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Race, Gender Prejudice and the Genesis of the "Womanish" Women in Selected Novels by African American Women

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Dedication

To my parents, my sisters Lamia and Sabrina, and my niece Tasnime

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Abstract

This thesis tackles the genesis of "womanish" womanhood as an alternative to the prescribed definitions of black womanhood in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The four novels examine black women as they grapple with the difficult circumstances they face in a largely white, racist society. The novels investigate what it meant to be a black woman in the first half of the twentieth century against a backdrop of marginalization, discrimination, and oppression that heavily impacted her femininity. This thesis intends to show how black women in Morrison and Walker's selected novels give a new meaning to black womanhood within the larger context of racism and sexism. Patricia Hill Collins' intersectionality and Alice Walker's womanism are adopted as the basic analytical approaches. The study is divided into four chapters. Chapter one examines the distortion of black femininity due to the superimposition of the controlling images that cast black women as bad mothers, bad wives, immoral, and ugly. Chapter two looks at the role of black patriarchy in further degrading black women's status through exerting different kinds and levels of physical, emotional, and psychological dominance. Chapter three deals with black women's defiance of race and gender prejudice through their creativity, bonding, rebellion, and well-being. Chapter four tackles black women's new conception of femininity, which differs from the hegemonic meaning of both white and black womanhood. The study concludes that black women in Morrison and Walker's selected novels embrace "womanish" womanhood through their assertive behavior, sexual freedom, self-love, and commitment to both commonweal and empowerment.

Keywords: Racism, Sexism, Black Womanhood, Womanism, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison.

ملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة نشأة الأنوثة بمفهوم أليس والكر كبديل للتعريفات الموصوفة للأنوثة السوداء في روايات توني موريسون وأليس والكر : *The Bluest Eye* ، *Sula* ، *The Color Purple* و *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. تظهر الروايات الأربع المرأة السوداء في بداية القرن العشرين وهي تتصارع مع الظروف الصعبة التي تواجهها في مجتمع أبيض عنصري. تعاني المرأة السوداء من أشكال مختلفة من التهميش والتمييز والقمع. هويتها مشوهة وخاصة أنوثتها. تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى إظهار كيف تعطي النساء السود في روايات موريسون و والكر معنى جديدًا لأنوثتهن ضمن التمييز العنصري والجنسي. تم تبني مذهب ال « Womanism »لأليس والكر و مذهب باتريشيا هيل كولينز « Intersectionality » كنهج تحليلي أساسي. تنقسم الدراسة إلى أربعة فصول. يفحص الفصل الأول دور الصور المسيطرة العنصرية التي تصور النساء السود على أنهن أمهات سيئات وزوجات سيئات وعديمات العفة وقبيحات في تشويه الأنوثة السوداء. يبحث الفصل الثاني في دور النظام الأبوي الأسود في تدهور وضع المرأة السوداء من خلال ممارسة أنواع ومستويات مختلفة من الهيمنة الجسدية والعاطفية والنفسية. يتناول الفصل الثالث تحدي النساء السود للتحيز العنصري والجنساني من خلال إبداعاتهن وترابطهن وتمردهن وصحتهن الجسدية و النفسية و الروحية. يناقش الفصل الرابع المفهوم الجديد لأنوثة المرأة السوداء والذي يختلف عن المعنى المهيمن للأنوثة البيضاء و الصور المسيطرة للأنوثة السوداء. خلصت الدراسة إلى أن النساء السود في روايات موريسون و والكر يتبنين تصورات مذهب والكر للأنوثة من خلال سلوكهن الحازم و حريتهن الجنسية وحب الذات والتزامهن بالخير العام والتمكين.

.الكلمات المفتاحية: التمييز العنصري، التمييز الجنسي، الأنوثة السوداء ، النسوية ، أليس والكر ، توني موريسون

Résumé

Cette thèse aborde la genèse de la féminité womaniste comme alternative aux définitions prescrites de la féminité noire dans les romans de Toni Morrison et Alice Walker; *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *The Color Purple* et *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Les quatre romans décrivent les femmes noires qui sont confrontées à des conditions difficiles dans une société blanche raciste. Ces romans s'adressent au sens de la féminité noire au début du vingtième siècle. La femme noire souffre de diverses formes de marginalisation, de discrimination et d'oppression. Son identité est déformée et surtout sa féminité. À cet égard, cette thèse a pour but de montrer comment les femmes noires dans les romans de Morrison et Walker donnent un nouveau sens à leur féminité dans le vaste contexte du racisme et du sexisme. L'intersectionnalité de Patricia Hill Collins et le womanisme d'Alice Walker sont adoptés comme approches analytiques. L'étude est composée de quatre chapitres. Le premier chapitre examine la distorsion de la féminité noire due aux images stéréotypes qui décrivent les femmes noires comme des mauvaises mères, mauvaises épouses, immorales et laides. Le deuxième chapitre examine le rôle du patriarcat noir dans la dégradation des femmes noires en exerçant différents types et niveaux de domination physique, émotionnelle et psychologique. Le troisième chapitre traite le défi des femmes noires envers les préjugés racistes et sexistes à travers leur créativité, fraternité, rébellion et bien-être. Le quatrième chapitre aborde la nouvelle conception de la féminité noire qui diffère de la signification hégémonique de la féminité blanche et stéréotype de la féminité noire. L'étude conclut que les femmes noires dans les romans de Morrison et Walker adoptent la féminité womaniste à travers leur comportement affirmé, leur liberté sexuelle, leur amour-propre, et leur engagement pour le bien commun.

Mots-clés : racisme, sexisme, féminité noire, féminisme, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison.

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General Introduction

This study tackles the "womanish" identity as an alternative meaning to black womanhood in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. It is an established fact that black womanhood has always been a central issue for black feminists and social activists. Black women cannot define their womanhood according to the traditional standards, which rely mainly on domesticity, submission, and beauty. The stereotypical images perpetuated by the dominant group make them the antithesis of white women. Moreover, black men, in their pursuit of hegemonic manhood, which implies toughness and sexual prowess, subjugate black women to physical, sexual, and emotional violence that has much more devastating effects on black femininity. Race and gender prejudice, among other forms of oppression, play a key role in the distortion of black womanhood through shaping black women's roles, their relationships with their male counterparts, and even their perceptions of themselves.

In *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Color Purple*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Morrison and Walker seek to reclaim the African American identity in general and black womanhood in particular. Both authors comment on black women's mistreatment in racist and sexist societies. They focus on the damage that black women suffer as a result of the discriminatory practices against their femininity. However, both writers challenge the prescribed understandings of black women's roles as women, wives, and mothers through emphasizing personal growth, individuation, and self-possession, which can be identified with the womanist standpoint. Walker defines the womanist or "womanish" woman as opposed to the "girlish" woman who is frivolous, irresponsible, and not serious. A "womanish" woman is

responsible and in charge. She exhibits outrageous, courageous, and willful behavior (*In Search* xi), which frees her from the white woman's traditional submissiveness and passivity.

The selection of the four novels as the corpus of this research is because they bring together the different components of womanhood. *Sula* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* discuss women's sexual freedom and sexual pleasure. *The Color Purple* deals with women's submission and subordination, and *The Bluest Eye* tackles the issue of women's beauty. Black women's invisibility and negative stereotypes also characterized these works. Accordingly, the afore-named novels help establish a full picture of the issue of womanhood in general and black womanhood in particular.

The main motive for the conduct of this research is Walker's book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*: *Womanist Prose* (1983), in which Walker presents a new concept of black womanhood related to black women's everyday lives and activities. This concept is not only limited to black women's roles, qualities, and relationships but also their resistance, empowerment, spirituality, and even physical and mental well-being. This flexibility opens different perspectives for black women to define themselves and, thus, provides new readings of black womanhood in African American literature in general and in Morrison and Walker's fiction in particular.

Numerous studies have examined the womanist identity in Morrison and Walker's novels. For instance, Melanie Harris (2010) has addressed an important womanist attitude in Walker's novels. She has explored the characters' self-love, which is, according to her, one of Walker's fully humanizing and spiritually empowering tools strong enough to eradicate the self-hatred fed to blacks over centuries of physical, emotional, and psychological slavery (28). She has also discussed the need for healing and wholeness in *The Color Purple*. Likewise,

Dhavaleswarapu Ratna Hasanthi (2018) emphasizes Tashi's healing process, which involves forgiving her complicitous mother and taking collective action to stop the pain. She argues that black women cannot understand oppressive cultural practices like female genital mutilation unless they develop womanist consciousness, which enables them to come to terms with their racist, sexist, and classist subjugation. Aoi Mori (1999) explores different methods for social change, such as nurturing and collective community expression, in Morrison's novels. She highlights the healing process in Walker's novels, including *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *Meridian*, and *The Color Purple*. Mori also asserts that black female characters display a womanist attitude by embracing artistic culture and refusing to let others define their femininity.

This notion of artistic culture has been briefly tackled by Harold Bloom (2010). He describes Mrs. MacTeer as an artist who has enabled her daughters' self-preservation over self-destruction through her singing wisdom and harsh protectiveness (61). Lisa Williams (2010) provides further explanation of the role of art in black women's lives. She describes Claudia as the resistant artist storyteller who succeeded in articulating Pecola's pain. According to her, "to write and speak of those experiences that have remained unrecorded is to begin to heal the invisible wounds created by silence" (76). Williams argues that Claudia's storytelling, which is communicated to her through her mother's songs, shows her connection to the oral tradition of her ancestors, unlike Pecola, who is isolated from both the black and white communities. Om P. Juneja (2008) contends that Celie, through the art of quilting, has followed a womanist process in her journey of self-discovery. She claims that quilting, among other crafts, is part of the folk-art tradition of African Americans' survival culture, which enhances black women's creativity despite oppression (86).

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (2006) briefly tackles the theme of spirituality in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. She argues that despite Pecola's superficial madness, she acquires an interior spiritual beauty, and it is this duality that makes her a scapegoat for others to clean themselves up on her. She also describes Sula as a binding, spiritual force in Medallion, which illustrates the womanist view of showing concern for the black extended family (29). Ogunyemi, however, discusses spirituality as a social change perspective in *The Color Purple*. She argues that black women's spirituality is sustained by letters, which affect their well-being, destiny, and relationships with both other people and the environment. Consequently, Ogunyemi claims that letters, as a spiritual medium, "ensure illumination of the black predicament that precedes black integrity" (34). Margaret Kamitsuka (2003) addresses the issue of natural sexed self and criticizes both white feminist and womanist theologians like Daphne Hampson, Mary Catherine Hilkert, and Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, who have overlooked sexuality in their readings of *The Color Purple*. She explains that these theologists ignore Celie's discovery of her sexuality, which juxtaposes her search for spirituality through referring to Celie's lesbianism as primarily friendship or sisterhood. In contrast, Dolores Williams (1985) tackles Celie's sexuality as integral to her spiritual self-discovery. She argues that the diversity of sexual identities gives black women independence and control over their bodies and, thus, supports their struggle for survival, transformation, and liberation.

Although the previous studies have addressed some womanist methods for social change, such as motherhood, sisterhood, and healing, these methods are still open to more interpretations. Besides, no study has deeply tackled, in one single work, the different components of the womanist identity as defined by Walker. "Womanish" identity has been ascribed to some characters as an adjective without a profound exploration of gender roles and

relationships. Without a fuller understanding of the womanist conception of femininity and the womanist methods for social change that advocate resistance and empowerment in black women's everyday lives, it will be difficult to overcome the race and gender prejudice that many black women still face.

The major research question of this thesis is how do black women in Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*, and Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* remodel the meaning of black womanhood within the larger context of racism and sexism? The study makes use of the following complementary questions that are meant to be answered in separate chapters, respectively:

1- How do racism and sexism distort black womanhood?

2- How do black men enhance black women's marginalization?

3- How can black women challenge race and gender prejudice?

4- To what extent does the newly constructed womanhood differ from both the traditional and the stereotypical images of womanhood?

The main aim of this research is to argue for the genesis of "womanish" women in Morrison and Walker's selected novels to counter the hegemonic conventions related to both white and black womanhood. "Womanish" women refuse to play a secondary role in society or settle for anything less than the right to fulfill their status as strong black women free from the prejudices and constraints of the different forms of oppression. In order to achieve this aim, this study focuses on black women's subjugation and, then, on their several defining moments of resistance, self-discovery, and empowerment.

Patricia Hill Collins' intersectionality and Alice Walker's womanism are the main approaches used in this study. Intersectionality is a social theory concerned with the various experiences of African American women. It focuses on the interconnectedness of the different forms of oppression, specifically race, gender, and class, in shaping black women's lives. Collins proposes that people other than African American women form the identity of black women through perpetuating negative images of black womanhood. Moreover, she sheds light on how the interlocking system of oppression determines black men and black women's power-structured relationships, which enhance black women's subordination and negatively affect their self-perceptions. Intersectionality is useful for studying the experiences of black females in Morrison and Walker's selected novels since it helps understand the effects of race and gender prejudice on black femininity.

Womanism is a social change perspective specifically concerned with black women's everyday problems and experiences. It evokes the feminist struggle against sexism and goes further to emphasize the interlocking oppression of race, gender, and class. Womanism provides a space for black women to develop a full sense of femininity and equality with their male counterparts in a world ruled by racist and sexist definitions of identity. Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, as well as Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, all feature a womanist view of the black woman, specifically in her relationships with other men and women, and her contribution to the well-being of not just the black community but of the entire people.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapters one and two deal with black women's oppression. Chapter one is entitled "Black Women and the Controlling Images of Womanhood". It provides various historical and literary representations of traditional gender

norms and racial stereotypes to identify the extent to which black women are marginalized. This chapter focuses on women's roles as wives and mothers, as well as their purity and beauty. Chapter two is entitled "Black Women and Black Sexual Politics". It looks at black men's physical, emotional, and psychological dominance of black women. This chapter concentrates on the way this multifaceted dominance has deep effects on black women's minds, bodies, and spirits.

Chapters three and four are concerned with black women's resistance, definition, and empowerment. Chapter three is entitled "Challenging Race and Gender Prejudice: A Womanist Therapy". This chapter traces the various means used by black women to resist and challenge race and gender prejudice. It looks at both individual and collective efforts that make social change possible. Chapter four is entitled "The Genesis of the 'Womanish' Identity". It tackles the way black women achieve self-assertion and reach an understanding of other possibilities and definitions for their roles and perceptions of themselves. The chapter focuses on strength, love, survival, and knowledge as the main features that shape black women's "womanishness". More about the aims of these chapters will be provided in their respective introductions.

All these help achieve a new understanding of black womanhood in Morrison and Walker's fiction, which would significantly improve not only black women's position but also that of the entire black community.

Chapter One

Black Women and the Controlling Images of Womanhood

Introduction

This chapter aims to show how racism and sexism create controlling images of womanhood that prevent black females from realizing their full potential as women. It contrasts the traditional views of women's domesticity, fragility, nurturing, purity, and beauty with the controlling images of the matriarch, the mule, the mammy, the jezebel, and the myth of black women's ugliness. Collins' intersectionality gives greater recognition to these controlling images that work as powerful justifications for black women's oppression. She claims that the "intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality could not continue without powerful ideological justifications for their existence [which make them] appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (*Black Feminist* 69). This chapter shows that black women are not only excluded from hegemonic womanhood but also pressured to conform to racial stereotypes that keep them invisible.

1.1. Wifehood

1.1.1. The Domestic Wife vs. the Black Matriarch

Within the discourse of ideal womanhood, wifehood and motherhood are glorified as the purposes of a woman's life. The ideal woman should be domestic. She must stay within her proper sphere so that she can fulfill her ultimate role as a good wife and mother. She also has to accept male dominance, be submissive, and show her dependence and need for protection. Submission is an important virtue of the "true" woman. Barbara Welter explains how

"[s]ubmission [is] perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women" (158). Women should depend both economically and psychologically on their fathers and then on their husbands. They should display weakness and an extreme need for protection. To preserve their purity and protect their maternal love, women need to remain within their sheltered domestic spheres. According to Welter, "[t]he true woman's place was unquestionably by her own fireside-as daughter, sister, but most of all as wife and mother" (162). She adds: "[m]arriage was the proper state for the exercise of the domestic virtues" (169). Likewise, Collins claims that

> The cult of true womanhood, with its emphasis on motherhood as woman's highest calling, has long held a special place in the gender symbolism of White Americans. From this perspective, women's activities should be confined to the care of children, the nurturing of a husband, and the maintenance of the household. (*Meaning* 286)

The image of the "true" woman, then, becomes limited to her roles as mother and wife, which enhance her domesticity, dependence, and complete submission. Within the cult of true womanhood, these roles are the ultimate feminine beauty. In other words, a woman's "patience, mercy and gentleness as well as […] her housewifely arts [make her] fulfill her dual feminine function--- beauty and usefulness" (Welter 163). Patriarchal societies not only frame women's characteristics and roles but also seek to justify their subjugation in order to preserve the status quo.

Both Morrison and Walker highlight the unhealthy marital relationships in black communities. Black women in their households find themselves obliged to submit to one of the two imposed roles: to follow the hegemonic meaning of womanhood by playing a secondary role in a patriarchal family, or to become the head of the household when black men abandon their duties. The latter is directly linked to the stereotypical image of the black

matriarch, which is central to intersecting oppressions of gender and race and is important in explaining the persistence of black social class outcomes (*Black Feminist* 76).

The paradoxical images of black women as either domestic wives or heads of households are central to *Sula*. The images of the ideal woman and the nuclear family strongly influence the black community. Morrison creates Nel Wright's traditional and conservative family in contrast to Sula Peace's matriarchal one. The Wright family inherited the traditional gender roles from one generation to the next. Nel's mother, Helene, is the daughter of a prostitute, but she has been raised by her strict religious grandmother, Cecile, who makes of her a very traditional woman.

Cecile plans Helene's marriage to her grandnephew because she believes in the necessity of marriage to preserve women's virtue. In the same way, Helene raises Nel on the two traditional women's roles: wifehood and motherhood. For the black community, Helene is "an impressive woman […] who won all social battles with presence and a conviction of the legitimacy of her authority" (*Sula* 18). Although Helene manipulates her daughter and her husband, she is far from being labeled a black matriarch because, on the one hand, she is not the breadwinner, and on the other hand, she tries as much as she can to instill the traditional roles in her daughter. Sula has been raised in a household headed by her grandmother, Eva. Like Helene, Eva is an authoritative figure in the Bottom. She is the one who names things and persons. In contrast to Helene, Eva is the breadwinner. Her non-traditional gender roles label her as the black matriarch.

The image of the matriarch was first introduced in Daniel Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), in which he explains how women's financial contributions to the well-being of black families support the matriarchy thesis. He further

argues that African American women who failed to fulfill their traditional "womanly" duties at home contributed to social problems in black civil society (20). In other words, black people are subjected to remarkable differences in gender roles as compared with white people. Gender norms that emphasize males as providers and authoritarian figures and females as homemakers and paragons of virtue exist in opposition to African Americans' gender roles. Black women as matriarchs are accused of emasculating black men. Collins argues that "[a]ggressive, assertive women are penalized—they are abandoned by their men, end up impoverished, and are stigmatized as being unfeminine" (*Black Feminist* 77).

It is important to recognize that the image of the black matriarch is the outcome of the intersection of race, gender, and poverty. Traditional roles are reversed in black families due to the lack of job opportunities for black men and their availability for black women. As Collins argues, "being employed when Black men have difficulty finding steady work exposes African-American women to the charge that Black women emasculate Black men by failing to be submissive, dependent, 'feminine' women" (*Black Feminist* 78).

In *Sula*, Eva's assertive behavior grows when her husband, BoyBoy, leaves the household and she finds herself with big responsibilities towards her children.

> The oldest child, Hannah, was five and too young to take care of the baby alone, and any housework Eva could find would keep her away fromthem from five thirty or earlier in the morning until dark—way past eight. […]. She thought also of returning to some of her people in Virginia, but to come home dragging three young ones would have to be a step one rung before death for Eva. She would have to scrounge around and beg through the winter, until her baby was at least nine months old, then she could plant and maybe hire herself out to valley farms to weed or sow or feed stock until something steadier came along at harvest time. (*Sula* 32-3)

Due to her husband's absence, Eva has to play the dual role of the mother and the breadwinner. As Linda Lindsey states, "[r]ooted in a tradition valuing economic opportunities for women, African American middle-class women moved into the professions earlier than white women. Like white women, they are steered into traditionally female occupations, but they have an added race liability" (339). Although the image of the matriarch is the outcome of the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender, the role of black men in constructing the matriarchy thesis should not be reduced. In other words, the image of the matriarch rises primarily as a response to black men's failure to perform the traditional gender roles.

The relationship between black men's failing manhood and the construction of the matriarchy thesis is also illustrated in Nel's relationship with her husband. Jude works as a waiter at the Medaillon hotel. Since the job of the waiter is genderless, his ultimate wish is to get a male-specific job. When he learns about the new project of building a new road to the river, he strongly longs to work on it. However, he finds that only white men can get the job. Strongly affected by the news, Jude wants to fulfill any male duty to satisfy his manhood, and thus, he proposes to Nel. Morrison writes: "[s]o it was rage, rage and a determination to take on a man's role anyhow that made him press Nel about settling down. […] He chose the girl who had always been kind, who had never seemed hell-bent to marry, who made the whole venture seem like his idea, his conquest" (*Sula* 82-3).

Jude feels his manhood only in the presence of a submissive woman, who can fill and complement his weaknesses. Morrison explains that Jude needs

> [S]omeone sweet, industrious and loyal to shore him up. And in return he would shelter her, love her, grow old with her. Without that someone he was a waiter hanging around a kitchen like a woman. With her he was head of a household pinned to an unsatisfactory job out of necessity. The two of them together would make one Jude. (83)

Like Jude, who uses Nel as a manifesto to prove his manhood, Nel tries to follow the traditional image of womanhood by becoming the ideal domestic wife. Her submissiveness is explicitly seen in her dependence on Jude. She "didn't even know she had a neck until Jude remarked on it, or that her smile was anything but the spreading of her lips until he saw it as a small miracle" (84). When Jude leaves the house, Nel, like Eva, is obliged to give up the image of the traditional domestic wife and play the head of the household's role. Although Nel is far from Eva's authoritative personality, she is also a matriarch due to her position as breadwinner.

The rise of women as breadwinners in the first half of the twentieth century was not limited to black women. The Great Depression of the 1930s and WWII enhanced women's roles in the workplace. The economic crisis made women search for labor to sustain their families and support their husbands. Jennifer Barker-Devine explains the changing workforce with the new demands of society:

> During the Great Depression, the identity of the typical worker changed tremendously. At the turn of the century, most female workers were young, under twenty-five, unmarried, and either ethnic minorities, immigrants, or the daughters of immigrants. By the 1930's, however, more married and educated women sought work, and they found a variety of new opportunities open to them. (Barker-Devine 56)

Society strictly opposes married women having jobs. Married women are still expected to function solely in their domestic spheres as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

The war also played an important role in the distortion of traditional gender roles. Men's participation in the war created a lack of labor in the factories. In order to support the war effort, these jobs were filled by women. When the war is over, both men and women are expected to return to their traditional pre-war roles, as Ravenna Helson et al. claim:

> The psychosocial effects of the Depression and World War II seem to have fed an exaggerated cult of women's domestic role in the late 1940s and 1950s. Even though women had in fact participated heavily in the labor force during World War II, they were 'helping out.' Their place was at home. (qtd. in Hogan et al. 297)

The war influenced American girls, who were mobilized as nurses and war workers. Continental manners and standards dismantle the traditional restraints, reticences, and taboos that made it impossible for this generation to return unchanged after the ordeal (Allen 72). Due to women's satisfaction with their freedom at that time, it became difficult to re-impose the traditional gender roles. The American patriarchy created the image of the ideal woman because "[a]bove all, women were expected to remain 'feminine'—a term that implied submissiveness and allure along with sexual chastity—and to embrace domesticity after the war" (May 70).

Despite the fact that both white and black women embrace the role of the breadwinner, the controlling image of the matriarch is exclusively tied to black women. Black women's work, independence, and assertiveness represent a threat to the traditional meaning of femininity, which should be and stay the only definition of womanhood. In other words, the image of the matriarch is a powerful image for women's independence because it "serves as a powerful

symbol for both Black and White women of what can go wrong if White patriarchal power is challenged" (Collins*, Black Feminist* 77). Stereotyping black women as black matriarchs helps in maintaining the traditional meaning of womanhood.

