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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

**BLACK FEMINISM AND THE QUEST FOR
IDENTITY IN TONI MORRISON'S
SULA AND *THE BLUEST EYE***

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree**

Candidates:

Ms. Imane RIGHI

Ms. Hanine REKIOUA

Supervisor:

Mr. Bachir SAHED

2019

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DEDICATION

-To the soul of my mother. Whose presence brought life to everything and whose absence brought pain. The person whose words of encouragement are still echoing in my memory.

- To my father who did not ever tell me how to live, but he lived and let me watch him do it. He gave me the greatest gift anyone could give to another person, he believed in me.

- To the love of my life, my dear husband, thanks for caring about my dreams more than I do. Because of you, I didn't give up.

- To my Family and friends for their love and support.

HANINE

DEDICATION

To the oppressed ones...

IMANE

ABSTRACT

The present research focuses on how racism and patriarchy influenced the development and formation of black female identity in Toni Morrison's novels, namely *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. Morrison's novels represent the way racial and gender stereotypes affect the quest for individual identity and selfhood establishment of the black female. Thus, the chief aim of this study is to develop a strong understanding of the different crucial aspects that influence the female character's identity realization. The study employs Black Feminist theory to examine the black female harsh experiences in a society dominated by white supremacy and patriarchy. Accordingly, the first chapter is devoted to investigate the African American experience of racism and patriarchy. The second chapter is an attempt to analyse Toni Morrison's representation of black female suffering and journey to shape their identity in the two novels.

Keywords: patriarchy, racism, identity, Black feminism

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Résumé

Cette recherche met l'accent sur l'étude de l'influence du racisme et du pouvoir patriarcal dans le développement et le façonnage de l'identité de la femme noire dans les romans de Tony Morrison intitulés « L'œil bleu » et « Solla ». Les romans de Morrison exposent la manière de l'effet des stéréotypes relatifs à la race et au sexe, à œuvrer à réaliser l'identité individuelle et le fondement du soi de la femme noire. L'objectif principal de cette étude est donc de développer une forte compréhension des différents aspects qui affectent la réalisation de la personnalité individuelle de la femme noire et qui peuvent être réalisés à travers une étude précise de Tony Morrison en « L'œil noir » et « Solla ». Du point de vue du féminisme noir, nous pouvons présenter une analyse claire des expériences de fractionnement des femmes noires dans une société dominée par la suprématie blanche et le pouvoir patriarcal. En conséquence, le premier chapitre est consacré à expliquer l'expérience des américains d'origine africaine après l'esclavagisme et la guerre civile. La recherche aborde également le concept de pouvoir patriarcal dans la société africaine et son effet sur la femme. En outre, le mouvement des femmes noires, le double colonialisme et l'identité féminine afro-américaine sont soumis à une étude approfondie à travers cet écrit. Le second chapitre est une tentative d'analyse de la représentation de Tony Morrison de la souffrance des femmes noires et un voyage pour façonner leur identité dans les deux romans.

Introduction

Writing is a gleam of hope and light in an obscured world for the voiceless. This spot of light that female black writers pursue is the beginning of being. The accumulation of the dire circumstances and the long years of bondage left the black women undefined, scattered and lost or let's say colorless. Being able to create, to imagine, to write and to feel determine the ability of understanding and defining one's self in a way that is different and uncommon and gives the black color a specific gloss and the African American literature exceptional subjects, themes and characters.

African American women are victims of racism and patriarchy during and after slavery. Being silent and victimized makes their situation even worst. They are exploited, harassed, abused and subjected to violence by both white men and their black male partners. It is simply considered acceptable and inescapable. Women as a whole, and black woman in particular, are accustomed to expect violence in their lives as well as to bear it. Besides, they are double colonized, black females are double ached since there is an absence of confession that an offense is committed. Hence, women have to handle the fact that pain would never be recognized. This killing silencing affects their development, their relationships, their emotions and their sense of identity.

African Americans find their destination in literature. Their strong desire for freedom and for acceptance as full citizens in their country encourages them to use literature as a strong means to tell and share their stories, hopes, goals, and pains with the world. The long history that is darkened by racism and patriarchy exhausts them; therefore, their refuge is to write and express themselves as humans capable of creation and imagination. The emergence of the African American literature contributes greatly in changing the world's perception towards the Africans as people learn about the long suffer and misery of the blacks' life. Adding to that, for the first time women's unbearable experiences are revealed to the entire world.

Writers like Toni Morrison tend to defy the bitterness and the terrible secrecy of black female's life. Morrison who is the first African American to win the Nobel Peace Prize for literature creates a voice to the inaudible women to both question and sensitize the world about the black woman's hard life and ache and to demonstrate the negative effect of racism and patriarchy on the black female's identity. Considerable number of critics and scholars pay a great attention to her novels because of the heavy themes she tackles. The Nobel Peace Prize winner draws a powerful portrait of the degradation and dehumanization that the black female is exposed to even after the abolishing of slavery. She sheds the light on the start of an alarming phase in the woman's life, the stage of passing through sorrow, death and madness to paint a new shape and new definition to the black woman once again.

The black feminist writer, Toni Morrison, deals with different subject matters. Although all her novels are suffused with patriarchy and racism; she presents them in each novel in a special manner. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and her second novel, *Sula* (1973), are dedicated to get the bottom of the women's dilemma. The author displays a thorough spectrum where she obviously expresses the tension between blacks and whites and how racism is a domineering system in the black community. Another common theme Morrison presents is the community's inspect to the difference between males and females in which the characters reside in.

Having a long history of mistreatment, misinterpretation and suffering from many forms of oppression for being both black and women, Morrison shows the struggle against male chauvinism, racism and social conventions and their aftermath on the female's individual identity. This marginalization and double colonization clearly influence the females' interaction in their environment, where they have distorted relationships and witness shockingly queer love. The sort of love that can't be absorbed by little girls. Such abnormal conditions that children live and undergo make them develop a certain kind of identity that is one and only

depicted in the African American literature. It is demonstrated in the two protagonists: Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye*, and *Sula* who carries the title of the novel.

The Bluest Eye is Toni Morrison's first novel. It was published in 1970 and was heralded for its richness of language and unused themes. It is a tragic study of a black adolescent girl's struggle to seek for normalcy and acceptance and to achieve her individual identity. We figure out that Pecola Breedlove, who is growing up in 1940's Ohio, yearns for blue eyes and white standards of beauty and is unable to love herself in a racist society as well as in a patriarchal society. Pecola grows up with low self-esteem. She is hated by her parents and black surroundings as well as white people.

The hatred that immerses her makes her feel ugly. A little child sees herself in a blurry mirror that reflects only the ugliness and unmerciful hearts of people around her. The source of ugliness relies in their vision and unaware minds that are enmeshed in shaping her identity. She has frustrating relationships in her community. Pecola is mocked and shunned by her mother, children in school and even her teachers. She is sexually abused and harassed by her own father. She perceives a queer and marred love from her parents which leads to her collapse and madness. Thus she is unable to achieve her stable individual identity.

Toni Morrison wrote *Sula* (1973), her second vibrating novel, in which she implies many messages to be discovered and uses many themes in order to create a deeper sense to the African American women's plight. In a different way by depicting a different protagonist, Morrison's words gave birth to a magnificent novel with a high level of complexity and simplicity all put in her new character Sula. The protagonist is a little child coming on age in the imaginary Bottom community, between the world wars period where we are taken from the world of little girls to that of the young black females. Sula, the novel's pivot, through her journey towards individuality is affected by the social institutions as well as the patriarchal and racist society is living in.

This novel explores the possibilities for the African American female in the realization of her individual identity against the racist and patriarchal society. Sula, the unconventional protagonist of the novel, is a woman who tends to change nothing about people and society's stereotypes but to make herself and meet her own needs. She is disobedient and rebellious. Focusing only on making herself and fitting her needs far away from the society conventions, Sula travels and attends college and enjoys uncensored heterosexual relations with both black and white men. Sula focuses on the question "who am I?" and ignores to question herself "How am I perceived by others?" Sula's focus only on her self-realization leads to her collapse and dying alone.

Both multi-faceted novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, can be read through the lens of black feminist theory since the writer herself is a black feminist. The primary focus of this study is the aspects of black feminism and how the author approaches the influence of patriarchy and racism on black females' individual identity. In the mentioned novels, Morrison draws a clear image about the protagonist's strife while attempting to shape their identities. This characterization clarifies the influence of the distorted relationships and love by racism and patriarchy on the heroines' quest for identity.

The plight of African American women is derived from racial segregation which is the outcome of long term bondage. Also, it comes from gender discrimination that is perpetrated by both white and black males. The black women have unique problems which the white women have never experienced, that is why; the new black literature becomes most arresting as it is sprung from real long harsh experiences. The black feminist writers are provoked to think and write on the themes that are chiefly linked to the effect of their miseries and to engrave unforgettable memories in a country that had a notorious history in discriminating black people.

Therefore, the main issue that this dissertation investigates is how Toni Morrison depicts black women in America under racist, repressive and patriarchal society and how, mainly

racism and patriarchy, influenced and determined the relationships between characters as well as how these experiences intersect with the love they perceive. In addition to this, another problem that this thesis addresses is the various challenges that the heroines face, mainly relationships and love, while striving to accomplish their individuality and the difference between the two protagonists journeys.

In Morrison's novels, space is given to the reader to respond and determine things. The things, real ones, that were worse than hell. For hell makes you die and ends your torture, but in that space they wish to die but couldnot, because it becomes their company for the endless sorrow and negation. Nothing else they own but to live; when life becomes a harder matter than death, so you are being embraced with amputated dreams which their parts grow in black American writings. African American women suffer the most, in the history of Man's race. Such mutilated souls that struggle to live should not be forgotten. Such black history should be told, retold, revised, studied and examined so that heinous acts will not be repeated. This is what motivates us to choose and explore these two novels.

The aim of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the different crucial aspects that influence the female character's individual identity. Moreover, among the essential objectives of this research is to portray the undeniable effects of the double colonization on the way the African American love one another and relate to one another and its direct effect on the protagonists. Furthermore, the research is conducted through a black feminist theory in order to analyze how Pecola and Sula developed such a complexity within themselves as well as to show the leading causes to the tragic ends in both novels. The current study seeks to compare between the protagonists of the two novels during their journeys. Some similarities and differences are to be highlighted to show the uniqueness of each novel in which she implies many messages to be discovered and uses many themes in order to create and give a deeper sense to African American people's life and existence. The author gives the characters and their

relationships an intensive voicing where they express their opinions and feelings about racism, sexism and love.

Hence, this dissertation seeks to provide answers to the following main question: How does Toni Morrison portray the impact of racism and sexism on the growth and realization of the black female individual identity?

In order to answer this question, the dissertation attempts to answer the following sub-questions: How do the difficulties experienced by the African American female protagonists in a racist and patriarchal society affect their relationships and love? What is the effect of the relationships and the love that the protagonists receive on their individual identity?

Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* are strong vibrating works that include numerous themes and symbols like racism as an impediment to reclaim identity. The females escape from their stereotypical status as well as the unconventional relationships and their impact. Such kind of novels that tackle these sensitive and debatable subjects undergo large number of reviews and criticism.

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison deals with the different types of racism and their effects on black Americans life. Ferdinand kpohoue, in his research paper “*Emasculation of male characters as seen through Sula by Toni Morrison*”, discussed how emasculation is a drawback of slavery and the way Morrison portrayed black female characters as leading while males are absent and irresponsible. The novel also deals with how black people strike to live under the extreme domination of the whites. Dr. Itishri Sarangi provided a deep study of racial discrimination and its destructive effects in her article “*The Outburst of Racial Discrimination in the Novels of Toni Morrison.*”

Toni Morrison's *Sula* depicts the failed mother-daughter relationship which leads her to build another bond with her friend Nel. This theme is deeply analysed in Bellahcene Mallek dissertation *Daughters of Distanced Mothers: The Quest of Selfhood in Toni Morrison's Sula*

(1973) and Alice Walker's *The Color*. Through his work he explains that facing various obstacles urges black women to form bonds.

Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, develops a story of a young African – American girl during the early 1940s. It analyses the disastrous effects of imposing white middle-class American ideals of beauty on Africans. The characters in *The Bluest Eye* loathe their own skin color and feel shame for their identity and culture especially the story's protagonist, Pecola Breedlove. Morrison's novel was used as a case study for countless numbers of researchers. Karen Ruiz's article, "*Feminist Critique on Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*" is one example of these studies. Ruiz's work aims at showing how Morrison criticized the racist and sexist ideology of the American community during that era.

Literary critic Lynn Scott argues that the repeated positive description of whiteness in *The Bluest Eye* serves to represent society's perception of beauty, which ultimately proves to have destructive consequences for the black characters in the novel (9). Royce, an associated professor of English at Delaware State University also notes that the novel emphasizes that living in a world defined by euro-centric norms creates a longing for whiteness, such as Pecola's desire for blue eyes, which destroys a young black girl's confidence (227).

Moreover, Dr. Jan Furman, professor of English at the University of Michigan, notes that the book allows the reader to analyse the "imprinting" factors that shaped the identity of the self during the process of maturing in young black girls (12-33).

The research is going to analyse the first two novels of Toni Morrison *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* from a Black feminist standpoint. The white feminist never suited to serve the black female interests because it did not take into consideration their struggle against racism and its results, "This omission of women of color from White feminist analysis has in itself been regarded as reflective of tire racism and ethnic exclusivity of the White women's movement" (Elizabeth Abel). During the twentieth century, black women writers started to feel the need to

bond together and shed the light on problems that ached them. This was the beginning black feminist theory. KaaVonnia Hinton explains that the central concern of this theory is questioning racial and gender problems.

The 1970s marked the beginning of the Black feminist theory by most scholars. However, there were many works written by African American women before this era like Lucy Terry and Zora Neale Hurston that tackle racial stereotypes and patriarchy. Black feminist theory is talked about, in rare cases, with the plural form “black feminisms” because theorists don’t agree to one fixed clear definition of the theory. However, there is agreement on the basis of the theory which can be summarized in Auder Lorde words, “I am a black Feminist. I mean I recognize that my powers as well as my primary oppression come as result of my blackness as well as my womaness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable.”

