

## **The Black Female Experience in Shaping Identities in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye and Sula**

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### **Abstract:**

The present paper focuses on female identity formation in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye (1970) and Sula (1973). It examines the black African women protagonists' struggle to find a space for themselves within their families and their communities as well in order to build female social and political identities. The article attempts to examine the main characters' ways of forming self-concept in the face of race and abuse. It analyzes the female character in the two narratives and discusses the effect of gender and constraints of tradition on women, it further tries to show that those black female protagonists follow womanistic ideas conduct to cope with their problems and eventually survive.

**Keywords: social identity, contemporary, black female**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The African-American writings have emerged as a specific literary genre found in bookstores, libraries, and databases produced basically by African immigrants to affirm the existence of African community in the U.S. In the last decade of the twentieth century, with the wake of multiculturalism, a new generation of immigrants starts to be active literally and culturally by drawing upon the African traditions in order to defy disseminated clichés of African nations. Defying stereotypes serves in subverting the cultural hegemony of the American mainstream resulting in diasporic voices that reflect hybrid identities. Unlike earlier generations, contemporary African-American writers seek to cast aside issues of racism in an effort to explore ethnic self-affirmation and diasporic sensibilities which touch upon issues of identity, racial discrimination and abusive parenting. Being members of diverse cultures, African-American writers get inspiration from revolutionary schools like feminism, Black theories, and postcolonial criticism in order to record decades of negative clichés and hostility and explore features of their ethnic native history.

The African-American writers, especially women, attempt to transmit their voices by telling their own stories which revolve basically around immigrant experiences marking in this respect a new literary episode in African-American literature. Many literary works produced by African-American women writers set the bridges to reach their mother land, their traditions and beliefs via forging new discourses.

In doing so, Toni Morrison has actively challenged the stereotypes which have been imposed on African American women throughout history. The characters in her novels are beautifully crafted in order to allow the reader to explore their journeys and the way in which they are presented, thus questioning the perspective of history that has been created. However, many of the stereotypes have undoubtedly stuck in the African American conscious and so it is necessary to initially perpetuate women in those images prior to examining exactly how to expel those stereotypes for good.

## **1. The Legacy of Toni Morrison's Narratives in Post Modern African American Fiction**

Memorable literary writings have concerned with nature, death, and love. Professional authors whose primary position was writing and whose experiences were far extracted from those who must work for a living. Critics have opposed to a historical principle that is irrelevant to everyone. Some observe that literature has been produced for the cultural intellectuals and the rest have come to consider it as a reflection of an elitist lifestyle to which the ordinary person cannot expect to relate. Another see literature and literary criticism as discrete from life as a self-serving ideology that is linked to the lives of the literary institution but offers nothing to readers who may be from ordinary families or working-class backgrounds. While others denounce the irrelevancy of contemporary fictional writing, which has nothing to offer working-class men and women. They find it erroneous that a national literature does not deal with dilemmas, ambitions, defeats and successes of the majority of men and women who inhabit the United States. They note that their culture, by neglecting real people and real troubles, is telling that they and their problems are not significant. They view work as a main forming experience in their lives, an experience that deserves to be performed in literature.

Although the nature of U.S. history and identity is one of Morrison's essential concerns, not one of her novels is without indication either to non-U.S. locations and identities or to incidents that include America but do not take place on its land. In *The Bluest Eye* (1970) Soaphead Church is of mixed English and African origin, an immigrant from the Caribbean. At the start of *Sula* (1973), Shadrack has just come back from fighting in World War I in France and this war remarked its presence in *Jazz* (1992) as well, while *Song of Solomon* (1977) opens with Robert Smith's hapless ambition to fly to Canada and details a smell. *Beloved* (1987) arranges a version of the Middle Passage from West Africa; *Paradise* (1998) comprises the American military deployment in the Pacific zone during World War II, as well as the Vietnam War and