However, the matriarch is no more than a misnomer because neither black women have the power to emasculate black men nor black men can perform the patriarchal roles in black families, which makes black families neither patriarchal nor matriarchal. Angela Davis argues:

> The designation of the black woman as a matriarch is a cruel misnomer. It is a misnomer because it implies stable kinship structures within which the mother exercises decisive authority. It is cruel because it ignores the profound traumas the black woman must have experienced when she had to surrender her child-bearing to alien and predatory economic interests. (Davis and James 113)

The image of the matriarch is not only the antithesis of the ideal domestic wife but also a portrayal of the bad mother who cannot nurture her children and runs after financial interests. Collins explains that work has always been part of the black mother's duties but the type of work itself is what affects black motherhood:

> The work done by African-American women in providing the economic resources essential to Black family well-being affects motherhood in a contradictory fashion. On the one hand, African-American women have long integrated their activities as economic providers into their mothering relationships. In contrast to the cult of true womanhood, in which work is defined as being in opposition to and incompatible with motherhood, work for Black women has been an important and valued dimension of Afrocentric definitions of Black motherhood. On the other hand, African-American women's experiences as mothers under oppression were such that the type and purpose of work Black women were forced to do have a great impact on the type of mothering relationships bloodmothers and othermothers had with Black children. (*Meaning* 288-9)

In *Sula*, motherhood is considered an important feature of black womanhood. It is significant to observe Morrison's depiction of Betty as "an indifferent mother, all of whose interests sat around the door of the Time and a Half Pool Hall" (*Sula* 113). The community calls Betty Teapot's Mamma because "being his mamma was precisely her major failure" (113-4). Through Teapot's Mamma, the black community shows its belief in the necessity for black females to be good mothers.

Morrison insists on the interrelationship between the Bottom's poor financial conditions and the difficulty of motherhood, not only in Sula's family but in the whole community. Eva is forced to abandon her children when BoyBoy abandons her and she is unable to find work in the Bottom. Morrison describes Eva's husband as the one who "liked womanizing best, drinking second, and abusing Eva third" (32). Eva leaves her children with a neighbor, promising to pick them up the next day. She comes back after eighteen months of absence with a sum of money and one leg. No one knows the source of Eva's money or the mysterious story behind losing her leg; "[s]omebody said Eva stuck it under a train and made them pay off. Another said she sold it to a hospital for $10,000" (31).

Whatever the source of Eva's money is, it is obvious that she devotes herself to the well-being of her family. The first thing she does is build a house for her children and keep supporting them financially. Chiara Cecchini describes Eva as a pragmatic mother "who is forced, by situations, to react in a way that will protect her children" (89). Eva is far from the traditional mother since her children suffer from emotional deprivation. Her mothering is much more concerned with ensuring her children's physical survival than with filling their emotional needs. Andrea O'Reilly describes Eva's maternal love as a preservative love, which indicates that black women's mother-work and mother-love stem primarily from ensuring the

physical survival of their children and those of the larger black community (119). This preservative love, as O'Reilly claims, "is often not regarded as real, legitimate, or 'good enough' mothering" (32).

Eva is far from the traditional, affectionate mother, but she is still a good mother. She succeeds in providing preservative love as both a blood-mother to her children and an other-mother to the Deweys. According to O'Reilly,

> [Eva] resists the patriarchal script of motherhood that demands women mother children in a nuclear family in which the mother is subservient/inferior to the husband; economically, psychologically, and so forth. [She] refuses the patriarchal dictates of "good" motherhood, namely, that mothers are to be respectable, moral, chaste, passive, obedient, controlled, altruistic, selfless, and domestic. (81)

Although the controlling image of the black matriarch is stigmatized as the bad image of the mother, in Eva's case it is not.

When BoyBoy comes back to town and visits her, Eva does not know what she wants from him; "[w]ould she cry, cut his throat, beg him to *make love* to *her*" (*Sula* 35, emphasis in original). Yet, she ends up realizing that she hates him, and she is happy about that feeling.

> Knowing that she would hate him long and well filled her with pleasant anticipation, like when you know you are going to fall in love with someone and you wait for the happy signs. Hating BoyBoy, she could get on with it, and have the safety, the thrill, the consistency of that hatred as long as she wanted or needed it to define and strengthen her or protect her from routine vulnerabilities […] and it was hating him that kept her alive and happy. (37)

Despite Eva's controversial feelings of submission and hatred, it is obvious that she is not enjoying her role as the black matriarch. In fact, both feelings show her preference of the role

of the dependent wife. Her weakness towards BoyBoy shows her submissiveness, and her hatred stems mainly from his inability to fill the role of the head of the household. Eva's statement that hating BoyBoy is what keeps her alive and that she has stayed alive for her children indicates that her life is related to her position as the only provider for her children, which makes her necessary for their survival and intensifies her hatred of BoyBoy at the same time.

In contrast to her deep hatred of BoyBoy, Eva loves all men, and it is this love that Eva communicates to her daughter Hannah and then to her granddaughter Sula.

> With the exception of BoyBoy, those Peace women loved all men. It was man love that Eva bequeathed to her daughters. Probably, people said, because there were no men in the house, no men to run it. But actually that was not true. The Peace women simply loved maleness, for its own sake. (41)

Even when she grows old, Eva continues to welcome a "regular flock of gentleman callers, and although she did not participate in the act of love, there was a good deal of teasing and pecking and laughter" (41).

When Eva first married BoyBoy, she was very much in love with him. This love that turns into hatred is not the outcome of her husband's abusive behavior but rather of his failing manhood. It is significant that her husband's name is "BoyBoy" which probably shows Morrison's emphasis on his boyishness, not his manhood. BoyBoy calls Eva "girl" (35), trying to degrade her womanhood into girlhood. Eva cannot accept such a prototype of failing manhood in her family, and that is why she kills her son, Plum. Eva claims:

> There wasn't space for him in my womb. And he was crawlin' back. Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time. I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more. I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again. He was growed, a big old thing. Godhavemercy, I couldn't birth him twice. (71)

Plum comes back from the war as a drug addict, and it is difficult for Eva to witness his degrading status every day. She cannot accept her son's weakness because she believes in men's traditional toughness and independence. Plum's failing manhood makes Eva burn him alive, though he is the child she loves most.

Despite Eva's position as the black matriarch, traditional gender roles still govern her life. She continuously encourages all women to be loyal to their husbands and perform all their housewifely duties. She advises Sula to marry and have kids. She claims: "'[w]hen you gone to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you.' […] 'Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around without no man'" (92). When Sula replies that she and her mother live without men, Eva argues: "[n]ot by choice" (92). Cecchini explains Eva's dual role as a communal matriarch and an arbiter of traditional marriages:

> [Eva] is reestablishing her role as a wife through these women, in order to regain reverence in her community and as a role model. In helping these wives, Eva is sought after as an advisor and authority as a wife. Eva bolsters her status in the community is by playing the role of the traditional wife. Eva is abandoned by her husband. In order to overcome the shame she feels by this situation, she reclaims her role as a wife by dictating the role to newlywed wives. (88)

Cecchini goes further and describes Eva as a "complex matriarch" because she is both the head of her household and an other-mother to her community without embodying all the qualifications of the stereotypical matriarch (96).

In contrast to Cecchini's claim, it is obvious that Eva embodies all the qualifications of the matriarch; she is assertive, aggressive, and the breadwinner for her family, but she, like Helen, supports the traditional view of women's domesticity and submission. Eva can be described as a "regretful matriarch" since she regrets her status as a black matriarch. According to Collins, "[m]any U.S. Black women who find themselves maintaining families by themselves often feel that they have done something wrong. If only they were not so strong, some reason, they might have found a male partner" (*Black Feminist* 77). Although black women enjoy their freedom in the role of the head of the household, the image of the ideal woman remains so powerful that they cannot escape.

1.1.2. The Fragile Woman vs. the Black Mule

Besides the image of the matriarch, the white upper-class dominant group also creates the mule stereotype. Collins defines the mule as a woman "whose back is bent from a lifetime of hard work" (*Black Feminist* 113). She introduces the origins of the word "mule", which is "mule uh de world" or "mule of the world". The term was first used in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). It defines black women as the lowest creatures in the world. It is mainly related to black women's labor market and their victimization as dehumanized objects and living machines (Collins, *Black Feminist* 45). In *The Color Purple*, Walker presents Celie as "the mule of the world". Valérie Croisille argues that:

> Because of her double victimisation as a woman and as a black person, Celie, 'the mule of the world' – 'de mule uh de world' to take up Zora Neale Hurston's labelling of the black woman in Their Eyes Were Watching God, has been deprived of her voice by both patriarchy and racist tradition. (98)

Celie embodies the image of the mule not only because she has been deprived of her voice but also because her husband, whom she calls Mr. _____, forces her to work hard and exploits her labor.

At first, Mr. _____ wants to marry her sister Nettie, but their father Alfonso refuses his offer. Instead, Alfonso proposes to him, Celie. Shocked at the sight of Celie, Mr. _____ says: "I ain't never really look at that one" (*Color* 8). Alfonso tries to convince him by claiming that "she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it" (8). Surprisingly, Alfonso informs Mr. _____ that "[s]he ugly [...] she a bad influence on my other girls [...] She ain't smart either [...] she'll give away everything you own [...] She tell lies" (8). He concludes with "she'll make the better wife" (8). Mr. _____ spends the whole spring thinking about Alfonso's offer, and he ends up accepting Celie as a wife. Despite Celie's negative features, as described by Alfonso, Mr. _____ marries her for two important qualities: she is not demanding and "she can work like a man" (8).

Collins discusses how race, class, and gender enhance the contradictions between the dominant ideology of womanhood and black women's objectification. She claims: "[i]f women are allegedly passive and fragile, then why are Black women treated as 'mules'" (*Black Feminist* 11). The designation of black women as mules goes beyond excluding them from standard womanhood. In fact, the image of the mule goes back to the era of slavery, when black women's exploited labor should be justified. According to Collins, "objectifying Black women agricultural workers as mules justified working them as if they were animals […]. The system was designed to stamp out agency and annex Black women's bodies to a system of profit" (*Black Sexual* 56). This system of profit that was adopted during slavery

pervades the black community. Collins discusses black women's labor exploitation in both society and the family. She explains that, in the United States, scholarship focuses on black women's paid labor while ignoring their unpaid labor:

> [R]esearch on U.S. Black women's unpaid labor within extended families remains less fully developed in Black feminist thought than does that on Black women's paid work […] such scholarship suggests that Black women see the unpaid work that they do for their families more as a form of resistance to oppression than as a form of exploitation by men. Despite these views, investigating how Black women's unpaid labor is exploited within African-American family networks […] remains a neglected topic. In the context of Black family studies […] the theme of how hard Black women *work* is often overlooked. When combined, Black feminist-inspired analyses of paid and unpaid work performed both in the labor market and in families stimulate a better appreciation of the powerful and complex interplay that shapes Black women's position as "de mule uh de world". (*Black Feminist* 46, emphasis in original)

Mr. _____ exploits Celie's labor inside and outside the house. Harpo claims that every day his father "git up, sit on the porch, look out at nothing. Sometime look at the trees out front the house. Look at a butterfly if it light on the rail. Drink a little water in the day. A little wine in the evening. But mostly never move" (*Color* 28). Despite the fact that Mr. _____ is the black patriarch, due to his authoritative personality and his over-use of violence, he does not work at all. Celie claims: "[o]ne good thing bout the way he never do any work round the place, us never miss him when he gone" (44).

More specifically, the relationship between Mr. _____ and Celie is similar to that of a master and slave. Mr. _____ brings his sick mistress Shug to his house, and Celie takes care of her. She cooks food for Shug, washes her body and even combs her hair. Celie longs to meet Shug from the first day she hears about her and sees her photograph in the magazine. She first

overhears the name “Shug Avery” during a discussion between Alfonso and Mr. _____. She asks her stepmother, “[w]hat it is?” (6). Later, she discovers that Shug Avery is not an “it” but rather a woman. She claims:

> Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier then me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair Like somethin tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motocar. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some. (6)

Although Celie is happy to take care of Shug, the coming of Shug into the house and sleeping with Mr. _____ while Celie has to work for both of them portrays Celie as a slave in Mr. _____’s house. When Old Mr. ____ shows his sympathy towards Celie by claiming “you have my sympathy. Not many women let they husband [mistress] lay up in they house” (55), Celie and Mr. ____ exchange glances, and Celie describes the moment as “the closest us ever felt” (55). In fact, Celie and Mr. ____ come to terms with the nature of their relationship, which transcends financial exploitation to a master/slave relationship in which Celie embraces humiliation and disrespect.

Harpo inherited his father’s paradoxical gender roles. Celie describes him as “strong in body but weak in will” (28). When Mr. _____’s sister asks him to help Celie bring water, he replies: “[w]omen work. I’m a man” (22). Later, Mr. _____ obliges him to work with Celie in the fields. She recounts: “[m]e and him out in the field all day. Us sweat, chopping and plowing. I’m roasted coffee bean color now. He black as the inside of a chimney. His eyes be sad and thoughtful. His face begin to look like a woman face” (28). Due to Harpo’s continuous complaining about hard work, Mr. _____ gives him wages while Celie works hard without any wages. According to Collins,

> Domination may be either cruel and exploitative with no affection or may be exploitative yet coexist with affection. The former produces the victim—in this case, the Black woman as 'mule' whose labor has been exploited. In contrast, the combination of dominance and affection produces the pet, the individual who is subordinate and whose survival depends on the whims of the more powerful. (*Black Feminist* 144)

Collins also argues that "African-American women simultaneously embody the coexistence of the victim and the pet, with survival often linked to the ability to be appropriately subordinate" (*Black Feminist* 144). Celie is the victim as well as the pet. On the one hand, Mr. _____ exploits her labor inside and outside the house, where she has to clean, cook, take care of the children, and work in the fields. On the other hand, her survival requires Mr. _____'s affection. Though there is no love between them, Celie is completely submissive to Mr. _____'s sexual needs for her survival.

Celie's double victimization destroys her sense of selfhood, as Trudier Harris points out: "[p]lowing a man's fields for twenty years and letting him use her body as a sperm depository leaves Celie so buried away from herself that it is hard to imagine anything stirring her to life" (158). The image of the mule in *The Color Purple* is another example of black men's role in black women's subordination. With the exploitation of Celie's labor, Mr. _____ not only embraces the white ideology that seeks to deny black women the fragility ascribed to white women but also justifies their labor market victimization.

1.2. Motherhood

1.2.1. The Good Mother vs. the Black Mammy

The image of the protective and nurturing mother has always been associated with true womanhood. Alison Mackinnon claims that motherhood is the "definition of women within the patriarchal ideology" (qtd. in Schneider-Wettstein 12). The intertwined relationship between womanhood and motherhood makes becoming mothers the ultimate wish of women. Welter argues that motherhood adds another dimension to women's usefulness and prestige (171). Childbirth, according to John Hawkings Miller, dominated the domestic life of a woman and "tested [her] strength, her femininity, and her spiritual condition" (qtd. in Schneider-Wettstein 11).

Among the different stereotypical images of black women, the image of the mammy is closest to the image of the good mother. The mammy is the "surrogate mother in blackface" (Collins, *Black Feminist* 74). While the matriarch is the authoritative, aggressive female, the mammy is the one who has both virtue and motherly love, primarily directed towards the white family for whom she works. Collins explains the role of the different forms of oppression in creating the mammy image:

> The mammy image is central to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Regarding racial oppression, controlling images like the mammy aim to influence Black maternal behavior. […] Black mothers are encouraged to transmit to their own children […] their assigned place in White power structures. (*Black Feminist* 73)

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline Breedlove represents the mammy figure. Pauline is obliged to work for the Fishers because her alcoholic husband, Cholly, abandons his duties. Fardosa

Abdalla describes Pauline as “an extreme character, and very much an extreme mother. The extremeness makes Polly fit the stereotypical images of black women and mothers so well” (9). In contrast to Abdalla’s view, Cecchini argues that despite the fact that Pauline is forced to work as a servant to a white family, being the sole breadwinner, she is still “embodying the image of a faithful mammy” (45-6).

Pauline’s duality is very remarkable in the novel. She is a good mother only in the Fishers’ house. With her children, she shows a totally different image.

> Pauline kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into her storefront, or to her children. Them she bent toward respectability, and in so doing taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly’s mother’s. Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life. (*Bluest* 126)

Pauline fails in providing neither love nor protection to her children, specifically to her daughter. She treats Pecola badly, unlike the way she treats the small white girl for whom she works. The white girl calls Pecola’s mother “Polly”, while Pecola calls her “Mrs. Breedlove”. Collins claims that the mammy stereotype was created primarily to represent

> [T]he normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women’s behavior. By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and ‘family’ better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power. (*Black Feminist* 72)

Pauline’s failed motherhood leads to the devastation of her two children. Sammy runs away many times, and Pecola is trapped in a vicious circle of self-hatred and ends up raped and impregnated by her father.

Unlike Pauline, Eva defies the role of the mammy when she decides to amputate her leg instead of being a domestic servant. According to Cecchini,

> The insurance Eva collects ensures that she will not become a mammy nor will she depend on 'White folk' or men for her income. With the money she collects she buys a house and takes in boarders and orphans and consequently promotes the African American community because she is not forced to work as a mammy. (96)

Likewise, Lisa Williams says that Eva sacrifices her leg and refuses to become a low-paid domestic worker in a white family. In this way, "she shatters the mammy stereotype of black women" (qtd. in Qasim et al. 221). Eva's preference to be a matriarch rather than a mammy is mainly because the mammy image represents a threat to the black family and the black community as well. The duality of the mammy image, which casts black women as indifferent mothers within their black families and caring mothers within white families, comes at the heart of the intersecting forms of oppression. In other words, as Collins notes, the image of the mammy influences black maternal behavior as black mothers transmit to their children the inferiority that they exhibit in their mammified jobs and, thus, teach them their assigned position in society. Accordingly, internalizing the mammy image is an effective conduit for perpetuating racial oppression (*Black Feminist* 73).

Pauline embodies the mammy stereotype. She is "an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs" (*Bluest* 125). However, Abdalla argues that Pauline resists the mammy image by shedding light on her environment and background: "[t]he text describes the ugliness as 'relentless' and 'aggressive,' which enables us to understand the almost physical power of this ugliness. It is more than skin deep; it is a force that is stronger than the character's sense of logic and reality" (14). Abdalla goes further by claiming that Pauline is not essentially happy and kind as the mammy:

> Polly's internal ugliness and hurt is described in resistance to the cheerful Mammy stereotype. Polly is not content with her life; she is so weak and desperate to escape her situation that she retreats into the home of her white employers. Working for them is a better alternative than taking care of her own ugly family, and therefore the happiness that she expresses when she is at her job is not a reflection of how well her employers treat her; it is rather a reflection of her desperation bordering on lunacy. (14)

Pauline not only shows her happiness and kindness in the Fishers' house but also her belonging to the white family. For instance, when Claudia and Frieda go to the Fishers' house to find Pecola, Pecola accidentally topples the cobbler in the kitchen. Pauline starts shouting: "[c]razy fool . . . my floor, mess . . . look what you . . . work . . . get on out . . . now that . . . crazy . . . my floor, my floor . . . my floor" (*Bluest* 107). By referring to the floor as hers, Pauline insists on her belonging to the white family's house.

The girls notice that "Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowed like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain, white woodwork, polished cabinets, and brilliant copperware" (105-6). In her house, Pauline is always fighting with Cholly and berating him for not providing for the family. She claims: "[y]ou sure ain't bringing in nothing. If it was left up to you, we'd all be dead" (38-9). Pauline emulates the Fishers. She embraces their values and lifestyle, and even begins to see her own daughter through the acquired astigmatism of the Fishers' world (Klotman 124). She punishes and beats Pecola harshly, though the cobbler has burned her legs. Pauline's thinking about her floor and ignoring her daughter's injury shows her dissolution within the obedient servant role and her distance from her black motherhood. She quickly starts comforting the little white girl with her lovable words. Harold Bloom comments on Pauline's reaction to her spoiled dessert:

> Pauline's maternal instincts to comfort and reassure a small child are directed at the Fishers' yellow-haired, beribboned daughter who has burst into tears over this disruption to her afternoon. Pauline's self-worth is so completely defined by her role as the "ideal servant" to this prosperous white family that she chooses to preserve that false identity rather than come to the rescue of her own daughter. (*Guides* 50)

When Pecola and her two friends are leaving the Fishers' house, they hear the white girl asking who they were. Pauline replies: "[d]on't worry none, baby" (*Bluest* 107). Pauline's statement reduces her daughter, family, and community to nothing.

Pauline loves everything in the Fishers' house; the cupboards that are full of food, the bathroom with endless hot water, and even brushing the children's straight blond hair. She internalizes the mammy image and proves that she is an obedient domestic servant; "[a]ll the meaningfulness of her life was in her work" (126). By describing that her disabled foot does not make any sound on the carpets of the white family's house, Morrison insists on Pauline's forgetfulness of her handicap. The Fishers offer her something she never had; a nickname, Polly, which gives her both identity and importance. Jennifer Gillan claims that "[e]mbodying the role of Polly becomes a substitute for what Pauline wants: a satisfying and substantial self. When she cannot access that self on her own, through her family or the black community, she accepts the self imposed upon her by the Fishers" (170). Pauline, however, is happy with that self. The Fishers give her respect from people who humiliated her before but now respect her when she talks for them.

Pauline rejects her blackness and her duties as a wife and a mother. Her longing for the white family's life makes her seek to experience it in the picture show. The pleasure she enjoys in the picture show makes coming home and looking at her husband's face hard (*Bluest*

121). Consequently, Pauline is not forced to play the role of the mammy but performs it with endless pleasure.

The image of the mammy distorts black motherhood, which has always been the site of black women's resistance. Black mothers used to raise their children, mainly their daughters, on the necessity of resisting the different forms of oppression. By shifting the black mother's nurturing towards the white family, the dominant group destroys the mother-daughter bond and represses black people's resistance.

1.2.2. The Protective Mother vs. the Submissive Wife

Black women's position in African society before, during, and after the colonial period is controversial. Many critics argue that in pre-colonial African society, women were equal to men. They were respected, valuable, and played influential roles in religion, the economy, and even politics. For instance, Oseni Afisi explains how the goal of community survival helps create a genderless society:

> The contributions of women towards the social, economic, political and educational developments of African societies cannot […] be gainsaid. In fact, traditional African society attached no importance to gender issues because every individual had a role to play both in the family as well as in the larger society. Each gender had its traditional role in the development of the society. In other words, the position of women was complimentary to that of men. There was the non-existent of gender inequality. Each role, regardless of who performed it was considered equally important because it contributed to the fundamental goal of community survival. What this simply implies is that indigenous people in Africa performed varying roles to maintain the efficient functioning of their society, prior to colonialism. (230)

Many other critics categorize African society as a sexist one. T. O. Beidelman claims: “it is common sociological truth that in all societies authority is held by men, not women” (qtd. in Onaiwu 134). Marvin Harris asserts that “men have always been politically and economically dominant over women” (qtd. in Onaiwu 134-5). Ayodele Ogundipe also supports the thesis of gender hierarchy in African societies. She states: “[o]ur social constructionist view is one that looks at gender through the male roles of supplier, safe keeper and spouse; and female roles of mother, nest builder and nurturer as forged by role socialisation by institutions and practices grounded in traditional societies” (96).

Other scholars shed light on the influence of colonialism on African social structures, which led to the distortion of African gender roles and relationships. Josephine Ahikire argues:

> Those who blame African culture for being eternally anti-women lack the sensitivity of the fact that what we call African now is largely the distortion of African culture and realities due to the colonial invasion. Those who uphold traditional African culture have committed an additional sin. They are not willing to look and go back, for that matter to those aspects of African culture that pointed towards egalitarianism. (56)

Awa Thiam claims that after colonialism, the African woman faces “ever-greater problems […]. She is still under the yoke of males: father, brother, husband; she is the object of sexual satisfaction on the part of the male and forms part of the proof of his prosperity. In a word, she is both an ornamental symbol and a maid-of-all-work” (95). Despite women’s position in pre-colonial Africa, colonialism leaves its deep imprint on African gender identity. The African woman loses her egalitarian and complementary status and moves to the bottom, as Afisi argues:

> [T]he face of African society on gender equality changed owing to the influence of colonialism. Women began to suffer oppression from men. The Shackles imposed by law, custom, religion and attitudes forced women to play; the second fiddle'. In fact, women mostly remained relegated to the last rung of the social and political ladder. Women no longer were giving the opportunity to exercise any power except those supervised by men. (234)

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker describes Olinka as a patriarchal society. In a letter to Celie, Nettie describes gender roles in Tashi's community:

> There is a way that the men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don't even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not "look in a man's face" as they say. To "look in a man's face" is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behavior around Pa. (*Color* 163)

Women have no significant social or political role in Olinkan society other than as wives and mothers (Moore 96). Tashi recognizes the absence of women in the Mbele's camp, and M'Lissa tells her that they are all on missions of liberation. Tashi thinks that women's tasks in the camp are "to forage for food and to conduct raids against the plantations [and] to recruit new warriors to swell the ranks of the Mbele rebels" (*Possessing* 63). She discovers later that even in the Mbele's camp, women are "expected to cook and clean-and be screwed-exactly as they had been at home (Moore 96).