Before proceeding to the presentation of this study, it seems relevant to give a brief account on how this dissertation is going to be organized; the whole work will be constituted of two main chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the socio-historical context and the theoretical framework. It starts with a socio-historical background of the novels to be studied. It explores the African American experience during slavery and Civil War eras. It investigates the manifestation of racism and how it strangles and limits black people’s life. The systemized racism leads to the emergence of patriarchy and its consequences. It is followed by in-depth display of the Black feminist theory and its given space to defend and create new identity for black females.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the two novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* from the Black feminist perspective. It begins with tracing the already shaped and modeled identity by racism and patriarchy for black females. Then, an analysis is provided to the process of identity development in terms of love and relationships in a patriarchal and racist society. Finally, the core study of this chapter is to show how the protagonists struggle to assert their identity. However, this is presented distinctly which demands the analysis of two different cases.

Chapter One: Socio-Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

In the land of freedom and ideals, the African-American life was not that easy, it had always been a struggle. From the earliest outset of the black experience in American history, the black Americans underwent many hardships through different stages: slavery, civil war, The Great Migration and the Civil Rights Movement. All what they sought for is equal opportunities in the Land of Opportunity where all men are supposed to be equal; they strove to find and shape a meaningful identity. They were longing for the identity that is accepted and respected by white people and the entire world. This is particularly for those who were living in the first 50 years of the 1900's where economic and social segregation were the dominant traits of that age.

1.The African American Experience in the 1900s

After being freed, the African Americans have started stepping on their full recognition's long way to have the same rights and opportunities as white Americans. The Abolition of slavery was a bright title to a new difficult era that revealed how whites viewed blacks as inferior. Here, it became clear enough for the black that it was never a matter of a slave person or a free person. It was race. They were different. They were not white. Racism had always been a major issue in America for long years. The African Americans were discriminated in a number of ways. Racism affected their lifestyle facets so badly such as education, region of residence, employment, occupational distributions and economic opportunities

Racism does not have one form and one place. It can happen everywhere, taking different forms. The one thing that is undeniable about racism that it involves discrimination, abusive actions and words, hatred, psychological harms and sometimes even physical ones. Racism generally is pointed toward someone because of their skin's color, physical appearance, religion, ethnicity or national origin. It is simply for being different for those who cannot accept

and coexist with diversity. Racist people make a set of ideas and concepts where they are superior and perfect while others are not. Therefore, people are incapable to enjoy their life and equality because of these racial classifications.

In its most serious form, racism is demonstrated in behaviours and activities that embody race hate, vilification, abuse and violence particularly experienced by groups who are visibly different because of their cultural or religious dress, their skin colour or their physical appearance.

Morrison claims, “In this country African means white, everybody else has to hyphenate” This is the blacks’ plight after the slavery was outlawed. They are not Americans. They are African-Americans, and from this additional word a whole destiny was drawn. Sutton says, “we are different in color, in talk, and in religion and beliefs, we are different in every way and can never be specked to think or live alike” (qtd.in. Bay153). Black people could not celebrate their blackness and heritage. They were seen and treated as inferiors so that extremely affected their perception to themselves as well as to white people. Bay adds, “race defined not only the way the slaves saw themselves but also the way they saw white people.(155)”

Adams, a former slave, declares, “Now we are free. What do we want? We want education; we want protection; we want plenty of work; we want good pay for it, but not anymore or less than anyone else... and then you will see the down-trodden race rise up” (qtd.in. Andrews 138). The early twentieth century marked the all-time low for the black Americans. They continued to be marginalized and treated unequally. Being free at that time was just another form of slavery. They were enslaved by the difficulties they face, discrimination and segregation. The African-Americans’ chains just became invisible but never disappeared. These chains were no longer made of iron but of unfair laws and codes as well as old white customs that could never fit with. They were enchained and unable to get easy access to facilities, housing, job, education, opportunities and other services. Incapable of enjoying full recognition, African-Americans suffered being citizens of second-class. Black people

witnessed racial oppression, racial slurs, lynching, and inequality. All these occurrences presented the manifestation of racism in America.

As mentioned above, racism has not one form. In one of her research papers, Charlotte Reading explores some several forms of racism such as relational racism that happens when a person endures discriminatory acts from people he/she meets with in their everyday life. She clarifies, “being shunned in order not to get close personal contact; being humiliated by name calling as well as physical and sexual assault; and being ignored”. This form of racism is the most apparent one since it is manifested in personal contact and involves humiliating language and assault.

“Racial slurs are words, deeds images, or behaviours that when communicated to another either voluntarily or involuntarily, have the effect of negating or denigrating the race of another person” (Les Washington). African-Americans were exposed to such humiliating behaviours in their daily-life. Lee illustrates that, “Blacks in America are subject to almost daily micro aggressions or put-downs” (62). Demeaning the blacks with the most heinous acts and insults became a part of their life, “Blacks were routinely called ‘orangutan’ and ‘porch monkey’ to their faces” (Kohn 357).

Another insidious form of racism is structural racism. It takes place in racialized conditions which has counter effects on African-Americans in America. In addition, Charlotte Reading adds, “structural racism emerges when a dominant group is established and its power is reinforced through inequitable laws, policies, rules and regulations, as well as excess to resources”. While Bailey et al argue, “Any account of structural racism within the USA must start with the experiences of black people and the indigenous people of North America”. In addition, Lawrence and Keleher state, “structural racism in the US [...] is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of black.”

Structural racism is mirrored in differences regarding income, residence, employment and education. “In the racial system of the United States, the experience of racism is an everyday occurrence for many African-Americans, work place racism, racism in school, discrimination in hiring [...] police profiling, medical racism” (Rosenblatt 153). African-Americans were placed in a disadvantaged position because they were simply black and different from the whites. “These differences received further reinforcement from a variety of inescapable forms of legal, civil, and political discrimination that set black Americans apart from white Americans throughout this era” (Bay 154).

Social exclusion is another dangerous form of racism that truly affects the racialized group’s life since it prevents them from benefiting and gratifying their full rights for a decent life. In her research paper, *Understanding Racism*, Reading declares, “these actions disadvantage certain racialized groups to the extent that they create unfair distribution of resources such as housing, health care, and opportunities for education, employment, justice and social welfare”. Upon this policy and application, “Many economic and demographic characteristics of African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century were not that different from what they had been in the mid-1800” (Maloney). Through a jam of laws and codes, racism in a way became legitimized under the logo ‘Separate but Equal ’against the freed black citizens. In fact, such laws and codes were basically replacement for the slave laws and restricts.

There were the slave codes which stated, defined, set and determined how African slaves should live and react. These codes clogged the blacks’ life as they managed and limited the slaves’ relationships with one another and with whites as well. They were directed and reinforced to besiege them in the slavery angle. Thus, blacks would not find any spot where to make a whole to bounce high toward freedom and well-being. However, the unfair and oppressive rule never last, always the spot is made as well as the whole and those besieged are no longer in the same place. Slavery was abolished but other codes were constituted, trying to

keep the Africans in a locked and stoned mould relegating them from stepping forward. Black codes were set up so the blacks were to be under the white dominance and the unfair rule.

Maloney states “Ninety percent of African-Americans still lived in the southern US in 1900” (Maloney), where they faced many challenges. Whites specifically in the southern of America regarded the newly freed slaves as inferior more than ever before. The hope of reuniting with their beloved; establishing a stable and normal life; enjoying full rights and relishing freedom for the first time evaporated. The hope was taken away as quickly as it was earned. The intention of restricting and narrowing the black’s freedom and rights still existed in the whites’ mind. All the dreams of winds of changes blew in the opposite direction when The Black Codes were enacted.

“The Black Codes was the term applied to laws enacted throughout the former confederate states between 1865 and 1867” (Stentiford & Brown 78). Thus, The Black Codes were constitutional amendments that each province came up with on their own, some differences existed in the maintained restricts, but one thing is common that they are racist and inequitable acts. Eudell clarifies, “although variations existed in these laws due to differing local conditions, they contained some unifying elements.” He adds that to make the blacks work, a “physical compulsion” is needed, which is a racist idea.

The bloodstained years of the civil war passed and how to deal with the freed slaves became a problem lingering in the air. Black Codes were legislated to hinder them from being equal citizens since most white southerners were still reluctant to their freedom. These laws made it possible for whites to regain control over blacks as it used to be in the slavery era. Thus, the difference between the slavery era and reconstruction era was that these new changes really displayed the fearful depth of racism that existed in the American society. Attempting to keep their “superior” statues pushed them to take away the African-American rights.

“Presidential Reconstruction made it easy for Southern state legislatures to pass laws that placed blacks into a twilight world between slavery and freedom.” (Gallagher & Lippard). These laws manipulated their role and position in the society because blacks “found themselves in an awkward position between the full freedom that they expected upon emancipation and the complete subordination of slavery” (141). These codes were clearly set on the purpose of defining the black race as an inferior. “In fact, the black codes sought to define the legal place of African people as permanently inferior to whites, and thus affirmed the white southerners’ attitude that black people were meant to serve the interests of the white population” (Cérol et al).

These codes forced intentionally to exclude the blacks from the American society, “They served to keep these African people from full participation in the political, economic and social life of the south.” (120) Being excluded meant to be submissive and under-class. “Black codes made African-Americans second-class citizens. In some states, they could work only as servants or farm hands. They could not own guns, serve on juries, vote, or travel freely. Black Codes challenged what freedom meant for freed slaves” (Wittman et al14).

Immediately after the Black Codes were set aside, Other laws, rules, and regulations were instated to establish legal segregation in the American system. These legislations were referred to as Jim Crow Laws. Across the South, from 1877 through the 1960s, the Jim Crow system enforced Blacks to experience and live under white supremacy. These racial segregation laws endeavoured to separate the Blacks from the Whites citizens from public transportation, public schools, restaurants, restrooms, movie theatres, cemeteries and so many other services. The Jim Crow system is held as a segregation system of life where blacks are expected to show inferiority and subservience to the whites; whereas the whites are able to enjoy and feel their superiority and pride. Correspondingly, signs of ‘whites only’ or ‘colored’ are spread almost everywhere. In this way, Jim Crow laws had subtler political, economic and social dimensions to keep the African-American hopeless, weak and controlled.

The term Jim Crow is signified as a highly mark of the bitter racism. This name was originated from a black character in an old song performed by a white man called Thomas ‘Daddy Rice’ a nineteenth century blackface performer, introduced the song and dance ‘Jump Jim Crow’ in 1828 in a minstrel show. Inspired by an old black man who was singing and dancing, Daddy Rice’s performance made a huge fuss in the Northern and Southern states. The character of Jim Crow was depicted as a gay and dim-witted slave. “The name was later extended to refer to blacks in general, and then to laws restricting the rights of blacks in particular” (Stentiford & Brown). This term became tremendously popular and a part from the derogatory American vocabulary against the African-Americans. Also, it gave a very negative view of them as lazy, uneducated and happy slaves.

Stentiford and Brown state that “the term ‘Jim crow’ refers to a set of laws passed in many states, predominantly in the south, that placed severe restriction on the rights and privileges of African Americans after the end of the reconstruction in 1877”. The Jim Crow term, from a derogatory and humiliating label to a set of laws, shaped a new way of life that actually celebrated another form of slavery, “Although Southern Democrats dared not reinstate the institution of slavery. They created a system that was analogous to it. They passed Jim Crow Laws that mandated segregated facilities, such as schools, hospitals, asylums, cemeteries and public transportation” (Gallagher & Lippard 401). The blacks endured almost a century of racial segregation that encompassed all their life’s facets depriving them from a better life, “This was particularly the use of white Jim crow laws that ensured that blacks were rigidly segregated eventually in every sphere of American life” (Dawkins & Kinloch).

Separate but Equal is a doctrine that emerged in the late of 19th century and early 20th century. It was underpinned by constitution and the Supreme Court laws. That budding philosophy of equality that appeared in America separated all the facilities between blacks and whites and nourished racism as well as apartheid. Now another barrier was created so that

Africans- Americans were unable to join the society as full and equal citizens. They were distanced from the whites and utterly unaccepted .

During the slavery era, there were two kinds of people: white people, who are normal persons, and blacks, who are property. After the civil war, two types of people existed in America: the whites, who are full citizens, and blacks, who are second-class citizens. “Segregation gained constitutional ‘respectability’ and was consequently used to legitimize a wide variety of types of racial discrimination for many decades” (Dawkins & Kinloch 4). And “With the separate but equal doctrine, the system of social, economic and political segregation, subordinating an entire race to the will of another and denying members of that race a full and equal place in the civic life of the nation” (Postema 1).

The Jim Crow Laws manipulated and adjusted the economic and social connections and relationships between whites and African-Americans. These laws were ultimately enacted to subject the African-Americans as a race to the whites’ dominance since they were passed in favour of the white people. These segregation laws embodied the white racist thoughts against the black race and served as a legal exclusion to the African-Americans from all the services, privileges and benefits. Even though the blacks had the so-called black services. They were poor quality ones. In fact, these acts were enforced accurately and harshly in cities where crowds intermixed with different races, but for the countryside and rural areas, they were already subordinated to different means of racial segregation and marginalization.

The Jim Crow era forced the African-Americans to a very harsh reality. Their living standards were crippled because of the unfair laws. The black people were still unable to ameliorate their life’s level, as they were restricted to certain kinds of jobs, “In the 1990s most black citizens were sharecroppers for tenant farmers. They farmed on lands they did not own, in return not for cash but for a share of the crop they had raised” (Schug et al 110). Owning no cash caused a great deal of poverty in the black communities. Furthermore, black people were

almost excluded and ostracized from cities which diminished their opportunities to get more benefits, “One of the most visible indicators of the Jim Crow inequality in rural housing was the physical of construction [...] During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, families lived in crudely constructed one- or two room houses, built with rough sawn wooden planks” (Reich 366).