Consolata's early life in Brazil; in *Love* (2005) Christine spends her brief and wistful marriage to Ernie Holder in Germany, where he is stationed with other American troops; and *Home* (2012) focuses on the experiences of a veteran of the Korean War. Morrison's consistent illustration of the United States as one country that exists in relation to many others works against American exceptionalism. To some extent her fiction contemplates, or at the very least corresponds with, theoretical moves toward a transnational positioning of America that work against nationalistic privileging of that country as a self-contained, unique, and outstanding structure. Morrison's fiction is absolutely rooted in black traditions, it is of course never simply a mouthpiece or vehicle of propaganda enhancing some vague concept of black worth. Her novels never blindly confess the forms that African-American struggle has taken. She looks behind and beyond the commanding myths of black history as well as white, perhaps no more so than in her concern to the experience of black women, in the positioning of women and girls at the core of her novels. Even in *Song of Solomon*, in which the protagonist is male; *Milkman*; Morrison creates through Pilate, Ruth, Corrie and Lena a specificity of engagement, a significance of precise social situations and cultural pressures, that is characteristic of her primary interest with what African-American women have been doing, thinking, saying, and not saying over the last four centuries. When considering the interactions between African-American culture and Morrison's work is that she writes within a context of two simultaneous time positions: the first in which a novel is set and the second in which she is writing it. As in the novel *Beloved* which is about slavery and its aftermath about Kentucky and Ohio in the nineteenth century. But it is also about what it means to match that subject in the 1980s, and, therefore, it is about the position and representation of African-Americans during Ronald Reagan presidency. While *Sula* is placed primarily in the 1940s, yet in its foreword Morrison writes of her experience of grabbing liberty and of female friendship.

## **2. Black Female Identity in African American Narratives**

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"<sup>1</sup> 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"<sup>2</sup>. 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"<sup>3</sup>. 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”<sup>4</sup>.

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”<sup>5</sup>. 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”<sup>6</sup>.

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”<sup>7</sup>. 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.

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”<sup>8</sup>.

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”<sup>9</sup>.

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”<sup>10</sup>.

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"<sup>11</sup>.

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"<sup>12</sup>.

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"<sup>13</sup>.

### **3. Black female placement in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye and Sula**

#### **3.1 *The Bluest Eye* and Girls' Trial**

A sorrowful narrative of child oppression, with race, gender and class mixed in, *The Bluest Eye* is expressed in the form of racial self-loathing, the loss of identity, and shame. Even though the setting for the story is the beginning of World War II for the United States it is also presentist in concept, ideologically happened in the 1960s when "Black is Beautiful" entered into the popular, if more militant, discourse. Setting out to write a narrative that she herself wanted to read, Morrison worried that this slogan of racial pride would be incapable to eliminate the long-term psychic impacts of prejudices rooted in racialism and sexism.

The inspiration for this novel comes from Morrison's personal life and the conversation she had with a childhood friend who told her she no longer believed in God because her prayers to have blue eyes

had never been responded. Morrison annotated that she began to write about a girl who wanted blue eyes and the horror of having that wish fulfilled; and also about the whole business of what is physical beauty and the pain of that yearning and wanting to be somebody else, and how devastating that was and yet part of all females who were peripheral in other people's lives.

As a result of racist prejudices and stereotypes about what is supposed to be beautiful, Pecola develops an inferiority complex, wishing to have blue eyes. She imagines that only if she could have blue eyes, all of her troubles would fade. "It has occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different"<sup>14</sup>. She thought that possessing blue eyes she would grant her charm and then people would be nice to her and her family would love her. For a young girl who has still not evolved the sense of identity, this perception used to be terribly wrong. The inferiority complex that Pecola suffers from, as probably many other black girls of her age do, also stems from the white people's insistence on manufacturing and buying white dolls with blue eyes and blonde hair that consequently all the children wanted to own. These were supposed as the perfect paragons of beauty, and everything that was different was thought of as ugly.

Pecola was often oppressed mentally by the community by being told that she was ugly. One of the major effects of racism is the low self-esteem that especially impacts black girls and women because the society imposes on them the wrong perception about what is beautiful and what is not. The ultimate consequences of these stereotypes and prejudices are Pecola's madness and her hallucinations that she indeed got the blue eyes that she so despairingly wished for. What additionally contributed to these mental disorders is the isolation Pecola felt, not only from the white people, but black people as well, who also judged her based on her physical appearance. Pecola is not only considered ugly by the society and community, but by her own family as well. The boys at school that bully Pecola are also black, and yet they call her black and ugly. Perhaps due to their own insecurities and because they hate their own colour of the skin they treat Pecola the way they do. The

basis of discrimination also comes from the financial and social status, the difference between richer and poorer black people is highlighted in the novel. The hierarchy and stratification between races and between different levels of income and social status of black people are very prominent. Even the choice of words to describe black people is very deliberate “Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud”<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, the poor black people are distinguished against by both white people and rich black people. There are many instances of racism in the novel, one of the most prominent being the moment when Pauline was giving birth to Pecola, and she heard the doctor saying to his students that black women do not feel pain while giving birth because they are like horses.

