Baldwin, the process of forming one's identity causes a great amount of suffering. Therefore, identity for him is a result of achievement over these suffering. To achieve, one must face with the detritus of society and must deal with them.

If there is one theme that runs through practically all of James Baldwin's works, it is this: America's great trouble is that it refuses to look objectively at its history and its essential nature. Blinded by a system of myths, racial and otherwise, which have little or no relationship to reality, the nation stumbles forward, headed for inevitable disaster. (French 226)

As a style, he has used Negro folk tradition a lot. The style, therefore, is a part of his cultural tradition in his works; in other words, his true identity. To illustrate, in *Another Country*, the struggle of the characters is thought to be similar to the description of Jazz.

For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz movement (as distinct from the uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight or improvisation, represents [...] a definition of his identity, as member of the collectivity, and as a link in the chain of tradition. (Kent 19)

As a literary career, he becomes an important figure in the twentieth century American literature because he writes bravely about the topics that no writers have mentioned. He regards a great novelist as the one who reflects the truth and also disturbs the reader by this reflection of reality. He has stated in a "New York Times Book Review" that a great novelist "involves attempting to tell as much of the truth as one can bear, and then a little more" (Kent 19). With the themes like homosexuality and racism, he may have been considered as an activist in that era. He picks up on the controversial norms of sexual identity. He is obviously opposed to the rational classifications of sexual characteristics and he claims that one may fail to be, to find



himself/herself, because of the rational and controversial norms. In short, for Baldwin, sex is a mystery.

In his literary career, James Baldwin constitutes a great challenge to the heterosexist society in the United States. He shares an important place in his works about homosexuality and bisexuality. It is a well-known fact that it is troubling to mention these kinds of abnormalities in sexual performances; however, Baldwin mentions a lot in a courageous way. What makes him brave in his works also makes him different from other African-American authors. The “negro problem” which is the main point in almost all African-American works follows the importance of sexual identity in Baldwin’s works. *Giovanni’s Room* is the main example of Baldwin’s use of gender identity in his works. In this novel, David has a homosexual affair with Joey and then he starts to escape from his own identity. During the novel, he denies who he is and tries to be another self that the society expects him to be. The use of homosexual and bisexual characters can also be seen in *Another Country*, which picks up on the troubled life of bisexual Rufus and also lovely experiences of homosexual couple Eric and Yves. Apart from *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country*, analyzing the other novels, plays, essays that were written by James Baldwin, one can easily figure out the dominance of gay / bisexual characters either black or white. In *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (1968), he tells the reader about Les Proudhammer who is a 39-year-old bisexual having affairs with Christopher. Similarly, Arthur Montana, the protagonist in *Just Above My Head* (1979), is retold by his brother after his death and readers can see the attempt of the brother to understand the troubled life that Montana has lived because of his homosexuality.

During the years he spent in the States, he witnessed the racial problems occurred his surroundings. For Baldwin, these problems come to its peak when his intimate friend jumps from the George Washington Bridge because of the troubles he has been suffering from. Upon this, Baldwin starts to be afraid of having a similar end. This feeling may have triggered him to leave America. Another factor that makes him fled from the States is that he has always wanted to be a writer regardless of his color. He defines the African-American literature of the time as the one which has been

shaped by the mainstream culture it should have been against, and also has just focused on the folkloric concerns (Fabre 196).

James Baldwin leaves America in 1948 and, in a way, flees to Paris. When he arrives France, the results of the World War II can be seen there. At first, he falls in despair and realizes that the conditions are completely unbearable for any American people. However, he changes his mind soon. In *No Name in the Street* he remarks that his flight to Paris is inspired by the hope that he would be treated humanely, different from how he has been treated at home. He is obviously in search for peace and security because of his lifestyle which is out of the standards that heterosexist American society expects. Although he comes from a black family, he is opposed to his father's hatred towards white citizens. He feels really complex about the way people treats each other in the United States. Apart from this racial issue, he becomes more confused when he realizes his sexual orientation. He starts to feel alienated not only from white people but also from his black friends and from the country he was born in.

His opposing feeling towards the racial issue occurred his surroundings affects his literary career, too. Therefore, his reasons for fleeing from the United States are literary as well. He mentions his reasons to flee in *Notes of a Native Son* by saying that "by the time I was 24, I had decided to stop reviewing books about the Negro problem – which by this time was only slightly less horrible in print than it was in real life – and I packed my bags and went to Paris" (*Notes* 2). During the first days after his arrival, he sees too many black writers in Paris. However, he fails to set an intimate friendship with them. He is seen to have a strong relationship with white American students and artists. This friendship can be the sign that James Baldwin is always far away from the racist ideology, as it is going to be discussed in the following chapter with references to two of his provoking novels.

The most important thing about James Baldwin and the Africans living in Paris is that when he meets them he begins to define himself as an American rather than African-American.

They spoke freely of their customs and tribal traditions, their deep-rooted sense of identity, and of the literary movement of the negritude. Their attitude would compel him to define himself as an American, a Westerner, even though his skin was black. (Fabre 200-1)

When he arrives Paris, he starts to explore what he calls “the legend of Paris.” In almost all the essays that he writes, he writes about Paris. He successfully decorates the life in Paris by writing.

The city where everyone loses his head, and his morals, lives through at least one *histoire d'amour*, ceases, quite, to arrive anywhere on time, and thumbs his nose at the puritans – the city, in brief, where all become drunken on the fine, old air of freedom. The legend operates to place all the inconveniences endured by the foreigner, to say nothing of the downright misery which is the lot of many of the natives, in the gentle glow of the picturesque, and the absurd; so that, finally, it is perfectly possible to be enamored of Paris while remaining totally indifferent or even hostile to the French. (*Notes* 108)

It is obvious from how Baldwin describes Paris that he attains what he is looking for in Paris. It is almost impossible for Baldwin to dislike Paris because he owes to France his own improvement as a human and as a novelist. The importance of the country in his literary career can be seen in that he is awarded the Legion of Honor in France in 1985.

The positive image of the city is also reflected in his novels, *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*. In the first one, James Baldwin tells the story of white American in Paris. Although he chose a white character, it has been highly claimed that it is an autobiographical novel. It is believed that he cast David as a protagonist to get the attention of mainstream culture of America on the issue of homosexuality. The novel picks up on a homosexual affair between David and Giovanni. (The general information

of the novel will be given in the chapter named after the novel itself.) James Baldwin uses the setting as Paris, because he cannot touch upon this kind of plot in the States where homosexuality is seen as an illness then. By making his main character flee from America to Paris – as he did in 1948 – he points out the escape from a prison of home. Also, he shows the readers that in Paris this kind of affair is really normal as the city provides all kinds of freedom. Being an American from birth, David, the main character, sometimes suffers from the long for America, which leads the reader to think the same thing for Baldwin's life, too. He may also long for America when he was living in Paris. However, the reason of this long is just the freedom that David (James Baldwin also) has not accustomed yet. In *Another Country*, Paris is a setting at the beginning of the second part. Eric lives in Paris with his boyfriend Yves. Although all of the characters have been suffering, Eric and Yves, homosexual couples, has survived a very happy life in Paris. By putting the only sensitive character in Paris, Baldwin succeeded in underlining the positive image of the city again. In addition to that, the title of the novel is also claimed to refer to Paris where Eric and Yves can free from all kinds of pressure that social forces form.