Another crucial factor that influenced the African-Americans life was the social segregation. Black people had been socially segregated by laws and ordinances that were blessed by the constitution and the Supreme Court. The primary purpose of the Jim Crow laws was “denying freedom and equality to the same group that had been enslaved, African Americans” (Tischauser xi). The rules were highly intensive and resulted from bigger fears. In her book, *Jim Crow Laws*, Tischauser clarifies that “The thing they feared the most -social equality- because the racists believed that social equality had one horrible consequence: interracial marriage and the mongrelization of the white race” (xiv). Hence, interracial marriage is banned by the law. Tischauser previously mentions that, “Jim Crow laws made it illegal for anyone to marry someone of another race” (xi). She gives the example of “Florida (as did 37 other states) prohibited “all marriages” between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation inclusive” (xii). Not only marriages, but any other sort of contact or communication between the two races; white and black people were separated in all facilities.

The laws were configured to serve each one apart, “The Jim Crow law and customs spread to restaurants, stores, hotels, and other facilities. Sometimes black’s costumers were served at separate counters or areas within a store that had been barricaded” (Schug et al 110). Besides segregating them from private facilities, they were also segregated in the countryside, “It also separated African-Americans families from whites within suburbs, including racially segregated schools” (Reich 368). It was quite different for black children schooling, “During the Jim Crow era, small-town white Southerners all went to the same schools and often grew up with the classmates from elementary through high school” (Griffin & Hargis 306) .

Segregation went to its extreme when the black dead bodies were not allowed to be buried with white ones. “Another Georgia law made it a crime for the official in charge of a cemetery to allow ‘any colored’ to be buried on ground used for the burial of white people” (Tischauer xii). Not only Georgia’s law that sounded terribly racist and loaded with hatred, grudge and offence, the Louisiana law was brutal as well. “Louisiana law required separate buildings for blacks and white ‘blind persons’ in institutions for the disabled” (xii). So many laws were set differently in Southern States but served one aim which was putting blacks under their control, trying to block off all the exits of the damned dark world they coerced to live in. Such an unimaginable amount of hatred and malice annotates the American’s history in a unique way.

2. The Impact of Racism on the African American Community

Racism has been a serious problem in America. The way it was manifested and exercised upon racialized groups on both the interpersonal level and the institutional level affected the African-Americans perilously and severely. The racist actions, the discriminatory behaviours, prejudices and stereotypes as well as the practices and policies that were planned accurately and directed toward the black race and ethnicity caused psychological harms on the black’s individuals. Labels, terms, and the lampooning caricatures and imageries slogged the African-American identity and individuality as it created an already shaped and pictured figure that the blacks could not escape even if they tried hard.

They were born to find themselves already defined to the world in an awful manner and image that never incarnated the truth. Being stereotyped and prejudiced created a huge rift in the African-American unity and solidarity since all members of different ages became frustrated and lost in such racist world. No longer in the righteous place and role, they were denied as an equal race and equal human beings. Because of racism, the black individual was unable to fit

in their role; to decide freely who they are and stick to their convictions, principles and standards. Thus, they found themselves lost into whites' customs and standards .

Between fluctuating and drifting into the white's customs. African Americans' standards and norms are built and recreated, but they are mutilated and baleful as their souls are mutilated and hurt. Such dangerous changes in the society's perception of its members lead to profound psychological impacts on the individuals extended sometimes to madness and psychiatric disturbances. Alternatively, for those who tried to challenge it, they were ostracized and avoided, sometimes treated as pariahs. Living without prejudices, stereotypes and pressure became such a distant dream. Growing in an unhealthy environment would produce unhealthy people, the kind of people who were unable to bond to one another, to love, to aid, to consolidate, to console or even wipe one another's tears.

Family is the womb where life stems to community. It can be the source of sorrow, joy, love, hatred, affiliation, loneliness and shunning. As universally agreed, the family is the focal unit of the community and upon its strong oneness, a strong society is built. In addition, upon its scattered pieces a dispersed community emerged. Racism and discrimination influenced the black family's structure and community in a negative way. "African-American families and communities are negatively affected in many ways by continuing white-on-black racism [...] the various white assaults on black families often have a significant impact on the larger communities" (Feagin & McKinney 94-95).

In the late of 19th century and the early 20th century, the African-American family had to face various challenges and difficult realities in their everyday life. "Discriminatory and stressful economic conditions have generated a number of serious and continuing problems for African American families" (101). The low wages is not the only obstacle but also "The stress of unemployment and under-employment do indeed break up some families, thereby creating the much-noted single-parent families" (101). Because most families were poor and underwent

economic hindrances, parents had no time to spend with their children to give them love and affection. They spent all the day working and serving white's interests while their children are emotionally starving. Rosenblatt claims that "In poverty parents may work long, extremely hard hours to bring in a bare minimum of income, with the long hours and hard work depriving children of parental time and energy.(149) "

The tough experiences that the family's members are subjected to under the rule of a racist society decided and formed the quality of the relationships within the family. Since "the experience of racism is an everyday occurrence for many African Americans" (153), family would present a shelter to its members where they could forget their pain and cure their wounds, but no one can get blood from stones. The black family was aching because of the racist environment and was no longer able to function healthily because of its dismantled relationships. "Family is not always a haven, because family is too needy, wounded, or depleted to help one another because there are interpersonal or personal difficulties that make the home a battle ground or a lonely place rather than haven.(154) "

Racism contributed greatly in scattering the black woman and affecting her familial life and her pivotal role in society as a wife and a mother. The female's conditions were the hardest ever from the first time the African-Americans stepped in The American country. In addition to the heavy load of slavery on them and their ancestors, another burden was cumulating on the black female's shoulders; which was economic deprivation that was resulted from racism. The severe conditions pushed her away from her children. Angela Davis explains, "Black women have historically been forced to work outside the home in large numbers and have thus had less time, energy, and financial resources to devote to motherhood" (qtd.in Castaneda & Isgro 115).

The harm that was resulted from the marital conflicts such as domestic abuse would naturally affect the woman's psychological state as well as the mothering quality, "The link between maternal psychological distress and parenting quality was hypothesized to be partially

mediated by the quality of adult's intimate relationships. Such negativity has been shown to spill over into interactions with children, compromising parent-child relationship quality" (Boss & Mulligan 280). It was the same for single mothers who found themselves obliged into a situation where they played the role of both a mother and a father. Such depressive conditions would sometimes lead her to isolate herself from her children by neglecting them, "Single mothers who reported more depressive symptoms were less involved in their children's lives" (278).

The black male was not lucky either. He had his part of torture and misery during and after slavery; He was like the deposed king who found himself standing watching hopelessly while his kingdom is stolen, dismantled and raped in front of his eyes. The African man was influenced and harmed deeply because of racism. The economic difficulties stripped him off from his significant function as the head of the family; and the breadwinner who protects his family from hunger, "Bread-winners who leave their families because they have no jobs or jobs that are degrading with very low wages. The stress of unemployment and under-employment indeed break up some families, thereby creating the much-noted single-parent families" (Feagin & McKinney 101).

Some stereotypical images that accused the black male to be a negligent and abusive person did not take in account the tough life the black male had. As mentioned above, the African-American men were tortured and deeply harmed both physically and psychologically. Such unbearable experiences and accidents through their life had shaped successfully their actions and reactions in their environment that were usually cruel and abusive, "Oppression and social context shape their experiences, perceptions, and interactions in profound ways" (Carrillo & Tello 110). Some men could get rid of this dark past, but for the majority they "turn against themselves through destructive responses to self, to those they profess to love, and to the community" (110) their love to their beloved may take a very destructive and violent form, which obviously effect their parental role.

knight claimed “The overall effect of racism, slavery, inequalities, and their consequences have caused many African American men not to see themselves in leadership role in their home” (96). So it was clear that the father figure was absent in the home even if he was present which caused many problems. Due to historical inequalities, Black men were deprived from well-paid jobs; good education and many opportunities to enhance their situation to be able to afford for a family. The African-American father was unable to be a protector and a provider for his family. Besides that, he was incapable to be a model for his children, “Father’s leadership is very important to full parental guidance for their sons and equally as important to their daughters” (96). Racism and its rigid effects restricted the black man’s role to be only a biological father, “Great many African American men father children but do not provide economic or emotional support for them.(96) ”

The children’s innocence and weakness did not intercede on their behalf with the racist and cruel community they live in. The black children witnessed the most terrifying experiences and instances. They were victims of a discriminatory society and children of tortured and exhausted parents. At that era, school became a theatre which held different racial scenes performed by white children that truly reflected the grown up’s beliefs. Racial slurs, jokes and epithets became a common part in the black children’s schooling life, while no one interfered. “Many teachers often fail to recognize the pain that racial slurs cause children and adolescents. And when teachers have observed incidents they rarely intervene on behalf of the victim” (Seltzer & Johnson 137) .

The daily racist actions that faced the African-American children had a huge baleful impacted on their psyche, “Racial jokes and slurs [...] serve to demean or psychologically injure the individual” (137). Having a harsh experience during the day, expecting to go home where wounds were supposed to be healed would worsen the situation if other violent actions were running over there, “Many black children the family home is considered a refuge from the daily hostility and racism they experience. Thus, any violence inside the home can seriously

undermine that sense of safety and can lead to particular feelings of vulnerability and insecurity for children” (Hester et al 75)

Each member in the African-American society had its own kind of plight. The black children’s tribulation was not only for living in a racist society but also for being sons and daughters of victimized men and women, “Due to inequities, oppressive conditions, and uncontrollable stresses, individuals are turning against themselves, their loved ones, and others to vent their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness” (Harris & Miller 187). Unfortunately, the African-American children became an outlet for all the anger, complicated feelings and the deep scars of their fathers. The black children witnessed very dangerous and violent situations in the shelter they escaped to from the ferocious outside world. “Many African American men are especially caught up in this cycle of violent behaviours and victimization and consequently becoming an endangered species.(187) ”

It was not limited only to father-child relationship, but even mother-child relationship was slogged by racism and oppression, “Motherhood is not, of course, always harmonious. Mother-daughter and mother-son relationship are rarely perfect. This may be especially true where the social context is one of oppression” (Jean & Feagin 187). The domestic violence in the African-American home influenced woman as a mother negatively and shaped her relationship with her infants, “Some studies have suggested that the impact on children of living with domestic violence might be affected by the relationship between mother and child, especially linked to the amount of stress experienced by the mother” (Hester et al77). Being emotionally clueless and emotionally un-available caused the domestic violence to spike. “This is especially the case where the mother’s experiences mean that she is emotionally distanced, unavailable or even sometimes abusive to the child, such that consequent lack of support and attachment may increase the impact of the domestic violence for the child.(77) ”

Being an abusive father or mother, certainly would have a different perception if this family was an African-American one. Things in the black families were not similar. Black parents were not like normal ones. The Parents of black children were children of black slaves, and this burden had been bequeathed to them so it affected their life for generations. They tended to express the love they felt to their beloved ones in a way that is unique for someone who had a heritage of slavery and a present of racism and oppression. Dixon says that “Child abusing discipline, although it may result in or put the child at risk of maltreatment is not the intent of the parent or caregiver. Even though the discipline may reflect violence, the intent is to express love and care.(275) ”

3. Black Women and The Patriarchal System

The word ‘patriarch’ comes from a combination of the Latin word pater, ‘father’ and the Greek verb archo, ‘to rule’. A patriarch is thus a ruling ancestor who may have been the founding father of a family, a clan, or a nation.” The etymology of the term ‘patriarchy’ can be traced to the Greek patria, meaning “fatherland”. In an ecclesiastical sense, ‘Patriarchy’ refers to a system of society or government headed by fathers or elder males of a particular community (Hopkins & Thomas 68).

Patriarchy is a social system in which the male member is the chief of the family. Also, it is the depiction of the situation where the male is exercising his power over his female partner. Patriarchy is defined in the English Cambridge dictionary that, “is a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family or a society controlled by men in whom they use their power to their own advantage.” Hence, it is clear enough that the patriarchy is the cover of a relationship between persecutor and persecuted where dominance is the striking theme of such connection. “The relationship of a dominant group, considered superior, to a subordinate group, considered inferior, in which the dominance is mitigated by mutual obligations and reciprocal rights” (qtd.in Majstorovic&Lassen 01).

Patriarchy as an ideology and a set of ideas adopted by the society's members naturally consists and shapes the social system of the African American community which is, of course, related to some specific conditions and experiences that took place in people's past and present life. It is never about men themselves but about what shaped the men and pushed them to be such partners and fathers in their community. Gwen Hunnicutt explains that, "The concept of patriarchy is also useful in that it keeps the gaze directed toward social contexts rather than toward individual men who are motivated to dominate" (554) It is clear enough that the black male was exposed to certain instances and events that prompted him to seek dominance over his female.

Because of the domination of the white master over black men, the African American men lived a long pain as they were disfranchised from their women and were unable to protect and take care of them. Black men's sense of duty towards their wives and their families vanished because "African American men were emasculated during slavery and with the emasculation; they lost their power to protect their women. When an African American woman was raped by her owner, for example, African American men did not have the power to intervene" (Mandalapu1). They were chastised if they would intervene to protect and defend their females; they were prevented from the most substantial item of the man's personality. The core of manhood was collapsing when unable to retaliate. Anderson and Stewart state: "In general, Black men could not protect girlfriends, daughters, wives, or mothers from physical or sexual abuse without suffering physical punishment or being killed.(116) "

Slavery is abolished and other destructing winds blew on the black male by the emergence of racism in the American society, "While slavery is over, a racist society continues to exert dominion over black men and their maleness in ways subtler but hardly less castrating than during slavery" (Carbado239). Black men underwent terrifying conditions and experiences in the racist American society that resulted in their frustration. Low incomes, exhausting works, physical and psychological abuse were the main reasons for black men's suffering. Racism

affected the economic state of African American people negatively and joblessness and poverty were a clear aftermath of white racist treatments for laws such as the Black Codes and the Jim Crow. Hence, the black men lost their role their family and got the habit to be dependent; a failed husband and father .