Though the African and Western concepts of womanhood intertwine in many aspects, like women's submissiveness and domesticity, ideal womanhood in Olinka village is directly related to black women's bodies. It is linked to the traditional ritual of female genital mutilation, which is used to remove what is considered masculine in order to preserve the full

status of the African woman. Yet, the main aim behind female excision is to control black women's sexuality, which "lie[s] at the heart of Black women's oppression" (Collins, *Black Feminist* 81). The ritual is also viewed as an act of resistance against the influence of white imperialists and Christian missionaries. In this regard, ethnicity, nation, gender, and sexuality intersect to shape women's lives in Olinka.

Tashi's transformation from a strong, rebellious woman into a mutilated, broken one is noteworthy. In the beginning, Walker describes Tashi as a rebellious girl who tries to enjoy independence and learn a new way of life. Her rebellious behavior is clearly seen in her lovemaking with Adam in the fields, which is considered a great sin. When the Mbele's detained leader sends a message to his people to make them "return to the purity of [their] own culture and traditions" (*Possessing* 115), Tashi obeys the leader's call and joins the Mbele's camp in order to undergo the surgery. Although the ritual causes the death of her sister, Tashi shows great courage and determination for her African womanhood.

Though Tashi and her sister Dura assume the responsibility of following the illusion of "true" African womanhood, their mother plays the most important role in their devastation. At first, when Nafa converts to Christianity and changes her name to Catherine, she shows her opposition to the traditional ritual. Kimberley Pollock argues:

> For Nafa, Christianity presents a way to refuse to submit her daughters to the lifelong torture to which her own culture says all women must submit if they are to be true women. As a 'good' Christian mother, Catherine does not have either of her daughters initiated at the proper time. (41)

Nafa is powerless to prevent the ritual from being performed on her own daughters. Her first daughter, Dura, dies, and her second daughter, Tashi, lives with complex trauma and ends up executed.

Within the context of the ideal womanhood in Olinka society, Tashi's mother is a good wife and a good mother since she perpetuates the patriarchal conventions. Suzanna Walters argues that "[t]he 'good' mother in a sexist society teaches her daughter to conform to female stereotypes such as passivity, spirituality, or irrationality" (184). In fact, Nafa finds herself in a controversial situation in which her roles as an Olinkan wife and a Christian mother stand paradoxically together. To be a good, obedient, and submissive wife, Tashi's mother should adapt her mothering to the patriarchal rules. If she chooses to be a nurturing, protective mother, she will be a bad, rebellious wife. Pollock claims:

> That is the tradition which Nafa was to pass on to her daughters, if she was to be a 'good' Olinkan mother. For Catherine, there is a different set of traditions to be transferred. [since] Christian missionaries argue that the practice of the 'bath', the rite of female initiation, is barbaric. (41)

Nafa abides by the patriarchal laws by allowing the continuity of the sexist ritual. She proves her status as a good wife and a good Olinkan mother. Nawal El Saadawi discusses the necessity of women's obedience to their men in African societies. She argues that "severe punishment of women who do not obey their men; obedience to the father and husband is inseparable from obedience to God—a woman who betrays her husband is punished by death" (194).

Tashi's mother "cling[s] to a tradition that wounds and annihilates […] in the hope that this obedience will be [her] salvation" (Gaard 90). Tashi recounts her mother's ignorance:

> In truth, my mother was not equipped, there was not enough of her self left to her, to think about me. Or about my sister Dura, who bled to death after a botched circumcision or about any of her other children. She had just sunk into her role of 'She Who Prepares the Lambs for Slaughter'. (*Possessing* 272-3)

Nafa's passivity and inability to protect her two daughters show her complicity in their suffering. According to Judith Fetterley, "women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principle is misogyny" (xx). The dominant group in Olinka village not only controls black women's sexuality but also breaks the mother-daughter bond by making mothers maintain their own daughters' devastation.

1.3. The Asexual Woman vs. the Black Jezebel

Purity is an essential component of ideal womanhood. Welter claims that the absence of purity makes a woman "unnatural and unfeminine" (154). Purity manifests itself in women's asexuality and is strongly linked to their roles as mothers. The intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality subordinates black women and degrades them to the symbol of deviant sexuality. Collins states:

> Heterosexuality itself is constructed via binary thinking that juxtaposes male and female sexuality [...] Men are active, and women should be passive. [...] Black people and other racialized groups simultaneously stand outside these definitions of normality and mark their boundaries. In this context of a gender-specific, White, heterosexual normality, the jezebel or hoochie becomes a racialized, gendered symbol of deviant female sexuality. (*Black Feminist* 83)

According to Rupe Simms, the Jezebel is “the sex-starved woman, who was childishly promiscuous and consumed by lustful passions. Her sexual aggression, fertility, and libidinous self-expression were considered limitless” (882).

The controlling image of the jezebel originated in slavery. It “was something to which the Southern White woman could compare herself and reaffirm her own image. These two images of women were, therefore, connected because without the one, the other could not survive” (Cecchini 22). By casting black women as having excessive sexual appetites, the white hegemonic patriarchy justifies any misconduct towards their bodies. This deviant sexuality oppresses black women in two main directions. On the one hand, black women have become the antithesis of asexual white women. On the other hand, it justifies their increased fertility.

It is necessary to shed light on the changes that affected women’s roles in the early years of the twentieth century. The cult of true womanhood seems to have lost its influence in American society. Women earned the right to vote in federal elections and looked for more equalily with men. They started adopting new lifestyles. They wore short dresses, cut their hair, wore makeup, and even smoked cigarettes, which helped construct the flapper stereotype. According to William Kenney,

> The “flapper” stereotype of the 1920s symbolized a curiously ambivalent social and aesthetic rebellion of young women against the domestic roles and musical sensibilities that their mothers had prepared for them. The “flapper,” named for the birdlike arm movements involved in dancing “the Charleston,” carried a reputation for unconventional behavior. Sometimes known as “Jazz Babies” or “Gold Diggers,” younger women defied the world of Victorian domestic propriety by throwing out the corsets, wearing short dresses, binding their chests to create a distinctly flat-chested, un-Victorian silhouette, cutting or bobbing their hair in short styles, smoking

> cigarettes and drinking prohibition alcohol in public, and generally challenging traditional white male expectations of them. (103)

The flapper's un-Victorian silhouette faced harsh resistance in American society. Even her dancing "was denounced in religious journals as impure, polluting, corrupting, debasing, destroying spirituality [and] increasing carnality" (Allen 70). Through both her physical appearance and behavior, the flapper is a real threat to the traditional moral code that exists and dominates American society. In other words, "[t]he sins of the flappers were disturbing the nation" (Allen 94).

The 1920s also witnessed the rise of the "new woman" stereotype. The new woman is a more mature figure than the flapper. She demands equality in sexuality and on the sociopolitical front (Fisher 6). One of the leading figures is Margaret Sanger. She promoted the necessity of educating women about sex and sexuality in order to enable them to exert full control over their bodies. According to her, "telling young girls the truth is for the definite purpose of preventing them from entering into sexual relations whether in marriage or out of it, without thinking and knowing" (9). Sanger also criticized women's ultimate hope of becoming good mothers and urged them to recognize that there are some functions of womanhood other than being a child-bearing machine **(**90).

Although many have applauded female sexual freedom, the image of the new woman remains controversial because it opposes the traditional conception of womanhood. Joseph Krutch makes the following argument in response to Sanger's request:

> When the consequences of love were made less momentous, then love itself became less momentous too, and we have discovered that the now-lifted veil of mystery was that which made it potentially important as well as potentially terrible. Sex, we learned, was not so awesome as once we had thought … Love is becoming so accessible, so unmysterious and so free that its value is trival. (qtd. in Fisher 6-7)

Women became convinced that "the first requirement of mental health was to have an uninhibited sex life. If you would be well and happy, you must obey your libido" (Allen 75). Though few married women join the public workplace and the majority of American families still preserve the nuclear structure, sexual freedom penetrates marital relationships, as Frederick Allen points out:

> [M]arried couples should be free to find sex adventure wherever they pleased and that marriage was something independent of such casual sport; it was quite another thing for a man or woman in whom the ideal of romantic marriage had been ingrained since early childhood to tolerate infidelities when they actually took place. (90)

Although white women have deviated from the image of the traditional woman who should repress her sexuality, the stereotype of the jezebel is tightly linked to black women. Black women are cast as sexually aggressive and with excessive sexual appetites. This image sits at the heart of the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender. Collins explains:

> [T]he controlling image of jezebel reappears across several systems of oppression. For class oppression, the jezebel image fosters the sexual exploitation of Black women's bodies through prostitution. The jezebel image reinforces racial oppression by justifying sexual assaults against Black women. Gender ideology also draws upon the jezebel image—a devalued jezebel makes pure White womanhood possible. (*Black Feminist* 132)

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison emphasizes the importance of women's purity in the black community's view of the three prostitutes living above Pecola's house. One day, when

Claudia and Frieda go in search of Pecola and they do not find her, Maginot Line, one of the three prostitutes, asks them to wait for her in her house. The two girls' reactions show the Bottom's social conventions. They reply: "[n]o, ma'am, we ain't allowed […]. My mama said you ruined" (*Bluest* 102).

Despite the fact that the three prostitutes are considered by both white and black communities as ruined women, they are still the only mother figures for Pocola. Morrison introduces them as the most confident characters in the novel. They are strong and self-possessed. They are not driven to prostitution due to their difficult lives or to make a living. Marie, China, and Poland "[do] not belong to those generations of prostitutes created in novels, with great and generous hearts, dedicated, because of the horror of circumstance, to ameliorating the luckless, barren life of men" (Fick 22). They use their sexuality to show their toughness and independence. Unlike Pauline, who fails in her motherly duties, Miss Marie, China, and Poland nurture Pecola with mother-daughter conversations about love and relationships. The three prostitutes challenge the traditional image of the good mother, which has always been linked to female chastity. As Allen Alexander points out,

> China, Poland, and Miss Marie—who live above the Breedloves offer a counterpoint to Pauline, showing Pecola that their lives, no matter how much they are despised by others, have meaning because the women define themselves rather than relying on the judgments of outsiders […] and thus provide Pecola with a contrast to her mother, who tries to change who she is in order to fit white society's dictates. (121)

When Claudia and Frieda tell Pecola that Miss Marie tried to kill them, Pecola defends her and even lies to show the three prostitutes' kindness:

> They give me stuff […] lots of stuff, pretty dresses, and shoes. I got more shoes than I ever wear. And jewelry and candy and money. They take me to the movies, and once we went to the carnival. China gone take me to Cleveland to see the square, and Poland gone take me to Chicago to see the Loop. We going everywhere together. (*Bluest* 105)

Though Pecola lies to her best friends by claiming that the three prostitutes give her dresses, shoes, and jewels and take her to the movies, her lie shows that she finds in them the mother figure that she misses in Pauline. Her statement about the three prostitutes' offer to travel with her reveals both her wish to flee her abusive home and the feeling of security that she embraces with them.

In *Sula*, Morrison portrays Hannah as the black jezebel. When Hannah's husband dies, she starts having affairs with different men in the community. She does not use her sexuality for money. She simply refuses to live without the attention of a man. Hannah does not spend the night with her lovers but only meets them during the day, which may suggest that she wants to separate her sexual life from her family life. Yet, by bringing her lovers to the house, Hannah shows that she is careless about her daughter's feelings. One day, Sula comes back from school to find her mother having sex with a man. In response, Sula learns that sex is "pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable" (*Sula* 44).

This conception of sexuality that Hannah transmits to her daughter as a child characterizes Sula's sexuality as a grown woman. Hannah and Sula enjoy their sexual freedom, which is disapproved by the traditional conventions of womanhood. According to Cecchini,

> Both Hannah and Sula have sexual appetites which could classify them as jezebels. However, the stereotype of the jezebel is one in which an African American woman is powerless. The stereotype was used during slavery, and further throughout history, as an excuse for White men to sexually abuse powerless African American women. However, in the novel, it is through their sexual appetite that Hannah and Sula find power. They control the men of the Bottom with their magneticism. (96)

Black women in the Bottom do not see in Hannah any threat to them. Though they call her "a nasty woman" (*Sula* 44) due to her affairs with their husbands, they believe that her temporary relationships are not menacing. In contrast to Hannah, they see in Sula's sexuality a threat to the whole community.

This contradictory view of sexuality in the Bottom helps understand the controlling image of the jezebel. Despite her deviant sexuality, the jezebel should preserve women's submissiveness and dependence. Hannah is not menacing because she upholds the traditional roles. Patrick Bjork argues that "both Hannah and Eva are inextricably linked to the ordering principle of the Bottom, and in spite of Eva's outlandish and taboo behavior, neither character genuinely threatens the essential fabric of the neighborhood; they accept similar conventional values" (qtd. in Cecchini 92). However, Sula is "an adventurer and a wanderer. She destroys the so-called obedient, passive image of black woman" (Qasim 222). She, like Mary, China, and Poland, uses her sexuality to prove her toughness and independence:

> [T]he fury she created in the women of the town was incredible—for she would lay their husbands once and then no more. Hannah had been a nuisance, but she was complimenting the women, in a way, by wanting their husbands. Sula was trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow. (*Sula* 115)

Hannah "made the man feel as though he were complete and wonderful just as he was—he didn't need fixing" (43). In contrast to the three prostitutes who hate all men, Hannah glorifies patriarchy. She loves men and makes them assert their manhood in her companionship. She

also fails in her motherly duties, which intensifies the view of the jezebel as the antithesis of the good mother.

1.4. White Beauty vs. Black Ugliness

Although the meaning of ideal womanhood depends mainly on women's chastity and submissiveness, women's physical traits are also important in giving them the status of "true" women. Kristin Weissman argues that: "[t]he word 'beauty' contains a meaning that is complex yet simple. It is an outward appearance, a feeling, and a fact of social change. A woman who desires to be beautiful is trapped in the confines of the structured definition of what beauty should comprise" (23-4). Naomi Wolf defines beauty as:

> [A] currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves. (12)

In this regard, beauty is not related to individual or communal preferences. It is, rather, a myth created to subordinate women whose only interest is to compete and embrace the myth.

Since the standards of beauty during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were strongly bound to whiteness, it became a form of oppression that undermined equality between races. As Robin Lakoff and Raquel Scherr point out,

> The myth of beauty as whiteness that whites imposed on blacks, was more than an attempt to force the value system on one culture upon another culture: beyond that, it was a means of utterly denying the validity of black culture. Blacks were, after all, seen by whites as being closer to animal than they were to the white man with all his culture and beauty. (251)

Black women are not only excluded from the competition but also their blackness justifies others' beauty. According to Collins, "[i]n order for one individual to be judged beautiful, another individual—the Other—must be deemed ugly" (*Black Feminist* 169). Beauty exists only in a binary system. Without the inferior part of this binary, which represents ugliness, the superior part cannot be declared beautiful.

In *Sula*, Morrison sets a hierarchy of skin color that works in opposite directions. On the one hand, the Bottom community sees the darkest skin as a manifesto of true black blood. In her description of Sula, Morrison claims that she "was a heavy brown with large quiet eyes" (*Sula* 52). Although Nel's skin is lighter than Sula's, she is still "just dark enough to escape the blows of the pitch-black truebloods and the contempt of old women who worried about such things as bad blood mixtures" (52). The conception of true black blood really matters for the black community, since it refers to the pure black identity, as Walker points out: "[t]o me, the black black woman is our essential mother—the blacker she is the more us she is" (*In Search* 291).

On the other hand, the hegemonic meaning of beauty, which is related to the lightest skin, influences the black community. Walker claims:

> [T]here is probably as much difference between the life of a black black woman and a 'high yellow' black woman as between a 'high yellow' woman and a white woman. And I am worried, constantly, about the hatred the black black woman encounters within black society. (*In Search* 291)

Black people's hatred of the black black woman makes their ultimate wish to reach the highest levels possible within the scale of skin color hierarchy and avoid the bottom. This categorization of black people, mainly black women, from the lightest skin to the darkest one is known as "colorism". Colorism is the belief that "one skin tone is superior to another […]. Initially without a name and then coined *colorism* by Alice Walker in 1983" (J. Davis 8, emphasis in original). It is a practice of discrimination like race, gender, and class. Collins declares:

> Colorism […] is deeply embedded in a distinctly American form of racism grounded in Black/White oppositional differences. Other groups "of color" must negotiate the meanings attached to their "color." All must position themselves within a continually renegotiated color hierarchy where, because they define the top and the bottom, the meanings attached to Whiteness and Blackness change much less than we think. (*Black Feminist* 90)

Although colorism is the belief that lighter skin is superior to darker skin, it can work in the opposite direction as well. As Jakira Davis notes, "[c]olorism is so decisive as it can allow one to favor lighter skin over darker skin or darker skin over lighter skin all while simultaneously succeeding in keeping the race divided" (10).

In *Sula*, Helene wants Nel to look as white as possible by asking her to straighten her hair and pinch her nose. 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) and his

generous lips" (*Sula* 18). Helene clearly believes in the superiority of the white race and tries to implant it within her daughter, to the extent that "[a]ny enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground (18). Unlike Nel, Sula embraces her blackness. She refuses to imitate white people and strictly rejects the white standards of beauty. She asks Nel to not straighten her hair every Saturday, as she did, and to not pull her nose. In each other's company, the two friends could "abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things" (55).

In *The Bluest Eye*, the black community adopts the white racist standards of beauty in which the lightest skin is the most beautiful. Morrison highlights the importance of beauty in the destruction of the black community in general and black womanhood in particular. For example, Geraldine instructs her son to distinguish between colored and black people: "[c]olored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (*Bluest* 85). According to Collins,

> White skin and straight hair simultaneously privilege (white women) in a system that elevates whiteness over blackness. In contrast, African-American women experience the pain of never being able to live up to prevailing standards of beauty—standards used by White men, White women, Black men, and, most painfully, one another. Regardless of any individual woman's subjective reality, this is the system of ideas that she encounters. Because controlling images are hegemonic and taken for granted, they become virtually impossible to escape. (*Black Feminist* 89)

Although Geraldine is a brown-black woman, she tries to appear white. She continuously attempts to hide the features that black people have in common. She softens her skin with Jergens lotion, straightens her hair with Dixie Peach, and puts on lipstick without covering her entire mouth to not make her lips look thick.

Geraldine is educated, clean, and asexual. She makes her son wear clothes that white children wear. She even cuts his woolly hair "as close to his scalp as possible" (*Bluest* 85), and puts lotion on his skin. She also warns him to stay away from black children. Through Geraldine, Morrison highlights the constant attempts of colored people to hide their black origins and to appear, as much as possible, white. Cecchini argues that Geraldine "is unable to completely eradicate the fact that she is bi-racial and has ties to an African American heritage. She is hiding a part of herself in order to fit into the 'White is beautiful' gaze that her community upholds" (70).

Morrison discusses the role of the media in the transmission of the beauty myth. The black community's adoption of the white hegemonic beauty is clearly illustrated in the gifts that parents give to their daughters at Christmas; "[a]dults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs--all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (*Bluest* 18). The various messages conveyed by the toys have profound effects on the construction or destruction of young black girls' womanhood. According to Lindsey, "[b]oth parents and children express clear preferences for gender-typed toys. These preferences reinforce the persistent gender-related messages that are sent to children through the toys" (81). She adds: "[d]olls for girls, especially Barbies [...] are standard gifts to children from parents. Not only are messages about beauty, clothing, and weight sent to girls via Barbie, but girls also learn about options and preferences in life" (80). By offering black girls white, blue-eyed dolls, black parents not only legitimize the traditional racist standards of beauty but also their daughters' ugliness. In other words, "the acceptance of the white ideal of beauty results in the worthlessness and 'physical ugliness of blackness'" (López 176).

Skin color hierarchy is explicitly manifest in the geographical division of black society. The Breedloves do not live in the forefront because they were poor, black, and, most importantly, because of their unique ugliness. Colorism casts the Breedloves at the bottom of the beauty scale. They not only accept their ugliness but also wear it as a guilt that should be confessed throughout their lives. Every one of the Breedloves deals with this ugliness in his or her own way. Mrs. Breedlove uses it to support a role she always prefers to play, that of a Christian martyr. Sammy uses it to intimidate his friends and cause them pain. While Pecola "hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed—peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask" (*Bluest* 37).

It is important to mention that colorism is deeply gendered. Though it divides the black community according to skin color hierarchy, it exclusively subjugates black women. Cholly and Sammy could fit with their dark skin, but Pauline and Pecola are trapped in self-hatred. According to Collins, "[r]ace, gender, and sexuality converge on this issue of evaluating beauty. Black men's blackness penalizes them. But because they are not women, valuations of their self-worth do not depend as heavily on their physical attractiveness" (*Black Feminist* 89). Like Collins, Walker also insists on the gendered nature of beauty:

> [A]lthough black men could be depicted as literally black and still be considered men (since dark is masculine to the Euro-American mind), the black skinned women, being dark and female, must perforce be whitened, since 'fairness' was and is the standard of Euro-American femininity. (*In Search* 301)

The beauty myth violently victimizes the young Pecola. Her suffering starts in her domestic sphere. Her mother, Pauline, dislikes her blackness. Her disabled foot and, later, her missing front tooth exacerbate her feeling of ugliness. According to Joy DeGruy, "[w]hen the parents in a family believe themselves to have little or no value, it reflects itself in behaviors that can

instill a similar belief in their children. This belief is passed down through generations in the form of unexamined, and often long-established, child rearing practices" (119).

Pauline has denied the fundamental physical reality of her body, which separates her from reality (Pereira 126). She is influenced by Hollywood movies presented on the silver screen, which convey, through their white actresses, the standards of beauty. The silver screen creates and promotes a white scale which is specific to the white race and, thus, excludes other ethnic groups and races. Morrison acknowledges that Pauline "was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (*Bluest* 120). The silver screen determines Pauline's social preferences and shapes her perspective on female beauty. The scale of beauty that she uses to judge other women's physical traits is "while seemingly 'absolute,' and thus not relative to racial or ethnic considerations, is actually an artificial scale that Pauline internalizes" (Pereira 123).

Pauline internalizes the white racist ideology of beauty, which results in her self-hatred and, then, transmits it to her daughter. Susan Bryant argues: "[i]f young black women stand in contrast to what society dictates as attractive, they may find it difficult to grow to accept themselves. As a result, the internalization of racialized beauty standards can perpetuate into a lifelong, intergenerational culture of self-hatred" (81). Pauline hates her daughter in the same way she hates herself. She plays an important role in her daughter's weakness. On the day of Pecola's birth, Pauline describes her as "a right smart baby. […] But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (*Bluest* 124). Her statement is the first judgment of Pecola's physical appearance. Cecchini claims that

> Pauline is not a doting and caring bloodmother and she is the first person who affirms Pecola's ugliness. She is therefore the first person to contribute to Pecola's crisis in identity […] Rather than breaking the cycle of selfhatred, Pauline passes on her own self- hatred of her 'blackness' to her daughter. (51-2)

Similarly, Tracey Walters argues that "Pecola is literally born into a hellish existence. Her domestic environment is toxic and her parents perpetuate an attitude of internalized racism that teaches Pecola that like her parents she is ugly" (108). Pauline's self-hatred and failing motherhood make it impossible for Pecola to love her blackness. Pecola hides behind her ugliness. She accepts the white racist and sexist ideology of beauty, which has been legitimized by her black community, black family, and particularly her black mother.

Pecola stands for long hours looking in the mirror and trying to understand the secret of her ugliness, which makes her teachers and classmates despise her. Morrison recounts how Pecola sits in the back, despite the fact that "[t]he first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always" (*Bluest* 43). She is "the only member of her class who [sits] alone at a double desk" (43). She is reduced to a taunting expression. When one of the girls wants to insult a boy, she accuses him of loving Pecola and she "never fail[s] to get peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused" (44).

Instead of resisting the dominant conventions, Pecola's ultimate desire is to get blue eyes in order to be accepted by both white and black societies. She finds herself trapped in loneliness imposed by her inability to accept her blackness or conform to the standards of beauty. Walker notes how black mothers and grandmothers insist on the damaging effects of colorism on black women and the necessity to "[e]scape the pain, the ridicule, escape the jokes, the lack of attention, respect, dates, even a job" (*In Search* 291). Pecola's inability to escape the mythical ugliness makes her wish to disappear. Walker suggests that for some black people, "as if

freedom and whiteness were the same destination, and that presents a problem for any person of color who does not wish to disappear" (*In Search* 291). Pecola closes her eyes and imagines that the different parts of her body are slowly disappearing, except for her eyes. She tries as much as she can to make them disappear, but she fails because "[t]hey were everything" (*Bluest* 43). Pecola's eyes work as a memory, which draws people's admiration of Mary Jane, Shirley Temple, and Mr. Yacobowski, the store owner, who hesitates to touch her hand when she gives him money.