### III. Rereading James Baldwin: Struggle for Identity in His Works

#### 1. *Giovanni's Room*

Published in 1956 as the second novel of James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* tells the story of an American man, David, who lives in Paris. Throughout the novel, his feelings about his own identity are presented in a detailed way by his own sentences. Using first person narration makes the novel more real and also makes it close to the latest definition of the concept of identity. As also mentioned in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "There is luxury in self-reproach. When we blame ourselves we feel that no one else has a right to blame us." Foucault also points out that "Western man has become a confessing animal," which leads Westerns literature to be confessional. From this point of view, it is possible for the readers to regard *Giovanni's Room* as a part of this literature and as an autobiographical novel. Because of the characters he has chosen in the novel, his importance in the field of African-American Literature will be argued in the following parts. As to *Giovanni's Room*, the confession of David constitutes the base of the novel.

At first the narrator implies that it is the sheer complexity, the disordered multiplicity of his passions that leads him to betray himself and the men and women who have loved him. 'I am too various to be trusted,' David confesses by way of explaining why 'the great difficulty is to say Yes to life'. (Glover 97)

In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin underlines the importance of one's history on his present life by saying that "the past is all that makes the present coherent." For this reason, in *Giovanni's Room*, the readers are exposed to almost all details of the American David's past experiences. Baldwin clearly wants the reader to comment on David's present situation with the aid of his past. Throughout the novel, that character suffers from a dilemma between his past and present in order to understand his own identity and to shape his future. Throughout the novel, experiences of David in America and in Paris, and the inner battle he has because of the two identities he has to have are mentioned. James Baldwin supports the idea of suffering through forging one's self-

identity. Search for self-identity is considered to be the central theme of Baldwin's works. In *Giovanni's Room*, David fails to seek his identity courageously; therefore, his failure prevents him from reaching to self-acceptance and a genuine self-identity.

*Giovanni's Room* is considered as a provoking novel written by an African-American author at the time when it is hard to have a small talk about non-heterosexual behavior and to present a character which is out of the social expectations. Therefore, the novel and the novelist have been acclaimed by the critics of that time and now.

### **1.1. Perception of Home**

*Giovanni's Room* presents the reader with the struggle of an "American" character, David. With the aid of this character, Baldwin draws a man divided. This cannot be difficult for James Baldwin since he also experienced similar inner battles in his childhood. David has been divided between what he should be and what he is. He constantly considers his homosexuality as the reason for his loss of manhood. As Yasmin Y. DeGout states in his article "Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni's Room*," "David, however, has assimilated the homophobic attitudes of mainstream society, and forces him to flee from Joey, then become cruel to him (DeGout 426)"

This thought leads him to show a great amount of anger, especially to his own deeds. He narrates the story during the night before Giovanni – his ex-lover – is executed because of the murder he has committed. The main character of the novel has a battle in his mind between Giovanni who he has met in Paris and Hella to whom he has been expected to get married. In order to emphasize this inner conflict, James Baldwin uses the perception of home as a metaphor during the novel. Therefore, the novel takes place in Paris, not in America. By using this kind of setting which is away from hometown, Baldwin aims at showing "home" not only as a place which forms one's personal identity, but also as a place which must be fled so as to "find" oneself. Another goal of Baldwin by creating a setting away from home can be the importance of journey in one's life. In the novel there are in fact more than one journey. The first one takes place from America to Paris by David; the second one is from Italy to France

by Giovanni; the main journey, however, is by both David and Giovanni from their own manhood. Needless to say that James Baldwin experienced a journey from the United States to Paris, too. This can be another factor that makes the novel autobiographical.

*Giovanni's Room* starts with the image of David sitting in front of the window and watching his own reflection on the mirror. The image of mirror has been created by the author in order to underline the split image that David has. With this reflection, it can be seen that Baldwin presents the character in two different ways, which is said to be an "internal David" and an "external David." Another way to read this image that Baldwin created leads the reader to regard David as the representation of Baldwin. The writer, himself, watches his split image while creating the novel through David.

In *Giovanni's Room*, readers can easily see this kind of inner war during David's experiences. Although David seems to be the only character experiencing an inner battle, Giovanni is also suffering from a similar one. James Baldwin uses a first person narration throughout the novel, so the feelings of Giovanni are not given as clearly as David's. The first person narration points out the relation between the experiences of David and James Baldwin. In addition to this, Giovanni's inner battle is not so much about his identity process. He has attained his realization about his identity long before. This must be because of the culture which he was born into. This realization causes the reader to sympathize Giovanni and to see him much more mature than David.

In the opening scene, David says "I stand at the window of this great house in the South of France as night falls, the night which is leading me to the most terrible moment of my life" (Baldwin 3). With this flash forward to the end of the novel, readers can understand that the novel takes place in just over a night and includes lots of background information about David's experiences. Through these experiences, his identity has been formed and deformed. He starts recollecting his ideas with his days at "home" in America. The first thing the reader learns about his home life is that his parents have moved lots of times over the United States. Baldwin wants the reader to interpret this as a reason for David's unsettled feelings.

We lived in Brooklyn then, as I say; we had also lived in San Francisco, where I was born, and where my mother lied buried, and we lived for awhile in Seattle, and then in New York – for me, New York is Manhattan. Later on, we moved from Brooklyn back to New York [...] (Baldwin 10)

James Baldwin gives wide coverage in *Giovanni's Room* about David's childhood to point out the sexual abnormality and its consequences. His father is shown as an inadequate figure, which makes David see his mother in his dreams. By creating such an inadequate father image, James Baldwin leads the critics to refer to Freudian explanations about sexual identity. Giovanni's childhood, on the other hand, has no place in the novel. The only thing that is known about Giovanni's past is that he was once happily married. Therefore, it is almost impossible to say that Giovanni has escaped from his family because of his sexual behavior. David points out the domination of his parents over home while he is recollecting the memories at home. In other words, it can be easily understood that James Baldwin frames the idea of parents as figures of authority which reflects the social expectations. "It was as though her (his mother's) photograph proved how her spirit dominated that air and controlled us all" (Baldwin 11). According to his parents' viewpoint, what is right and wrong must be learnt at home. Therefore, his father has constantly tried to set an example to David as being a "man." The lack of communication between father and son in the novel is strongly emphasized by Baldwin. The main reason of this emphasis must be the psychological fact; that is, boys who have suffered from a negative relationship with father are likely to be homosexual. In addition to this, when the writer's biography is read, the lack of communication between Baldwin and his father (especially stepfather as his father died when Baldwin was too young) can be seen easily, which is similar to David's. One day his father and his aunt, Ellen, had a fierce conversation about David. With this conversation, the difference between David and his father can be underlined again:

'And listen' said my father suddenly, from the middle of the staircase, in a voice which frightened me, 'all I want for David is that he grow up to be a



man. And when I say a man, I don't mean a Sunday school teacher.'

'A man,' said Ellen, shortly, 'is not the same thing as a bull. Good-night.' (Baldwin 15)

David also says about the same relation in the following part of the same chapter: "He thought we were alike. I did not want to think so. [...] He wanted no distance between us; he wanted me to look on him as a man like myself" (Baldwin 17). As a result of these expectations that are formed at home, David struggles an internal battle. He tries to arrogate what has been offered to him by denying what he has in fact because it is out of the social order. David himself feels that trying to the former one is better as it exactly fits the identity that society in which he lives created for him; therefore, he tries to imitate his father's behavior in the first chapter. "The vision I gave my father of my life was exactly the vision in which I myself most desperately needed to believe" (Baldwin 20). With this kind of identity he has presented to his father, he has tried to deny his own self and projects what he should be according to the norms of society he has been living. With this kind of relation with his father, David projects his anger toward his father. This anger can be a strong tie between him and his father and also it can be the reason for his not being able to accept the possibility of affair between two men. Therefore, he, in a way, tries to forget his experiences that give him insecurity. He, himself, declares this aim with the following words;

I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well – by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion (Baldwin 20).