The strong spirit and body of the black male who, for centuries, had the protector and provider role, faded away because of slavery and racism. He was no longer the head, the provider, and the saviour of his wife and his children, “I think that those black men who have been emasculated have been emasculated by the racist society, not by the black women” (Ladner162). This idea is referred to Willie Lynch, who is a man that studied the psychology of the slaves and suggested a method to control and emasculate slaves, “On December 25, 1712, was invited to the colony of Virginia to deliver a speech among the slave owners because they felt that they were losing control of their slaves in the plantations basically, the slaves were rebelling against the owners by fighting for and running away for freedom” (Brown 1). He found a way to destruct and emasculate the black man.

Lynch’s idea aimed to demolish the strong status of the black man by shaking the structure of the black family. Thus, he no longer became the defender and supplier of his household. The slave owners adopted this way by preventing the black male from his freedom. Thus, he was unable to feed and support his wife and his children. Slave owners aimed to make their slaves, “dependent” on their masters, and later on his female partner in order to emasculate them, which led to the decline of the black family order (Wallace).

The heavy jobs in farms or in other difficult domains could not destroy the black man. Neither fear of death, nor fear of torture would lead him to collapse. But the most influential factor that Lynch focused on is to make him feel unable to fit his role. As a result, the black man would lose his sense of manhood and masculinity in front of his wife. This method sought to create a gap in their relationship. By her being left without a male protection, the black lost

her faith in her partner's manhood the reason that led to the deflection in her psyche of being totally independent and frozen, this latter issue would reshape the identity of the black mother (Wallace).

The black male was violent toward the black female because he was feeling emasculated, "African American men are held to the breadwinner standard just as much as white men are. When they are not successful as breadwinners, African American men, like all men, often feel emasculated. One reaction to this feeling of emasculation can be violence" (Hattery and Smith 62). Violence against their women would make them feel capable of doing something successfully! When African Americans reported in an interview that, "Their use of violence against their female partners was a feeling of being emasculated because they were unemployed or employed but earning less than their wives and girlfriends thought they should be" (62). As a result, the black women plight relied on their responsibility to offset the needed feeling of men's emasculation. This responsibility classified her as a subject wife to black man.

The Black woman served to be a vent for the black male's anger, hatred and inability. The violent attitudes that were directed to the African-American woman made the Black man feel his manhood. Besides the physical abuse, sexual abuse against the black woman presented another form of compensating the black male manhood while she cooled him from the sweat of hatred and cured his feverish wounds "The use of woman as sexual objects and as proof of masculinity has made Black women the 'hated other' instead of the white man, who is the architect of patriarchy" (Hopkins & Thomas 68-69).

The more racist the society was, the more patriarchal the black community became, so the more hurtful the black male sexually went, "because Incest occurs within a family that had incorporated the values and standards of traditional patriarchal society, it is important to understand father' sexual abuse of daughters as an outgrowth of patriarchy, even though other circumstances may also be relevant" (White 59) The little girls are endangered in such society.

Daughters of abusive fathers and submissive mothers who were “denying the incident and failing to throw the father out, even though he “may also be physically and sexually abusing the mother.(59) ”

African American women suffered from racism especially as mothers. They were humiliated by being portrayed to the world in a very negative image. These stereotypical images, which were rooted deeply in history and became popular view about Black mothers, aimed to undervalue their sacred maternal role. The matriarch was one of the most commonly known stereotypes that deformed the picture of the African American mother. In general, the word matriarch is defined, according to Stephen:

A clan mother or chief is an autocratic female ruler of a human family, clan, or kinship, or of an animal grouping. The matriarch is usually the oldest female in extended family. Her authority over the others, as well as their trust in her, often stems from her knowledge and life skills, and especially in the acquisition in the distribution food. (qtd.in Webster)

According to Reiss, the word matriarch may not even refer to motherhood, as he explains, “motherhood is implied and perhaps preferred, but not mandatory” (ix). While in portraying the black mother, the term matriarch is always linked to her. It presents the African American mother negatively, Collins notes that the matriarch “symbolizes the ‘bad’ black mother” (qtd. in Dixon 71).

According to Dillon, the matriarch describes black women as governors and administrators who impose force over their households. Thereby, matriarchs force their men to leave their houses. This “bad” mother is the main reason for the frustration of the family and hence, the collapse of the black community. Moreover, the black matriarch is the main reason for poverty.(330)

The black mother’s representation as a matriarch raised negative assumptions about female-headed black families. The reason why these families suffered from poverty was that there was no man as breadwinner to support the family. These assumptions about black mothers

who took control over their families denounced them as bad and stupid mothers who had several children with multiple men. According to Collin “the matriarch is particularly problematic because it places the blame for the success or the failure of children on mothers” (qtd.in Ingle & Sutera 50). For both Ingle and Sutera: “Black mothers are seen from a white patriarchal viewpoint; which is problematic because it does not take into consideration the unequal political, social and economic factors that may affect black mothers” (51). This bad image that was given to the black mother did not take into consideration this harsh reality. Therefore, the white representation of black motherhood directs the popular understanding of the black mother in a wrong way .

The emergence of the misnamed description of the black mother as matriarch was an impact of the long life of bondage since suffering from slavery and racism influenced her character. The black woman endured grievous conditions where she was raped, tortured by white, and was subjected to take the responsibility of the domestic life of her master. Slavery had a great impact on shaping her personality and her identity as fierce, strong, brave and somewhat aggressive while expressing her emotions and feelings when playing the role of the mother.

The black woman was exposed to terrifying experiences where she was obliged to face them all alone since the majority of black men were taken away as slaves. Her struggle against the racial system in the American society to protect herself and her children made her develop a strong and stern character that would enable her to deal with the harshest situations. Racism, discrimination and oppression became daily routine for the African American woman. Eventually, the black mother learned how to coexist with such pain and hurt. She got the habit of enduring these heavy loads upon her shoulders without leaning on others. She tended to fight racism and segregation while she tried to rally her family and protect it from falling apart. Dr. Alvin and Poussaint argue, “It is because of that racism that the black women had to be strong since she frequently had to support her family.(160) ”

4. The Rise of Black Feminism

Black women were trapped by the slavery institution where they witnessed the darkest days ever in an endless circle of exploitation. The same as men, they were cruelly treated, demeaned, dehumanized, persecuted and over worked. Besides that, they were raped and coerced into sexual acts. Jean and Feagin declare: “slavery was riddled with torture and brutality toward enslaved women and men, and this brutality often had a sexual dimension .(104) ”

White masters used to contempt black people but could not stay away from the black female body: “During slavery, white men often professed being revolted by the physical characteristics including body odors (usually from hard, sweaty work), of those whom they enslaved. Somehow, nonetheless, white men suppressed this ‘distaste’ and sexually exploited many enslaved women” (104). This sort of abuse not only shook their sense of individuality, self-esteem and self-determination but also misrepresented them to the world as a sexual object “the image of the ‘bad’ black woman, in particular, which has persisted into the twentieth century, portrays her as sexually promiscuous and, because of her hard work as a laborer, physically powerful.(42-41) ”

Denying the humanity of Black women sanctioned all manner of physical, mental, and sexual cruelty on the part of white men. Thus the stereotypes of the black woman as sexual savage emerged and prospered. Even after slavery, white attitudes and behaviours toward Black women changed little. Perceiving them as slut, mammies, or tragic mulattoes legitimized the harsh treatment of black women leveled by white men and women (Bobo 57).

The Black female’s situation was not that good after the Emancipation Act. The end of slavery had never ended her ordeal. After slavery, the black female became a victim of a system that is based on subjugation and discrimination. Racism highlighted that era and influenced Black women’s life facets. So, the damage of slavery had been replaced by the impact of racism. Also, the images and attitudes that had emerged and directed the African-American women’s

life did not disappear after slavery. On the contrary, they continued to exist in a way that was hurtful as much as it had been. Crawford proclaims:

The institution of slavery no longer gripped the souls and psyche of black folk but its progeny, institutionalized racism took its place. The social stratification that emerged during slavery in the general society, as well as in the slave community, continued to develop and mature in sophistication and impact on the lives of African American women.(42)

The black female was torn up between racism and patriarchy. Facing various forms of oppression and stereotypes led to create great walls that bounded her identity. The African-American woman was unable to be herself by herself. She found a difficulty in determining and shaping who she is since an already role and identity is made for her. Her role was only reduced to a domestic function that always spins around her home responsibilities and her children. Beal illustrates ,

“A woman who stays at home, caring for children and the house, often leads an extremely sterile existence. She must lead her entire life as a satellite to her mate. He goes out into society and brings back a little piece of the world for her. His interests and his understanding of the world become her own and she cannot develop herself as an individual, having been reduced to only a biological function. This kind of woman leads a parasitic existence that can aptly be described as “legalized prostitution(67)””

In a racist society, the Black woman found herself physically unacceptable simply because her skin color and face features were distinct from the white ones. Black females were discriminated because of their physical appearance and shape. They were prevented from feeling themselves as black women since their black beauty was denied according to the white standards of beauty. Moor and Cosut point out the dilemma ,

Given the racist past and present of the United States, there are several identity and beauty issues that African American women face, since 1619, African American women and their beauty have been juxtaposed against white beauty have been juxtaposed against white beauty standards, particularly pertaining to their skin color and hair.(351)

Being sexually abused, socially refused and physically demeaned made the black female feel scattered and question her values and identity from white stand-point and standards. At this juncture, black female lost faith in her blackness and no more able to discover her stunning beauty as all she could see and read the degrading looks on her. She was lost because she saw herself from white racist eyes which made her wishing to be someone else, “The desire to change her outer appearance to meet a Eurocentric ideal may lead her to loathe her own physical appearance and believe that ‘Black’ is not beautiful...that she can only be lovely by impersonating someone else.(351) ”

For such misery and silence, the black female’s oppression is undeniable. All these unbearable conditions required an outlet where she could save herself, “black women and other historically groups aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/ or oppose prevailing social and economic justice” (Collins 9). Thus, African American women discover that being secured and safe from that destroying oppression cannot be fulfilled by remaining silent. Black female who voiced their rejection to oppression and discrimination are to be black feminist. Among many movements that appeared at that time, Black feminism rised to make the inaudible women heard, “In the early 1970s, many black feminists began to voice dissatisfaction with existing liberation movements [...] they began to develop organizations designed to address the dual, often multiple, forms of oppression that affected their own lives” (Barnett 116).

Makaryk states, “Black feminist criticism and theory emerged in the 1980s from the complex and conflicted relationship of black women to black men during the Black Power and Civil-Rights movement of the 1960s, and of women of colour to white women during the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1970s” (9). The Black women search for a field where she can define herself and shed the light on her specific situation and conflicts away from Black male interests as well as White women concerns, “Many black women recognized that while the Black Power was radically Afrocentric, it also remained powerfully androcentric” (9). They

tend to create something that is mainly about the black female and her weak status in the black community where she was oppressed by her male partner.

For never being enslaved nor doubly abused for being black and woman, the white woman has never understood the black female pain and suffering. For many years the black female has her own issues that were far away from those of the white female. Thus, by the emergence of the White feminism that seeks to assure the female's rights and privileges, the black female has never found a space for her plight in that movement. Although their concerns are quite similar, black and white females are still different for not sharing the same physical appearance, history and culture, "the feminist movement seemed to offer some redress but women of colour increasingly saw that the concerns and standards of the movement were those of white, middle-class women who tended to ignore the different needs and desires of women of colour.(9) "

From their reality and living circumstances that was related only to black females, a set of ideas are formed by themselves to fit the harsh conditions they experience, Patricia Hill Collins illustrates, "I suggest that Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it". Black feminism plays a major role in helping women to take back their sense of identity and celebrate their blackness as well as their womanhood. The shared opinions and knowledge by black females make them feel the unity and strength they need. Feeling proud for who they are provides them ease in their life. For it is the simplest yet the most relevant thing, the feeling of being normal and acceptable. Barbara Smith declares, "One of the greatest gifts of Black feminism to ourselves has been to make it a little easier simply to be Black and female."

Based on their reality and history, their knowledge, thoughts and attitudes are created. Black feminists unlike white feminists do not see or treat men as an enemy, “black feminists have refused to see black men simply as enemies, and their political allegiance may at times lie with men of their ethnic group rather than with white women” (Bryson 202). During slavery, while quarrelling with racism and in the toughest times ever, black males and females suffered together and bled together. Thus, white women could never understand the kind of bond that relates them. Even black male had been cruel and aggressive with his wife, this never meant to be eliminated from his partner’s life, “acknowledging the sexism of black men does not mean that we become “man-haters” or necessarily eliminate them from our lives. What it does mean is that we must struggle for a different basis of interaction with them” (Hook76).

5. The Black Female Identity from and Black Feminism

A space is needed to ache loudly; a groan must be released. If pain is silenced, it will never go away and it will never be cured. Thus Black females challenge their bitter reality and voice their suffering to the world. In different pieces of writing, Black feminism emerged to shape and assert a new identity to the black female. In a patriarchal and racist society, Black female writers tend to draw a new image that destroys all the false stereotypes against the African-American female. This was achieved by revealing what was happening behind the scene and unfolding the reality of harsh racism and patriarchy that caused the black women’s plight.

Black feminist writers have tackled many issues where the black female is the central element of the study or the tale. The black feminist literature diagnoses the African-American woman position in a racist and patriarchal society and gives a voice to the unheard offense and oppression she was exposed to. As a marginalized group, Black feminist writings serve to criticize and question the stereotypes and the modeled identity for the black female. This unique

sort of literature treats many themes such as sexual violence, racist stereotypes; oppression, the demeaning of black beauty as well as the effect of racism and patriarchy on black women's life.