Although Morrison describes Pecola's friends Frieda and Claudia as self-possessed, she insists on the power of prejudiced beauty in affecting young black girls' lives. For instance, when Mr. and Mrs. MacTeer rent a room in their house to Mr. Henry, he calls Claudia and Frieda "Greta Garbo" and "Ginger Rogers" (14), the names of two white actresses who were beauty icons at that time. Claudia, Frieda, and even their father are happy with Mr. Henry's naming, which is seen as a compliment. Collins claims that: "[a]lthough most Black women typically resist being objectified as the Other, these controlling images remain powerful influences on our relationships with Whites, Black men, other racial/ethnic groups, and one another" (*Black Feminist* 89).

Pecola loves the white Shirley Temple. Shirley is known as the first child-star who became famous internationally. She has white skin, blue eyes, and golden curls. Ara Osterweil argues that "[f]or a generation of children and adolescents growing up during the Great Depression, Temple was indeed the primary ego ideal" (4). Pecola's friend Frieda also loves Shirley Temple. Frieda's sister, Claudia, recounts how both Pecola and Frieda have loving conversations about how "cu-ute Shirley Temple was" (*Bluest* 17). The two girls cannot resist

the white beauty and find it difficult to affirm their own, but Frieda can accept her blackness, whereas Pecola cannot.

Pecola not only loves the white beauty, but also digests it. She drinks a lot of milk from a Shirley Temple cup and eats a lot of Mary Jane candies, where Mary Jane's picture appears on the wrappers with her pretty, blue-eyed face. Pecola "eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (*Bluest* 48). T. Walters explains the way the Mary Jane candies are another example of the subtle way white hegemonic beauty infiltrates Pecola's psyche in particular and American culture in general:

> From candy wrappers, to movie stars and dolls Pecola cannot escape the culturally promoted image of blonde hair and blue eyes. Without the money to purchase skin-bleaching creams or to access colored contact lenses that allow today's Black girls to buy into the fantasy of whiteness, Pecola must find other ways to make the transition from Black to White. Pecola's resolve is to digest whiteness. She achieves this by eating Mary Jane candy ... and drinking from a [Shirley Temple cup]. (qtd. in Bloom, *Guides* 41)

Pecola's eyes also remind her of the way her light-skinned classmate Maureen Peel is privileged in both white and black communities. Both Shirley Temple and Mary Jane symbolize white/black beauty discrimination, while the character Maureen illustrates the conception of colorism in the black community. Morrison describes Maureen as

> A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of the white girls […]. There was a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk. (*Bluest* 60)

Although Maureen has “both an unattractive canine tooth and signs of an early disfigurement on her hands” (Bloom, *Guides* 43), she is still considered beautiful.

Maureen’s skin color valorizes her in both white and black societies. When a group of taunting black boys meets Pecola, Claudia, Frieda, and Maureen, their target is the one with the darkest skin. Maureen will never be taunted by the boys because of her light skin. According to Mark Hill, “the light-skinned Negro woman---the 'high yellow,' the mulatto---incites awe in African American men. The link between fair skin tone and feminine beauty remains firmly established and is reinforced continually by the media and other institutional mechanisms” (80). Morrison describes how Maureen is privileged due to her skin color. Teachers smile when they call her name. Both white and black boys do not hurt her. White girls do not get angry when she is assigned to be their partners, and black girls step aside when she wants to use the sink in the girls’ toilet (*Bluest* 60). Through the preferential treatment given to Maureen, Morrison highlights the deep effects of colorism on the black community’s unity.

Maureen sympathizes with Pecola and even expresses her wish to befriend her. Then, she quickly begins to tease her. Claudia tries to defend Pecola by punching Maureen in the face with her notebook. Maureen benefits from the skin color hierarchy and stresses her racial superiority. She claims: “I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly” (71). Maureen’s words devastate Pecola. She “fold[s] into herself, like a pleated wing” (71). Pecola’s silence clearly shows her belief in Maureen’s superiority.

Claudia and Frieda respond quite differently. They quickly reply to Maureen’s racist words with an insult of their own: “six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie” (71). Although Claudia and Frieda seek to defend their blackness, they are still manipulated by the binary of beautiful and

ugly. In other words, to assert their beauty, the two sisters need to confirm Maureen's ugliness, which makes them turn into a vicious circle of oppression. Collins argues:

> Redefining beauty requires learning to see African-American women who have Black African features as being capable of beauty. Proclaiming Black women "beautiful" and White women "ugly" merely replaces one set of controlling images with another and fails to challenge Eurocentric masculinist aesthetics. This is simply binary thinking in reverse. (*Black Feminist* 169)

Instead of reversing the oppressive binary, Claudia and Frieda should show their capability of beauty through self-acceptance and self-worth.

Prejudiced beauty devastates Pauline, Pecola, and many other girls and women, whose physical appearance not only discards them from the ideal meaning of womanhood but also instills in them self-hatred. Walker claims:

> [U]nless the question of Colorism---in my definition, prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color---is addressed in our communities and definitely in our black 'sisterhoods' we cannot, as a people progress. For colorism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us. (*In Search* 290-1)

Morrison insists on the importance of the mother-daughter relationship in shaping young black girls' self-esteem. In contrast to Pauline, Mrs. MacTeer implants in her two daughters the importance of self-worth to resist and challenge the different forms of oppression.

Conclusion

Black women in their search for womanhood in *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Color Purple*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* face a complex issue. They find themselves unable to follow the traditional meaning of wifehood, which enhances women's domesticity and

submissiveness. They are obliged to financially support their families due to black men's inability to perform the role of the breadwinner. Although the Great Depression of the 1930s and WWII enhanced white women's roles in the workplace, black women are exclusively labeled as matriarchs, a misnomer that not only portrays them as less feminine but also accuses them of emasculating black men. The image of the matriarch also serves as justification to renounce women's independence and assertiveness, which threaten the white patriarchy. In contrast to white women's fragility, black women are assigned to do heavy work, which makes them regarded as mules or living machines. This image originated in slavery to serve as justification for black women's labor market victimization. Yet, it pervaded the black community, where black women's labor is exploited even within their black families. Due to their roles as servants in white houses, black women are portrayed as black mammies. They neglect their families and direct their care and nurturing towards the white family. The image of the mammy is a threat to both the black family and the black community because it instills in black children their inferior position in society and, thus, represses black people's resistance.

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed remarkable changes in white women's roles with the rise of the flapper and the new woman images that advocated women's freedom and sexual equality. Despite these images, black women are specifically regarded as the symbols of deviant female sexuality. Although the image of the jezebel does not conform to conventional womanhood, it still conforms to patriarchal rules. In other words, any sexual expression that seeks to enhance black women's assertiveness and autonomy is disapproved in both white and black societies. The controlling images of black womanhood set black women in a critical situation where wifehood and motherhood stand paradoxically together. Black

women have to choose between the role of the “good” wife and mother who seeks to instill the patriarchal conventions within her daughter and, thus, perpetuates her subordination, and that of the protective mother who seeks the well-being of her daughter.

Finally, the beauty myth excludes black women from the ideal beauty and divides the black community according to skin color hierarchy, enhancing black women’s invisibility and self-hatred. To challenge the beauty myth, black women should not seek to confirm white and light women’s ugliness, but rather show their capability of beauty through self-worth and self-esteem. The controlling images distort black womanhood by perpetuating black women’s images as bad wives and mothers and by emphasizing their unchastity and ugliness. These images are deeply embedded in dominant ideologies, which make black women unable to escape.

Chapter Two

Black Women and Black Sexual Politics

Introduction

This chapter attempts to show that black men enhance black women's victimization through their physical, emotional, and psychological dominance exerted at both individual and communal levels. It explains the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and the construction of unjust black sexual politics. Collins defines black sexual politics as "a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men and women's treatment of one another as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others" (*Black Sexual* 349). According to Kate Millet, the term "politics" refers to "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (23). This chapter examines black men's physical dominance by focusing on black women's bodies and sexualities as the main sites of conflict in black men and women's relationships. It tackles another kind of dominance exerted among women themselves. The lack of love in the mother-daughter relationship not only destroys both mothers and daughters but also enhances black men's supremacy. Finally, the chapter discusses the black community's psychological dominance through silencing black women's rape, pain, and resistance. The different forms of violence and silence leave deep scars on black women's bodies, minds, and spirits, which degrade their status and annihilate any possibility for empowerment.

2.1. Physical Dominance

2.1.1. Women Battery

Physical dominance constitutes an important aspect in black men and women's power relations. It is the most obvious and most memorable. The female body has always been the site of conflict in man/woman power relations due to its direct link with the traditional meaning of manhood. Women's dominance starts with the domination of their bodies, which makes them vulnerable to different forms and levels of violence. This urges feminist and womanist activists to foreground women's struggle to reclaim their bodies, among whom Andrea Dworkin, who states that the "struggle for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the struggle for actual control of one's own body, especially control over physical access to one's own body" (qtd. in Messina-Dysert 66). Unjust black sexual politics is primarily based on black women's physical dominance. Collins argues:

> One of the most pressing issues for contemporary Black sexual politics concerns violence against Black women at the hands of Black men. Much of this violence occurs within the context of Black heterosexual love relationships, Black family life, and within African American social institutions. Such violence takes many forms, including verbally berating Black women, hitting them, ridiculing their appearance, grabbing their body parts, pressuring them to have sex, beating them, and murdering them. (*Black Sexual* 225-6)

In *The Color Purple*, Walker describes the way physical dominance not only shapes but also devastates Celie's life. Celie has been abused at the hands of both her stepfather and her husband. Alphonso continuously beats Celie. He beats her once for thinking that she winked at a boy in church, though Celie claims that she does not wink but only gets something in her

eyes. She says: “I don’t even look at mens. That’s the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them” (*Color* 5). Alphonso beats her again “for dressing trampy” (7).

When Celie marries Mr. _____, the latter beats her regularly and for any reason. Mr. _____’s son, Harpo, says to Celie: “[w]hen Pa tell you to do something, you do it, he say. When he say not to, you don’t. You don’t do what he say, he beat you” (63). Celie replies: “[s]ometime beat me anyhow, I say, whether I do what he say or not” (63). According to Donald Dutton, “[w]ife assault was seen as a systematic form of domination and social control of women by men. All men could potentially use violence as a powerful means of subordinating women” (36). Mr. _____ not only makes Celie the “mule of the world”, he also humiliates her by beating her brutally. Celie says: “[h]e beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man” (*Color* 23). In order to avoid pain, Celie denies her body and tries to convince herself that she is a tree. She concludes that even trees fear men, which suggests the brutality of the violence she is subjected to.

It is essential to highlight the relationship between the physical dominance of black women and the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Vickie Jensen et al. argue that “[h]egemonic masculinity is a concept that is often used to describe how it is that ‘real’ men are defined” (5). Hegemonic masculinity not only discriminates between men and women in society but also between men. To be cast as “real” men, males should practice their gender according to certain standards. Jensen et al. state the four aspects associated with hegemonic masculinity:

> (1) dominance over women, children, and lesser masculinities; (2) work in the paid labor force, (3) heterosexism, and (4) uncontrolled, driven sexuality. Those who are known or become known to violate one of these parts of the ideal of hegemonic masculinity are relegated to lesser masculinities and subject to the same treatment and regard as women. (6)

To avoid the emasculated figure, men should be the antithesis of women. They must show toughness, violence, and sexual prowess. Deviation from the prescribed roles is not accepted in patriarchal societies. Every man's ultimate objective is to conform to patriarchal standards in order to legitimize his manhood. Collins argues that "[i]n the United States, hegemonic masculinity is installed at the top of a hierarchical array of masculinities. All other masculinities, including those of African American men, are evaluated by how closely they approximate dominant social norms" (*Black Sexual* 186). She adds: "Black masculinity and Black femininity […] are both constructed in relation to hegemonic masculinity, a situation that also shapes their relation to one another" (*Black Sexual* 188).

In *The Color Purple*, Walker describes women's physical dominance as not only necessary for defining black manhood but also a hereditary aspect that is transmitted from one generation to another. She illustrates this dominance through three generations: Old Mr. _____, Mr. _____, and Harpo. Old Mr. _____ refuses to let his son marry Shug because, on the one hand, she is the polar opposite of the pure, domestic woman due to her job as a singer. On the other hand, she is strong and, thus, uncontrollable. Mr. _____ also refuses to let Harpo marry Sofia due to her strong behavior, but Harpo marries Sofia against his father's will.

The power of hegemonic masculinity is clearly evident in the relationship between Harpo and Sofia. Though Harpo loves Sofia, he tries to subjugate her. Harpo's unsecured manhood enhances his need to dominate Sofia, which shows that the cult of toughness is "born as much

out of fear of oppression as out of a need to dominate" (J. Mills et al. 73). Harpo's unsuccessful attempts to dominate his wife make him ask his father "what to do to make Sofia mind" (*Color* 36). Mr. _____'s answer was brief and clear: "[w]ives is like children. You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating" (36). Dutton claims that "[w]ife abuse reinforces women's dependence and enables all men to exert authority and control" (36-7). Gail Garfield discusses the relationship between gender and violence. He expresses the way racism and sexism help in the construction of the violent black man:

> The prominence of gender and its link to violence are by no means inconsequential to the shaping of African American men's experiences. To the contrary, in their racialized experiences, violence becomes essential to the social and cultural construction of masculinity, of defining manhood, and of what it means to be a man in American society. All men, to some degree, are socialized into violence: that socialization is largely predicated upon either an idealized dominance or the projection of power or both, in ways that link their development of a sense of manhood to violence. Depending on the form it takes and the setting in which it occurs, violence gives meaning to black men's gender identity. That meaning shapes the tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions they experience as they assert their sense of masculinity. (2)

Hegemonic masculinity, then, is the practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and justifies women's marginalization.

Raewyn Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). Connell's use of the word "practice" means that hegemonic

masculinity is not only a set of gender expectations but also the continuous performances that work to maintain the status quo. He claims that hegemonic masculinity is "the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (qtd. in French and Rothery 5).

In *The Color Purple*, Old Mr. _____, Mr. _____, and Harpo illustrate the concept of hegemonic masculinity through their transgenerational practices that preserve gender hierarchy. Mr. _____ seems convinced that only violence can prove a male's manhood. Through violence, he controls his wife and sustains the system of patriarchy in both black and white societies. It is significant to note that African American males seek to construct their own definition of manhood, which is different from the established model. However, with the imposition of hegemonic masculinity, black men's attempts turn into failure, as Lindsey claims: "[f]eeling blocked in achieving masculine goals offered by mainstream society, these men initially may adopt the dominant hegemonic views of masculinity" (310).

What is surprising in the conflict between Harpo and Sofia is when Celie agrees with Mr. _____'s view and asks Harpo to "beat [Sofia]" (*Color* 37). Celie's submission makes her wish to see other women's passivity. Although she claims that she likes Sofia, she cannot hide her hatred of Sofia's strong behavior. Celie not only succumbs to the cycle of re-abuse but also wants other women to endure the same fate.

Mr. _____'s violence is only directed towards Celie. He treats his mistress, Shug Avery, differently. Shug, like Sofia, is a strong woman who cannot be submissive. It is essential to parallel the relationships between Mr. _____ and Shug and Harpo and Sofia with that of Mr. _____ and Celie, to observe that women's physical dominance is related primarily to women themselves as strong or weak, and that violence is exerted predominantly in marital

relationships. For instance, Celie tells Shug that Mr. _____ beats her "[f]or being me and not you" (*Color* 76). Celie's weakness and submissiveness play an important role in increasing her husband's violent behavior. Moreover, black women share the responsibility of other women's subjugation. Mr. _____ tells Celie: "some womens would have just love to hear they man say he beat his wife cause she wasn't them. Shug one time was like that bout Annie Julia" (275).

Mr. _____'s paradoxical treatment of both women stems from his relationship with each one of them. Shug is the mistress, while Celie is the wife. Mr. _____ also beat his first wife, Annie Julia. Consequently, Walker sheds light on physical dominance as a main aspect governing the relationship between a black husband and a black wife. According to Dutton,

> [T]he maintenance of patriarchy and patriarchal institutions is the main contributor to wife assault. Wife assault is mainly 'normal' violence committed not by madmen who are unlike other men but by men who believe that patriarchy is their right, that marriage gives them unrestricted control over their wife, and that violence is an acceptable means of establishing this control. (37)

Mr. _____ controls Celie's body at different levels. He controls her clothes when he refuses to let her wear pants and her behavior when he refuses to let her go to Harpo's juke joint while Shug sings there. He claims: "[w]ives don't go to places like that […] My wife can't do this. My wife can't do that. No wife of mines" (73). When Harpo asks Mr. _____ why he beats Celie, Mr. _____ answers: "[c]ause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for" (23). Surprisingly, Celie states: "Harpo ast me, How come you stubborn? He don't ast How come you his wife? Nobody ast that" (23). Harpo's question shows the normality of violence towards every wife.

Harpo, like his father, seeks to control Sofia. Though he loves Sofia and though she has the qualities of a good wife, as Celie tells Harpo: "Sofia love you, she a good wife. Good to the

children and good looking. Hardworking. Godfearing and *clean*" (*Color* 63), Harpo still claims that he wants her to do what he says. Sofia defends herself against Harpo's violence. She shows determination and refuses subjugation. She claims:

> "[a]ll my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house […] I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me" (39-40).

In describing Harpo and Sofia's fights, Celie states: "[t]hey fighting like two mens" (38). Collins explains that strong black women are more subjected to black males' violence because they refuse to be submissive:

> If African American men need women to bring their Black masculinity into being, then women who seemingly challenge that masculinity become targets for Black male violence. Educated Black women, Black career women, Black women sex workers, rebellious Black girls, and Black lesbians, among others who refuse to submit to male power, become more vulnerable for abuse. Violence against "strong" Black women enables some African American men to recapture a lost masculinity and to feel like "real" men. (*Black Sexual* 231)

Harpo tries to imitate his father and reclaim his manhood through subjugating his wife. Since Harpo is half of Sofia's size, he eats a lot to become as big as her and be able to beat her into submission. However, Harpo fails to control Sofia because, as Celie claims, "[s]ome womens can't be beat, […]. Sofia one of them" (*Color* 64).

The coexistence of love and violence in black marital relationships has deep effects on black women as well as black men. In other words, in their attempts to dominate black women, black men lose their support in defining their manhood, which is far from hegemonic masculinity. As Barbara Omolade observes, "[b]lack male violence is even more poignant

because Black men both love and unashamedly depend on Black women's loyalty and support. Most feel that without the support of a 'strong sister' they can't become 'real' men" (qtd. in Collins, *Black Sexual* 231).

2.1.2. Incestuous Rape

Besides wife-beating, Morrison and Walker shed light on another kind of physical dominance that is related to women's sexuality. Throughout Morrison and Walker's selected novels, sexuality is described as central to the black characters' sexual politics. According to Collins, "sexuality will serve as an important site of dominance, both racial dominance of Blacks by Whites, [and] gender dominance of women by men (*Black Sexual* 206). The intersection of race and gender makes the sexual relationships between black men and black women a site of domination, in which men are the subject and women are the object. Catharine MacKinnon argues:

> Hierarchy, a constant creation of person/thing, top/bottom, dominance/subordination relations […]. These textualities and these relations, situated within as well as creating a context of power in which they can be lived out, become sexuality. All this suggests that what is called sexuality is the dynamic of control by which male dominance—in forms that range from intimate to institutional, from a look to a rape— eroticizes and thus defines man and woman, gender identity and sexual pleasure. It is also that which maintains and defines male supremacy as a political system. (137)

To set black women's sexuality at the centre of black sexual politics promotes black women's submission to different forms and levels of violence.

In *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye*, both Celie and Pecola have been raped by their fathers and have given birth to children. The incestuous rape makes the two young girls suffer

both physical and psychological pain. Celie has been repeatedly raped by Alfonso, her stepfather, whom she thinks is her real father and calls Pa. When Celie's mother cannot satisfy his sexual needs, Pa abuses his stepdaughter. Celie recounts: "[h]e never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't" (*Color* 1). Celie gives birth to two children, Olivia and Adam. Alfonso gives away the two children who have been raised by a missionary couple.

Rape is first a violent act against the female's body, as Gina Messina-Dysert points out: "[r]ape must be understood as functioning as a violent act. Sexuality is not at the center of the perpetrator's act; instead, rape and other forms of sexual violence against women derive from abhorrence and the intention to dominate and control" (66). Celie remembers the physical pain of rape. She recounts: "[w]hen that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it" (*Color* 1). Collins explains how rape is a powerful tool through which the man exerts full control over the woman's body:

> Rape is a powerful tool of sexual violence because women are forced to "assume the position" of powerless victim, one who has no control over what is happening to her body. The rapist imagines absolute power over his victim […] Rape's power also stems from relegating sexual violence to the private, devalued, domestic sphere reserved for women. The ability to silence its victims also erases evidence of the crime. These dimensions of rape make it a likely candidate to become an important form of social control under the new racism. (*Black Sexual* 228)

It is significant to shed light on Celie's first letter to God, after being raped by Alfonso, where she states: "I am fourteen years old. ~~I am~~ I have always been a good girl" (*Color* 1). By claiming that she is no longer a good girl, Celie shows that "the one identity she has always known is no longer accessible […] Celie has no present tense subjectivity, no present tense 'I

am'" (Cutter 164). Celie loses control over her body while Alfonso embraces hegemonic manhood through dominating her sexually. He even tries to dominate Nettie, but Celie succumbs to his abuse to protect her sister.

Celie also experiences marital rape. In describing Mr. _____, she claims that he reminds her of Pa (*Color* 23), which suggests that she sees him as a rapist of her body. She tells Shug: "[Mr. _____] [n]ever ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (78). Shug comments that Celie is "still a virgin" (78), since she has never experienced pleasure. According to Messina-Dysert, "[t]o invade the interior of someone's body is a form of torture by any measure. The act of rape results in physical pain, humiliation, and shame, as well as loss of self-respect, autonomy, and identity" (66). Celie keeps silent in front of Mr. _____'s abuse. The only refuge she finds is in writing letters to God, to whom she communicates her fear, shame, and isolation.

It is relevant to clarify that Mr. ____ also tries to rape Celie's sister, Nettie. When Nettie resists his sexual harassment and leaves his house, Mr. ____ separates the two sisters by preventing communication between them. Martha Cutter explains that through hiding Nettie's letters, Mr. ____ has discursively raped the two sisters:

> Albert's physical attempt to Nettie fails, but he finds a discursive way of "raping" both women when he refuses to deliver any of Nettie's letters to Celie. Indeed, this discursive rape is far more effective than his actual rape, as Celie's response shows. When Celie learns that Albert suppressed all of Nettie's letters, her consciousness becomes blank […] and she feels "cold" and almost "dead" […] "sickish" and "numb". (168)

With the two types of rape, Celie experiences what Carole Sheffield calls sexual terrorism. Sheffield argues that "sexual terrorism is a crucial strategy in sustaining the power of

patriarchy because it ensures women's compliance to male wishes, desires, ideas, and wants" (qtd. in Grana 174).

According to Cutter, although the horror of Celie's rape is evident, it is also apparent that Celie narrates this experience as a kind of resistance, "[i]n these letters Celie begins to create a resistant narratological version of events that ultimately preserves her subjectivity and voice" (166). Walker highlights how black women's physical dominance not only shapes black sexual politics but also black women's perceptions of their own bodies. Celie never looks at herself in the mirror. She falls into the dispossession of her own body. Collins discusses the role of unjust sexual politics in creating dishonest bodies. She claims:

> [T]op-down power relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality permeate individual consciousness and tell African Americans how they should think about their own bodies. Moreover, such power relations invade the body because they also instruct Black people how they should *feel* within their own bodies. This ideology severs mind, soul, and body from one another and helps structure oppression. (*Black Sexual* 282, emphasis in original)

Celie's dishonest body stems from her ignorance of her own body, which fosters her submission to oppression. In other words, ignoring her body makes her unable to defend what she does not know and does not earn. As Collins points out, "[p]eople who are alienated from one another and from their own honest bodies become easier to rule" (*Black Sexual* 249).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola, as Celie, is subjected to sexual dominance. Unlike Celie, Pecola has been raped by her real father. It is difficult to understand Cholly's controversial behavior. His traumatic past makes his rape of Pecola an expected outcome. He has been abandoned by his parents, and when he finds his father, the latter rejects him. Also, he has endured a racist experience in which he feels emasculated. He has been obliged to perform sex with a little

country girl in front of two white men, “which clearly is a kind of rape enforced on both of them” (Holm 52).