Pecola’s dysfunctional family played a major part in her perception of herself as ugly which directly contributed to the development of her identity in the negative way. Pecola’s father is an alcoholic and the core of his violent and abusive behaviour could be found in his breeding as his parents abandoned him when he was a baby. His first sexual experience was perceived by two white people, which left him traumatised and possibly impressed his becoming an offensive person who was beating up his wife and who raped his daughter. Cholly redirects his frustration to others. He has an inferiority complex, he has no clear distinction between love and brutality and he has to take out his aggression on those weaker than him. “Pecola is a casualty of the malignant love of her father, the failures of her mother, the disinterest of her community, and a culture that defines her as disposable, insignificant, and ugly”<sup>16</sup>. Morrison chose an interesting narrative technique, she depicted the incest and the rape from the point of view of the person who did it. This does not in any way justify his behaviors but it provides more understanding of why he would do such a horrendous act. Pauline, Pecola’s mother keeps on staying in an unhealthy marriage even though she herself is oppressed and her children are suffering major consequences from being a part of such a destructive family. “Pauline takes on rather than resists the identity assigned to her by the dominant culture”<sup>17</sup>. She behaves in the accurate way that white

and high-class black people expect her to, she holds the ugliness assigned to her family and she neglects them. “So when her child is born, and it is both black and female, Pauline sees it as she herself was seen while in labor as undesirable, irrelevant, and unimportant”<sup>18</sup>. Pauline gives the motherly love and awareness to the girl for whose family she works, as she represents the beautiful and ideal daughter she always dreamt of. In this respect Pauline appears capable of providing support, love and care, but she simply chooses not to do it for her children. Society portrayed them as ugly because they were black and dysfunctional as a family, but they took it upon themselves and accepted it. Even when Pecola is bullied she never quarrels back as if she accepts these insults as true.

In contrast, Claudia who comes from a loving caring family has high self-esteem, not longing for blue eyes or white dolls. She actually damaged the white dolls as a sign of hatred she felt for white people. Claudia does not understand why these dolls are assumed so beautiful, that she breaks down her doll attempting to find where the beauty is. Perhaps Claudia was able to evolve her own opinion and not get influenced by accepted standards of beauty because of the family she was raised in, that made her feel loved and beautiful the way she was. a crucial difference between Pecola’s and Claudia and Frieda’s father is noticed , the first one rapes his daughter, while the second almost kills a man who is inappropriate with his daughter.

“What Pecola lacks most decidedly is a sense of self”<sup>19</sup>. Pecola is unable to promote a healthy and confident sense of identity due to many complex reasons. Pecola is a child, a black female, with unsupportive family who do not show love towards her and the judgmental stereotypical society. The paradigm of Claudia and Frieda show that having a loving and caring parents and siblings makes a significant difference. “There can’t be anyone, I am sure, who doesn’t know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained periods of time”<sup>20</sup>. Morrison’s foreword clearly indicates that this narrative is universal, the search for identity and figuring out who women are and what is their place in this world. However, she shows how far this feeling of not belonging and being

excluded can take an insecure, young, female child who has no one to turn to.

Morrison concludes: “Many readers remain touched but not moved”<sup>21</sup>. She does not want the readers to feel sympathy for Pecola, she wants them to realize that the only thing ugly about the black people is the history they had to go through and experiences they had to overcome.