Black women had been unjustly prevented from living freely. They kept be down and silenced in a racist and patriarchal society where they were burdened with psychological and physical weight. Because they were positioned in a complicated relationship between sexism and racism, black women had few or nearly no options to support their life and existence. Bell hooks examines the relationship between these two destroying institutions, "racism and patriarchy are not two separate institutions that intersect only in the lives of Black women. They are mutually supporting systems of domination and their relationship is essential to understanding the subordination of all women" () According to this analysis, Black females are considered to be doubly colonized and the jeopardy she was exposed to is doubled as well.

Many Black feminists analyse the oppressed status of the black female. Writers like Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Patricia Hill Collins and Deborah King, "theorized that black women's lives are colored by interlocking oppressions that are bounded by patriarchy, racism" (72). Pointing the finger at the core of the problem would not save black females from this quagmire unless black females they challenge and break the silence. Hook believes, "now it is time to write about who really the colored women are and hope to become" (qtd.in Torabi and Ghasemi 123). Writing about the desired identity gives hope and a chance to those submissive women who gave up to these unfair institutions. In fact, this ultimately strengthened and reinforced their self-determination and confidence.

Family is the most important institution where black females are contextualized in their suitable roles and attitudes. In addition, it determines others behaviors and attitudes toward the black females themselves. If family is deconstructed because of racism and patriarchy, the black female position is destroyed as well. So family and relationships are designed according to the society type. Thus Black feminist writers give such a great importance to this relevant theme,

“black feminist writers have turned their attention increasingly to the family, broadly defined, as a site at which black women and children suffer the varied and conjoined effects of racist and patriarchal exploitation” (Valerie 205).

The way black females perceive themselves affects the way they act and interact in the society. Moreover, self-definition and self-perception decides how people treat and perceive them. Thus, they cannot enhance their situation and get rid of oppression without creating new perception and new spirit for themselves. Collins says, “Black feminist thought cannot challenge intersecting oppressions without empowering African-American women. Because self-definition is key to individual group and empowerment” (36). Indeed, this new spirit can only be achieved if black female reconciles with themselves and their hurtful history, Hooks notes, “oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story.(254) ”

Maria Stewart, the first African American woman lecturer on political issues. She refused the domestic of black women and defied black female to refuse the passive portrayal of black femininity that was pervasive at that time “pointing out that race, gender, and class oppression were fundamental causes of black women’s poverty [...] to Stewart, the power of self-definition was essential, for black women’s survival was at stake”. Stewart asked them to seek their rights and revolt against the limited role they used to perform, especially as mothers, by inviting them to not only feed their children but also to help the children be themselves by making them seek “knowledge, the love of virtue and the cultivation of a pure heart” (McCann and Kyna)

Black feminist writers stress on describing and embodying the terrible sexual experiences that the black female had. She was assaulted and harassed twice by white and black males. The aftermath of such incidents can be destructive especially to her sense of identity. When all the events that happened in her life are related to her body, the African-American

perspective toward herself is generally affected negatively. Sexual violence presents a huge part from her miserable experiences, “Black feminist writing provides an incisive critical perspective on sexual political issues that affect Black women- for example, the issue of sexual violence” (Warhol and hrndl 786).

The black female had been denied from all rights and privileges during the past years. She was never asked when it came to her body. Because even after slavery, the African American women’s body still a property that is owned by any male regarding his race, white or black. Being easily accessed, led to labeling and stereotyping her with bad and denigrating images such as, slut, whore, snag, mummies, jezebels and emasculating sapphires. Collins writes, “Black feminist theory argues that African American women in the United States have been violently positioned as the “objectified other” (qtd.in 272 Auletto and Sableski) .

No one gave the Black female any excuses or even tried to know why she was easily accessed. As mentioned above, the black female lost the sense of her body; she became submissive and rather subjugated to these bad images. She somewhat saw herself from this demeaning perspective. As a result, Black feminist writers were interested to fight against these stereotypes, “On issues of sex and sexuality, black feminists are still working against the stereotypes of black women’s animalistic, wanton sexuality” (Anderson 123) .

The African American female identity was rocked and deformed. Hence, Black feminist writers shed light on that danger that threatened and shook the black female identity. Many works and novels addressed and tackled that main point to clarify and uncover the reality of the sexual abuse the black female was exposed to. Thus a new understanding sprang which marks the growing of new African American female identity. Lorde explains, “The differential treatment these women endure transcends sexual orientation, and ultimately gives rise to African American women’s self-defined point” (qtd.in Auletto and Sableski 272).

Another crucial factor that influences the black female negatively is being unable to love herself. The white domineering system and its controlling values devalue the black beauty and physical appearance of the black women. Hence, feelings of ugliness and insecurity are generated by African American women. Black feminist writers glorifies their blackness and their distinct beauty by describing themselves in a new stunning way,

“one of the profound liberating effects of the rise in black feminist literature is the ability of African American women writers to reconstruct the beauty norm for black females outside the dominant controlling images of white beauty standards” (Beaulieu51).

They fight the manipulative image that blackness means ugliness. They aim to display how being different can mean beauty which destroys the white illusion about black female’s physical appearance, “Black feminist writers dissipate and fracture the white gaze that looks upon the black female as not white, and therefore not beautiful, and instead present ideal images of beautiful, desirable black women.(51) ”

Chapter Two: Identity (DE) Formation Through Love and Friendship

As a black feminist, Toni Morrison has joined Angela Davis, Gloria Jean Watkins (bell hooks), Kimberlé Williams, Patricia Hill Collins and Alice Walker in their fight against racism, sexism, and gender stereotypes. Black feminism is different from classic feminism as Patricia Hill Collins clarifies, “To me, feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels- sex, race, and class...” Black feminism highlighted other problems that classic feminism did not address, mainly the issue of race.

In her first two master pieces, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, Toni Morrison stresses on the impact of sexism and racism on the kind of identity black female may develop. The author demonstrates how men are typically dependent on women, especially in economic financial. Men in the novels are unable to raise a family and solve their problems which lead black women to find themselves, obliged to face everything alone and feel unsupported. They are obliged to develop an identity of an independent women. Moreover, the theme of racism is developed throughout the novels because black women’s identity is also shaped and affected by racial stereotypes and conventions. Morrison focuses on the issue of racism and its impact perfectly portrays the life of black people, the interaction between them, and with the whites in the community.

1. Identity in the Whirling Vortex of Racism and Sexism

The Bluest Eye explores the impact of white ideology on the black community. The novel also deals with some other tragic dimensions of black life such as female abuse and male emasculation. However, no solutions to the problems are offered, nor does the novel attempt to simplify the complex realities. Morrison simply invites her readers to examine the ache caused by sexism and racism to black female’s psyche.

The black passive male who is totally unsupportive to his wife and family is essential issue in the novel. He is embodied in the most important male character in the novel, Cholly, Pecola's father. He failed his family at all levels. He is constantly referred to as a drunk careless man. He fights with his wife whenever he comes back home and never do his duties as a husband or a father. Morrison even dehumanize him in the script where she describes the way Cholly burned his house and put his family outdoors, "but that old Dog Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife's head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors" And in another part she states, "Cholly Breedlove, then, a renting black, having put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger" (Morrison 17-18).

Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove always fight causing pain for each other and for their son and daughter. Sammy reacts to these fights by cursing and running away from home. He would disappear for days, weeks and sometimes months. However, Pecola is obliged to stay at home and bear the pain because she is a girl. Pecola knows that her family and society would never tolerate her running away from home the way they did with Sammy. The society have agreed upon some rules concerning her gender and one of them was the prohibition of running away no matter how convenient the reasons were.

Sometimes, she would pray God to disappear and in her sub-conscious she feels that she is disappearing, "'Please, God,' she whispered into the palm of her hand. 'Please make me disappear.' She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away" But her eyes are never gone. They are always there witnessing the miserable life she has, "Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left" (45).

As a result of Cholly's inability to provide Pauline with all what she needs, Pauline tries to fill his financial shortage. She starts working in as a housekeeper for the Fishers' white family. Pauline, by observing white families, learns to see patriarchy as desirable, and feels

disappointed that her life does not fit it. She gets convinced that life criteria and standards declared by white supremacy are right. She lives her life and treats her family members in accordance with those imposed ideals.

Moreover, after losing one of her front teeth, Pauline realizes that she would never be able to fit in the white standard of beauty. She has very dark skin. She can never live according to Western white standards, she decides that her own life and family are not priorities. Pauline starts dedicating herself almost exclusively to her job for the white family, “More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man—they were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely” (125)

Like her mother Pecola, the protagonist of the novel, suffers from the mainstream ideals of beauty. Her struggle, in fact, is the main problem discussed along the novel. Pecola grows up in humiliation because she is black, poor and considered ugly by everyone she knows. She is discriminated against by the children from the school, by the owner of the market where she buys candies, by everyone, even by her mother. Her only way out for a normal life is to have beauty. Therefore, she develops a kind of obsession for the most loved child in her country, the child actress Shirley. She is considered as the prettiest girl in the country. Pecola starts drinking milk several times a day in a cup decorated with the picture of the young actress Shirley. Moreover, she begins to eat Mary Jane candies, also pictured with the image of a beautiful white girl, “Three pennies had bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane. Lovely Mary Jane, for whom a candy is named” (50). This ritual is done every day by Pecola because she thinks that drinking milk in that cup or eating those candies will make her be like them and obtain beauty.

Pecola’s journey through her unfortunate circumstances is a prove that without family support, she is unable to reject community conventions which try to assert power over her. She

starts to believe the negativity she feels towards herself and questions her own self-worth. Pecola Breedlove is damaged by the toxic public messages. The ugliness of the Breedloves family is cruelly portrayed in the novel. In a very interesting script, Morrison speaks about the physical and emotional ugliness. Cholly is a good-looking black man with an ugly heart. However, the ugliness of the other members of the family is clear on their faces,

But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior, the rest of the family—Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove—wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. (38)

They were declared to be ugly by the white master and they simply agreed to this unfair declaration with no efforts of resistance. All what they have lived and experienced in their life reinforced the white master's statement. There is nothing in their memory to help them rebel against the inferior identity shaped for them by the discriminating society, "The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right"" (39).

Pauline Breedlove and Pecola are black characters who try to conform to an imposed ideals of femininity. They are absorbed and marginalized by the "cultural icons portraying physical beauty: movies, billboards, magazines, books, newspapers, window signs, dolls, and drinking cups" (Gibson 20). Pauline Breedlove, for example, learns about physical beauty from the movies. Morrison herself said, "along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another – physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion" (95).

The novel starts with the description of an ideal white family of a school reading book, where we meet Dick and Jane and their lovely parents living in a fine house with a lovely dog and a cat. The Dick and Jane text functions as "the hegemonizing force of an ideology focused

by the supremacy of ‘the bluest eye’ by which a dominant culture reproduces its hierarchical power structures” (Grewal 24).

As Donald B. Gibson also argues, the Dick and Jane text implies one of the primary and most insidious ways that the dominant culture exercises its hegemony, through the educational system. It reveals the role of education in both oppressing the victim – and more to the point – teaching the victim how to oppress her own black self by internalizing the values that dictate standards of beauty (Gibson 20).

Consequently, the black women characters see themselves through the eyes of white people. They follow the ideal of white femininity. This makes them hate their blackness which in turn leads to self-hatred. However, not all the black characters adore Western standards of beauty. The novel also shows black people who are aware of the danger of adopting Western standards of beauty. This type of people is presented in Claudia, the young girl narrator. While Pecola and Frieda adored Shirley Temple, Claudia hated her. She did not hate Shirley Temple because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, an African American tap dancer and actor. According to Claudia, “he is her friend, her uncle, her daddy, and he should have been dancing and laughing with her” (17). She feels that Temple is taking something which belongs to her, to her culture.

The community around us can shape and define us only if we give them the right to do so. However, if we fight back and hold on to the things we believe in, they are no longer able to define us the way they want. Claudia, for example, was defiant and headstrong. She had protective and loving parents consequently she could grow up as a strong black female who is proud of her race. Pecola on the other hand never had positive role-model in her family. They reinforced what white community labelled them with; that they were ‘ugly’ people. The novel, *Sula*, highlights the miserable life of black people in the Bottom community as long as they are governed and dominated by the white men. The relationship between black and white people is

based on racism, supremacy, and the deception of white people over the feeble and powerless African Americans.

The setting of *Sula*, where the major events happen and the characters live, takes place in Medallion, Ohio. This city, in fact, has two portions; the rich land of the small valley of Ohio where middle class white people live, and the poor hilly lands of Medallion where black people settle. Even though the two segments are so close to each other, the interaction between white and black people in the novel is nearly non-existent.

The prologue of the novel gives the readers knowledge and insights of the history and the destruction of the Bottom community in almost four pages. Black Americans who have to deal with the continuity of segregation and racism reside in the neighborhood that is referred to by the name of the Bottom. The origin of this proper name is typically a racist act.

It is explained in the novel in a short incident how the black neighborhood comes to be known as the “Bottom” although it is situated above the valley land. The Bottom is more than a land to reside in. It is relevant to the plot of the novel. It is symbolic and indicates the kind of racist connections between whites and blacks. It also shows the supremacy and exploitation of white masters over their black slaves. The narrative mentions, “the master said, “Oh, no! See those hills? That’s bottom land, rich and fertile.” “But it’s high up in the hell,” said the slave. “High up from us,” said the master, “but when god looks down, it’s the bottom. That’s why we call it so. It’s the bottom of heaven-best land there is”” (11).

The anecdote about the insertion of the Bottom as a “nigger joke” is that a slave is promised to be rewarded by giving him freedom and later a bottom land, that is to say, the fertile land of the valley, if he accomplishes some very challenging works. The diligent slave does his job perfectly and the master gives him his freedom but refuses to give up the fertile river land to his slave. Manipulating his words, the master tells the slave that he would give him

the top land that is called the Bottom because it is the nearest place to God (10). This cruel joke affects the life of the slave when he finds that the hilly land is so hard to form.