Cholly’s racist experience makes him hate Darlene and refuse to see her again. Lindsey claims: “[o]ver their lifetimes, men experience more physical violence than women. However, it is abundantly evident that the acceptance of traditional masculine gender roles in a patriarchal society is closely connected with escalating violence toward women” (303). Cholly directed his rage at Darlene because he acknowledges that he is less masculine than the two white men. He keeps cultivating his hatred for her, refusing to meet her again and even leaving town when he has suspected she is pregnant.

Cholly’s rape of his daughter can be regarded as an act of love. Pecola wants to have a boyfriend and be loved by someone. She asks one of the prostitutes living above them: “[h]ow come you got so many boyfriends, Miss Marie?” (*Bluest* 50). She also asks: “[h]ow come they all love you?” (51). Pecola needs someone to love her in order to erase her own and others’ hatred of her blackness. Cholly can feel her pain and, in his own way, tries to embrace her with his love.

> What could he do for her—ever? What give her? What say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him—the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn’t she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile? What of his knowledge of the world and of life could be useful to her? What could his heavy arms and befuddled brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love? (161-2)

Cholly's past experience with Darlene makes him feel Pecola's sadness. What binds Cholly and Pecola is their inability to define themselves according to hegemonic norms of masculinity and femininity, which causes them deep trauma that makes both father and daughter sympathize with one another. Morrison writes: "[t]he sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love. His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence" (161). Claudia claims that Cholly certainly loves Pecola. Yet, the nature of love depends on the lover himself:

> Cholly loved her. I'm sure he did. He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her. But his touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death. Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye. (204)

Cholly is incapable of giving Pecola nurturing love or expressing it healthfully, and Pauline cannot teach him because she, too, has been isolated and unloved (Bakerman 544). Still, despite the fact that Cholly seeks to fill Pecola's need for love in his own way, he is the only one who benefits from this love. He gives himself the right to violate Pecola's innocent body, which makes his love a destructive one for Pecola. According to Lindsey, the traditional norms of masculinity, which are mainly related to anti-feminity, aggression, and sexual prowess, when "[c]oupled with patriarchal beliefs about domination, these norms blend insecure and destructive masculinity with violence and sexuality. Rape, therefore, can be viewed as an end result" (306).

Cholly not only dominates Pecola but also his wife, Pauline. Despite the fact that Pauline fights Cholly both verbally and physically, she believes in men's conventional role of dominating women. Pauline does not seek to defend herself like Sofia or to reverse power relations with Cholly. As Amanda Putnam argues, "Pauline Breedlove believes it is her Christian duty to punish her alcoholic husband and thus co-creates constant domestic disturbances within the family, initiating fights with her husband, Cholly, which, in turn, encourages more violence from her children" (36). Cholly and Pauline struggle continuously, and their children show different reactions to their battles. Sammy runs away no less than twenty-seven times, and Pecola "struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die" (*Bluest* 41). In one fight, Pecola's desire has been articulated by her brother, who screams: "Kill him! Kill him!" (42). Pauline, then, stops the fight when she hears these words because it is the last thing she can do.

Pauline's submission to Cholly's physical dominance is clearly illustrated in their sexual relationship. At the beginning of their marriage, Cholly and Pauline share a healthy sexual relationship, which brings Cholly deep affection and Pauline "the laughing […] mixed up with the colors" (129). Cholly was able to make Pauline feel both strength and happiness. She claims: "I feel a power. I be strong, I be pretty, I be young" (128). Due to Cholly's inability to overcome his traumatic experience with Darlene, sexuality becomes a way of expressing his sorrow. He no longer feels affection, and Pauline forgets the rainbow of colors she used to experience. Pecola describes her parents' sexual intercourse:

> He making sounds as though he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn't let go. Terrible as his noises were, they were not nearly as bad as the no noise at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence. (57)

Birgit Holm comments on Cholly and Pauline's sexuality: "[Pecola's] parents' love for each other has turned into a power struggle, and in turn they have become dependent on the abuse they give to one another" (52). Even though Pauline and Cholly fight constantly, there is no power struggle between the couple. It is evident that Cholly is the dominant figure, and Pauline is the subordinate. Pauline's silence, which is worse than Cholly's terrible noises, shows her acquiescence to his sexual needs. Her submission is clearly illustrated when she prays and asks God to punish him for what he has done to her. Her prayers are similar to Celie's letters in *The Color Purple*, in which both women show their passivity and their need for God's help to change the status quo.

Morrison insists on the fact that Cholly and Pauline still depend on one another to maintain their individual identities. Pauline seeks to prove her role as a martyr. She thinks that, as a good Christian woman, she has to endure the burden of her hellish marriage. She stays with Cholly, despite his physical and verbal abuse. Cholly finds in Pauline the only refuge to nurse his injured masculinity and hatred for women.

Cholly, like Alfonso, tries to assert his manhood through dominance and aggression. He rejects Darlene because she witnesses his emasculated manhood. Despite his sorrowful sounds, he dominates Pauline through her silence. With Pecola, he is no more than a rapist. Pecola describes Cholly's sexual assault as "[h]orrible" (*Bluest* 198), and "dirty things" (199). Cholly has destroyed all that remains of Pecola's innocent self. Collins claims:

> One important feature of rape is that, contrary to popular opinion, it is more likely to occur between friends, loved ones, and acquaintances than between strangers. Black women typically know their rapists, and they may actually love them. Violence that is intertwined with love becomes a very effective mechanism for fostering submission […]. Violence and love become so intertwined that many men cannot see alternative paths to manhood that do not involve violence against women. (*Black Sexual* 230)

Cholly's sexual behavior towards his daughter can be seen as an act of imposing power and dominance rather than an act of love, which is illustrated by the repetition of the act at least twice.

2.1.3. Mutilated Sexuality

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker presents another aspect of physical dominance that is related to black women's ideal womanhood. Nettie tells Celie that "the one ritual they do have to celebrate womanhood is so bloody and painful" (*Color* 189). African society dominates black women through the practice of the ritual of female genital excision. The ritual is centuries old in Africa and some regions in Asia. It is basically linked to traditional rituals dedicated specifically to very young girls in order to control their sexuality. According to El Saadawi,

> FGM [Female Genital Mutilation] is one of the means used to diminish women's sexual ability and social mobility, so that her husband will be sure of his fatherhood, sure that his children are his and sure that his children will inherit his land and money and carry his patriarchal name. Patriarchy is based on the name of the father. (194)

Female genital mutilation has many types, which differ according to what has been removed from the female's body. It can be either partial or total excision of the genital organ.

Since it is a dangerous act against women's bodies, it needs to be deeply embedded in society. The compelling reasons behind female circumcision differ from one community to another. According to Amira Seif Eldin, "the three overlapping reasons for the practice of FGM are the myth of: Religion (spiritual cleanliness), Hygiene and Aesthetic (fear about ugly look and bad odour), and Society (to be accepted)" (qtd. in Chandra et al. 494).

Myth also plays a crucial role in the spread of the ritual in African societies. Seif Eldin claims that "[a]ccording to the numerous myths associated with this set of beliefs, the external genitalia have the power to make a birth attendant blind; cause infants to become abnormal, insane or die or cause husbands and father to die" (qtd. in Chandra et al. 494). Whatever the reason behind practicing female genital excision, may be, it remains the most explicit act of patriarchy since it works directly on the woman's body and sexuality.

Signe Arnfred discusses African women's sexuality as an important aspect of colonial ideology. She argues:

> Female sexuality was considered a tool for procreation and nothing more. The civilised norm for women is passionlessness […] allegedly the Victorian advice given to young women facing their sexual debut. To acknowledge the existence of female sexuality, to focus young women on their sexual potential, educating them in the area of sexual pleasure was considered vile, immoral and offensive to human nature. (113)

The patriarchal control of African women's sexuality originates from the "superimposition of Victorian values and morality on the traditional order by colonialism" (qtd. in Prah 28). The ritual is both directly and indirectly related to white imperialism; directly because white imperialists cannot opt for an African egalitarian society while they maintain gender hierarchy in their societies, and indirectly because white imperialism is used as the main reason for women's subjugation. In other words, to resist the influence of white imperialism and preserve

their cultural identity, African women should return to the dangerous ritual. The ritual does not end with the end of the operation but leaves deep physical, sexual, and psychological effects that make black women's position in society worse since it promotes patriarchy and perpetuates women's subordination.

At the beginning of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi is described as a young girl with a vivid personality and a cheerful face. She befriends Celie's children, Adam and Olivia, when they come to Africa with their family as missionaries. Although girls in Olinka village were dedicated solely to homework, Tashi was always with Olivia, trying to learn a new way of life.

> Tashi's mother and father were just here. They are upset because she spends so much time with Olivia. She is changing, […]. She is becoming someone else; her face is beginning to show the spirit of one of her aunts who was sold to the trader because she no longer fit into village life. This aunt refused to marry the man chosen for her. Refused to bow to the chief. (*Color* 161)

Tashi tries to forge a new way of life, which seems difficult to live in Olinka's patriarchal society.

She rebels against Olinka's norms and taboos. Her lovemaking with Adam in the fields is considered a great sin. As Adam states, "this way of loving, among her people, the greatest taboo of all (*Possessing* 28). Olinka's people believe that making love in the field stops the crops from growing. Adam claims that "[n]o one ever saw us and the fields produced their harvest as before" (27). Tashi and Adam experienced the intense feeling of pleasure. Adam states that

> Each time we made love, she'd wanted me as much as I'd wanted her. She had engineered most of our meetings. Whenever we held each other she was breathless in anticipation. Once, she claimed her heart nearly stopped. Such pleasure as ours was difficult for us to believe. Was it a pleasure of which others knew? we often asked ourselves. (32)

Despite her rebellion, Tashi still has an internal conflict about her African identity. When the Mbele's detained leader sends a message to his people to make them remember their origins and "return to the purity of [their] own culture and traditions" (115), Tashi complies with the leader's call and decides to stop the influences of both white imperialists and Christian missionaries. The only way to do that is to return to traditional rituals, specifically female circumcision.

Tashi leaves Olinka village and joins the Mbele's camp in order to undergo the surgery. Although the ritual causes the death of her sister Dura, Tashi shows great courage and determination for her African identity. She tells her psychiatrist Raye that she gives up her sexual pleasure in order "to be accepted as a real woman by the Olinka people" (120-1). Tashi not only endures the surgery but also performs the total excision of her genital organs. Janine Lewis claims that

> The confusion borne out of the clash between tradition and modernity is dealt with in various ways. Young black educated men and women, when faced with traditional circumcision and traditional menstrual rites, often choose to forego their knowledge of Western teachings about human rights and doggedly follow tradition, regardless of any questions they may have" (174).

Though female genital mutilation is a patriarchal tool used to control black women's sexuality, Tashi assumes the responsibility when she succumbs to the illusion of the "true"

African womanhood. M'Lissa, one of the village circumcisers, describes the ritual as "the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinka tradition" (*Possessing* 63). According to Collins,

> Contemporary forms of oppression do not routinely force people to submit. Instead, they manufacture consent for domination so that we lose our ability to question and thus collude in our own subordination […] oppression becomes expressed as a routinized violence or normalized war within one society. (*Black Sexual* 50)

Women themselves take the responsibility for their own mutilation, as Thiam argues: "[i]t would seem that males have forced women to become their own torturers, to butcher each other" (qtd. in Shell-Duncan et al. 28).

Although Tashi loves Adam and shares a special bond with his missionary family, she, like all Olinka women, has been raised to desire their leader. She claims: "I was in love with the perfect lover who already had three wives. The perfect lover and father and brother" (*Possessing* 121). She also thinks that Adam is unlucky because he "couldn't hold a candle to [their] Leader, the real—to [them]—Jesus Christ" (121). Walker identifies the reasons behind African women's submission to female circumcision. She argues: "I think genital mutilation plays a role. The early submission by force that is the hallmark of mutilation. The feeling of being overpowered and thoroughly dominated by those you are duty bound to respect" (Walker and Parmar 69). Tashi's respect for their leader leads her to M'Lissa, the circumciser, so that she can gain the acceptance of the Olinka tribe and be suitable for Olinka men.

As an African ritual, female circumcision is used to ensure that what is considered masculine in the female body is removed and, thus, preserve the full status of the African woman. Walker describes how female circumcision means wholeness for Olinka women:

> The operation she'd had done to herself joined her, she felt, to these women, whom she envisioned as strong, invincible. Completely woman. Completely African Completely Olinka. In her imagination, on her long journey to the camp, they had seemed terribly bold, terribly revolutionary and free. She saw them leaping to the attack" (*Possessing* 63).

Tashi tries to please her community, which despises her for her friendship with Adam and Olivia. She has undergone both the facial scarification and the female initiation ceremony in order to "stop the jeering. Otherwise [she] was a thing. [She] was never trusted, considered a potential traitor" (120). Both scars are painful, but for Tashi, they are signifiers of her African identity. She explains the importance of rituals for African people's identity: "[w]e had been stripped of everything but our black skins, here and there a defiant cheek bore the mark of our withered tribe. These marks gave me courage I wanted such a mark for myself" (24).

Consequently, Tashi suffers emotional and sexual pain. She loses the intense sexual pleasure she has experienced with Adam in the fields. She can no longer have a healthy sexual relationship with her husband, who finds refuge in the arms of his French friend, Lisette. El Saadawi strictly opposes the practice of female genital mutilation, which she herself underwent as a child, "calling it a human rights violation and a health threat of the gravest nature that should be totally banned" (168). She also insists that circumcision has nothing to do with a woman's sexual pleasure. She states:

> From my experience as a medical doctor and a psychiatrist, I learned that FGM has nothing to do with the morality of women; it does not make them more monogamous or more faithful to their husbands. On the contrary, cutting the clitoris increases women's sexual desires, for two reasons: (1) because the brain is the main site of sexual desire and (2) because circumcised women have difficulty reaching sexual satisfaction with their husbands, they look for this satisfaction outside marriage. (194)

In contrast to El Saadawi, many other feminists and social activists such as Fran Hosken, Efua Dorkenoo, and Scilla Elworthy affirm that "sexual dysfunction, psychosexual problems, and loss of sexual desire" (qtd. in Johnson 227) are the common negative consequences of female genital mutilation. Likewise, Pratibha Parmar claims that "[m]utilated women become mere vehicles for male sexual pleasure and lose the ability to control their own sexuality" (Walker and Parmar 227).

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker insists on the direct relationship between genital mutilation and losing sexual pleasure. Besides Tashi, Walker also introduces a white girl named Amy, whom Tashi meets in America. Although Amy belongs to a white, rich family, she is also a victim of genital mutilation. She tells Tashi that even in America, a girl cannot touch herself sexually and that the main reason behind her circumcision is that her mother wants her daughter to have the "gentleness of spirit" (*Possessing* 187), which means "docile in the extreme […] superbly slavish in spirit […] no spunk. No self" (187). Women's gentle spirits necessitate stripping them not only of their sexual pleasure but also of their full sense of selfhood. Amy describes the controversial view of female genital mutilation in America:

> Many African women have come here […]. Enslaved women. Many of them sold into bondage because they refused to be circumcised, but many of them sold into bondage circumcised and infibulated. It was these sewed-up women who fascinated the American doctors who flocked to the slave auctions to examine them, as the women stood naked and defenseless on the block. They learned to do the "procedure" on other enslaved women; they did this in the name of Science. They found a use for it on white women […] suddenly. They wrote in their medical journals that they'd finally found a cure for the white woman's hysteria. (186)

The white men's wish to circumcise white women proves that patriarchy is colorless. Controlling women's sexual pleasure comes at the heart of the man/woman power relationship since it denies the woman's sexual autonomy and sexual freedom.

Unlike Tashi, who gives up her sexual pleasure to be accepted as a "true" Olinkan woman, the protagonist in *Sula* uses her sexual pleasure to challenge the patriarchal conventions of the Bottom. According to Deborah McDowell, "Sula's female heritage is an unbroken line of 'manloving' women who exist as sexually desiring subjects rather than as objects of male desire" (82). Though both the mother and the daughter show a passion for sexuality, they use their sexuality in opposite directions. Hannah's sexuality glorifies patriarchy, while Sula's is both a rebellion against men's dominance and a means to realize her self. Nel's husband is attracted to Sula's thinking. Jude claims: "[a] funny woman, he thought, not that bad-looking. But he could see why she wasn't married; she stirred a man's mind maybe, but not his body" (*Sula* 104). Ajax is also seduced by Sula's strong character. Sula exhibits a remarkable difference from her mother; Hannah is the body, while Sula is the mind.

Sula rejects the traditional conventions of womanhood. She "went to bed with men as frequently as she could" (122). In contrast to Sula, Nel's sexuality is not expressed for her own satisfaction but for the pleasure of her husband and is limited within the institution of marriage. When Nel finds Jude with Sula in bed, she describes her thighs as empty and dead, which suggests her inability to express her sexuality outside the confines of social conventions. Sula assumes responsibility for her own pleasure. Her sexual expression is not bound by social definitions of female sexuality and duty conventions (McDowell 83). Morrison describes Sula as the woman who "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 is masculine in that sense (Morrison and Stepto 487).

Although Sula thinks that sex is wicked, she ends up realizing that it brings her a special kind of joy. Her sexuality is "neither located in the realm of 'moral' abstractions nor expressed within the institution of marriage that legitimates it for women. Rather, it is the realm of sensory experience and in the service of self-exploration that leads to self-intimacy" (McDowell 83). Nel rejects this intimacy when she complies with the community's conventions and refuses self-exploration. It is noteworthy to mention that Sula uses her sexuality not to dominate men but to reject being dominated. Her limitless sexual pleasure is to defy the Bottom's conventions and achieve self-possession. Victoria Middleton argues that "Sula is not unnatural, however, but anarchistic. She does not emasculate black men but rather subverts the fiction that maintains their ascendancy" (376).

Physical dominance is an important aspect of black men and black women's power relations. Black men's need to fit into hegemonic masculinity makes them use different kinds and levels of violence to subjugate women. Although physical dominance is displayed at the individual level, it directly contributes to black women's subordination at the social level. In other words, since physical dominance plays a role in maintaining unjust black sexual politics, it becomes difficult for black women to call for race and gender equality within the larger American society.

2.2. Emotional Dominance

Racism and sexism also dominate black women emotionally. Emotional dominance does not only stem from the emotional effects of the different forms of oppression upon black

women or from using love and affection as a way to dominate them, but also by making black women unlovable. Morrison comments on the importance of the theme of love in her writings: "[a]ctually, I think, all the time that I write, I'm writing about love or its absence. Although I don't start out that way.... But I think that I still write about the same thing, which is how people relate to one another and miss it or hang on to it . . . or are tenacious about love" (qtd. in Bakerman 541). Love has always been a site of power in black communities. It helps in asserting togetherness and commonweal. Collins claims that:

> [L]ove relationships between two people constitute a community of two members […] if these two individuals can recognize one another's humanity, love one another despite their faults, and commit to one another in the harsh environment that destroys love and therefore self […] then love and commitment constitute important qualities for a progressive Black sexual politics" (*Black Sexual* 298-9).

Black people's inability to love would certainly be damaging since it breaks both the individual and the community and fosters oppression, as Audre Lorde argues: "impoverished notions of love of self and others lie at the heart of oppression" (qtd. in Collins, *Black Sexual* 52). Oppression does not function solely by forcing people to submit, but also by rendering its victims unlovable. This lack of love makes them easily exploited and easily controlled (Collins, *Black Sexual* 250). Both Morrison and Walker portray this emotional oppression and its damaging effects on the mother-daughter relationship.

2.2.1. Distant/Negligent Motherhood

In *Sula*, Morrison shows how the lack of love has devastating effects on both the mother and the daughter. A very meaningful example is Sula's coldness when she watches her mother burn. In all kinds of families, the mother's position is central, primarily because her figure is strongly related to caregiving, love, and affection. Sula suffers from her distant mother. She

even hears her saying, “I love Sula. I just don’t like her. That’s the difference” (*Sula* 57). In fact, there is no difference. It is hard to distinguish between the two verbs, “love” and “like”. If Hannah loves Sula, how can she say that she does not like her? This binary of “love/not like” makes Hannah’s feelings towards Sula neutral. Hannah neither loves nor hates Sula.

According to Robert Grant, although Hannah’s comment is interpreted as maternal neglect or insensitivity, and although it affects Sula, it helps clarify her daughter’s independence (98). Grant goes further when he claims that “there is no suggestion in the text that [Hannah] ‘abuses’ Sula in any way” (98). Middleton argues that “Hannah's mothering is equally unconventional but it is not negligent. It liberates Sula from lifelong dependency on others […] Hannah's candor helps her distinguish herself from her mother, giving her the right independently” (374). However, Hannah’s statement makes Sula fall into dark thoughts. She stands at the window, bewildered by the sting in her eye (*Sula* 57), which suggests her unusual tears and her deep sorrow.

Mila Tuli discusses the importance of love in a child’s upbringing. She claims that “love was believed to be most important in helping the child establish a sense of trust and contributed to them growing up feeling secure” (81). Maureen Jones argues that “the earliest memories of emotional deprivation of love leave the deepest imprint” (195). The lack of the mother’s natural feelings deeply affects Sula. Her emotional pain causes her more complex physical and psychological suffering.

Hannah also suffers from her distant mother, who is unable to show her love for her children. Eva kills her beloved son to protect him from a slow death. Eva’s burning of Plum in *Sula* parallels Sethe’s killing of her crawling baby in *Beloved* (1987). This controversial motherhood that combines the mother’s thick love with the most barbaric act for the sake of

protection becomes an imprint in Morrison's novels. Hannah spends her life wondering whether her mother loves her and her brother, Plum. She comes into Eva's room and asks: "Mamma, did you ever love us?" (*Sula* 69). Eva replies: "what you talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head or what is that between your ears, heifer?" (69)

Eva kills Plum out of mercy. She cannot witness his self-destruction, and Plum welcomes his death at the hands of his mother. When Hannah runs to Eva's room and tells her that Plum is burning, Eva replies: "[i]s? My baby? Burning?" (48). The two women's eyes were enough to make Hannah understand that it was her mother who killed her brother. Eva describes fire as "warm" (168). Still, her actions, though stemming from her affection, make her motherly love more suspicious.

Hannah, like Eva, raises Sula without affection, but Eva is a devoted mother while Hannah is not. Eva does everything for her children's survival. Although she sets fire to her son, she strongly believes that she has done the right thing and has given him a death worthy of a man. Eva's devoted motherhood is clearly illustrated when she sees her daughter Hannah on fire and quickly jumps from the window of her bedroom to save her. Before she could reach her, Hannah was totally burned. Eva's lack of affection does not prohibit her from performing her motherly duties and taking her responsibilities seriously, which Hannah fails to provide for Sula.

When the neighbors take Eva to the local hospital because she was bleeding from her fall and an orderly named Old Willy Fields saves her life, Eva keeps cursing him throughout her life. Her inability to live without her children proves that her motherly love is unquestionable. She is a devoted mother, though she is less affectionate. As Collins argues, "[f]or far too many

Black mothers, the demands of providing for children in intersecting oppressions are sometimes so demanding that they have neither the time nor the patience for affection" (*Black Feminist* 187).

While in the hospital, Eva remembers Hannah's dream of a wedding in which she wore a red bridal gown. Eva understands that Hannah's dream foreshadows her death, since marriage has always meant death for her, and the red gown refers to fire. Surprisingly, Eva remembers Sula "standing on the back porch just looking" (*Sula* 78), without trying to save her mother. Although Eva's friends claim that Sula's reaction is natural and that anyone in her place would be struck dumb, Eva secretly disagrees with them. She is strongly convinced that "Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested" (*Sula* 78). According to Grant,

> Hannah's honest comment and attitude inspires not an answer but a question: why wouldn't a mother (especially one as "tolerant" and unconventional as Hannah) like her own daughter? Hannah, we may infer, has instimations of Sula's unresolved "difference." And this strangeness in Sula, this curious detachment, is borne out most memorably and disturbingly when she "watches" her mother burn to death. (98)

Grant justifies Hannah's lack of love towards her daughter by claiming that, as a mother, she is able to see Sula's unresolved strangeness. However, Sula's curious detachment is a response to Hannah's motherly attitude.

The issue of love in *Sula* is handed down from one generation to another. The lack of maternal love and affection creates cycles of hatred and violence. Every daughter becomes colder than her mother. Though Eva is a devoted mother, she cannot shower her children with affection. Hannah's lack of love makes her unable to provide it to her daughter. Gloria Randle claims that "[t]he transgenerational cycle of deficient mothering from grandmother to mother

to daughter has wrought profound psychic damage upon the beautiful Peace women" (75). Sula experiences the most emotional damage, which is illustrated in her coldness when she watches her mother burn. Obviously, Sula's "insecurity and consequent neurosis […] stem from her unstable relationship with her mother" (Ogunyemi, *Sula* 130). Sula's behavior is similar to Geraldine's son, Junior, and his sadistic pleasure while watching his mother's cat die in *The Bluest Eye*.