Wifrid Koponen underlines the importance of this relationship between David and his father on David's own life with the following statement from the part "Anger: Giovanni's Room" in his book *Embracing a Gay Identity: Gay Novels as Guide*;

To distance himself from this 'vileness', he projects a contrived self-image to win the love and approval of his manipulative father, whose presence is felt, though an ocean separates father and son. (Koponen 54)

James Baldwin spares an important place for David's childhood in *Giovanni's Room*. The kind of depiction that he puts forward gives a lot of clues about David's sexual orientation. Yasmin Y. DeGout underlines the importance of the relationship between David and his parents in her article "Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in Giovanni's Room" by referring to the psychological facts with the following words:

Baldwin's depiction of David's childhood concurs with the psychological explanations of homosexuality that have developed during the latter half of the twentieth century. The absence of a mother, for example, was listed by Lawrence Hatterer (1970) as one of the 'fifteen factors in the mother-son relationship that lead to homosexuality' (DeGout 429)

Because of this identity he has to act in America, he escape to Paris. He has a single aim in his journey to France, which is to find himself as they say in America (Baldwin 21). In the previous chapter, the reason why James Baldwin escaped to Paris has just been figured out, so it is easy to understand that David represents Baldwin in a detailed way.

The importance of religion is also pointed out by James Baldwin. David and Giovanni have clearly different opinions on the idea of sin. Theological terror surrounds David when he remembers his first affair with Joey. For David it is much more than a sign of homosexuality. It is a thing that causes a great religious fear. It is a corrupt and shameful act which he is unable to forget.

A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern, I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how could have happened in me. (Baldwin 9)

Giovanni has experienced any sort of religious fear because of his sexual behavior; however, he also feels the existence of a sin and Hell and Heaven. He himself

exclaims the fact that what he has experienced in Paris is a kind of divine punishment for his sins.

I left my village and I came to this city where surely God has punished me for all my sins and for spitting on his holy son, and where I will surely die. I do not think that I will ever see my village again. (Baldwin 140)

Like David, James Baldwin survived a religious childhood. Because of his stepfather's attempts, Baldwin attended church a lot, and he became a preacher for a while. However, he left the church when he got older. He searched for other religions, such as Islam. Then, he found no religion to define himself. Instead, he began to describe himself just as a writer, away from any religious boundaries.

During the journey, Baldwin presents reader too many dilemmas David has suffered from. The divided man is not only escaping the expectations his parents has forced on him but also the identity which has been formed in him. Thus, the journey brings a lot of questions which are going to be answered in the latter days he has spent in Paris. David starts to feel homesick because he feels that home is a single place that he can hide his true identity; hence, he feels safe under shelter. However, in Paris he has no boundaries to be hid. From the beginning till the end of the novel, the reader sees David longing America whenever he faces his homosexual desires. As a way of escape and self-denial, once, David tries to have a sexual relationship with a whore; and also he tries to escape his desires by arranging to marry Hella. However, in the end of each attempt, he finds himself into the homosexual underworld. The real conflict about the longing for America in David occurs when Giovanni calls him as "American." He does not want to be called in that way. On the other hand, he realizes that without being American he has no other identities. In other words, he feels that he is nothing without being American because he has denied his real self. However, he cannot deny this identity in Paris. That is the reason why David longs for his life in America.

I think now that if I had had any intimation that the self I was going to find would turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time

in flight, I would have stayed at home. (Baldwin 21)

The reader first faces with this longing in an apparent way when David enters the Giovanni's room. He starts to feel sure about the identity that he has denied up to that moment. At that time, if he had a chance to leave Paris to America, he would prefer to return home, as it means escape from his real identity to the safety. However, he cannot return as he seems to accept his homosexual identity as a result of his continuing affair with Giovanni although he keeps them under wraps.

I thought, if I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost. But I knew I could not open the door, I knew it was too late; soon it was too late to do anything but moan. [...] With everything in me screaming *No!* yet the sum of me sighed *Yes*. (Baldwin 64)

In an encyclopedia named *Gay Histories and Cultures*, the importance of David's feelings in Giovanni's room is being underlined. In that work, the room has been considered as a "claustrophobic" space.

The American David is in flight from his sexuality, which reemerges when his fiancée leaves him in Paris while she travels in Spain. Caught up in the claustrophobic space of Giovanni's room, David flees once more, abandoning Giovanni and ultimately causing his death (or so the reader is directed to believe through the guilty narrative voice of David), thus reiterating Baldwin's major theme that the failure to love is the source of most unhappiness. (Haggerty 921)

During the days he has spent in Paris, the main incident that has made him long for home is the time when he has met a sailor in American Express Office. While talking to the sailor, David has been framed not only with a homosexual desire towards the sailor but also a high amount of envy that he wants to be like the sailor. As David says "I was staring at him, though I did not know it, and wishing I were he" (Baldwin 92). David himself realizes that desire and fears from the fact that the sailor has understood his real identity. For David, the sailor is the first American that has noticed

what he has been keeping up to that point. Thus, home is now that inescapable for David.

As can be seen, James Baldwin has framed his provoking novel *Giovanni's Room* over the perception of home. Also, for this metaphor, he has sent his character away from home as an immigrant. Therefore, the idea of home has showed different feeling throughout the novel. At first, it is the place where social expectations are practiced. Then, it turns out to be a place which must be left to find one's real identity. At the end, it becomes a single place where the one can feel protected and safe although denying some parts of oneself. For the *Giovanni's Room*, the novel ends with David's success to find himself at the expense of Giovanni.

## **1.2. Race and the Innocence of Homosexual Love**

Ever since its discovery, the United States of America has been a kind of shelter for a variety of ethnic groups and minorities. The trouble some lives and struggles of these groups have become to form the backbone of American history and culture. This so called mission of the United States has been underlined in the lines of Emma Lazarus on the Statue of Liberty.

Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Despite the multicultural social structure of the country, American society has constantly been ruled by white and heterosexist norms. Accordingly, such ethnic and minority groups as African- Americans and homosexuals have been considered by the rest of the society as “inferior” and “queer” and they have always been discriminated against to a great extent. Throughout the American history, the members of these ethnic

and minority groups aimed and tried hard to achieve equal rights with the white majority; yet, they haven't been able to realize their aim completely.

Accordingly it has been highly difficult being an African-American or a homosexual in the white-dominated American society. What's more, there is an even harder situation for the members of American society: being both black and homosexual. The African-American gays have been (and are) discriminated, exposed to belittlement and mockery by the society, and to make the matters worse, they have even not been accepted by the white homosexual communities. Humanist Mark F. Johnson puts this situation in his column:

As an African American gay man, I often find there welcoming place for me in either camp. To blacks, I am often seen as "gay" and therefore not a part of the family. "It's not natural," say the singing Winans sisters. To many in the predominate gay community, I am often just another black man, and they have difficulty identifying with me.