The master takes advantage of the naïve slave by greed and deception. Using his superiority, controlling, and manipulating words, the white master acts in a racist way with his slave. Therefore, as Dubey explains, “The nigger joke perpetuates the history of racial exploitation, casting the white slave master as an omnipotent manipulator and blacks as his innocent dupes” (57).

Morrison’s novel depicts relationships between men and women and how they both function and affect one another. Morrison describes men as powerless, totally irresponsible, and dependent on their women. In addition, they are hopelessly incapable of bettering themselves. Men and women in the Bottom community are a careless husband and a struggling wife; a negligent father and self-sacrificing mother.

Black men undergo terrifying conditions and experiences in the racist American society which results in their frustration. The submissive and subjective role that bondage imposes on them causes their feeling of emasculation as they lose their real sense of manhood. This defect in their manhood and personality makes them unable to fit in their natural role with their women and their families. Therefore, “The characters in the novel face many difficulties when trying to assimilate into the American mainstream society and the racial oppression has a great impact on their interpersonal relationship” (Pernicova 45).

The model of the independent, caring and hard worker man who provides his family with all their needs, and assiduously tries to make his wife and children live comfortably does not exist in the novel of Morrison, *Sula*. The first male character who is presented in the novel is Shadrack. He is a young black man who fights in World War I. Because of the horrible things he witnesses in the wartime, he becomes unfortunately a shell-shocked person. Shadrack is a

jobless man who works only “on Tuesdays and Fridays he sold the fish that he had caught that morning, the rest of the week he was drunk, loud obscene, funny and outrageous” (15).

Tar Baby is one of the settlers of the Bottom. “Most people said he was half white” (31). Eva gives “a small room of the kitchen to Tar Baby” (29). He lives in her house. Tar Bay is one of the jobless men in the community who is, in fact, fond of “cheap wine” (31), eat a little and drink a lot, and one of the young men, the old lady takes care of. Doing nothing and spending most of his time sitting on a chair gazing on the wall, he does nothing to help or serve others.

Plum Peace is a young black man, and Eva’s Peace youngest son. He is soldiered in World War I and returns a devastated and traumatized man like Shadrack because of what he experiences in the war. If not plummeting to addiction of drugs, Plum spends his time sleeping. He lives in Eva’s house, who strives to comfort him and take care of him; he is totally dependent on his mother. Page states that “The males in Sula, are displaced by their inferior racial status. Tar Baby and Plum lose their identities. They are like Shadrack, whose sense of a self and other is shattered in the war” (71).

Eva Peace is an elderly woman with one leg, who is the matriarch of the Peace family. She tends to help and support other people. She has a “big old house” (29) that is composed of “many rooms” (26). “Among the tenants in that big old house were the children Eva took in” (29). Besides children, Eva hosts men in her house. Eva Peace picks up the homeless, orphaned, and jobless people in her house. She administrates their life while she “sat on a wagon on the third floor directing the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of boarders” (26). Eva is the typical example of a caring, responsible, and domineering black woman over the feeble and functionless men. “Importantly, in *Sula*, Morrison circumvents the stereotype of black males as “feminized” by the dominant order or by black women” (Stockton 87).

More notably, Morrison’s novel, *Sula*, tells the story of two women’s bonding, Sula and Nel’s, that lasts over a period of almost 45 years, and that is formed out of several

circumstances. Their relationships start from childhood and endure so many changes until adulthood. It grows with shared dreams and different thoughts but is confronted with stereotypes and society conventions. Sula and Nel, despite their different backgrounds and personalities, succeed in making one another's life meaningful.

Their relationship is based on their discovery that as black women must fight with the constrictions of society and racism; thus, their need for one another becomes necessary. In an early age, the two girls know what means to be a woman in a conventional society. Freedom and personal achievement are forbidden to women who live under supremacy and patriarchal domination. Hence, they tend to create something else by finding the love they need. As the narrator describes:

Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had to set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to go on. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for (52).

Sula and Nel, both girls from different backgrounds, struggle against their society's expectations and aim to invent themselves away from others' standards. They seek to draw their role in the society and not to fit in the role that their society defines for them.

Nel's mother, Helene Sabat, is oppressive and dominating. She entertains controlling her only child, Nel. Under Helene's orders, Nel is raised "obedient and polite" (18), with no reactions to her mother's disciplines. Moreover, she restricts her imagination and silences "any enthusiasm" the child reveals (18). What Helene aims to fulfil, is not only to teach but to fit her daughter to black society's conventions and principles. She also wants to make her daughter a model of the traditional black woman. Her mother does what she thinks is right for her child without asking her what she wants or prefers; and as a result, Nel feels discontent. The little girl grows to feel the need of being her true self. In fact, it is exactly what Sula assists Nel to do.

Helene does not like the way her daughter, Nel, looks. She thinks that Nel “had not inherited the great beauty that was hers: that her skin had dusk in it, that her lashes were substantial but not undignified in their length, that she had taken the broad flat nose of Wiley (although Helene expected to improve it somewhat)” (18). Helene insists on Nel to pull her nose to make it narrower even if Nel hates to do it. This is clearly mentioned in their conversation, ““While you sittin’ there, honey, go “head and pull your nose”. “It hurts, Mamma”. “Don’t you want a nice nose when you grow up?”” (39).

After the first and last trip that Nel has with her mother to New Orleans, Nel discovers how much she feels disparate from her mother and her grandmother. In the meantime, the little girl looks at the mirror and says, “I’m me. I’m not their daughter” (68). Consequently, a great feeling of me-ness swamps her. Nel feels a sense of selfhood and individualism apart from all others in the community. Matus notes that Morrison “is in part of feminism experiment and tries to imagine a self-creation, rebelling from, and at odds with, all previous perception” (60). Nel resolves to be wonderful as she recognizes that what she wants is to create herself away from her mother’s principles and from what the society expects.

Nel’s parents succeed in making their daughter choose to settle down and construct a family. She gives up her wiliness for a life that is full of independence and adventures to fit in the conventional social role of being both a good wife and an excellent mother, a role that is previously defined by society. By doing so, Nel accepts the traditional boundaries which are drawn by her race and gender.

On the other hand, Sula refuses to accept the known mores and chooses to stand alone instead of converting to her society’s conventional ideas. Thus, her selfhood is her main goal. Sula leaves the town on Nel’s wedding day. The feeling of loss of the only thing she loves and depends on causes her to take a trip that lasts for ten years, exploring life outside the Bottom community.

Sula prefers to do what she wants and what suits her. Sula's desire to be educated and to chase a career drives her to go to college even if it is something that most people in her community rarely do. Furthermore, Sula refuses to get married and conform to the societal role of the female as a mother, a wife, and a server to her household like all women in her age.

“Accompanied by a plague of robins, Sula came back to Medallion” (57). People suspect the reasons of this plague and they predict something bad and evil, it is a sign in its own word and they associate it with Sula's return. There are many reasons that reinforce the society's reaction. It is basically her total difference from them.

While arguing with her grandmother, for example, Sula tells Eva that she wants to build herself. She refuses to marry and declares, “I want to make myself” (21). This declaration clarifies the burden that African American woman bears while trying to be self-determined and to practice her own freedom of choice.

2. Sula's and Pecola's Formative Experience

Black children attain the assumption of being inferior because of what they experience during their childhood. The communities and families where they live are the source of their thoughts and beliefs which form their identities as adults. Toni Morrison perfectly portrays this process of identity development for both children and adults characters. She depicts Pecola and Claudia's childhood experiences with different society members and the way these experiences affected their personality building. For adults, for example, she tackles various stages in the lives of Mrs. And Mr. Breedlove. She aims at showing the reasons that made them become such a mother and a father.

Pecola Breedlove's interaction with a white shopkeeper in her childhood showcases Pecola's understanding of the rejection and invisibility she experiences in her society because of her blackness. In the white shopkeeper, Pecola notes, “the total absence of human recognition-- the glazed separateness.” The vacuum Pecola saw in his eyes was not new. It

reminds her of the looks she constantly sees in white people's eyes. She knows that this distaste is because of her skin color. Pecola is well aware that "the distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her flux and anticipation. Her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, and creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes." (48-49).

She does not feel comfortable with the shopkeeper's looks consequently she cannot clearly say what she wants to buy. Mr. Yacobowski gets angry because of her silence and yell at her. When Pecola holds the money towards him, he hesitates and takes long time to move his hand towards her to get the pennies in a sign of disgust of touching her. She is aware of the "interest, disgust, even anger, in male grown eyes" that the people around her see her with (49). SusmitaRoye expresses how "nothing can convince these little girls of their otherness more than this utter lack of recognition of their humanity in the eyes of the other, mostly white people."

Pecola's life at school is also sad and destructive. The girls use her as a tool to annoy boys by telling them that they love Pecola; "Body loves Pecola!". On the other hand, boys insult Pecola and bully her "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo black e moyadadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo ..." (65). Teachers also avoid looking at her or saying her name. They do it only when they are obliged to.

Unlike Pecola, Maureen is a white and rich girl. She is highly loved and respected by boys, teachers and everyone.

She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet. (62).

Maureen acts kindly to the girls when she first meets them. She suggests they walk back home together. She has friendly conversation with them and she even buys ice-cream for

Pecola. However, after few minutes they starts fighting and Maureen performs the expected white attitude. She crosses the street screaming at the girls “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!” (73).

Mrs. Geraldine is another character who abuses Pecola. She is a light-skinned African American woman. She encourages her child to play with white children only. She has a black cat which she loves and cares for more than her own son. Because he is not allowed to play with black children, Junior spends most of his time alone at home. One day, Pecola is passing through their garden. He interrupts her walk and asked her to play with him. She refuses at first. He persuades her to come in by telling her that he will show her some cute little kittens and that she can take one.

Geraldine’s son traps Pecola in a room and used the black cat to scare her. However, the cat feels so comfortable and starts playing with Pecola. When he sees that, it remindshim of his own mother’s love for the cat which he thinks should be directed to him. He angrily grabs the cat and flings it against the window. Geraldine walks in and sees her beloved cat dead on the floor. Junior blames Pecola for killing the cat. His mother approaches to examine Pecola, “the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out.” Geraldine orders Pecola, “get out of my house”, calling her a “nasty little black bitch” (91- 92).

When Geraldine sees Pecola, “she is reminded of everything she has sought to escape everything associated with the poor struggling African masses: their physical appearance, their behavioural patterns, their lifestyle, their speech patterns.” Her reaction resembles her efforts to detach herself from her own identity. Her encounter with Pecola is like facing her essential fear she tries to escape her whole life. Pecola seems to embody all the negative aspects of her views of black girls. Therefore, her rejection to Pecola is her way to repress her black characteristics which are not ‘fitted’ to white femininity as she strives “to get rid of the

funkiness” (91). On her way back home, Pecola realizes that she is not rejected by her white superiors only but by those who share race and blackness with her as well.

Distinct from Pecola, Claudia and her sister Frieda are happy with their difference, their blackness as narrated by Claudia: “We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness” (57). This may suggest that Claudia resists the pressure to conform to a white vision of beauty.

However, Claudia learns to love white symbols of beauty such as Shirley Temple: “I learned much later to worship her, just as I learned to delight in cleanliness...” (16). Claudia’s learning to love Shirley Temple suggests two things. Firstly, it reflects the mother-daughter relationship. Claudia’s love of Shirley Temple, is a result of her mother pressure, as Anne Anlin Cheng argues. It cannot be read as a gesture of social compliance only but as a response to the call of the mother as well. Secondly, Claudia’s learning to love Shirley Temple proposes that “beauty” is something we learn about in our communities. It is not “natural” or “inherent” (Cheng 200).

Although Claudia and Frieda, at the time, do not possess a sense of self-hatred, Claudia becomes aware that Shirley Temple and Maureen’s appearance is what makes them beautiful. Claudia realizes that the thing to fear is the standards that make girls like them be seen as beautiful and thus worthy.

The youngest MacTeer’s resistance to white beauty standards is also represented by her hatred for blond blue-eyed dolls. She interrogates the way adults thought these kinds of dolls would be the perfect gift for their children. Claudia declares that she did not want white dolls for Christmas, and if any adult had asked what she truly desired, she would have said that,

“I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been, ‘Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?’ I could have spoken up, ‘I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama’s kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone.’” (19-20).

The African American tradition is presented as better alternative to the quest of beauty standards.

For the character of Cholly, he is abandoned by both his mother and father when he was a new born baby. However, he is taken in by his Aunt Jimmy and surrounded by a helpful community of old black women. Cholly’s sorrow over his situation south him during his childhood; He was calm and kind. Through time, this grief emptied him from feelings. When his aunt dies he tries to find his father. He travels for days in order to find him and he succeeds in finding him at the end. However, he does not have enough courage to say to him that he is his own son; maybe because he finds no solution in his father’s character that would be worth trying to build a father-son relationship with him.

Cholly Breedlove is a character carefully examined in the novel. Having suffered abuse during his teenage years, the boy turned into an abuser himself. The anger caused by the humiliation Cholly suffered from white men when he was thirteen was misdirected at those whom he is supposed to love and take care of, those who are even in more vulnerable position than his own women. He abuses his own daughter.

It is absolutely clear that Cholly is portrayed as an oppressor in the novel. However, he is also a victim of oppression. As hooks reminds us, “men too are victimized”, and “to be an oppressor is dehumanizing and anti-human in nature” (hooks 158). It is patriarchy that leads to men to believe they should be superior to women, and makes fathers act like monsters, husbands and lovers rape, brothers feel ashamed for caring for their sisters, and “denies all men the emotional life that would act as a humanizing, self-affirming force in their lives” (hooks 158). Being abusive father is not Cholly’s choice after all. It is inevitable result of what he has been exposed to during his whole life.

Pauline William, Pecola's mother, is the ninth of eleven children. she lives on a ridge of Red-Alabama. When she is two years old, her foot is injured by a nail at the road. Therefore, her foot is lame. Due to this sad accident, Pauline is treated differently; no one made funny jokes about her action, no one teased her, and no one cared about what she likes or dislikes. When her mother, Mrs. Williams, starts working as maid in a white people house, Pauline is the one to take care of her young brothers and does all the house work. She is oppressed and marginalized by her own family. She never feels belonging to that family. Her life as a child explains all about the harsh way she treats her family with. She simply knows no other way of being a mother. That is the only kind of family she knows.