### **3.2 *Sula* the Girls Becoming Women**

*Sula* is considered as an extra, peculiar masterpiece, it follows the development of identities of two best friends Nel and Sula, who could not be more different from each other but whose friendship and bond seem to be stronger than those of family members. By depicting the lives of two black girls, very contrasting in their character traits and the lives they choose to live, Morrison is again attracting attention from the readers, taking her writing to the next level by describing a black girl who voluntarily sleeps with white men and a mother who murdered her own child. Her comment about her writing is: “I don’t want to give my readers something to swallow, I want to give them something to feel and think about...”<sup>22</sup>. This is true of all the Morrison’s work, all of the pieces of art she created, apart from being beautifully written, carry a powerful message and a call to action. “As the novel spans the destructive years from World War I through the Depression to the threshold of World War II in 1941 to 1965 and the civil rights movement, it becomes an elegy for the victims of war, poverty and racial violence”<sup>23</sup>. The novel recounts all the challenges facing the development of female identities in the period of racial discrimination and social hierarchy battles.

Nel and Sula were brought up in completely different families, which directly influenced the development of their identities. Nel’s mother is conventional and rigid, and wants the stable life for her daughter, the same one that she has had. On the other hand, Sula’s family is eccentric: “The trinity of women who share the spotlight in *Sula* – Eva, Hannah and Sula – have much in common with this world view. Their breaks from expected codes of behaviour also enable them to transcend the usual depictions of black women in

African-American literature, thereby debunking numerous stereotypes and myths”<sup>24</sup>. The girls develop opposite personalities and they go on to live the lives they were expected to lead – Nel ends up in a traditional marriage with children and Sula is independent and lives her life the way she wants it to, without following any traditions or societal expectations. “According to most of the residents of the Bottom, the worst thing a black woman like Sula can do is to sleep with a white man”<sup>25</sup>. In the world where black people vividly remember the atrocities dating from the period of slavery and where the hatred between the races is very much present, black community condemns Sula for voluntarily sleeping with white men, as black women were raped and abused by them for such a long period of time. In their eyes, this sin is unforgivable and cannot be justified. In many ways Sula shows the characteristics which are typical of men. She does not want to settle for what a black woman is expected to be and do Morrison says: “She really behaves like a man. She picks up a man, drops a man, the same way a man picks up a woman, drops a woman. And that’s her thing. She’s masculine in that sense. She’s adventuresome, she trusts herself, she’s not scared, she really ain’t scared. And she is curious and will leave and try anything. So that quality of masculinity – and I mean this in the pure sense – in a woman at that time is outrage, total outrage”<sup>26</sup>. Perhaps Sula also did some things out of spite since at times she felt unsupported by her own family, especially when she overheard her mother saying: “You love her, like I love Sula. I just don’t like her. That’s the difference”<sup>27</sup>. In this way her mother emphasizes she loves Sula because she has to and she is her daughter but not because she wants to. On the other hand, Nel is a typical woman of the time and she survives it all but in the end she is not happy and cannot say that she led a content life. Sula was defying all the traditions, she died young but lived a fulfilled life full of excitement and adventures. And she was probably much happier than Nel. Sula’s personality is very strong and dominant, she is self-confident and believes she leads a life that she created on her own terms. She did not long for marriage and children, her explanation being: “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself”<sup>28</sup>.

However, the friendship that these two women built is deep and strong and continues despite their differences. “Out of their awareness that their lives, as black females, are restricted by their community and by the outer society, Nel and Sula are drawn to each other. As only-girl children, each takes the other as sister, sharing each other’s dreams of freedom and excitement”<sup>29</sup>. The bond and sisterhood between women is so strong and so significant to them because of the conditions they lived in, both of them felt they were not understood and they could not freely express themselves, one of them feeling the need to conform to the traditional expectations and the other one defying them in the most conspicuous way, but both of them feeling fully understood and supported only by each other. “Sula is representative of an independent, strong, and proud black woman; however, her pride and her independence seem to leave her without enough empathy for other people and cause her ostracism from the community. A compromise between Nel’s dependence and Sula’s independence seems to be the novel’s suggestion for achieving the right balance for a happy and full life”<sup>30</sup>.