Written by African-American homosexual writer *Giovanni's Room* picks up on the experiences of a white man who has a devastated life because of his uncompleted identity process. Throughout the novel, David fails to identify himself and he never succeeds in finding his true identity. As a result of that, he feels that he destroys not only his life but also the lives of others, especially the life of Giovanni – the young Parisian he met and had an affair. In *Giovanni's Room*, all the characters are white. This must have a reason. Homosexuality has been a fragile issue for the United States of America for years. To make it worse, it is even more fragile for African-Americans. Therefore, if there had been a black character in the novel, it would probably have been much more troublesome for James Baldwin to be accepted as a great author of the twentieth century. If it is said that homosexuality is stoned in African-American society, no one could invalidate this argument easily. However, the validity of the argument is as much easier. According to the recent surveys throughout the America, blacks' approach to homosexuality is more strong and challenging than the whites' approach.

The reason why there are so much dissential views on homosexuality can last to the affects of racial discriminations. Acceptance of blacks to the white-dominated community –as it has been witnessed for years- is hard. For the black people in America, to survive equates with the adjustment to and acceptance from white America. Not only racism but also heterosexism and excessive homophobia affect the African-Americans’ lives in the United States of America. Logically, the acceptance of “abnormal” blacks –according to the heteronormative point of view- seems impossible. Being black requires a kind of process which includes different steps in order to integrate into the white America. Being homosexual requires different kind of process as well. That’s why; African-Americans generally have to decide on their identity as either black or gay, but not as a black gay. Therefore, most African-Americans –even some of the black gays- tend to denounce the homosexual affairs and try to avoid any subversive deeds in order to be accepted. As can be understood, homophobia serves a basis for black perceptions toward homosexuality.

Homophobia is an important problem all over the United States. Homosexuality was regarded as an illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973. When it comes to the black community, homosexuality is considered as a “white problem.” Benoit Denizet-Lewis points out in her column that;

[...] the black community is simply too homophobic: from womanizing rappers to moralizing preachers, much of the black community views homosexuality as a curse against a race with too many strikes against it. The white community, the conventional wisdom goes, is more accepting of its sexual minorities, leading to fewer double lives, less shame and less unsafe sex.

That is why; black communities are more homophobic than the white communities. Elijah G. Ward explains this homophobia in his report “Homophobia, hypermasculinity and the US black church.”

In effect, homophobia is used as a strategy of domination by various individuals and groups – both in US society and within this black subculture- to define not only who or what a

homosexual is, but even more importantly, who or what a man is not. For as Thomas has argued, ‘The jargon of racial authenticity insists, as the gangsta-rapper Ice Cube has put it, that ‘true niggers ain’t gay.’ (Ward 497)

Written by an African-American author, it is unlikely to analyze *Giovanni’s Room* without specifying the novel on the base of racist ideology. The presence of “black” characters in any literary works can make them easy for the reader and critics to approach it in terms of racism. However, the absence of “black” images in a novel – especially the one written by a “black” author – must also lead the critics to the ideas of racism. Before focusing on the novel, *Giovanni’s Room*, itself, it is better to share what James Baldwin thinks about the issue of racism. In the article “James Baldwin’s Vision of Otherness and Community,” Emmanuel S. Nelson starts by quoting from James Baldwin’s dialogue with Nikki Giovanni. In this dialogue, Baldwin states that “people invent categories in order to feel safe. White people invented black people to give white people identity... Straight cat invented faggots so they can sleep with them without becoming faggots themselves. (Nelson 27)”

Throughout the novel, readers face with just white people both in America and in France. It is impossible to see any images belonging to an African-American. This makes it necessary to approach *Giovanni’s Room* by referring to the struggle between African-American and white American.

The main character of the novel is David. James Baldwin may have created this character as a black one. However, he did not. It is generally believed that David is a white character because Baldwin is afraid of the fact that *Giovanni’s Room* is regarded as an autobiographical novel. Nevertheless, he failed as David shares too many similarities with Baldwin. This kind of belief can have a base because of the era that the novel was published. In the second half of the twentieth century, it was not easy for an author who had “double-handicapped” by being black and gay to be successful.

In addition to James Baldwin’s own life experiences, the main reason why the novel has only-white characters must be a reference to the stereotypes that have been occurring between the racial groups. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin argues that white



man feels innocent and ignores his own brutality. On this issue, Beau Fly Jones' article "James Baldwin: The Struggle for Identity" underlines by referring to Freud that "Whites are 'innocent' in the Freudian sense that they know not what they do because they have subconsciously blinded themselves to the horrible deprivation they have caused the Negro (Jones 108)." David in *Giovanni's Room* is also a white man and he is presented as blinded to his own identity and also to his own deeds that have led Giovanni's execution. In the novel, the failure of David in achieving his own sense of identity and also mainly in acceptance of his sexual behavior are emphasized clearly by showing his being blind. In the same article Jones also emphasizes the "tension syndrome" which is caused by the meeting of white man and Negro (Jones 108). In Baldwin's novel, whenever David encounters Giovanni, tension and confusion created. Thus, it can be implied from this quotation that David and Giovanni are disguised by their white identities; however, they are reflected as a part of different categories like black and white.

The concept of status is another factor that may lead Baldwin to create a white novel. Again in "James Baldwin: The Struggle for Identity" Beau Jones mentions about the importance of status among Americans.

Americans are so status-conscious and ambitious that they live in fear of losing that status. 'The Negro tells us where the bottom is: because he is there ... we know ... how far we must not fall.' And there are other fears – that the individual Negro will challenge the power and masculinity of the white [...] (Jones 109)

If David was a black man, the novel would not be so provoking, as black men were seen "subhuman", so being gay should be normal for them. However, it is really problematic for a white man especially for his status and identity.

Another important point in *Giovanni's Room* is the innocence of David and Giovanni. Readers can easily feel close to these characters and emphasize with them. In other words, Baldwin describes the homoerotic love as a natural fact away from all

degeneracy. Baldwin puts forward his own idea on homoerotic affair in his essay “The Male Prison” in *Nobody Knows My Name*:

[The] argument, for example, as to whether or not homosexuality is natural seems to me completely pointless – pointless because I really don’t see what difference the answer makes. It seems clear, in any case, at least in the world we know, that no matter what encyclopedias of physiological and scientific knowledge are brought to bear the answer never can be Yes. And one of the reasons for this is that it would rob the normal – who are simply the many – of their necessary sense of security and order. (128)

*Giovanni’s Room*, in fact, shows two different ways of homoerotic love. The innocent homoerotic love is symbolized by David and Giovanni. However, Jacques and Guillaume are the representations of the deviant lust of homosexuality. Baldwin underlines his side for homosexual affair by making Giovanni kill Guillaume at the end of his provoking work. In *Giovanni’s Room*, David and Jacques have a conversation in the second chapter of the first part, which exactly underlines the difference between the ideas of those men. The main part of this difference starts in the novel after Jacques’ statements about the garden of Eden. Upon this conversation, David starts considering what Jacques has said.

[...] it’s true that nobody stays in the garden of Eden. Jacques’ garden was not the same as Giovanni’s, of course. Jacques’ garden was involved with football players and Giovanni’s was involved with maidens – but that seems to have made so little difference. Perhaps everybody has a garden of Eden, [...] Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another kind of strength to forget, it takes a hero to do both. People who remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind of madness, the madness of the denial

of pain and the hatred of innocence; and the world is mostly divided between madmen who remember and madmen who forget. Heroes are rare. (Baldwin 25)

With this quotation, David not only emphasizes the difference between Giovanni and Jacques but also shows the difficulty he has been facing since his escape from home – from his own identity.