In her teenage, Pauline starts to fantasize about men and sex. She wants to be loved and touched. Every girl in her age starts to have these feelings but for her the feelings are stronger because she never felt loved or appreciated by her family. Moreover, the society where she lived considered men as significant for women's comfort; She needed comfort so she needed a man. During this very crucial timing in her life, Cholly come in the picture. They fall in love, get married and move to Ohio for a better life.

When they move, Pauline is faced with totally different society. She is shocked by the white culture dominance that can be seen clearly. Besides, even black women like her look differently and consider her strange because she does not straight her hair and dresses in a different way. Pauline starts to shape her new conviction about feminine standards of beauty. She leans more about it when she starts going to Cinema.

Going to the picture show is extremely destructive to Pauline's life because it made her hate her family; more precisely her husband and daughter. First, she is exposed to the tenderness of white men; how they treat their wives and daughters with love. She compares these movie stars thrilling kindness with her husband rudeness,

“The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Every time I got, I went. I'd go early, before the show started. They'd cut

off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in them pictures. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard." (123)

Second, when she gives birth to Pecola all she could see in her is her black facial features. The features that are totally distinct from those of white beautiful little girls in movies. All she could see in her new-born baby is how much she was ugly: "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly." (126).

Sula Peace, the only child of Hannah Peace is raised in a house that is always messy and full of different people, visitors and strangers. She loses her father when she was three years old. Sula's personality and life perspectives are influenced mainly by her upbringing environment. For instance, the matriarchal power in her house that is clear in the novel results from, if not the absence of men in the house, the presence of drunk and jobless men. Also her mother's frequent sexual relationships with men and her one-legged grandmother's flirting construct Sula's feeling that men are not necessary for women existence and having sex can be a part of her daily routine. This recognition and observation at a very young age lead her to draw a different path that defines "Sula".

Morrison portrays Sula as a young woman who tends to live free from the expectations of the Bottom community. Sula has the strength and bravery that other black women do not have. These characteristics distinguish her from other people and make her the center of different controversial talking points. The author distinguishes her character, Sula, with a birth mark "that spread from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow" (37-38).

The birthmark arouses different interpretations among the people of the Bottom. Sula, the child is beautiful and innocent when the birth mark is described as a "stemmed rose" (38). As, Sula grows "the birth mark over her eye was getting darker and looked more and more like stem and rose" (50). The rose develops a stem and Sula develops her sense of individuality in the conformist society.

When Sula is young, she travels away from her town but “accompanied by a plague of robins, Sula came back to Medallion” (57). People suspect the reasons of this plague and they predict something bad and evil, it is a sign in its own word and they associate it with Sula’s return. There are many reasons that reinforce the society’s reaction. It is basically her total difference from them.

The interesting relationship that was between Sula and Nel from childhood to maturity is reinforced by having common experiences. They are the only children in their families; they both experience a failed mother-daughter relationship; and their fathers are absent as Sula is a fatherless child and Nel’s father is always away because of his job. Therefore, their connection is maintained to offset the lack of required affection. Their meeting is an opportunity to build an intense relationship where they support and empower each other. In The love they hold inside themselves towards each other helps to free them from the conventions and judgment of their society, as well their families.

At an early age, Sula and Nel’s feeling of innocence is shaken because of the tough discovery that they are neither “male” nor “white”. This awareness shows them the unfair world they live in, gives them the insight of their wants, and ends feelings of isolation and loss because they find refuge in one another as a result of this awareness.

Sula, as a child as well, dreams she is riding a horse and moving towards another person.

The narrative describes:

“Sula, also an only child, but wedged into a household of throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices and the slamming of doors, spent hours in attic behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of a someone who shared both the taste and the speed” (52).

These pictured dreams are in fact complementary parts. Nel dreams of the coming of a “prince”; and on the other hand, Sula is that prince of Nel. These dreams become true when both girls meet. Eventually, they find a way that enable the two girls to make the two parted

dreams come true; Therefore, their relationship helps them to become what they always dream to be; since their childhood, their own selves. Nel is the delicate and beautiful princess and Sula is the strong and free woman with a masculine character.

When Nel is harassed by a group of Irish boys and she is afraid of taking the shortest way to school in order not to meet them, it is Sula who encourages her to confront them when. She defends Nel and acts like a man who has to protect his woman. Sula is brave enough to face a group of boys alone even if she is a girl of 12 years old. She slashes the tip of her finger with a knife and says “if I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you?”(39). She shows them how she is willing to do more than this to anyone who could touch or annoy Nel.

The two friends spend most times together, and meet “without even planning it” (39). Their growing bodies create feeling of curiosity that urges the girls to explore men and their sexuality. For the purpose of passing by men and feel the joy of their regards and flirts, “They moved toward the ice cream parlor like tightrope walkers” (37). “Even if it was too cool for ice cream” (37). The males of the bottom community start to see the little girls as young women. Together, Sula and Nel begin to explore the “theme” of “men” since sharing experience of their own is one of the bases of their relationship.

The marital relationship is another relevant relationship that defines the community’s life, and shapes its structure. Morrison, in her novel, sheds light on the couple relationship in the Bottom community and shows how the female characters play the major role and take everything upon their shoulders. On the other hand, men are free to do what suits them, and are independent to escape from the situation they are in. In his article, “Emasculation and the Male Character in Sula by Toni Morrison”, Ferdinand Kpohoué clarifies that; “Male characters are shaped to be absent, irresponsible or insane and female characters take care of the household and fight for their own survival” (n.p.).

Low incomes, exhausting works, physical and psychological abuse are the main reasons for black men's emasculation and black women's plight. As a result, responsibility of black women is to offset the needed feeling of men's emasculation. This responsibility classifies her as a subject wife to black man. This role is to define the woman's function in her relationship with the black man in the American racist community.

Because of the domination of the white master over black men, the African American men live a long pain as they are disfranchised from their women and are unable to protect and take care of them. Black men's sense of duty towards their wives and their families vanishes because "African American men were emasculated during slavery and with the emasculation; they lost their power to protect their women. When an African American woman was raped by her owner, for example, African American men did not have the power to intervene" (Mandalapu 1).

Toni Morrison's depiction of the male-female relationship is characterized by the lack of emotional connection and commitment as a result of the oppression that both men and women are exposed to. "African American men have historically been blocked from enacting both the traditional African and traditional American mainstream gender roles of provider and protector" (qtd.in Mandalapu 1).

3. The Black Pursuit of Identity

Pecola Breedlove, the story protagonist, go through many harsh circumstances in her life. These hardships gave her a feeling of rejection. She first feels rejection when her father tries to burn the house and she is put to live with the MacTeer's family for some time. In addition, when Pecola goes to see her mother at the Fisher's house, she accidentally drops blueberry on the kitchen's clean floor:

““Crazy fool . . . my floor, mess . . . look what you... work . . . get on out . . . now that . . . crazy . . . my floor, my floor . . . my floor.” Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread.”

In a very dramatic scene, her mother starts cursing her and comforting The Fisher's little daughter: "Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don't cry no more. Polly will change it.'" (109).

Furthermore, Pecola is thrown out for the third time from Mrs. Geraldine's house and she is oppressed by the shop-keeper, students and teachers at school. She is not rejected only by her parents but by the society as a whole. Pecola seems to float because she cannot find a place where she is accepted. She thinks that as long as she looks ugly, things will not get better. She loses hope in having beautiful life as a black girl. She believes that her belonging to the black community is the reason for her suffering. Pecola starts to develop some weird thoughts. She starts to imagine her life if she had blue eyes. Her parents would act differently, "maybe they would say 'Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes'"(46).

In Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism, bell hooks argues that, "in patriarchal society, men are encouraged to channel frustrated aggression in the direction of those without power—women and children" (hooks 145). This misguided ire can be seen in the thoughts of Cholly Breedlove.

In an interview in 1978, Morrison explains that Cholly "might love Pecola in the worst of all positive ways because he can't do this and he can't do that. He can't do it normally, healthily and so it might end up in the rap" (Jane Beckerman's Interview 38). This interesting character of Cholly is a result of long years of struggle and search for selfhood. Morrison devotes long parts of her novel exploring his controversial nature.

Cholly dare to sexually abuse his own daughter in a complex scene where the reader feels the need to hate Cholly but he really does not feel that hatred. This queer love Cholly felt towards his daughter is one of the most debatable thoughts in the novel. While Pecola is trying to find a solution to her doomed reality, she gets raped by her own father. When she tells her mother, she doesn't believe her and beats her hardly. Despite the heavy load of the problems she has, she is still looking for a way out. She is keen on having pair of beautiful blue eyes. She

desperately prays to have them each night. She is aware that her wish needs a miracle to come true. So, she is patient and never loses hope.

Pecola is moving toward insanity. Her decision to challenge nature is a prove of the massive destruction that her personality is subjected to. The story of Pecola shows the influence of family relationships and society convictions on the quest of individual identity. As a child, Pecola is ultimately influenced by her family. She formed her opinion about herself and others upon their attitude and the way they treat her. She is physically, psychologically and culturally oppressed by both her family and society.

Pecola goes to Soaphead Church to make her wish happen. He is a reader, adviser and interpreter of dreams in Lorain's African American community. His real name is Elihue Whitcomb. He is described in the novel as a light-skinned west Indian man who had a very peculiar attitude towards people and his mixed blood made him proud and feel superior over people of color. He is another example of how preference of whiteness

Pecola appears at Soaphead's door and asks him to give her blue eyes. Although he judges her physical appearance by describing her as "pitifully unattractive" (173). He feels sympathy towards her. He really wants to help her because his attraction to whiteness and hatred to all other races made her wish very logical and comprehensible for him. Soaphead brings a piece of meat and sprinkle poison on it. He tells Pecola to give it to the dog and if it reacts her wish will come true. In a very contradictory scene, he sympathizes with Pecola but does not hesitate to aggressively kill his landlady's dog which he hates. The dog painfully dies in front of her. She gets shocked and run away home.

Pecola finally obtains her wish. She gets the blue eyes but loses her mind; she is no longer able to understand the world around her and function in it as a normal person. She wanted the blue eyes in order to be accepted by society. However, the blue eyes reinforced her isolation. The only person she can communicate with is her imaginary friend. She is the only one who

can see her blue eyes. This imaginary friend is the only confirmation for her blue eyes but it does not protect her from her bad memories. Here, Morrison tries to show that Pecola does not really get rid of her insecurities. They are still buried in her deepest mind because she constantly requires reassurance from her imaginary friend about how much blue her eyes were and gets angry when she brings up her painful incident with her father.

Therefore, Pecola fails to form her individual identity both as a back girl and when she acquires the beautiful blue eyes. At first, she fails to embrace her African American nature and culture. In fact, she is unwilling to go through this fight to make herself be as it is supposed to be. Second, when she thinks she has those blue eyes she does not get the acceptance and love she looks for. No one notices her beautiful blue eyes apart from her imaginary friend.

“and nobody but nobody saying anything about it? They all try to pretend they don’t see them. Isn’t that funny? ...I said, isn’t that funny?”

Yes. You are the only one who tells me how pretty they are.

Yes.

You are a real friend.” (195-196).

Although Pecola is the novel’s heroin, she is not the one telling the story. Morrison intentionally used Claudia as the narrator so as to make the reader have great amount of sympathy for Pecola. If it was Pecola narrating her miserable story, she wouldn’t be seen as a total victim which is one of the most important themes of the novel.

The closing part is Claudia’s revolt against community. She blames it for what is happening to Pecola. She states that community has used Pecola’s suffering to hide their own and used her self-hatred to prove their self-worth:

“it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn’t matter. It’s too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it’s much, much, much too late” (206).

Claudia blames the black community which adopts “a white standard of beauty ... that makes Pecola its scapegoat” (Furman 21). Pecola is symbolically ‘dumped’: being pregnant, ugly, and mad and an object of repulsive nightmares,

“All of us –all who knew [Pecola] – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humour. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used – to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength” (163).

Claudia’s consciousness can also be read as decolonizing her mind from the racial oppression white supremacy practiced on blacks. She frees herself from white standards imposed on black people. As Grewal argues, “individuals collude in their own oppression by internalizing the dominant culture’s values in the face of great material contradictions” (Grewal21).

Through the character of Pecola, Morrison warns the black female artist of the obscurity and madness that will befall her if she internalizes the racism that is infecting her surroundings, while through the character of Claudia, Morrison demonstrates the actions the black female artist must take, so she can construct an environment in which she can create and make herself. Morrison demonstrates her focus on the liberation of the individual from society’s constraints. Society’s order is not God-given but it is made by people’s agreement. Thus, a great deal of disagreement faces the characters who want to escape the routine-based life. In *Sula*, the Bottom community maintains a conformed system that represses individuality.

The society in the novel restricts its members to specific standards that are related sometimes to gender and racism. Members who reject their society’s expectations are isolated from other people in the community in order to be able to attain their individuality. Morrison’s character, Sula, attempts to create a meaning for her away from society’s limitation by refusing to celebrate other’s way of living, something that black society does not tolerate and accept.

Sula stresses her own belief and conviction about her individuality, and it is obvious in some of her spoken words. According to Andrea O'Reilly, "Sula is a self-made orphan. Sula presents herself as a self-invented and self-defined woman" (63). In the novel, Sula's expressions emphasize her individuality such as "I got me" (143), "whatever's burning in me is mine" (93), and "my lonely is mine" (143).

Sula's habit of having affairs with different men in the community is another example of breaking the society's norms. She sleeps with single and married men in the town. Sula's sense of sexuality is different from other women since she acts like men who try women and then throw them away, "She would lay their husbands once and then no more...Sula was trying them and discarding them without any excuse the man could swallow" (Mbalia 73). Mbalia states that "Her casual sexual relationships with the men of the Bottom...emasculate them and insult the women" (45).