The lack of motherly affection in Sula's life leads her to hurt her own body. Steven Levenkron highlights the relationship between suffering and self-injury. He argues that among the reasons that lead to self-mutilation is a rage that cannot be expressed or consciously perceived, usually toward a parent. Consequently, self-cut skin and the sight of one's self bleeding can be a cure for emotional pain (23-4). Sula injures herself when she tries to protect her friend Nel from a group of Irish boys.

Sula's cutting of her finger can be understood in terms of Marilee Strong's conception of self-injury which is called the "bright red scream". Amelio D'Onofrio explains the "bright red scream" as:

> The blood that flows from cutting one's flesh is symbolic of the tears that do not, or perhaps cannot, flow. The pain may be too great, or it may even have been forgotten. Amid the numbness, the injurer may have little or no understating of the nature of that pain. It often remains inchoate and, while experienced, is not framed in either thought or words. The flowing blood of self-injury, the "bright red scream," shouts what cannot be shouted. It points to pain that is deep, raw, and compelling. (36)

Sula's quiet voice, direct look at the boys, and her words when she tells them, "[i]f I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?" (*Sula* 54-5) show that she is conscious of her self-injury and the pain she causes to her own body. Hannah's lack of love towards her own

daughter makes Sula feel emotionally dominated. However, self-injury is also a way to recover and regain confidence. According to D'Onofrio, self-injury

> [P]rovides the injurer with a sense of being alive in an otherwise deadened existence. The pain of self-injury is about the attempt to feel, the effort to speak, and the hope for connection. It is the attempt, fueled by emotional deprivation, to make sense of an inconceivable personal history and to find oneself again. (36)

After cutting her finger, Sula grows stronger. She accepts the distance between herself and her mother and decides to grow on her own.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline's motherhood is similar to Hannah's. Pauline dislikes her daughter because of the neglect and dislike she felt in her childhood.

> [W]hy she alone of all the children had no nickname; why there were no funny jokes and anecdotes about funny things she had done; why no one ever remarked on her food preferences—no saving of the wing or neck for her—no cooking of the peas in a separate pot without rice because she did not like rice; why nobody teased her; why she never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace. (*Bluest* 108-9)

Raised in a family of eleven children, Pauline suffers from her mother's carelessness. The only pleasure she can find is in arranging things and lining them up according to their size, shape, or color. This pleasure moves with Pauline from childhood to adulthood and becomes a destructive behavior that shapes both her selfhood and motherhood.

Pauline arranges her family members according to beauty standards, placing them at the bottom. Her feelings of separateness and unworthiness make her shower her daughter with the same negligence. At the Fishers' house, she lavishes both love and affection on their little daughter. Pauline's maternal behavior makes Pecola believe that a pair of blue eyes will undoubtedly change her life.

> [I]f those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, 'Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes'. (*Bluest* 44)

Pecola's longing for blue eyes is not a quest for beauty but love. A pair of blue eyes will make her loved by her mother, family, and community. According to Randle, Cholly and Pauline's inability to love themselves makes them ill-equipped to love their daughter (69).

Pecola falls into self-isolation and self-hatred. Her wish to disappear, while looking at herself in the mirror, is crucial in describing her low self-esteem. DeGruy offers a definition of esteem and its relation to both family and community:

> Esteem has to do with worth and value. Self-esteem is the judgment we make concerning our own worth. Through the years there have been many ways people have tried to define and measure self-esteem. Often these definitions confuse self-esteem with self-confidence or self-efficacy. While self-confidence and self-efficacy have to do with our beliefs about how effective and competent we consider ourselves to be, self-esteem, though related, refers to our beliefs about our value, our value to our families, our friends, community and the world at large. (116)

Vacant esteem is one of the symptoms of what DeGruy calls "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome" (PTSS), which is "a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today" (114). DeGruy defines vacant esteem as,

> [T]he state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by the group and societal pronouncement of inferiority. Vacant esteem is the net result of three spheres of influence – society, our community and our family. Society influences us through its institutions, laws, policies and media. The communities in which we live influence us through establishing norms and encouraging conformity to society at large. Our families influence us through the ways in which we are raised and groomed to take our place, as our parents see it, in our community and society. When these influences all promote a disparaging and limiting identity to which we believe we are confined, vacant esteem can be the result. (118)

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison describes the influence of society, community, and family on Pecola's self-esteem. White society has established whiteness as the only meaning of beauty, which indirectly stereotypes black women as hideous. The black community adopts the hegemonic meaning of beauty to the point that black people, and mainly black women, place themselves within the scale of skin color to measure their beauty by the extent of their closeness to whiteness.

Pauline also plays an important role in decreasing Pecola's self-esteem. According to DeGruy, "[w]hen the parents in a family believe themselves to have little or no value, it reflects itself in behaviors that can instill a similar belief in their children. This belief is passed down through generations in the form of unexamined, and often long-established, child rearing practices" (119). Pauline's hatred of her blackness and her daughter's blackness instills in Pecola the feeling of inferiority and worthlessness, which is reflected in her isolation and escape every time she faces others' contempt.

2.2.2. Absent/Complicitous Motherhood

In *The Color Purple*, although Walker does not shed light on the relationship between Celie and her mother, it is obvious that Celie, like both Sula and Pecola, suffered from her distant

mother. After the death of Celie and Nettie's father, their mother falls into depression. Despite the fact that she marries Alfonso, she keeps lying in her bed till her death. According to Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman, the absent or ill mothers "were seen by their daughters as helpless, frail, downtrodden victims, who were unable to take care of themselves, much less to protect their children" (745). Celie's mother is both mentally ill and physically absent.

She refuses to satisfy Alfonso's sexual needs, and that is why he turns to Celie. She is aware of her daughter's pregnancy, and when she asks Celie about the father of her baby, she replies that it is God's. Although Celie's answer is not convincing, her mother does not comment or try to understand, which probably suggests that she is suspicious about her daughter's rape. Celie's mother dies screaming and cussing at Celie (*Color* 2). She is angry at her daughter, who has become slower at doing housework, but she does not seek to know how she got pregnant.

Celie's mother witnesses her daughter's two pregnancies, which suggests that she is not only an absent but a complicitous mother. bell hooks comments on the nature of motherly betrayal in *The Color Purple*: "[s]ince the mother is bonded with the father, supporting and protecting his interests, mothers and daughters within this fictive patriarchy suffer a wound of separation and abandonment; they have no context for unity. Mothers prove their allegiance to fathers by betraying daughters" (qtd. in Moore 115).

In describing Shug, Celie argues: "[s]he sicker than my mama was when she die. But she more evil than my mama and that keep her alive" (*Color* 47). Celie's statement suggests that she sees her mother as evil. While her mother is lying depressed in her bed, Celie does the housework and cares for her other brothers. She claims: "I used to git mad at my mammy cause she put a lot of work on me. Then I see how sick she is. Couldn't stay mad at her.

Couldn't be mad at my daddy cause he my daddy. Bible say, Honor father and mother no matter what" (41-2). Celie, as a good Christian woman, shows respect to her parents, which makes her bear her father's rape and her mother's absence.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker insists on the distance between Nafa and her two daughters. Despite Nafa's conversion to Christianity and her opposition to female genital excision, she is the one who decides to make her daughters endure the operation. M'Lissa tells Tashi:

> As soon as [Nafa] heard the new missionaries were black, she felt certain the village would be returned to all its former ways and that uncircumcised girls would be punished. She could not imagine a black person that was not Olinkan, and she thought all Olinkans demanded their daughters be bathed. I told her to wait. But no. She was the kind of woman who jumps even before the man says boo. Your mother helped me hold your sister down. (*Possessing* 253)

Nafa urges Dura's operation because she thinks that the coming of black missionaries will certainly re-establish black rituals in Olinka. Although she pretends that she wants to protect her daughters from punishment, she only wants to ensure their marriageability (Moore 94). Nafa's submission to the patriarchal laws makes Tashi feel betrayed by her own mother. According to Walker,

> [T]he mother's betrayal of the child is one of the crudest aspects of it. Children place all their love and trust in their mothers. When you think of the depth of the betrayal of the child's trust, this is an emotional wounding, which will never go away. The sense of betrayal, the sense of not being able to trust anyone, will stay with the child as she grows up. I think that is a reason why in a lot of the cultures that we are talking about, there is so much distrust, so much dissension, and so much silence. (Walker and Parmar 274)

In fact, Tashi feels betrayed by every mother figure in Olinka. Significantly, the tsunga's name "M'Lissa", which is an abbreviation of "Mother Lissa", suggests her position as a mother to the whole community. According to Pollock, "Nafa, as mother, and M'Lissa, as mother, both play the father by becoming the creator of the daughter, who is created in her (their) own image(s)" (45).

The transgenerational practice of the ritual makes every mutilated mother recreate her broken self-image within her daughter. Hasanthi explains how the mothers' legacy of pain is handed down to their daughters:

> Tashi's life in the novel showcases how women in a patriarchal society willingly get their daughters circumcised and nothing is spoken of the repercussions of the procedure, or even the possible death associated with it. Mothers on account of the patriarchal norms dictated by society are both willingly and unwillingly ready to hand over the legacy of pain to their female child and slay their well-being mercilessly along with patriarchy. A woman in such a society never speaks about her pain, like her mother and hands down the painful legacy to her daughter, like her mother who has handed it down to her. Walker through the novel projects how handing down the legacy of pain and taking it as token of femininity, is considered to be acts of pride and honour. (45)

Tashi's mother plays an important role in her daughter's trauma. During the healing process, Mzee asks Tashi to draw anything that comes to her mind. Tashi draws a picture which, according to her, "represented [her] birth. [Her] entrance into reality" (*Possessing* 54). The picture illustrates the meeting of her mother and the leopard on her path. Surprisingly, Tashi draws "a leopard with two legs. [Her] terrified mother with four" (54). Though Tashi claims that she does not know why she has drawn her mother with four legs, it is obvious that she is explicitly criticizing her mother.

By ascribing to her mother animalistic features, Tashi seeks to convey her loss of humanity. The leopard is known for its solitary life, which suggests that Tashi is perhaps criticizing her mother's detachment from her two daughters. Pollock points out that "Tashi feels betrayed by her own mother and by all of the other women (mother figures) in the village" (42). Mothers are supposed to provide their daughters with love and protection. By allowing the continuity of the ritual, Olinkan mothers complicitly work to distort not only their daughters' bodies but also their minds and spirits.

Both Morrison and Walker show how the lack of love and affection is passed from one generation to another and plays a crucial role in destroying the mother-daughter relationship, which contributes to maintaining unjust black sexual politics. The lack of maternal love makes it difficult, if not impossible, for young black girls to construct their womanhood because mothers are the tutors that young black girls need to challenge the traditional definitions of both white and black womanhood and achieve their full potential as women.

2.3. Psychological Dominance

Both Morrison and Walker discuss the role of the black community in the lives of black men and women. The black community's solidarity and togetherness bring well-being to both the individual and the community itself, while its weakness and separateness foster oppression among its members and suppress their resistance. In discussing PTSD, DeGruy insists on the role of the black community in transmitting trangenerational trauma. She claims:

> In addition to the family, the legacy of trauma is also passed down through the community. During slavery, the black community was a suppressed and marginalized group. Today, the African American community is made up of individuals and families who collectively share differential anxiety and adaptive survival behaviors passed down from prior generations of African Americans, many of whom likely suffered from PTSD. The community serves to reinforce both the positive and negative behaviors through the socialization process. (113)

Among the negative behaviors transmitted by the black community in Morrison and Walker's selected novels is the black community's denial of black women's suffering and rejection of their resistance, which make black women's position in society worse.

2.3.1. Silencing Rape

Morrison and Walker shed light on individual and communal responses to rape. Both the individual and the community deny and silence black women's abuse, which contributes to sustaining unjust sexual politics. Madonne Miner notes that men, as potential rapists, assume presence, language, and reason as their particular province. While women, as potential victims, fall into absence, silence, and madness (4).

In *The Color Purple*, Celie cannot tell anyone of her suffering because of Alfonso's instructions: "[y]ou better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (1). Celie feels sorry for her mother and is "robbed, in the name of her mother, of her story and her voice" (Froula 638). Alfonso ensures her complicit silence and "even implicat[es] God in the conspiracy of silence" (Kamitsuka 51).

Alphonso tells Albert, who is about to marry Celie, that she tells lies to make sure that "even the little she speaks will be doubted […]. Prevented both from speaking and from being believed" (Cheung 165). Similarly, Albert also seeks to hide his sexual advances towards

Nettie when he prevents correspondence between the two sisters. He "metes out the same punishment to Nettie that Alphonso does to Celie: the denial of communication" (Cheung 163). Alfonso also steals Celie's babies to silence her. In this way, no one will know the real father of her children. D'Onofrio explains that

> Silence is a prevailing theme in childhood abuse. Those who are repeated victims of childhood abuse are frequently warned to be silent. If they speak, they may experience further abuse or may not be believed at all. As a result, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. (35)

Celie's silence is part of the black communal belief in the necessity of protecting black men from the white stereotypical image that casts black men as hyper-sexualized. According to Collins,

> African American women grapple with long-standing sanctions within their communities that urge them to protect African American men at all costs, including keeping 'family secrets' by remaining silent about male abuse. Black women also remain silent for fear that their friends, family, and community will abandon them. (*Black Sexual* 226)

Celie cannot harm Alfonso because she thinks that he is her real father. Consequently, she finds herself trapped in a silent circle of sexual abuse.

In *The Bluest Eye*, the community not only rejects Pecola's ugliness but also blames her for the incestuous act. Pecola's unhealthy family and community push her into a vicious state of loneliness and sadness. When Pauline learns of Pecola's rape and pregnancy, she refuses to believe her daughter's claims and beats her harshly. One of the community's members points out that "the way her mama beat her she lucky to be alive herself" (*Bluest* 189). Miner draws parallels between Pecola and Philomela, who has her tongues severed by Tereus, her rapist:

> To enforce this silence, Cholly need not cut off Pecola's tongue or imprison her behind stone walls. The depresencing of Pecola Breedlove takes a different form from that of Philomela. Upon regaining consciousness following the rape, Pecola is able to speak; she tells Mrs. Breedlove what has happened. But as Mrs. Breedlove does not want to hear and does not want to believe, Pecola must recognize the futility of attempted communication. Thus when Cholly, like Tereus, rapes a second time, Pecola keeps the story to herself, in silence this eleven year old girl steps across commonly accepted borders of reason and speech to enter her own personal world of silence and madness. (4)

Pauline silences Pecola when she refuses to listen to her story. Pecola "can only talk to herself and reverts to an inner dialog so that she can process what has happened to her. This inner dialogue represents Pecola's madness because she has divided herself into two people. This division creates a split identity" (Cecchini 55-6).

The community also wants Pecola's baby dead, and "[s]he be lucky if it don't live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking" (*Bluest* 187). The black community's desire for the baby's death serves as a deafening silence for Cholly's incestuous rape. Collins argues:

> This 'conspiracy of silence' about Black men's physical and emotional abuse of Black women parallels Black women's silences about the politics of sexuality in general. Both silences stem from a larger system of legitimated, routinized violence targeted toward Black women and, via silence, both work to reinscribe social hierarchies. (*Black Feminist* 158-9)

Though child abuse is not unique to the African American community, it should be kept silent because acknowledging the abuse will further exclude African American men from the American mainstream (Hampton 162-3). The white hegemonic society stereotypes the black man as the Black Macho or the hypersexualized man. The acknowledgement of the black man's rapist character will legitimize this categorization. As Jennifer Nelson claims, "black

women were often afraid to speak out about rape for fear that it would increase racist ideas about predatory black male sexuality" (qtd. in Hayden and Hallstein 107).

However, silencing black men's sexual abuse of women to protect black men will never help the black community establish progressive black sexual politics. According to Audre Lorde, sexual violence against black women is "a disease striking the heart of Black nationhood, and silence will not make it disappear" (qtd. in Collins, *Black Feminist* 159). In other words, by attempting to protect the black man from the oppressive image of the black rapist, the black community contributes to the perpetuation of unjust black sexual politics.

2.3.2. Silencing Pain

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the Olinka community seeks to silence Tashi's pain. The ritual of genital mutilation brings Tashi physical, mental, and even emotional problems. Although she married Adam and moved with him to America, where she is known as Evelyn Johnson, the effects of genital mutilation still persist on her. Walker writes:

> It was heartbreaking to see, on their return, how passive Tashi had become. No longer cheerful, or impish. Her movements, which had always been graceful, and quick with the liveliness of her personality, now became merely graceful. Slow. Studied. This was true even of her smile; which she never seemed to offer you without considering it first. That her soul had been dealt a mortal blow was plain to anyone who dared look into her eyes. (*Possessing* 65)

Tashi's legs are unbound. She miraculously gives birth to a mentally retarded boy. Her infibulated vagina results in his brain damage. Though her son Benny claims that "her scent [is] warm, lovely [and] soft" (94), Tashi "bathed constantly, as if to rid herself of any scent whatsoever […]. To smell like herself seemed beyond her ability to accept" (94).

Tashi has disturbing nightmares every night about her sister's death and about a cool, tall, and dark tower in which she sees herself confined, with broken wings. She refuses to talk about her nightmares with her doctor. Adam describes the terrifying nights of his wife that make her shake with fear:

> There is a tower, she says. I think it is a tower. It is tall, but I am inside. I don't really ever know what it looks like from outside. It is cool at first, and as you descend lower and lower to where I'm kept, it becomes dank and cold, as well. It's dark. There is an endless repetitive sound that is like the faint scratch of a baby's fingernails on paper. And there are millions of things moving about me in the dark. I can not see them. And they've broken my wings! (26)

Tashi's recurrent nightmares illustrate her complex trauma. Her silence is epitomized by the boulder in her throat, which prevents her from talking about her victimization.

Despite the different effects of female genital mutilation, the Olinka community seeks to silence women's pain by linking the ritual to women's beauty. M'Lissa argues that men see women as beautiful when they endure pain: "women are too cowardly to look behind a smiling face. A man smiles and tells them they will look beautiful weeping, and they send for the knife" (238). Women's ultimate wish is to have "the classic Olinka […] walk, in which the feet appear to slide forward and are rarely raised above the ground" (65), which is a manifesto of their "true" womanhood. They have finally realized that this proud walk has become a shuffle.

When the missionaries come to Olinka and hear Tashi crying for her sister's death, the elders of the village deny the presence of any crying girl. Walker argues:

> It's remarkable to me that the suffering of the children is the thing that is least considered. Children cry in pain and terror when they feel pain and terror, and yet the elders and their parents just assume that they will forget the pain that they endure. That has very much preoccupied me. I find it quite chilling. (Walker and Parmar 347)

Tashi's community seeks to silence girls and women's suffering to the extent that "[t]hey do not want to hear what their children suffer. They've made the telling of the suffering itself taboo" (*Possessing* 161). Olinka's elders keep telling Tashi, "*You mustn't cry*!" (15, emphasis in original) and insisting that it was a nightmare. Other children keep teasing her about her crying because they believe the elders' claim that "one crying child is the rotten apple in the barrel of the tribe" (7). The community is uncaring about Tashi's cry and even about Dura's death. When Dura "*cried piteously, her arms outstretched, looking about for help. No, they laughed, telling this story, not simply for help, for deliverance*" (10, emphasis in original). The community elders' indifference towards black girls' suffering and even death makes them, as M'Lissa comments, no more than "torturers of children" (219).

When Dura bled to death, Walker insists that "[n]o one was responsible. No one to blame" (81), because finding someone or something to blame will raise questions about the practice of the ritual, which is in itself taboo. According to Geneva Moore, "[t]he village elders believe that God 'created the tsunga' and thus it is a religious taboo to break the silence surrounding what […] women have endured for centuries in Africa" (118). It is this imposed silence that numbs Nafa's senses. Even though she witnesses her daughter's death, she never cries. Tashi claims: "I studied the white rinds of my mother's heels, and felt in my own heart the weight of Dura's death settling upon her spirit" (*Possessing* 16). Nafa represses her guilt and fills the emptiness left by her daughter's death with hard work. She is powerless and passive to the point of being unable to resist the ritual or even mourn her dead daughter.

Nafa not only betrays her daughters when she succumbs to the traditional ritual but also shows her complicity in silencing both her and her daughters' pain. According to Giulia Fabi, "the oppressive silence that surrounds this taboo issue, a silence that represents another, more indirect form of patriarchal domination and culturally enforced female complicity" (230). Even though Tashi, as Celie, feels sorry for her mother, she cannot forgive her betrayal.

2.3.3. Silencing Resistance

In *Sula*, the community works to silence the protagonist's resistance to the patriarchal conventions. When Sula comes back to the Bottom after ten years, her return coincides with the plague of robins. Birds are falling dead everywhere. Sula's coming in what the community calls "the evil days" makes her not only unwelcome but also the personification of evil. Morrison sheds light on the different accidents attributed to Sula that make the community consider her evil. For instance, she has been accused of knocking Teapot down the stairs and of having Mr. Finley choke on a chicken bone when he saw her (*Sula* 114).

People do not harm her, but start putting broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkling salt on their porch steps. Morrison describes the way the community deals with evil things: "[t]he presence of evil was something to be first recognized, then dealt with, survived, outwitted, triumphed over" (*Sula* 118). In an interview with Claudia Tale, Morrison defends the Bottom community in *Sula*:

> I found that community to be very nurturing for Sula. There was no other place in the world she could have lived without being harmed. Whatever they think about Sula, however strange she is to them, however different, they won't harm her. Medaillon is a sustaining environment even for a woman who is very different. […]. They call her bad names and try to protect themselves from her evil; that's all. (*Black* 130)

Despite Morrison's claim, it is obvious that the community rejects Sula's difference. Her personality, which is far from the mentality prevailing in the Bottom, is what makes her an alien. The community's rejection of Sula is mainly because she advocates change, which the community strictly opposes. For Sula, change is not only important, but necessary. She states: "[t]he real hell of Hell is that it is forever […] doing anything forever and ever was hell" (*Sula* 107-8).

Sula's autonomy is regarded as an attempt to emasculate black men in the community. It is significant that they are the ones who label her a pariah, which "fingerprinted her for all time" (112). Morrison explains the conception of the pariah:

> There are several levels of the pariah figure working in my writing. The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs. The civilization of black people that lives apart from but in juxtaposition to other civilizations is a pariah relationship. In fact, the concept of the black in this country is almost always one of the pariah. But a community contains pariahs within it that are very useful for the conscience of that community. (*Black* 129)

Although Morrison claims that the notion of "the black" is in itself a pariah in the American mainstream and advocates the existence of pariahs as a healthy aspect of the black community, she still defends the community's rejection of Sula. She argues that, unlike Shadrack and the Deweys, who are other variations of the pariah but are accepted by the community because they are systematized, the Bottom community cannot know what to expect from Sula (*Black* 129).

Sula's sexual freedom leads the community to accuse her of sleeping with white men, which is the greatest taboo that has no excuse and no compassion. Collins explains the black

community's contradictory view of interracial love relationships, in which black women are accused of being race traitors while black men get their status raised:

> Historically, good Black women were those who resisted the sexual advances of White men, not those who invited them. The history for men differed. One mark of hegemonic White masculinity lay in its ability to restrict the sexual partners available to Black men. African American men were forbidden to engage in sexual relations with all White women, let alone marry them. In this context, any expansion of the pool of female sexual partners enhances African American men's standing within the existing system of hierarchical masculinities. Thus, within Black civil society, African American women in interracial love relationships face the stigma of being accused of being race traitors […] whereas African American men engaged in similar relationships can find their status as men raised. (*Black Sexual* 262)

By claiming that Sula is capable of interracial sexual relationships, the black community sees in her a menace to all conventions and taboos. Sula is a threat to both men and women in the Bottom; to men because she challenges patriarchy, and to women because she expresses the autonomy that they lack. Barbara Smith claims that Sula is a "living criticism of their dreadful lives of resignation" (qtd. in Nigro 20).

The black community desperately seeks to silence Sula's resistance to social conventions by stereotyping her as a pariah. It is noteworthy considering that Sula "returns to the Bottom determined to live outside and not inside the community" (Cecchini 90). Although the people of the Bottom appear to reject her behavior, it is Sula who rejects them. As Grant argues, she is a willing pariah, rather than a stereotypical victim (91).

Conclusion

Hegemonic masculinity emphasizes dominance not only between men and women but also between men themselves. Due to race prejudice, black men face difficulties in coming to terms with their manhood. In this regard, they subjugate black women to different forms of dominance and violence, which result in unjust black sexual politics. Both Morrison and Walker, in their selected novels, portray the different forms of physical dominance in which black women's bodies and sexualities lie at the heart of their oppression. Black men exercise authority through both wife battery and rape. They also seek to suppress black women's sexual pleasure in order to annihilate their sexual freedom because, as Morrison points out, "[f]emale freedom always means sexual freedom" (*Sula* xi). This sexual freedom helps in challenging patriarchy and the hegemonic conventions of the white asexual woman and the black jezebel. However, black women should express their sexual freedom to avoid being dominated, not to dominate men.