## **2. *Another Country***

*Another Country* was written by James Baldwin in 1962. The main character of the novel, Rufus, surprisingly – although Baldwin presents concrete images for the upcoming end of the character – commits a suicide at the very beginning of the novel. However, the rest of the novel starts to be based on the relations between Rufus and other characters. Therefore, although he dies in the beginning, readers witness the effects of Rufus on them throughout the novel by mouth of the other characters. The death of Rufus bears another importance for the analysis of the novel. Rufus commits suicide in the George Washington Bridge where Baldwin's friend also committed suicide. Therefore, it can be said that Baldwin has used some elements which are similar to his own experiences in the novel.

*Another Country* includes two parts. In the first chapters of the first part, it tells the story of Rufus Scott who is a jazz musician. His sufferings are presented throughout these chapters. The jazz musician's feelings are generally reflected through his relation with his friends, especially Vivaldo. Later, Rufus meets Leona and they start to have an affair, which leads Rufus's downfall. As a result of Rufus's abusive manners to Leona, she has committed to a mental hospital. All these sufferings lead the musician to a great sense of despair and, finally, to a suicide. Although he dies in the very beginning, the rest of the novel (the second part) picks up on his relationship with his friends. In an essay called "The Phrase Unbearably Repeated" Eugenia W. Collier describes Rufus with the following statements:

By most standards Rufus is an undesirable. He gets drunk, takes dope, allows himself to be supported by his mistress, hurts his friends, uses vile language, and indulges in a virtually amoral sex life. He is largely responsible for the complete destruction of Leona, his Southern-white mistress. (Collier 39)

Collier is said to be right with this description of Rufus; however, he seems to ignore the suffering that Rufus has survived during his childhood and so on. His manners towards Leona are just the reflection of the hatred he has dwelled against the mainstream society. Another point that Collier neglects in the novel is the bisexuality, in fact homosexuality, of the character. James Baldwin does not want to point out Rufus's sexual orientation in an ostensible way, but he leads the readers to feel it through his attitudes towards Eric and Vivaldo. Being homosexual and forcing to behave like heterosexual in a homophobic society must cause Rufus to behave violently.

In *Another Country*, each character shows a great sign of despair because of the lack of self-belonging. They seek of this sense of belonging causes them to be together and to have affairs. Vivaldo begins a relationship with Ida, Rufus's sister. Eric, who is the first sign that proves Rufus's bisexuality, leaves Yves –his lover – and turns back to New York and has a relationship with Cass. In the turning point of the novel, Cass and Eric confess their relation to Richard –Cass' husband. After this confession, Eric and Vivaldo experience a sexual affair and also Vivaldo learns the sexual encounter between Ida and Ellis. These complex love affairs between the characters may force the reader to imagine “another country” which has no taboos about the sexual performances of the individual. The great emphasis on this kind of affair also shows that James Baldwin represents the queer literature more than African-American literature. He puts a great importance on the individuals' struggle for sexual identity rather than their struggle for race identity. In other words, he emphasizes on the individual experience by focusing on their social identity and standing away their national one.

The novel provokingly picks up on racial and gender identity in the late 1950s America. Being an influential writer of contemporary American literature, James

Baldwin bases his novel on the experiences of white and black Americans. In terms of identity, the novel has a great importance. In the course of reading *Another Country*, readers can easily encounter the record of the characters who have undergone significant changes throughout the novel. This identity process is presented in the frame of ignorance and interracial affairs. In this novel, different from *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin underlines the realization process that what is known as black or white is in fact not true. To attain this realization, he has used juxtapositions by using characters who are different from each other. Title of the novel must be a great reference for this aim. Baldwin has tried to create “another country” where there are no boundaries in terms of race and gender. *Another Country* is the novel of characters, not actions. How the characters feel and what they do are the main factors to comprehend Baldwin's approach to identity.

The author constitutes a microcosmic America by creating racially and sexually diverse characters. Baldwin underlines the relation among these characters, and also reflects the nightmarish side of contemporary American life. He is able to make the readers believe that homosexual love affairs can have a redemptive power via Eric and Yves. Therefore, it is suggested by James Baldwin that being gay can help one build a new world away from the troubles.

### **2.1. Interracial Love Affairs**

In *Another Country*, James Baldwin gives a really important place for white and black relationship and much more important place for the relationships seen abnormal by the society. While reading the novel, the reader sometimes forgets the racial issues occurring in 1960s' America and imagines these issues fading away, instead focusing on the sexually-different characters having affairs with each other. The title may refer to the country that the reader forms in their mind while reading: Another country where all the barriers are at their weakest level. The author uses black and white characters in the novel to reach his goal, which is to force the reader to focus on the characters' sexual performances, not racial backgrounds.

Baldwin's great emphasis on an unusual relationship between white and black Americans (unusual because of historical context) leads the reader to his own idea on racism. As a teenager, he escaped from home ignoring all kinds of labeling as a result of racist ideologies, and also as a result of the fact that he realized his "abnormal" sexual desires.

In *Another Country*, Rufus and Ida are the main characters who are in search for their personal identities. The novel can be said to deal with this search for identity from the beginning till the end. Each of the characters starts questioning their being after their relations with others.

Rufus, first of all, starts questioning his identity when he starts to have an affair with Leona. It is sometimes apparent in the novel that Rufus has started this affair just because he has known that it is challenging in the society he lives in. He realizes this challenge when walking along the street with Vivaldo and Leona.

Without Vivaldo, there was a difference in the eyes which watched them. Villagers, both bound and free, looked them over as though where they stood were an auction block or a stud farm. [...] Then he thought, If she could take it so calmly, if she noticed nothing, what was the matter with him?  
(Baldwin 29-30)

At that moment he questions himself by thinking that "maybe he was making it all up, maybe nobody gave a damn" (Baldwin 30). However, he is fully aware of the fact that "the lowest whore in Manhattan would be protected as long as she had Vivaldo on her arm. This was because Vivaldo was white" (Baldwin 31). Due to this pressure he has put on himself, he begins to abuse Leona physically and emotionally to show his strength over a white body and to gain respect in the society. He, himself, cannot believe that a white girl can fall in love with a black man. He thinks that the only reason why Leona is with him is black man's superiority over the white in terms of sexual affair. The reader begins to face with Rufus's abuse when Vivaldo remembers the day he has found Leona sitting on the bathroom floor and crying. Leona tells him that "I don't know, it can be for nothing I did. He's always beating me, for nothing, for

nothing! He says I'm sleeping with other colored boys behind his back and it's not true, God knows it's not true!" (Baldwin 55). Although Rufus seems to insist on his being right hitting Leona, he also realizes the mistakes he has made, which leads him to commit suicide. Leona has predicted this end when she has told Vivaldo "Rufus ain't going to kill nobody but himself" (Baldwin 59).

In addition to Rufus, Ida also reflects the black anger towards the white society. However, Ida falls in love with a white, too. Upon the death of his brother, her importance as a character in the novel has increased a lot and she is always reflected angry and revengeful until he starts an affair with Vivaldo. This love affair is also regarded unusual for the society. Although Ida is a charming girl, his skin color changes all the ideas people have about her.