The seemingly unbreakable friendship fell apart when Nel’s husband Jude cheated on Nel with Sula. For Nel, this betrayal was unforgivable: “That was too much. To lose Jude and not have Sula to talk about it because it was Sula that he had left her for”<sup>31</sup>. To Nel, losing a husband and losing a best friend were the losses that hurt the same. On the other hand, Sula did not do it to purposefully hurt Nel. In her mind, she and Nel always shared everything, there was never possessiveness in their relationship, so she thought it natural that they could share Nel’s husband. “Nel was the one person who had wanted nothing from her, who had accepted all aspects of her. Now she wanted everything, all because of *that*. Nel was the first person who had been real to her, whose name she knew, who had seen as she had the slant of life that made it possible to stretch it to its limits. Now Nel was one of *them*”<sup>32</sup>. Both of them were disappointed at each other, but for different reasons, they saw their friendship differently. At the end of the novel Nel has not fully supported Sula’s lifestyle: “You can’t do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man. You can’t be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, talking what you want, leaving what

you don't"<sup>33</sup>. Her view of Sula's life was the same like the one the black community had. She disapproved of it, but it seems that it only started bothering her when it affected her own life. It took many years of not speaking to each other and Sula's death for Nel to finally forgive Sula and admit to herself: "All that time, all that time I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We were girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." It was a fine cry – loud and long – but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow"<sup>34</sup>. She finally understood that her friendship with Sula was more important than her marriage, but as it usually happens in life, it was too little too late to change anything.

The novel challenges the traditional opposition between good and evil and lines between them are blurred. Sula seems independent and free from all social constraints but she breaks an unwritten moral rule by getting involved with married men, Nel could also be described as a bad person for following the traditions blindly and never questioning them. And even though she led a religious, righteous life, Nel was not awarded in any way for her kindness and good heart. "*Sula* insists that readers put aside conventional expectations to enter a fictional world deliberately inverted to reveal a complex reality; a world in which evil may be a necessary good, where good may be exposed for its inherent evil, where murder and self-mutilation become acts of love, and where simple answers to ordinary human problems do not exist"<sup>35</sup>. Sula accomplished her identity by not conforming to traditions and expectations. She did not marry or have children and she put her grandmother in a nursing home, she has done all these things that are considered inhuman in black culture. Sula and Nel's characteristics together would probably account for one perfect woman, one fully formed and satisfied identity that could meet both the societal expectations and personal longings and wishes.

Men in the novel influence the development of female identities in a major way. It seems that the most of them fall short in the eyes of the women, they abandon them and leave them alone to take care of the household and children. Eva's husband left her, Jude left Nel, Ajax left Sula. It seems that all men in Eva's life disappointed her,

her husband when he abandoned her and the children and her son when he started using drugs. All men in *Sula* do not have a developed sense of identity, either because of war, racism or social status. Jude for instance was a victim of discrimination, as he was denied the job he wanted badly due to racism. What he was looking for in a woman was empathy, comfort and support in the hope that this can substitute for being racially discriminated against.

All the experiences Sula have lived were part of her journey to find her own identity. The events of her life caused her to strive for her self 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"<sup>36</sup>. They were using her bravery to try different things and challenge society in order to show how normal and acceptable their characters were.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Toni Morrison uses Pecola and Sula in order to thoroughly examine the viability of African American female stereotypes and effectively offers enough proof as to why they must be challenged and dispelled. They not only mask the true nature of what it means to be a woman but also set her alone when in fact the collective conscious defies the imposition of any such stereotype. Morrison's works provide an excellent foundation for understanding the nature of African American womanhood via black feminist, but she goes above and beyond the values and factors offered by the feminist theories in order to ensure that the novels undoubtedly go some way to dispelling such negative representations and furthers the achievements of black feminism thought in the process.

“...Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality - collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there. From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another, they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do

with the way they found each other...”, *The Bluest Eye*(33)

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<sup>4</sup> Donna J. Nicol and Jennifer A. Yee, “Reclaiming Our Time”: Women of Color Faculty and Radical Self-Care in the Academy, *Feminist Teacher*, Volume 27, issue 2-3, 2017

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, Routledge New York & London, p.1

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<sup>11</sup> Edited by Jane L. Parpart, M. Patricia Connelly and V. Eudine Barriteau, *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development*, International Development Research Centre, p.58

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<sup>14</sup> Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Vintage, p.44

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<sup>16</sup> Carmen Gillespie, *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*, Facts On File, p.52

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<sup>19</sup> John Duvall, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison*, Palgrave, p.55

<sup>20</sup> Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Vintage, p. vii

<sup>21</sup> Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Vintage, p.207

<sup>22</sup> Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations Toni Morrison's Sula*, Chelsea House Publishers, p.5

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