Black women suffer from emotional dominance, which mainly governs the black mother-daughter relationship. Morrison insists that the lack of love is passed down through generations, while Walker describes passive mothers as complicitous in their daughters' devastation. The lack of love in the mother-daughter relationship has deep effects not only on the mother and the daughter but on the whole community since it fosters oppression. Black women are also subjected to psychological dominance that maintains unjust black sexual politics. The black community works to silence black women's suffering and resistance. In both *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye*, the black community seeks to hide black females' sexual abuse to counter the whites' view of black men as rapists or hyper-sexualized. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy,* the black community tries to silence black girls' suffering by

linking the ritual of female genital mutilation to beauty and making the telling of the suffering itself taboo. In *Sula*, the community attempts to silence the protagonist's resistance to social conventions by labeling her a pariah, an outsider who cannot be accepted and should not be followed. The different forms of dominance make black women dispossess their bodies, fall into self-hatred, and suffer different traumas. Black women, then, have to challenge the different forms of oppression to repossess their bodies, minds, and spirits.

Chapter Three

Challenging Race and Gender Prejudice: A Womanist Therapy

Introduction

This chapter seeks to show that Morrison and Walker adopt the womanist methods of motherhood, sisterhood, rebellion, and healing to challenge race and gender prejudice and achieve social change. Layli Phillips explains that "[w]omanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people" (xx). Walker's focus on black women's everyday lives and experiences is mainly to make change possible for every woman in any environment, through major or minor activities of daily life and communal or individual work. This chapter examines celibate sisterhood in *The Color Purple* with a focus on black women's sexuality and spirituality, which lead to their autonomy. It tackles creative motherhood in *The Bluest Eye*, which provides new meanings to the concept of motherhood. Creative mothers are necessary to raise strong daughters. It also discusses rebellious daughterhood as an important factor in lifting the community's consciousness in *Sula*. Finally, it looks into the healing process in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, which requires both mutual aid and self-help. Black women need healthy bodies, minds, and spirits to make social change possible.

3.1. Celibate Sisterhood

In *The Color Purple*, Walker focuses on sisterhood as the main element in Celie's empowerment. Sisterhood does not only imply biological sisterhood, but transcends it to the larger meaning of women's bonding. Women's empowerment according to the womanist

discourse requires their solidarity, which can take different dimensions for the well-being of the black woman's body, mind, and spirit. In *The Color Purple*, while Celie feels paralyzed and accepts her submissiveness as a constant reality, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug systematically help her understand her physical and emotional pain and achieve empowerment.

Nettie evokes Celie's empowerment by asking her to fight back against Mr. ____'s violence. She claims: "[d]on't let them run over you […]. You got to let them know who got the upper hand […]. You got to fight. You got to fight" (*Color* 17-8). Celie replies: "[b]ut I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive" (18). Celie cannot fight back against Mr. ____, not only because she lacks the necessary tools, but also because she cannot conceptualize a reason for which she needs to fight. In other words, though she knows that she is subjugated to different forms of oppression, she still ignores her body and her sexuality, and this ignorance makes her unable to defend them. Celie follows Nettie's advice and writes letters to God in order to communicate her shame and her unspeakable feelings. Nettie claims:

> I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray. (130)

Letters, then, become the only means of communication between the two sisters and the only spiritual medium between Celie and God.

Sofia also plays an important role in Celie's empowerment. Celie confesses her sin to Sofia and regrets asking Harpo to beat her. She claims: "I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't […] Fight" (39-40). Sofia can understand Celie's jealousy, and the two women start a new relationship. They start quilting using the

pieces of the curtains torn during Sofia and Harpo's fights; even Shug gives them her old yellow dress. The act of quilting echoes Walker's womanist assumptions, which advocate black women's creative spirits. According to Juneja,

> Celie's journey of self-discovery is symbolic of the "Womanist process" embedded in the Afro-American folk-art tradition of their survival culture. This is a tradition in which the Black American women, despite heavy oppression, expressed their creativity in such crafts as gardening, cooking and quilting. The art of quilting, for example, allowed them to satisfy their creative urge in bits and pieces of waste material to create new designs. Quilting therefore represents the two-way process of art: economy and functionalism. (86)

The quilt that Celie describes as "a nice pattern call sister's choice" (*Color* 59) exemplifies black sisterhood, where the different pieces are stitched together to make a whole. According to Catherine Lewis, "[w]ith each woman in Celie's female support-system contributing, the quilt, made in the 'Sister's Choice' pattern, reverberates a sense of sorority" (166-7). The refurbishment of the various curtains represents the womanist sisterhood that never dies but thrives in the face of adversity.

Although many black women try to enhance Celie's self-assertiveness, the most influential change is made by Shug. Shug first asks Celie to discover her body. Celie sees herself in the mirror and claims, for the first time, "it mine" (*Color* 79). Her statement abnegates her previous denial of her body. In "discovering and accepting with pride her own body, Celie initiates a desire for selfhood" (Ross 5). Celie's recognition of her body is the first step in her self-assertion process. She is subjected to Mr. _____'s physical violence and feels powerless to defend herself. Although Nettie, Sofia, and even Mr. ____'s sister, Kate, ask her to fight

back, she cannot. It is only when Celie discovers her body and claims that it is hers that she starts to understand Mr. _____'s misdeeds towards her own body.

Shug also helps Celie achieve mental stability. When Celie knows that Mr. ____ has been hiding Nettie's letters, she takes a razor and decides to slash him. Shug stops her and convinces her that this is not the right way. Instead, she asks Celie to take a needle and sew, a kind of sublimation in which she can overcome her rage and start thinking carefully about her life. Celie's sewing "functions as an alternative methodology of language that moves her away from violence and victimization and into self-empowerment and subjectivity" (Cutter 163).

Shug initiates conversations on sexuality and pleasure, which Celie has never felt with her husband. Celie tells Shug about her father's rape, her pregnancies, and the disappearance of Nettie and her children. She also breaks her silence and talks about her loneliness and lack of love. She says: "[n]obody ever love me" (114). Shug replies, "I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss [her] on the mouth" (114). Celie, in her relationship with Shug, fits Walker's definition of the "womanish" woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Walker claims:

> I can imagine black women who love women (sexually or not) […] referring to themselves as "whole" women, from "wholly" or "holy." Or as "round" women—women who love other women, yes, but women who also have concern, in a culture that oppresses all black people (and this would go back very far), for their fathers, brothers, and sons, no matter how they feel about them as males. My own term for such women would be "womanist". (*In Search* 81)

Even though Walker's womanist discourse enhances women's bonding and love, whether sexually or not, it does not embrace gender separateness as a way to overcome oppression. Walker suggests gender detachment only for health. Celie's separation from Mr. ____ is the

only way to save herself from total devastation. Her relationship with Shug allows her to reclaim not only her body and her sexuality but also her spirituality, as Jeannine Thyreen notes: "[t]his intimate relationship with Shug allows Celie to re(claim) her physical body and sexuality for herself rather than to view them as something taken by others. This (re)claiming of her body leads also to the (re)claiming of the spirit within her" (56).

Although Celie and Shug's relationship developed into a sexual one, they are not regarded as lesbians but, as Walker calls them, celibate sisters. Their bonding is similar to that of the two black religious activists, Rebecca Jackson and Rebecca Perot. In her essay "*Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson*" (1981), Walker discusses the relationship between the two Rebeccas. She claims that they are the only religious group she has ever heard of that believes in celibacy (*In Search* 76-7). Celibacy means spiritual sisterhood, "the two Rebeccas became spiritual sisters partly *because* they cared little for sex" (81, emphasis in original). Walker rejects lesbianism as synonymous with celibacy. She argues that

> Even if Rebecca Jackson and Rebecca Perot *were* erotically bound, what was their own word for it? […]. The word 'lesbian' may not, in any case, be suitable (or comfortable) for black women, who surely would have begun their woman-bonding earlier than Sappho's residency on the Isle of Lesbos. (81)

Walker's distinction between the two terms shows her focus on black women's bonding, which has always existed in black communities, over the merely sexual meaning. She goes further in describing celibacy:

> At any rate, the word they chose would have to be both spiritual and concrete and it would have to be organic, characteristic, not simply applied. A word that said more than that they choose women over men. More than that they choose to live separate from men. In fact, to be consistent with black cultural values (which, whatever their shortcomings, still have considerable worth) it would have to be a word that affirmed connectedness to the entire community and the world, rather than separation, *regardless* of who worked and slept with whom. (81, emphasis in original)

Since celibacy is an organic and characteristic word, it is necessary to parallel Celie and Jackson's lives. Both Celie and Jackson were the eldest girls, responsible for the care of their younger siblings. They had no opportunity to attend school. They could neither read nor write. Both of them tried to learn the language by themselves. Also, both of them focus on letters as a way to express their ideas.

In describing the two Rebeccas' relationship, Jean Humez claims that "the evidence suggests a relationship combining elements of motherhood, marriage, and sisterhood in a blend that seems to have suited the two women's personal needs for over thirty-five years, until Jackson's death in 1871" (69-70). Celie and Shug's relationship embraces the three mentioned patterns. They share a mother-daughter relationship. They illustrate a powerful example of black women's bonding, and their marriage is seen in their cohabitation.

Within their mother-daughter relationship, Shug nurtures Celie as the mother who nurtures her daughter. Ellen Barker argues that Shug acts as "a surrogate mother, [who] subtly nurtures Celie into self-acceptance and guides her through all the stages of self-actualization that most children go through early in their lives" (qtd. in Carey 70). Celie participates in this mother-daughter relationship. She nurtures Shug back to health and floods her with tenderness. When she combs Shug's hair, she claims:

> I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia—or like she mama. I comb and pat, comb and pat. First she say, hurry up and git finish. Then she melt down a little and lean back gainst my knees. That feel just right, she say. That feel like mama used to do. Or maybe not mama. Maybe grandma. (*Color* 53).

Celie becomes a source of inspiration for Shug. She inspires her to create a new song. Shug starts humming a tune, and when Celie asks her what song that is, she replies: "[s]omething come to me […]. Something I made up. Something you help scratch out my head" (53). Later, in Harpo's juke joint, Shug offers Celie a blues song titled "Miss Celie". Celie claims: "[f]irst time somebody made something and name it after me" (73-4). Shug's song not only shapes Celie's individuality but also makes Shug identify with Celie's struggle, as Kevin Quashie's statement: "when Shug makes up a song for Celie and names it after her, she is both identifying with Celie (and her struggle) as well as being Celie (Shug the performer becomes the narrative 'Miss Celie')" (39).

Celie and Shug also share a spiritual sisterhood. Though it is Nettie who asks Celie to write letters to God, it is Shug who shapes her conception of God and religion in general. Celie's "discovery of her own sexuality is part and parcel of her discovery of a divine, loving Spirit in the world" (Kamitsuka 49). She writes her first letter to God after her rape experience. Though she is asking for God's guidance, there is some blame in her letters. This blame is explicitly seen when her mother asks for the identity of her children's father, and she replies that it is God. Despite the fact that it is Alphonso who warns Celie against telling the truth to her mother, her lie does not only show her weakness but also her blame of God for her misfortune. Celie also claims that it was God, not Alphonso, who killed her babies.

Celie's blame turns into rebellion when she learns that Alphonso is not her real father but her stepfather. She stops writing letters to God and loses faith. She describes God as a white

man who can never hear the voice of a colored woman. In other words, "the Divine is reduced to a being that is identified with the dominant, oppressive white patriarchy, which is both racist and sexist" (Thyreen 51). Although Shug tries to make Celie change her view, Celie's rebellion persists for a while. She claims: "[Shug] talk and […] talk, trying to budge me way from blasphemy. But I blaspheme much as I want to" (*Color* 193).

In trying to make Celie regain her faith, Shug explains her personal conception of God. She states: "[t]he thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for" (196). Through Shug's words, Walker shows her adoption of Rebecca Jackson's spiritual belief in the manifestation of God in the female body. Shug convinces Celie that God is neither a "he" nor a "she", but an "it" that manifests itself inside every person. Okonjo Ogunyemi argues:

> Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is also complex and variable in its structure. The first addressee in its epistles is a power-wielding God. White, patriarchal, he acts the role of the indifferent voyeur. When God metamorphoses into "It," neuter but not quite neutral, in the female imagination, life miraculously improves for womanhood. (*Womanism*, 33)

The novel "abandons a fixed, patriarchal notion of God for one that is more free, recognizing the Divine in all of creation and claiming the Spirit within the individual" (Thyreen 65). Celie's recognition of the neutrality of God fosters her confidence in concretizing her spirituality. In her last letter to Nettie, she shows her new conception of God. She writes: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (*Color* 249). Celie becomes able to understand and interpret her own experiences as well as the experiences of others. Her final letter is not "to the God who is everything but to the

everything that incorporates godly spirit, she writes of the fulfillment of the womanist promise, as the community turns toward the future in expectation of more profit, pleasure, and satisfaction from their labor and from each other" (Berlant 40).

Celie's blaming turns into thanks. She thanks God for bringing Nettie and her children home, and for the happiness she is enjoying with her family and friends. Her gratitude articulates her faith. According to Shug, "God is everything […] Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found It" (*Color* 197). Likewise, Samuel and Nettie, during their missionary trip to Africa, changed their conception of God. In her letter to Celie, Nettie writes:

> God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone—a roofleaf or Christ—but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us. When we return to America we must have long talks about this, Celie. And perhaps Samuel and I will found a new church in our community that has no idols in it whatsoever, in which each person's spirit is encouraged to seek God directly, his belief that this is possible strengthened by us as people who also believe. (261)

Walker's womanist theology emphasizes non-institutional self-discovery of religion. Nettie and Samuel see religion as free from boundaries and based on unmediated relations of "Being to Being" (Berlant 36-7), while Celie tends towards a more personal and flexible view of religion. Still, the two sisters' religious views do not exist in opposition to one another. As Kamitsuka argues,

> A womanist identity-politics reading, however, might emphasize that Celie's non-institutional spiritual journey and the religious commitment of her missionary sister, Nettie, are never put into conflict. In the narrative world of Walker's story, these two spiritualities coexist peacefully, joined by the love and solidarity between the two long-separated African American sisters whose lives have taken such divergent paths. (54)

Within this spiritual context, it is noteworthy to clear up the tension between spirituality and sexuality that shapes Celie and Shug's sisterhood. Although Celie claims that: "[f]irst time [she] got the full sight of Shug Avery [she] thought [she] had turned into a man" (*Color* 49), she regards Shug in the same way she regards her sister Nettie. When Shug is leaving Mr. ____'s house, Celie claims: "[f]eels like I felt when Nettie left" (75). Like the two Rebeccas, Celie and Shug care less about sex despite their cohabitation. Shug becomes a spiritual source for Celie. Celie argues: "I wash her body, it feel like I'm praying. My hands tremble and my breath short" (49). When Celie is leaving Mr. _____'s house, she claims her autonomy and sexual-assertiveness by declaring: "I'm here" (210). Shug replies: "Amen […] Amen, amen" (210), as though Celie is praying.

Celie and Shug's spiritual sisterhood enhances Celie's determination to revolt against Mr. ____ and leave his house. Jackson also left her husband to not endure what she calls "the sin of the fall" (Walker, *In Search* 75). She believes that her role as a wife who should obey her husband and take care of him is an obstacle to her free spirit. Celie endures the sin of the fall, and to regain self-possession, she has to leave Mr. _____.

Celie's revolution against Mr. _____ ends with a meaningful statement that shows her belief in her supernatural power. She claims: "I curse you, I say. […]. Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble […] everything you even dream about will fail" (*Color*

209). She adds: “I give it to him straight, just like it come to me” (209). According to Berlant, “[Celie’s] new mode of counteropposition also deploys the supernatural power of language, turning Mr. _____’s negativity back on himself” (38). However, like Jackson, who forgets her feelings of revenge and starts loving all humankind, including her enemies, Celie later transcends her rage towards Mr. _____ and accepts his friendship. Humez comments on the difficulty that Jackson faces in acquiring the demanding self-discipline of “perfect love”:

> After receiving the call to a holy life […] It was one thing to experience a wave of love for all humankind, instantaneously, in the crisis of conversion. It was quite another to teach oneself to love one's enemies, in practice, day after day. Before she was called to make herself into a “new creature”, she said, “my principle by nature was to revenge all that troubled me”. But her inner voice had told her that this would not do. (34)

Celie’s spirituality is the concrete reality that she continues to live throughout her life. Writing letters to God is no longer a refuge for her inability to express her sadness to other people, but a preference for a spiritual life in which she finds her wholeness. When Shug tells her about her new affair with Germaine, Celie cannot speak. She writes on a scrap of paper, “[h]e’s a man” (*Color* 254). Shug claims that she knows how Celie feels about men and that she does not feel that way. Celie, later, has no intimate relationship with Shug and refuses to remarry Mr. _____, but keeps writing letters to God.

Although womanism focuses on spirituality within black sisterhood, it still regards black women’s bonding as a struggle for sexual freedom, which is essential for their autonomy. Women whose spirituality overcomes their sexuality cannot be regarded as womanists. Cheryl Sanders claims:

> [I]t should be noted that although the question of Rebecca Jackson's sexual orientation is Walker's point of departure for discussing the meanings of womanist, she refrains from applying the term to Jackson. […]. Jackson's choice of celibacy (i.e., not to love either women or men sexually, not even her own husband) as an act of submission to a spiritual commitment to follow Jesus Christ evidently is not regarded by Walker as a womanist assertion of sexual freedom. Thus it would seem inappropriate to label as womanist those saintly rebels (e.g., Sojourner Truth) whose aim was not to assert their sexual freedom but rather to work sacrificially toward the liberation of their people as followers of Jesus Christ. (131)

Jackson's advocacy and practice of celibacy is best understood in the context of her need to gain complete control over her body, which she had come to regard as an instrument for the receipt of spiritual instruction (Humez 17). In other words, celibacy calls for autonomy as a first step before moving on to spirituality. In describing black women's sexual assertiveness, Walker argues that these women are "wholly" or "holy" (*In Search* 81). "Wholeness" or "roundness" stems from black women's sexual assertiveness, while "holiness" implies black women's spirituality. Therefore, womanism enhances sexual assertiveness with a spiritual connotation.

Celie reclaims her honest body and shows her sexual assertiveness. According to Collins, "[i]ndividuals who reject dominant scripts of Black gender ideology by fully accepting their own bodies 'as is' move toward achieving honest bodies" (*Black Sexual* 283). She adds: "[u]sing one's honest body engages all forms of sexual expression that bring pleasure and joy" (287). Celie is, finally, able to reject the dominant gender ideology and come to terms with her own individual consciousness about gender. According to Dolores Williams, "the new Celie has a more profound understanding of human relationships. She believes that each person in a

relationship should be free to live beyond the social conditioning associated with masculine and feminine roles" (99).

Celie leaves Mr. _____ for her autonomy, not spirituality. She tells him: "[i]t's time to leave you and enter into the Creation" (*Color* 202). Leaving Mr. _____'s home gives her a sense of freedom because "leaving home in a sense involves a kind of second birth in which we give birth to ourselves" (Bellah et al. 65).

Celie's sexual assertiveness is not only seen in her relationship with Shug but also in her refusal to remarry Mr. _____ a second time. She becomes able to judge her relationship with him. When he tells her "[w]e still man and wife, you know" (*Color* 257), she refuses to title their relationship as husband and wife and replies: "[n]aw […] we never was" (258). Sexual autonomy means "the ability to select one's own sexual orientation, sexual practices, and/or sexual partners" (Collins, *Black Sexual* 286). Celie's capability to conceptualize a healthy meaning for marriage proves her sexual assertiveness. Finally, Mr. _____ ends up recognizing Celie's autonomy and describes her as a bird.

Celibate sisterhood helps Celie move from victimization to empowerment. This kind of sisterhood not only advocates black women's bonding but also insists on the interconnectedness of spirituality and sexuality as important components of black sisterhood. It works in shaping black women's spirituality and promoting their sexual assertiveness, which is crucial for their autonomy. Celibate sisterhood, as a womanist method for social change, helps black women challenge race and gender prejudice and achieve individual change, which works within the communal framework of social change.

3.2. Creative Motherhood

Morrison advocates motherhood as a perspective for social change that shapes little black girls' responses to race and gender prejudice. In *The Bluest Eye*, the contrast between Claudia and Pecola sheds light on the different conditions of their upbringing. Claudia lives in the same financial conditions as Pecola. She is poor. Her house is old and cold. At night, only one large room is kept lighted and warm with the tiny pieces of coal fallen from trains on the railroad tracks that Claudia and Frieda collect. Claudia's house is full of love and protection, just like her bed, which is cold but becomes warm after making the right adjustment. In fact, it is Mrs. MacTeer who makes the right adjustments to turn the family's coldness into warmth.

Mrs. MacTeer plays an important role in shaping her daughters' strong personalities. Claudia strictly opposes society's beauty conventions. Her mother teaches her, along with her sister Frieda, the importance of self-worth to resist and challenge both racism and sexism. Sanders claims that "it is evident that Walker's concern is to include the mother in the womanist context by ascribing to her the role of teacher and interpreter, and by portraying her as resigned to the daughter's assertion of her womanhood" (128-9).

Despite the MacTeers' poverty, they find happiness in the very little things they have, like the Candy Dance that Claudia and Frieda perform beside the lilac bushes to make their white neighbor, Rosemary, jealous. In contrast to the MacTeers' house, Pecola's house has no memories among the different pieces of furniture. Everything is dead. The only living thing is the coal stove, which

> [L]ived independently of everything and everyone, its fire being 'out,' 'banked,' or 'up' at its own discretion, in spite of the fact that the family fed it and knew all the details of its regimen: sprinkle, do not dump, not too much . . . . The fire seemed to live, go down, or die according to its own schemata. (*Bluest* 35)

The lack of memories in the Breedloves' house is mainly due to Pauline's feelings of separateness and unworthiness that she has developed from childhood.

Though Morrison describes both Pauline and Mrs. MacTeer as having sharp personalities, the reasons for which they manifest this sharpness differ widely. Claudia describes her mother's anger: "[m]y mother's fussing soliloquies always irritated and depressed us. They were interminable, insulting, and although indirect (Mama never named anybody—just talked about folks and some people), extremely painful in their thrust" (22). Mrs. MacTeer's behavior is guided mainly by her deep protection of her daughters from hunger, cold, sickness, and any other danger that may affect them.

Claudia's depiction of her mother's furious behavior when she falls sick is very significant. She claims: "[w]hen we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration" (8). Mrs. MacTeer shows high vigilance against her daughters' sickness and cannot accept their lack of consideration. When Claudia throws up, her mother shouts: "[w]hat did you puke on the bed clothes for? Don't you have sense enough to hold your head out the bed? Now, look what you did. You think I got time for nothing but washing up your puke?" (9). Claudia discovers later that her mother is enraged by her illness, not by her. She is not speaking to her, but to the puke, and she is calling it by her name. According to Ruth Rosenberg, "Claudia shows her ability to realize that she is loved during an illness-the vehicle of her understanding being the pair of rough hands that smear salve on her chest" (137-8).

Mrs. MacTeer wants her daughters to be healthy physically in order to be strong psychologically. She shows her womanist belief that "physical and psychological well-being provide a necessary foundation for social justice and commonweal" (Phillips xxvi). Mrs. MacTeer tells her daughters: "[h]ow […] do you expect anybody to get anything done if you all are sick?" (*Bluest* 8). Her words are so powerful and influential that Claudia feels guilty and self-pity. She claims: "[m]y mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness 'take holt'" (9-10). She adds: "[b]y and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to" (10). Mrs. MacTeer's constructive anger not only makes Claudia hate her sickness but also decides to reject sickness in the future. She raises in her daughter a sense of authority over something that is normally beyond her control.