The women, too. They saw Ida first and might have been happy to admire her if she had been walking alone. But she was with Vivaldo, which gave her the status of a thief. This means that she had used to accomplish this abduction were beneath or perhaps beyond them, but their eyes briefly accused Vivaldo of betrayal, the narrowed against a dream or a nightmare, and turned away. (Baldwin 144)

Rufus and Ida reflect the troubling side of contemporary American life. The novel has two parts and these characters are the protagonists of the first part. The second part, on the other hand, begins with the heaven-like description of the life that Eric and Yves have been living in Paris. The author definitely forces the reader to compare the protagonists of the first part with the protagonists of the second chapter. Although they experience "abnormal sexual behaviours," they are much happier than Rufus and Ida are. As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, the victory of love can be underlined in this chapter by James Baldwin again. Unlike the first part of *Another Country*, in the second part the author underlines the interracial homosexual affair. Eric and Yves are introduced to the reader at the very beginning of the part. Throughout the part of the novel, readers begin to learn about the relationship between Eric and Rufus. It soon becomes obvious to many readers that Rufus's suffering may result from the

insidious hatred towards his own self. As a black man, he must have suffered from homophobia although he was homosexual. The reason why James Baldwin points out the rage in Rufus, which led him to the suicide, is to show the importance of masculinity for the black man. As a gay man, Baldwin should create the feelings that the jazz musician experienced without difficulty. As been discussed before, the novel can have autobiographical parts with Baldwin's own experiences and feelings performed by Rufus.

Some critics claims that "the death of Rufus Scott in *Another Country* as a consummate example of Baldwin's death-wish" (Dunning 104). Although it is seen in the first part of the novel that he commits a suicide because of the racial oppression he has experienced, in the second part it becomes apparent that his sexual orientation affects him negatively and leads him to end his life. Contrary to these critics, Baldwin must have another reason to lead the main character to a suicide. The African-American author might criticize the narrow-minded society shaped by the traditional values and stereotypes and unwilling to accept any "unusual" performances. For that reason, Baldwin tries to show the hope for another country where racial or sexual identities would be out of concern.

## **2.2. Suffering and Suicide**

In *Another Country*, James Baldwin focuses primarily on the importance of suffering through the realization of self-identity. The experiences of twentieth century black Americans also show that those people tried to fulfill their identity process as a result of great sufferings. Civil Rights Movement is the concrete example of this process full with suffering for African-Americans. Many critics argue the importance of suffering in the novels of James Baldwin in a detailed way. For *Another Country*, he clearly tells the reason why Baldwin has made his characters suffer; for him, suffering causes the characters to look into themselves and criticize their deeds, also lead them to accept responsibility for their actions, and as a result, find themselves.



Isolation is the main factor that leads the characters to suffer. Rufus commits a suicide by jumping from George Washington Bridge and before committing a suicide, he has experienced a great amount of alienation and he has started to lose touch with his friends. What Rufus apparently feels is that “entirely alone, and dying of it; he was part of an unprecedented multitude” (Baldwin 4).

The story of Rufus, the jazz musician, includes his fight within himself as a result of the aspects of race problem apparently, but also secretly his problem about being homosexual. This fight has already conquered his all life. He always remembers his childhood; however, it is full with great amount of despair.

When a child he had lived on the eastern edge of Harlem, a block from the Harlem River. He and other children had waded into the water from the garbage-heavy bank or dived from occasional rotting promontories. One summer a boy had drowned there. [...] one man in the middle, the boy's father, carrying the boy's unbelievably heavy, covered weight. He had never forgotten the bend of the man's shoulders or the stunned angle of his head. A great screaming began from the other end of the block and the boy's mother, her head tied up, wearing her bathrobe, stumbling like a drunken woman, began running toward the silent people. (Baldwin 17)

The suffering that Rufus has experienced in the society caused by his origin leads him to question his own identity. James Baldwin clearly uses the realism of the blues to reflect Rufus's despair. Baldwin constantly refers to the songs of Bessie Smith and relates the lyrics with the life of his main character. Apparently, blues provide a fitting background to understand Rufus's surroundings.

*There's thousands of people, Bessie now sang, ain't got no place to go, and for the first time Rufus began to hear, in the severely understated monotony of this blues, something which spoke to his troubled mind. The piano bore the singer*

witness, stoic and ironic. Now that Rufus himself had no place to go – ‘*cause my house fell down and I can’t live there no mo’*, sang Bessie – he heard the line and the tone of the singer, and he wondered how others had moved beyond the emptiness and horror which faced him now. (49)

When he starts a relationship with Leona, a white girl, he realizes that he cannot communicate with her, which leads him to practice sexual exploitation towards Leona. Because of the pressure caused by racist society in which he has been living, he cannot tolerate any remarks done by Leona about his origin. What force him to commit suicide are exactly the pressure and the feeling of alienation caused by that pressure.

D.H Lawrence once remarked that a fundamental limitations of modern tragedy was that in it man was no longer at war with God, his sense of conflict being limited only to his alienation from society, and though the context of this remark suggested a rather typical Lawrentian caprice, the observation was itself one that few critics could take exception to. (Macebuh 69)

In this novel, James Baldwin apparently aims at touching to the issue of pain which has not been examined by any of the characters yet. The pain discussed in this work is the one which is unshared and which belongs only to the person who possesses it. In this sense, *Another Country* is believed to be the first of Baldwin’s novels in which he gives a great amount of place for pointing out the function of anger clearly. For this reason, characters in the novel are created in a very detailed way and each of them has a function to reflect their psychological representation. Ida Scott, for example, is definitely the personification of rage. The main reason why Ida has been chosen for this purpose cannot be anything but her origin and skin color. When the social and political actions that have been arousing during the 1950s are analyzed, Baldwin’s choice of Ida as an angry and the least sympathetic character is easily proved. Despite being the angriest character who commits suicide at the beginning of the novel, Rufus, on the other hand, is more sympathetic than Ida. However, both Rufus and Ida are led to their

own depression throughout the novel. On this issue, the definition of anger in *James Baldwin: A Critical Study* by Stanley Macebuh is really meaningful. He claims that anger “might conceivably be the instrument of regeneration in its object, but it inevitably consumes and destroys its subject” (Macebuh 88). Throughout the novel, Ida Scott is reflected as having too much anger at the issue of racism. She is obviously against the idea of Rufus’s having a relation with a white girl, Leona.

He knew that Ida would instantly hate Leona. She had always expected a great deal from Rufus, and she was very race-conscious. She would say, You’d never even have looked at that girl, Rufus, if she’d been black. But you’ll pick up any white trash just because she’s white. What’s the matter – you ashamed of being black? (Baldwin 28)

She is obsessed with the racist stereotypes and points out these ideas in her manners towards Vivaldo, too. One day, Vivaldo gets jealous of Ida and they have a fierce argument. On that night, Ida gets angry with him and said “all you white bastards are the same” (Baldwin 169). This quotation shows the hatred of Ida clearly.

The suffering taken place in *Another Country* is definitely not limited only to the protagonist of the novel. In addition to Rufus and Ida, Vivaldo also shows the signs of suffering especially towards the end of the novel. The suffering that he has survived reminds the reader of David’s experience with Joey. Vivaldo has an affair with Eric and then blames himself of failure. He starts to hate himself because of the acts he has performed. As a result of this feeling, he also prefers to escape and starts to live away from home. Thus, at the end of the novel, Vivaldo is seen in a plane leading to Istanbul.