The Bottom community "band together against the devil", Sula (75). They associate signs such as the robin's plague and "too much heat, too much cold, too little rain, rain to flooding" with her return. Sula's individuality separates her from the rest of the community. Because "evil must be avoided" (57), Sula is avoided by most of the people who live there. When Sula returns from her trip, "a little boy ran up to her saying, "Carry yo'bag, ma'am? Before Sula could answer his mother had called him; "You, John. Get back here" (79). This scene shows that people do not accept Sula and tend to avoid her.

Her casual relationships with men provoke peoples' feelings of disgust but Sula actually does not care since she is convinced about her behaviours. "She was pariah, then, and knew it. Knew that they despised her and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men" (77). Cannon explains that "What casts Sula as a pariah, therefore, is precisely her rejection of the values of the community attempts to espouse, those things that stifle the self and aim at uniformity but also lend order and constancy" (203).

The bonding between Nel and Sula has a great influence on Nel's self-confidence, as Toni Morrison affiliates, black feminist ideals in the event where Sula Peace appreciates black standards of beauty, which markedly affects Nel. After meeting Sula, Nel's wish of being attractive and beautiful vanishes because Nel feels perfect in the eyes of Sula who is the person "in whose view inadequacy was mere idiosyncrasy, character trait rather than deficiency" (61). Black beauty standards are highly valued by black feminists. Rose explains that the black feminist "takes pride in being black and female, [and] repudiates the conventional white norms of beauty" (qtd.in Walker 2).

As a result, Nel stops pulling "the nose her mother hated" (24). After meeting Sula, "Nel slid the clothespin and the blanket as soon as she got in bed" (39), and is no longer interested in having a smooth hair. She is beautiful, attractive, and perfect as she is, in Sula's eyes. With Sula's love to her shape which her mother actually hates, Nel is bold enough to exceed her mother's restrictions and stereotypes. Nel is finally satisfied with who she is and with how she looks.

Sula also has a dysfunctional relationship with her mother and her relatives which creates a great feeling of loneliness. She grows with no "speck" and "no center" (118). This generates a strong feeling of un-belonging and a strong desire to fill the gap that completes the unshaped part in her personality and to live independently. Sula's relationship with Nel takes a different side since both girls come from different families. Sula's attitude of sharing nothing with nobody is to change. Sula starts to feel herself and to fit in her true own role and sense of being Sula Peace with the stem rose birth mark.

Sula, the unconventional protagonist of the novel, is a woman who tends to change nothing about people and society's stereotypes but to make herself and meet her own needs. In the words of Karen Stein, in Sula, "The truest heroism lies not in external battle, as in the wars which destroy the novel's men, but in confrontation with the self" (qtd.in Mbalia 43).

Toni Morrison; thus, focuses on depicting the African American woman's journey to be self-assertive because the "affirmation of the importance of black women's self-definition and self-valuation is the first key theme that pervades historical and contemporary statements of black feminist thought" (Fong 96). Thus, selfhood is a central theme in the novel which is expressed clearly through the struggle of its characters.

During her ten years of absence, Sula goes to college, visits different cities, experiences new things, and of course she has affairs with men. Her travel of discovery makes her deduce that the world is just a bigger Bottom for a black woman suffers from the same social stereotypes and racism. She gets back to Medallion city because of her deep missing for Nel and her absolute need for a "comrade", since "it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be- for a woman" (76).

The comeback of the audacious, outrageous, daring and rebellious woman to the town brings joy to Nel's heart. Sula can observe that Nel is not quite happy in her life with her husband and her three children since it is "Sula who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy" (61). Nel is her true self when she is with her friend Sula, and these feelings no longer exist if Sula is away from her.

Since their relationship is based on achieving their selfhood and helping each other survive any difficult and miserable condition where they might find themselves. Sula sees the extreme boredom that kills Nel's passion towards a vivid and happy life, as she becomes just like the rest of the women of their community, "Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways. She had given herself over to them" (76). Thus, she sleeps with Jude, Nel's husband in order to demonstrate to Nel the bitter reality, that, Nel is giving up her me-ness and admitting other women's way of life for a husband who can easily betray her.

When Nel discovers Sula's betrayal with her husband, a gray ball appears, "a gray ball, hovering just there. Just there. To the right. Quiet, gray, dirty. A ball of muddy strings, but without weight, fluffy but terrible in its malevolence" (70). The gray, terrible, dirty and messy ball represents the pain that Nel feels because of her husband, because of her failed relationship with her only friend, and because of her own self for giving up to the role that her society has chosen for her. Eventually, after Sula's death, Nel discovers that all those years she does not miss her husband, but she does miss Sula, her friend and the most beloved person in her life, and she cries as she reaches this discovery. At the moment, the gray ball disappears; it vanishes as Nel knows the truth of her feelings and that losing herself for the community brings her sorrow and sadness. As the narratives describes:

"Sula?" she whispered, gazing at the tops of trees. "Sula?" Leaves stirred; mud shifted; there was the smell of overripe green things. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze. "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude". And the lose pressed down on her chest and game up into her throat. "We was girls together", she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl". (107).

All the experiences Sula have lived were part of her journey to find her true self. The events of her life caused her to strive for her identity formation. Ironically, all of her efforts to discover herself led her eventually to solitude instead of identity. Sula's identity is not stable. It changes throughout her life. In fact, her way of life helped people define themselves. Nel expresses "Sula never completed, she simply helped others define themselves" (95). They were using her bravery to try different things and challenge society in order to show how normal and acceptable their characters were.

Conclusion

The present research has explored the effect of racism and patriarchy on the black female identity in the two first novels by Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. It employs the Black feminist theory that appeared to examine different contexts and conditions that participated in dehumanizing and oppressing the African-American females. Thus studying and analyzing Toni Morrison's novels from a Black feminist perspective brings insight into diverse life experience of the black female's life in a racist and patriarchal society. Also, clarifies the most important factors that influences the building of black female's identity

The Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison writes about black women who struggle against racism and patriarchy. *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* represent the struggle of the African-American female in the society of the twentieth century, and the stereotypes that chain black women's identity, freedom and options. Morrison writes about black women's suffering to reveal the true dimensions of the African American women life to other ethnic and racial groups in the world. Through her first two novels, Morrison explores the African American experience in distinct forms. The protagonists of these two novels represent totally different cases of the black female life journey.

Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, displays the effect of the controlling image of the white beauty standards which is an extremely racist gaze that judge the black female physical appearance and demean her black beauty by comparing it to the white one. The Black feminist writer directs the story events to show the dehumanizing aftermath of such judgment and stereotypes on the black female identity. In a patriarchal society as well as a discriminating one, a little girl's story is told to incarnate one of the bitter dimensions of being neither white nor male in that era.

The Bluest Eye develops a story of a young African – American girl during the early 1940s. It analyses the disastrous effects of imposing white middle-class American beauty ideals

on Africans. The characters in *The Bluest Eye* loathe their own skin color and feel ashamed of their identity and culture where it is clearly stressed on the protagonist story, Pecola Breedlove. She, in her journey of quest for identity, is desperately attempting to put herself out of the pit of blackness because the American society conditioned her belief that blackness equals ugliness.

The novel displays the damage in the psyche of the young black girl, Pecola. She yearns to be loved and accepted by the white people who rejects and lessens the worth of her race. Besides the patriarchal society she is living in, where she is a daughter of a drunkard and abusive father and a matriarch mother. She is beaten; sexually abused and cruelly treated while experiencing deformed love and empty relationships Pecola's family plays a significant role in making her struggle harder. Neither her mother nor her father provides the expected parental emotional support for her. She is a little black girls standing alone faced with great amount of hatred and marginalization from both the white master and her own black community .

Pecola is forced further and further into her fantasy world, where she personifies another identity, imagining herself with blue beautiful eye. She loses her mind because she is no longer able to face the social conventions made about her. She strives to embody the whites' identity which she considers as her only shelter from

Thus, she is unable to reach her individuality that is to be loved and accepted which droves her insane. The prominent discussion in the analysis of *The Bluest Eye* is the failed identity because of self-hatred as a result of the unhealthy environment that is loaded by racism and patriarchy. Pecola's failure reflects the whole society's failure to accept and embrace what is different from them. She never felt appreciated or love which naturally leads her to have lack of self-esteem. It is unbearable for a little girl to resist her society's rejection. Because of the love lacking environment and the horrible look she sees in people's eye every day, Pecola

escapes her real life and decides to create her own fantasy world where she is beautiful and blue eyed .

Morrison's second novel, *Sula* is based on the struggle against the already made identity that is an aftermath of patriarchy and racism intersectionality. In the novel, the racist relationship between blacks and whites forces African Americans to endure poverty that creates patriarchy in their society which obliged the black female into an identity that never reflects herself and her interests. The stereotypes that are brought in the novel by the Black feminist writers are to be one of the major effects on the African-American community. Since these stereotypes misrepresent the Black female negatively and coerced her into a role that she is not willing to play, which create a huge gap between the female individual identity and the society forms and restricts that is formed by patriarchy and racism.

As Black feminism tend to destroy the misleading stereotypes about Black female, Toni Morrison manages to create a new type of heroine who is rebelling against both racist and patriarchal society. Sula who is raised in a house led by a matriarch, her grandmother Eva, challenges the community's standpoints and aims to achieve only her identity and her interests by traveling; studying in college; celebrating her beauty and blackness and enjoying her sexuality by her own will. Disconnecting herself from anything that could prevent her joy, Sula, of course, is not accepted in her community. People around her felt threatened by her revolt. Thus she is treated as a pariah and left alone with no one by her side even her best friend. The relationships she seeks to form and the love she wants to feel in order to feel her individuality drives her to tragedy. She is ostracized by her own black people and dies alone. Being treated as pariah and shunned can never be traits of a healthy identity.

Sula is a controversial since she practiced her freedom but still could not succeed to build her identity. She is totally focused on her self-development and didn't care about what people in the Bottom community said about her. She is independent and people's opinions of

her did not mean much for her. Sula's identity is shaped and reshaped for various times during her life's countless experiences. Yet, at the end of the story; when she was dyeing she admitted that she did not find her true self and couldn't find inner peace .

Reading *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* one might easily conclude that Social and racial stereotypes undermine and intersect with black women's journey towards their selfhood. In their racist patriarchal society where women's roles and relationships are already determined by racism and sexism. This double burden makes it hard for them to form their identities. By the end of both novels Morrison shows that the bitter reality of black females can never help them be themselves whether they chose the fight and challenge it like Sula or mingle in it and blindly follow it like Pecola .

As anti-racist novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, were a black feminist author call to revolt against the mainstream culture that made both black female protagonists fail to build their individual identity. Morrison used her gift as a writer to fight for her race and gender like many other black female writers. She aims at sharing the long history of struggle of the African Americans with the whole world. She was interested in addressing her culture and her own people's problems .

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ملخص

يركز هذا البحث على دراسة تأثير العنصرية والسلطة الأبوية على تطوير وتشكيل هوية المرأة السوداء في روايتي توني موريسون هما "العين الزرقاء" و"سولا". تعرض روايتا موريسون الطريقة التي تؤثر بها القوالب النمطية المتعلقة بالعرق والجنس على السعي إلى تحقيق الهوية الفردية وتأسيس الذات للأنثى السوداء. وبالتالي، فإن الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو تطوير فهم قوي لمختلف الجوانب التي تؤثر على تحقيق الشخصية الفردية للأنثى والذي يمكن تحقيقه من خلال دراسة دقيقة لتوني موريسون في العين الزرقاء وسولا من وجهة نظر النسوية السوداء يمكننا أن نقدم تحليلاً واضحاً لتجارب تجزئة الإناث السود في مجتمع يهيمن عليه التفوق الأبيض والسلطة الأبوية وبناء على ذلك فإن الفصل الأول مكرس لشرح تجربة الأمريكيين من أصل إفريقي بعد العبودية والحرب الأهلية. كما يناقش البحث مفهوم السلطة الأبوية في المجتمع الأفريقي وكيفية تأثيرها على المرأة بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن الحركة النساء السود، الاستعمار المزدوج والهوية النسائية الأمريكية الأفريقية تخضع لدراسة عميقة من خلال هذه الورقة. الفصل الثاني هو محاولة لتحليل تمثيل توني موريسون لمعاناة الإناث السود ورحلة لتشكيل هويتهم في الروايتين.

الملخص

يركز هذا البحث على دراسة تأثير العنصرية والسلطة الأبوية على تطوير وتشكيل هوية المرأة السوداء في روايتي توني موريسون هما "العين الزرقاء" و"سولا". تعرض روايتا موريسون الطريقة التي تؤثر بها القوالب النمطية المتعلقة بالعرق والجنس على السعي إلى تحقيق الهوية الفردية وتأسيس الذات للأنثى السوداء. وبالتالي، فإن الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو تطوير فهم قوي لمختلف الجوانب التي تؤثر على تحقيق الشخصية الفردية للأنثى والذي يمكن تحقيقه من خلال دراسة دقيقة لتوني موريسون في العين الزرقاء وسولا من وجهة نظر النسوية السوداء يمكننا أن نقدم تحليلاً واضحاً لتجارب تجزئة الإناث السود في مجتمع يهيمن عليه التفوق الأبيض والسلطة الأبوية وبناء على ذلك فإن الفصل الأول مكرس لشرح تجربة الأمريكيين من أصل إفريقي بعد العبودية والحرب الأهلية. كما يناقش البحث مفهوم السلطة الأبوية في المجتمع الأفريقي وكيفية تأثيرها على المرأة بالإضافة إلى ذلك فإن الحركة النساء السود، الاستعمار المزدوج والهوية النسائية الأمريكية الأفريقية تخضع لدراسة معمقة من خلال هذه الورقة. الفصل الثاني هو محاولة لتحليل تمثيل توني موريسون لمعاناة الإناث السود ورحلة لتشكيل هويتهم في الروايتين.