This tormented self-consciousness caused Vivaldo to fear that their moment might, after all, come to nothing. He did not want this to happen, he knew his need to be too great, and they had come too far, and Eric has risked too much. (Baldwin 384)

### **3. Baldwin's Room for Freedom in Another Country**

In this part of the thesis, two novels of James Baldwin have just been analyzed. From the point of view that the writer suggests, lots of things can be said. However, many critics prefer to focus on his skin color while criticizing –positively and negatively- his works. They prefer to ignore the power of the characters that Baldwin creates to represent homosexuality in a homophobic society. That's why; both of the novel force the characters to find their home, in a way to find themselves.

The power of the sexual performances in his works cannot be ignored and the power is much more than the one on the racial matters. Apart from the fact that he creates homosexual and bisexual characters, he reflects them as the happiest characters of the novels. Therefore, the idea that James Baldwin aims at writing about racial problems in the States cannot be accepted. His aim is to show individual experience in a raceless society. In *Giovanni's Room*, for example, readers cannot find any signs about the origins of the characters. Similarly, in *Another Country*, the sexual performances of Rufus, Ida, Vivaldo, Eric and other characters are the main concern for the author. In contrast to the idea that Baldwin creates positive atmosphere via the theme of homosexuality, Donald Gibson writes in *James Baldwin: A Critical Evaluation* that “whereas there is a great deal in the novel which stands to sympathize with homosexuality, the overwhelming evidence is negative in character, not positive or supportive” (Gibson 9).

From the beginning to the end of the *Another Country*, James Baldwin clearly ignores the brutal relationship between white and black Americans. He presents only a few examples via Rufus's childhood to show the opposition between these two groups. Therefore, it is almost impossible to categorize *Another Country* as a novel about the sufferings of African-Americans in the United States of America. It is much more than that. James Baldwin has an aim while erasing this violent border. He forces the readers to focus on something else. He wants the readers to forget his skin color, but to regard him just as a writer. James Baldwin aims at underlining the sexual performances that the characters experience during the novel. Similarly, he creates a room to perform freedom

in terms of sexual identity in *Giovanni's Room*. What is common between these two novels is that the novelist tries to show the possibility to experience what seems “abnormal” not away from the society but in the society.

The main point that must be underlined is the white dominancy in *Giovanni's Room*. Baldwin creates no black characters in the novel. This can account for the reason why the readers must focus on other issues than the racial ones. By creating white characters, he wants to get away from the racist ideology that the critics are going to analyze his novel because of his being African-American. He wants to show the homosexuality and homosexual affairs in the United States of America.

In conclusion, James Baldwin says a lot for the freedom of homosexuals in *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*. In each of the novel he creates a place where the characters can behave in a free way regardless of their sexual orientation, not of their racial background.

## CONCLUSION

The problem of being has always been discussed in the social history of the States. The main reason of this is the fact that America is a founded country. In other words, it is a continent full with different ethnic groups. Since the colonial period, many migrated to the States for different reasons. Because of this high number of immigrants, several precautions were taken. Assimilation process was the most important one taken. The aim of this process was to create a unique American identity. The process succeeded for the old immigrants; however, it failed when the new immigrants arrived. With the increasing variety in the background of the immigrants, it became more and more difficult for the national government to create a unique identity. The assimilationist doctrine that the States has been applying for years is known to force the immigrants to leave their ethnic values and accept the American way of life. This doctrine generally refers to the process of “Anglo-conformity.” However, the process started to lose its power because twentieth-century immigrants were unwilling to give up their own identity.

The problem got worse when the World War II finished. The end of the war was supposed to cause peaceful atmosphere in the States. However, it soon turned out to be a fearful society. American government started to take action against the expansion of communism and Soviet Russia. During the Cold War, the States left its isolationist policy which was regarded to last long after the World War II. In addition to the conflict with Soviet Russia, American government took action in North Vietnam. The mass-destruction in the war led the society to the feeling of fright and to feel unsafe at home. These negative feelings caused the society to lose their confidence in the national government.

The Eisenhower Era began with a positive atmosphere which was called as an affluent society; yet it finished with an idea of protest. Therefore, the period was named as “The Crewcut Era” in the second chapter. The physical appearance and the style are always thought to be the sign of the change and protest. For the 50s, crewcut must signal the idea of upcoming frustration. After the Eisenhower Era, American society

survived the era of frustration and protest. Many groups organized riots against the traditional values, and started to seek their own cultural values. The idea of self-identity gained its importance. Civil Rights Movement of 60s, started to stop racial oppression, proved that all minority groups could fight for equal rights. Therefore, 1960s witnessed a great level of frustration against the political and social actions taken by dominant culture.

The cultural changes, occurring in the 60s' America, are the main concern of this thesis. These changes led to several new cultural instruments produced. With the changes, the term American identity was also subjected to change. This thesis aimed at pointing out the flexibility of identity by referring to the historical events occurring in the States and also with references from provoking philosophers, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler.

In the first chapter, identity politics was explained as a concept. To clarify this complex term, it divided into two categories: gender identity and racial identity. The works by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler were used to define what gender identity is and how it is formed. In terms of racial identity, assimilationist doctrine in the United States was emphasized and the difference between race and ethnicity was pointed out. Apart from these concepts of identity, the first chapter focused on the formation of American identity by referring to the idea of American creed. The importance of creating a unique American identity was also discussed.

The second chapter concentrated on the historical events that led to the social and cultural changes in the 1950s' and 1960s' America. First of all, very brief information about the history of America till the Civil Rights Movement was given. Then, the elements that led to the minorities' struggle for equality were suggested with references to the historical events between 1950 and 1970. The last part of the chapter picked up on the effects of these changes on African-American literature, especially on James Baldwin.

The main concern of the thesis was underlined in the last chapter. The social changes having mentioned in the previous chapter were referred to understand the

characters in James Baldwin's novels; *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*. The effect of these changes can be seen in the literary works of the era. In that era, James Baldwin was considered as one of the greatest authors. He was regarded as an activist for Blacks rights. However, it is open to discuss. The aim of this thesis is to reread James Baldwin with a reference to the theme of identity in *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* to challenge this idea. While analyzing the social changes in 60s' America and also the novels that were written by Baldwin, the idea of anti-essentialism was used. To this view of point, no one has a fixed and collective identity. In other words, the fact who we are is a flexible concept and can change over a period. The reason why this point of view was chosen was that the characters that Baldwin created in both *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* survive a great deal of change throughout the novels. These changes are based on the social construction they live in. Similarly, anti-essentialism claims the flexibility of self-identity depending on the social and cultural circumstances.

Although black people left the troubling life in the South during the Great Migration, many black writers of the twentieth century still wrote about the sufferings of black people in the States to end the segregation and the oppression by generally referring to the experience of slavery. Among the popular topics, racial oppression was still the first one, but the setting was different. Chicago was the common setting for the twentieth century African-American writers. The problem was generally the acceptance in the North States. Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, for example, tells the story of a family in Chicago. They suffer from being black in a white environment.

Many critics consider James Baldwin as one of these authors. However, he is definitely different from them. Baldwin never writes about the racial oppression as the main concern. He prefers to write about the sufferings of all people regardless of their national origins. This thesis aimed at showing this difference. In order to attain this goal, two novels of Baldwin were chosen. The reason why these novels were chosen is the protagonists the author created. In *Giovanni's Room*, readers face with the David's struggle for identity in Paris. Away from home, he experiences great difficulties at first, but then he realizes that he can easily find himself in France. David proves the



importance of the society and social factors to determine one's self-identity. *Another Country* brings the reader to the life of a black musician Rufus. In the first part of the book, Rufus is supposed to suffer from racial oppression; however, later it becomes obvious that all the anger against the society is just the anxiety and hatred that he himself has. The reason of these feelings is pointed out in the second part of the novel when Eric is introduced to the reader. The failure of Rufus in understanding his self-identity leads him to a suicide. He tries to seem as how the society wants him to be, but he does not succeed.

These two novels suggest the importance of the identity in different social circumstances. While David succeeds finding himself away from the States, Rufus fails in America. This leads us to consider the effect of the cultural changes in the identity process. In the twentieth century, the level of changes in American culture was too high. The Civil Rights Movement encouraged all minority groups to seek their values to shape their own identity, not to accept fixed American creed. Therefore, in the first chapter of the paper, the anti-essentialist point of view for identity process was underlined. By using these novels and referring to the other works of the author, the idea that Baldwin was a black activist was challenged. It was pointed out that the writer was opposed to any categories depending on his skin color and race. Similarly, his attempts to ignore the national background of the characters that he created were emphasized. *Giovanni's Room*, for example, has only white characters, and there are no signs about the characters' family history. Although *Another Country* has black protagonist, the stress is not on the character's national background, but on his decisions and acts.

To sum up, at the end of the thesis, it can be safely reached the conclusion that regarding James Baldwin as one of the black activists cannot be right as he, himself, aimed at a peaceful world without any signs of racism, sexism or any borders. With this thesis, entitled "Rereading James Baldwin: Struggle for Identity," the place that many put James Baldwin in the field of literature and social life was challenged and it was claimed that the author put almost no effects of racism or his national background in

his works. Similarly, the characters of the novels have almost no signs for the readers to guess about their national backgrounds.

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## **ÖZGEÇMİŞ**

1987 yılında İzmir’de doğdum. Lise öğrenimimi İzmir Balçova Salih Dede Yabancı Dil Ağırlıklı Lisesi’nde yaptıktan sonra Lisans öğrenimimi Ege Üniversitesi Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bölümü’nde 2006- 2010 yılları arasında tamamladım. 2010 yılından bu yana Ege Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu’nda okutman olarak çalışmaktayım.

## ÖZET

Yaşadığımız koşullar ve sınırlar bizim kim olduğumuzu belirler. Dolayısıyla tek ve değişmez bir kimlikten bahsetmek imkânsızdır. Kimlik devamlı olarak değişen bir olgudur. Bu değişim sürecinde insanın kendi kimliğinin farkına varması ve kendini bulması esastır. Eski çağlarda hiçbir şekilde sorgulanmayan bu kavram, modern çağda en çok sorgulanan olgu haline gelmiştir. Bunun en önemli sebebinin özel mülkiyetin ortaya çıkışı olduğu söylenmektedir. Bu bağlamda insanlar artık sahip oldukları “şey”lerle adlandırılmaya ve tanımlanmaya başlar. Kimlik mücadelesinin ortaya çıkmasını tek bir sebebe dayandırmak kesinlikle yetersiz olacaktır. Bu kavram üzerine birçok düşünürün farklı görüşleri bulunmaktadır. Michel Foucault ve Judith Butler’ın öne sürdüğü değişebilir kimlik algısı yaşadığımız yüzyılda da hakim olan düşüncedir. Bu düşünce 50lerin ve 60ların Amerika’sında Sivil Haklar Mücadelesi ile geçerliliğini göstermiştir. Tarih boyunca uygulanan asimilasyon yöntemleriyle yaratılmaya çalışılan Amerikan kimliği, 50lere gelindiğinde geçerliliğini kaybetmeye başlamıştır. Bunun yerine, her bir azınlık grubu kendi kültürel değerlerini ön plana çıkararak kendi kimliklerini yaratmışlardır.

Bu dönem içerisinde yazılan bir çok eserde bu kimlik mücadelesi görülebilir. Döneme damgasını vuran bir çok Afrikalı-Amerikalı yazar bu arayış içerisinde geçmişin tecrübelerini ve acılarını eserlerinde kullanmaya devam ettiler. James Baldwin ise Afrikalı-Amerikalı olmanın getirdiği sancıları bir kenara bırakıp genel bir kimlik arayışını sorgulamayı tercih etmiştir. Bu bağlamda kendi döneminde yer alan diğer yurttaşlarından ayrılmıştır. Fakat buna rağmen Baldwin’i siyahi haklarının savunucusu olarak gören çok fazla eleştirmen vardır. Afrikalı-Amerikalı hakları da savunan Baldwin’i bu kategoriye almak ise doğru değildir. Yazarın eserleri incelendiğinde amacının köken, cinsiyet, etnik kültür konularına girmeksizin rahat ve özgürce yaşanabilecek bir ülke yaratmak olduğu rahatlıkla anlaşılmaktadır. Kendisi de bir çok röportajında Afrikalı-Amerikalı olarak adlandırılmak istemediğini dile getirmiştir. Bu bağlamda yazarın iki eseri incelenmiştir.

İlk eseri olan *Giovanni'nin Odası* David isimli karakterin Paris'te yaşadığı kendini bulma çabasını anlatmaktadır. *Bir Başka Ülke* ise siyahi müzisyen Rufus'un Amerika'daki acılı süreci anlatılmaktadır. İki karakterin de ortak noktası ise eşcinsel ilişkiler yaşamış olması, fakat bu hareketlerini inkar ederek bir nevi kendilerini inkar etmiş olmalarıdır. Bu eserlerden de anlaşılacağı üzere, James Baldwin kimlik arayışı kapsamında sadece ırk ayrımına odaklanmamıştır; hatta ırk meselesini arka planda tutarak cinsel kimliği ön plana almıştır.



## ABSTRACT

The social environment that we live in shapes our identity. Therefore, it is impossible to talk about fixed identity. It always changes depending on the social constructions around us. The main concern in this process is to find ourselves. The concept of identity did not use to be questioned in the ancient times. When people started to possess, they began to be named after what they had. This can be considered as the very first step of the self-identity. In terms of self-identity, many philosophers put forward several ideas. The flexibility of the identity, suggested by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler is still valid in our century. The United States of America experienced the validity of this idea during 1950s and 60s with the Civil Rights Movement. This movement showed the failure of assimilation process that had been used in America for long years. Instead, minority groups in the States started to seek their own identities.

In many works written during the 50s and 60s, struggle for identity can be seen. African-American writers of the era also used this theme; however, they tried to seek their identity in the literature by reflecting the sufferings in the era of slavery. James Baldwin, on the other hand, put these sufferings aside and wrote just about the civil rights that all minority groups must attain. Therefore, he differs from his contemporaries. In spite of this, many critics still categorize Baldwin as one of the black activist for the black rights. In many interviews, Baldwin emphasizes that he does not want to be defined as a black writer. When analyzing his works, it is apparent that he creates diverse characters by ignoring their national origins.

The first novel that is discussed in this paper is *Giovanni's Room*. In this novel, the protagonist David struggles for his identity in Paris. The second novel in the study is *Another Country*. The novel shows the sufferings of the black musician Rufus in America. The common point that these two protagonists share in the fact that they have homosexual affairs, and both deny these acts and also deny their self-identity. It can be understood from these novels that Baldwin puts more emphasize on the sexual identity rather than on the racial identity.