In discussing black motherhood, Walker claims that black mothers are not merely mothers but artists whose creativity can be seen and felt in minor as well as major activities. She explains that black mothers' creativity is not new. It dates back to the ancestor mothers who worked to nurture the artistic spirit and transmit it from one generation to the next. Creativity is not limited to artistic artifacts, but to all black mothers' acts that help in shaping consciousness and achieving commonweal in both family and community (*In Search* 233).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia argues that she prefers to stay in her Big Mama's kitchen than receive gifts at Christmas:

> 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. The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward. (20)

By making Big Mama's kitchen the place where all the senses become engaged at the same time, Morrison, like Walker, shows her belief in black mothers' creativity. In contrast to Big Mama's kitchen, the "Breedloves kitchen serves as a battleground rather than as the center of domesticity. The sound of dishes rattling in the morning signifies […] Mrs. Breedlove's attempt to awaken her drunken husband so as to finish a quarrel from the night before" (Groover 36)

Like Big Mama, Mrs. MacTeer maintains her household and keeps her family nourished, healthy, and together with the meager resources that she has (Bloom, *Guides* 22). It is this ability to balance between the family's financial and emotional needs that Walker calls the "black mother's creative spirit". According to Walker, black women are artists. They are creators with the very small things they do in their daily activities. For instance, their stories, overwork, quilting, and even taking care of their flowers are among the activities that show black women's artistic talent (*In Search* -238-41). In describing her mother, Walker claims that "being an artist has still been a daily part of her [mother's] life. This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work black women have done for a very long time" (*In Search* 242). Collins comments on black women's ability to incorporate their creativity into their motherly duties:

> Historically, much of that creativity could be expressed through music, much of it within Black churches. Many Black women blues singers, poets, and artists manage to incorporate their art into their daily responsibilities as bloodmothers and othermothers. But for far too many African-American women who are weighed down by the incessant responsibilities of mothering others, that creative spark never finds full expression. (*Black Feminist* 197)

Mrs. MacTeer plays a major role in her daughters' strength. Although she buys white, blue-eyed dolls for her daughters at Christmas and admits that the dolls are beautiful, she still insists on the importance of black girls' self-worth. Claudia explains that her mother's unfulfilled longing to have baby dolls in her childhood makes her buy them for her and her sister. Mrs. MacTeer is a strong woman. In the very hard times, she keeps herself from falling. Claudia recalls her mother's story about the tornado of 1929, which blew away half of south Lorain. She states that her "mother's hand is unextinguished. She is strong, smiling, and relaxed while the world falls down about her. So much for memory. Public fact becomes private reality, and the seasons of a Midwestern town become the *Moirai* of our small lives" (*Bluest* 185-6).

Mrs. MacTeer's creativity makes her daughter mix her memories with those of her mother. Claudia claims: "I mix up her summer with my own. Biting the strawberry, thinking of storms, I see her" (185). The mother's artistry makes the daughter live the past in the present. Her smiling in the very hard times raises her daughter's strength and self-possession. In the womanist discourse, creativity does not entail extravagant actions, but rather the small things that the black mother does in her daily life that benefit the family and the community. Walker argues: "many of us have spent years discovering (the creative spirit). We have constantly looked high, when we should have looked high—and low" (*In Search* 239).

Mrs. MacTeer's creativity is also shown in her songs. According to Bloom, "[o]ne source of strength for [Mrs. MacTeer] is her singing; pain and frustration are reworked through song to make them more manageable and understandable" (*Guides* 22). She performs storytelling with her rhythmic voice, through which she communicates her sadness and sorrow and nurtures her resistance. Her songs link the past to both the present and the future. In other

words, Mrs. MacTeer's melodies behold the past stories that her daughters live in the present and serve as advice for the future. Walker claims that her mother, while working on her flowers, is "radiant, almost to the point of being invisible---except as a Creator: hand and eyes" (*In Search* 241). Likewise, it is only when Mrs. MacTeer sings that she disappears and remains only as a creator. Her songs become a necessary aspect of the MacTeers' lives. Claudia claims: "[b]ut without song, those Saturdays sat on my head like a coal scuttle" (*Bluest* 24). According to Paul Mills, "Toni Morrison paints a picture of weekends in a family household in Ohio. The child narrator remembers the impact of her mother's voice. She recreates her singing, her idioms of speech, the actual words spoken in the house. The picture has been painted for us in sound" (2).

In describing her mother's voice, Claudia points out that: "her voice was so sweet and her singing-eyes so melty I found myself longing for those hard times, yearning to be grown without 'a thin di-i-ime to my name'" (*Bluest* 23). Although Mrs. MacTeer sings about hard times, her voice makes her daughter long for those hard times to the point that Claudia imagines the time when her man will leave her and describes it as a "delicious time" (24). Mrs. MacTeer's creativity is shown in her daughter's conception of things when hard times become delicious and the longing is not for the good times, but for the hard ones. Claudia claims: "[m]isery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet" (24).

When Frieda has been molested by Mr. Henry, Mrs. MacTeer defends her daughter and hits Mr. Henry with a broom. She also screams at Miss. Dunion when she tells her that she must take Frieda to the doctor because she might be ruined. When Claudia comes back home, she

notices that her mother is behaving strangely. She sweeps the porch many times and then starts singing. Mrs. MacTeer is cleaning her house after throwing Mr. Henry out of it. Claudia sits down on the floor to hear the song's story. It is about trains and Arkansas. With her mixed feelings of anger, fear, and betrayal, Mrs. MacTeer's song gives hope, which is paradoxical to the damaging situation of being outdoors. It is hope for a new place to go to if you cannot stay in your own house. Mrs. MacTeer is singing while cleaning the porch. She is also wearing her hat and dusty shoes as though she is ready to leave if the house is not cleaned.

Unlike Mrs. MacTeer, Pauline's inability to express her sorrow or sing her sadness makes her an indifferent mother. She "finds her artistry when she is employed in the Fisher household. There she has the freedom to rearrange and sort things which satisfy her artistic needs" (Cecchini 68). Her failing motherhood breaks her family, especially her daughter. She cannot protect Pecola from the incestuous rape of her father. She also blames her for what happened and beats her almost to death. The lack of creativity in Pauline's mothering destroys her and her daughter and threatens the commonweal of the black community because her passivity maintains race and gender prejudice. The contrast between Pauline and Mrs. MacTeer emphasizes Morrison's womanist view of motherhood as a social change perspective. According to Phillips, "[m]otherhood as a womanist method of social transformation has its roots in African cultural legacies. Motherhood, here, however, must be dissociated from its purely biological connotation and even from its strictly gendered connotation" (xxix). Motherhood, then, becomes a caretaking and nurturing approach that can be exerted everywhere from the small family to the large community. Phillips further explains that "[i]n so doing, every individual has the ability to contribute to the ultimate goals of

womanism: societal healing, reconciliation of the relationship between people and nature, and the achievement and maintenance of commonweal" (xxix).

Morrison, like Walker, does not limit motherhood to blood-mothering but transcends it towards other-mothering. Mrs. MacTeer plays the role of Pecola's other-mother. When Pecola is sent to her house, she does not make any difference between her and her two daughters. Claudia claims:

> Mama had told us two days earlier that a "case" was coming—a girl who had no place to go. The county had placed her in our house for a few days until they could decide what to do, or, more precisely, until the family was reunited. We were to be nice to her and not fight. Mama didn't know "what got into people," but that old Dog Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife's head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors. (*Bluest* 14-5)

At the beginning, Mrs. MacTeer views Pecola as a case who has no place to go because her father burned the house, and, as a consequence, everybody was outdoors. Mrs. MacTeer teaches her daughters that being outdoors is the real terror of life (15). She claims that Cholly is a criminal because his family is outdoors not due to misfortune, but because he himself put them outdoors. She also explains the difference between being put out and being put outdoors: "[i]f you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go" (15).

Although Mrs. MacTeer becomes furious when Pecola drinks three quarts of milk, she stops when she learns about her state of mind. She even criticizes Cholly and Pauline's carelessness towards their daughter. They do not come to the MacTeer's house to see whether Pecola is alive or dead. Mrs. MacTeer cannot even find a word to describe their behavior towards their daughter. She claims: "[w]hat kind of something is that?" (23).

Mrs. MacTeer not only takes care of Pecola but also shares with her the very intimate things that only a mother can share with her daughter. When Pecola experiences her first menstruation, Claudia and Frieda try to ease her worries. Although they feel scared, they assure her that she is not dying. They bury Pecola's bloody clothes, and the white neighbor, Rosemary, sees them through the fence. Rosemary accuses the three girls of playing nasty. Accordingly, Mrs. MacTeer punishes them without making a difference. She says to Pecola: "'[y]ou too!' […] 'Child of mine or not!'" (29).

When Mrs. MacTeer knows that Pecola is menstruating, her anger changes into tenderness. She pulled Frieda and Pecola toward her and "her eyes were sorry" (29). She claims: "stop crying. I didn't know. Come on, now. Get on in the house. Go on home, Rosemary. The show is over" (29). Mrs. MacTeer gives Pecola a family and a home. Her creativity as an other-mother is also seen in the bathroom when she washes Pecola's body. Claudia states: "over its gushing we could hear the music of my mother's laughter" (30).

Besides Mrs. MacTeer, the three black prostitutes are also other-mothers to Pecola. Pecola "loved them, visited them, and ran their errands. They, in turn, did not despise her" (48-9). Every one of the three prostitutes shows her creativity in mothering her. China is always sitting on a pale green kitchen chair, where she is forever curling her hair. Poland is always ironing and singing blues songs. Pecola describes her voice as sweat and hard, like new strawberries (50). Marie tells Pecola her love story with Dewey Prince, and with the stories, she remembers the taste of the food that she ate with him. The depiction of past memories makes the past livable in the present. Within her stories, Marie's laughter is "like the sound of many rivers, freely, deeply, muddily, heading for the room of an open sea" (50).

The three prostitutes show sympathy and tenderness towards Pecola. Their conversations about love and relationships nurture her curiosity. Though they are far from the traditional meaning of the pure mother since they are regarded as ruined women in their community, they still portray another model of creative motherhood. Nevertheless, they cannot save Pecola from total devastation.

The only character who helps Pecola is Elihue Micah Whitcomb, a light-brown-skinned West Indian misanthrope labeled by the community as Soaphead Church. Soaphead studied psychiatry and other social sciences. He was the first guest preacher in the Anglican Church. Then, he becomes a caseworker, and finally, he declares himself a "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams" (163), a profession that gives him both freedom and satisfaction because, through it, he witnesses people's stupidity and manages it in the way he wants.

Soaphead was raised in a family proud of its academic accomplishments and its mixed blood. Morrison explains the way the mixed-blood changes humans' lives to the point that the family becomes obsessed with Anglophilia: "they married 'up,' lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features" (166). They try to maintain their whiteness by marrying some distant and non-distant relatives.

When Soaphead comes to Lorain, he rents a back-room apartment from a deeply religious woman named Bertha Reese. Bertha has a mangy dog with runny eyes named Bob that she does not care for properly; "[s]he fed him, and watered him, left him alone" (169). Soaphead pretends that he cannot bear to see anything suffer, but "[i]t did not occur to him that he was really concerned about his own suffering, since the dog had adjusted himself to frailty and old age" (169). He buys poison to put an end to the dog's misery, but he cannot go near him.

When Pecola visits him, from the first glance, she seems to him "pitifully unattractive" (171). He proposes to her his miraculous offer:

> If you are overcome with trouble and conditions that are not natural, I can remove them; Overcome Spells, Bad Luck, and Evil Influences. Remember, I am a true Spiritualist and Psychic Reader, born with power, and I will help you. Satisfaction in one visit. During many years of practice I have brought together many in marriage and reunited many who were separated. If you are unhappy, discouraged, or in distress, I can help you. Does bad luck seem to follow you? Has the one you love changed? I can tell you why. I will tell you who your enemies and friends are, and if the one you love is true or false. If you are sick, I can show you the way to health. I locate lost and stolen articles. Satisfaction guaranteed. (171)

When Soaphead learns about Pecola's request for blue eyes, "[a] surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her" (172).

Despite his religious hypocrisy, "[f]or the first time he honestly wished he could work miracles. Never before had he really wanted the true and holy power—only the power to make others believe he had it" (172). Soaphead tells Pecola that he is not a magician. He then starts thinking, and while seeing the dog sitting on the porch, he gets the miraculous solution that would certainly help the two miserable creatures. He asks Pecola to take the poisoned food to the dog and observe his reaction after eating it. He claims: "[i]f nothing happens, you will know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one" (173). When the dog starts shaking and dies, Pecola runs back home.

Soaphead writes a letter to God in which he confesses his manipulation of Pecola's innocence. He claims: "[s]he must have asked you for [a pair of new blue eyes] for a very long

time, and you hadn't replied" (178). He explains that he has changed Pecola's eyes neither for money nor for pleasure, but because he has done what God has not. Soaphead makes Pecola live in a world of fantasy where she will be the only person to see herself with blue eyes, which seems to him the only solution that enables her to "live happily ever after" (180). Within the womanist discourse, mothering is detached from its pure sense of blood-mothering, and transcends all boundaries, including gender. As Phillips argues,

> Essentially, motherhood is a set of behaviors based on caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual mediation, and dispute resolution. Anyone—whether female or male, old or young, with or without children, heterosexual or same-gender-loving—can engage in these behaviors and, therefore, mother. (xxix)

While Pauline fails in instilling self-worth in her daughter in reality, Soaphead is able to make her live this self-worthiness in fantasy. He plays the role of other-mother to Pecola.

Soaphead claims that he loves Pecola: "I looked at that ugly little black girl, and I loved her" (*Bluest* 180). He describes himself as a creator who changes Pecola's life: "I, too, have created. Not aboriginally […] but creation is a heady wine, more for the taster than the brewer" (180). He sees himself ascending to a greater place of power and saintliness (Bloom, *Guides* 59). Soaphead realizes Pecola's impossible dream. It is important to shed light on Pecola's conversation with her imaginary friend.

> No. Really. You are my very best friend. Why didn't I know you before?
> *You didn't need me before.*
> Didn't need you?
> *I mean . . . you were so unhappy before. I guess you didn't notice me before.*
> I guess you're right. And I was so lonely for friends. And you were right here. Right before my eyes.
> *No, honey. Right after your eyes.* (*Bluest* 194, emphasis in original)

Although Soaphead mothers Pecola and ends her misery by making her happy, he fails in his mothering, which is, according to the womanist discourse, a contribution to societal healing, a reconciliation of the relationship between people and nature, and the achievement and maintenance of commonweal (Phillips xxix). In other words, creative motherhood is always constructive, not destructive.

Pecola's madness cannot contribute to the black community's commonweal. On the contrary, it is a concrete example of total surrender to, and devastation by, race and gender prejudice. Also, there is no reconciliation between Pecola and nature since, even in her world of fantasy, she thinks that people are jealous of her blue eyes. Walker claims: "[i]n an oppressive society it may well be that *all* fantasies indulged in by the oppressor are destructive to the oppressed. To become involved in them in any way at all is, at the very least, to lose time defining yourself" (*In Search* 312, emphasis in original).

Pecola's detachment from the physical world illustrates her complex trauma. D'Onofrio explains how the trauma victim feels disconnected from his own body and inner self:

> One of the common sequelae of the exposure to trauma is a dissociative response by the victim. Individuals report feeling numb or disconnected from their feelings and experience a sense of depersonalization in which they feel like automatons living in a dreamlike state within their bodies. They feel detached and estranged from their selves, and they experience themselves standing on the outside looking in at the events of their lives; they feel disconnected even from their bodily sensations. While dissociation emerges out of self-protective necessity—it helps victims detach, distance themselves, and push out of consciousness the reality of their past abuse or trauma—it also deleteriously disconnects them from their inner lives. (80)

The difference between reality and fantasy is what makes Claudia and Frieda different from Pecola. While Pecola is proud of her imaginary blue eyes in fantasy, Claudia and Frieda are

proud of their blackness in reality. Walker argues: "[t]o isolate the fantasy we must cleave to reality, to what *we* know, *we* feel, we think of life. Trusting our own experience and our own lives; embracing both the dark self and the light" (*In Search* 312, emphasis in original).

Mrs. MacTeer's creative motherhood shapes her daughters' assertiveness. Although their mother restricts them to the homes of familiar people when they go to sell seeds in the spring, the two sisters knock on all the doors without fear. Bloom comments on Mrs. MacTeer's role in enhancing her daughters' self-preservation, even in unfamiliar territory:

> Some things, Morrison has reminded us, can be made sense of only through the eyes of an artist. Through her singing wisdom and sometimes overly harsh protectiveness, Mrs. MacTeer has enabled her daughter to choose self-preservation over selfdestruction. As Claudia tells of how she and Frieda go door to door selling seeds to get money for a new bicycle, we see how the protective rules their mother has put in place restricting how far they can go can be reasonably (although deceptively) dismissed, as the girls feel sufficiently safe and secure to stray into unfamiliar territory. (*Guides* 61)

The seeds for Claudia and Frieda are the heritage that they seek to spread throughout the community. As Walker argues, "[g]uided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength---in search of my mother's garden, I found my own" (*In Search* 243). Claudia and Frieda not only find their mother's garden but also help others find theirs.

Creative motherhood is necessary for establishing a healthy mother-daughter bond. Black mothers' creativity can be displayed through their artistic productions such as songs and storytelling or the small things of daily life. The mother is the one who plays the most important role in her daughter's strength, which contributes to the well-being of the whole

community since she is the tutor of future generations of strong daughters who can challenge the different forms of oppression.

3.3. Rebellious Daughterhood

In *Sula*, the heroine's return to her community after ten years is shocking. Sula comes back in a new style. When a boy offers his help to carry her bag, his mother stops him before Sula can answer. Morrison writes:

> She was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone would ever see. A black crepe dress splashed with pink and yellow zinnias, foxtails, a black felt hat with the veil of net lowered over one eye. In her right hand was a black purse with a beaded clasp and in her left a red leather traveling case, so small, so charming—no one had seen anything like it ever before, including the mayor's wife and the music teacher, both of whom had been to Rome. (*Sula* 90)

Sula's physical appearance reflects her intellectual and psychological change. She starts acting as a grown woman. Morrison insists that Sula's change is related to the experiences that she goes through outside the Bottom. She travels to different places where she first goes to college and then graduates from the university.

Walker defines the "womanish" woman as the one who is "[i]nterested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: 'You trying to be grown.' Responsible. In charge. *Serious*" *(In Search* xi). Walker's repetition of the word "grown" shows her insistence on black girls' maturity that allows them to become responsible and in charge. Sanders explains that

> The context of the womanist perspective is […] the intergenerational dialogue between black mothers and their daughters in an oppressive society. The origin of the word *womanist* is a traditional warning given by black mothers to their daughters, "You acting womanish," in response to their precocious behavior (i.e., "You trying to be grown") […] suggesting rebellion against the mother's authority, as well as resistance to oppressive structures that would limit knowledge and self-realization. (128)

Sula's first conversation with Eva shows her rebellious daughterhood. When Eva tells her that no woman can stand without a man, Sula despises her grandmother, who cuts her own leg under a train to get insurance money. Sula thinks that Eva wants to destroy her autonomy in the same way she has mutilated her leg. After exchanging accusations of burning their beloved ones, Sula threatens Eva: "[m]aybe one night when you dozing in that wagon flicking flies and swallowing spit, maybe I'll just tip on up here with some kerosene and—who knows—you may make the brightest flame of them all" (*Sula* 94). Sanders argues that "[t]here is an intergenerational exchange where the traditional piety of the acquiescent mother is in conflict with the brash precociousness of the womanish daughter […] evoking approval of the daughter's rebellion and the mother's resignation to it" (130-1). Sula, then, ends up putting Eva in Sunnydale. By separating Eva from the community, Sula frees herself from being tied down by traditions (Cecchini 94).

When Nel asks Sula about the reason behind throwing Eva out of the house, she replies: "I don't know the real one. She just didn't belong in that house" (*Sula* 100). By claiming that Eva does not belong to the Peaces' house, Sula sets herself apart from Eva. In other words, she does not see in Eva the model of womanhood that she hopes for. Though Eva is a black matriarch, Sula rejects her belief in women's dependency on men and her complete devotion to her motherhood. For Sula, Eva has lost herself in her maternal duties.

Morrison comments on Sula's behavior towards Eva: "Sula put her grandmother away. That is considered awful because among Black people that never happened. You must take care of each other. That's more unforgivable than anything else she does, because it suggests a lack of her sense of community" (qtd. in O'Reilly 62). Sula, however, manifests her hospitality when she keeps the Deweys in the house. Though her rebellion seems immoral, it is still a womanist rebellion. Phillips argues that "[w]omanists just act in the course of everyday life, and the nature of these actions varies widely from person to person. This diversity is not problematized; rather, it is viewed favorably […] As a womanist, there is no need to be 'perfect'; personhood is enough to qualify" (xxiv-xxv).

While the black community spends time building up stories to justify their judgment of Sula, the latter was experimenting with her difference and assessing her autonomy. Morrison highlights Sula's artistry by describing her "need to experiment, to think, to do the outrageous" (qtd. in Qasim 222). At the beginning, Morrison insists on Sula and Nel's complementarity; "[t]heir friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other's personality" (*Sula* 52). This complementarity is also seen in their opposite families, homes, and lives. Yet, everyone wants to live the other's life. Sula and Nel never quarrel or compete with each other; "a compliment to one was a compliment to the other, and cruelty to one was a challenge to the other" (84).

Sula's return to the Bottom is of great importance to Nel. Morrison describes the magic that Nel sees and the wholeness she feels with the coming of Sula:

> Although it was she alone who saw this magic, she did not wonder at it. She knew it was all due to Sula's return to the Bottom. It was like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed. Her old friend had come home. 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. Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions. Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself" (95).

While Nel insists that she and Sula are two parts of one self, those parts are distinct and complementary, not identical. Although the two friends share one eye, which metaphorically suggests one vision, they have different needs and desires (McDowell 81). For instance, Sula's relationship with Jude is not intended to harm Nel but to see to what extent she is different from Nel.

Sula's difference alienates her from Eva, Nel, and the whole community. She portrays what Walker calls a "revolutionary petunia". In her poem "The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom", Walker writes:

> Rebellious. Living.
> Against the Elemental Crush.
> A Song of Color
> Blooming
> For Deserving Eyes.
> Blooming Gloriously
> For its Self.
> Revolutionary Petunia.
>
> (Walker, *Revolutionary* 73)

Sula lives by her own standards; she grows and blooms for herself. Like the black community, which lets the natural cycle of evil run its course and fulfill itself, Sula follows the same manner in her rebellion. She does not rebel violently, but her mere presence is a rebellion.

Sula's autonomy is in itself a rebellion. After ten years of education in societies similar to the Bottom, she comes back to experience this autonomy in her own society. Phillips points out that "[a] womanist knows oppression when she (or he) sees it, and she (or he) is against it. She lives her life in such a way as to fight and dismantle oppression in whatever ways she can, individually or in organized formations with others" (xxiv). Similarly, Sula can recognize the existing oppression in the community and explicitly tells Nel that she dislikes Medallion:

> "Somebody need killin'?"
> "Half this town need it."
> "And the other half?"
> "A drawn-out disease."
> "Oh, come on. Is Medallion that bad?"
> "Didn't nobody tell you?"
> "You been gone too long, Sula."
> "Not too long, but maybe too far." (*Sula* 96)

By making a difference between time and distance, Sula insists that what changes her is not the ten years that she has lived far from Medallion, but what she has learned during those ten years.

Sula criticizes the gender hierarchy in the community. On her first visit to Nel's house, she tells Jude that "everything in the world loves [black men]" (103). She argues that black men are the main focus of both white and black men and women. White men's main focus is to destroy black men's sexuality, and white women's main fear is being raped by black men.

Surprisingly, Sula translates that as both love and respect. She adds: "[a]nd if that ain't enough, you love yourselves. Nothing in this world loves a black man more than another black man. You hear of solitary white men, but niggers? Can't stay away from one another a whole day. So. It looks to me like you the envy of the world (103-4).

Black men throughout *Sula* are portrayed as selfish, irresponsible, and emasculated because of their inability to perform the traditional gender roles. Morrison insists that both their presence and absence fill women's lives with sadness.

> Those with husbands had folded themselves into starched coffins, their sides bursting with other people's skinned dreams and bony regrets. Those without men were like sour-tipped needles featuring one constant empty eye. Those with men had had the sweetness sucked from their breath by ovens and steam kettles. Their children were like distant but exposed wounds whose aches were no less intimate because separate from their flesh. They had looked at the world and back at their children, back at the world and back again at their children, and Sula knew that one clear young eye was all that kept the knife away from the throat's curve. (122)

Sula appears much younger and healthier than her Bottom counterparts, which makes her criticize their degradation. Her criticism stems mainly from her wish to help them achieve independence. She "never competed; she simply helped others define themselves" (95). Black women cannot understand Sula's motives and reject change. Even Nel claims that "Sula was wrong. Hell ain't things lasting forever. Hell is change" (108).

When Sula becomes sick and dies, the community members do not mourn her death; "either *because* Sula was dead or just *after* she was dead a brighter day was dawning" (150-1, emphasis in original). They believe they have finally defeated evil, and life will undoubtedly be better without a pariah, but the bad luck persists in the Bottom. In the fall, a drought hits the

fields, destroying almost all the crops. The winter that follows brings much misery to the community, where everything turns to ice and people cannot go to work. People "suffered heavily in their thin houses and thinner clothes" (152), which deepens their poverty and discontent.

Sula, then, is not the source of their suffering. On the contrary, she "can be considered a catalyst for good in the society" (Ogunyemi, *Sula* 130). It is relevant to mention how the members of the community stop trying to be good mothers and daughters and stop cherishing their husbands and wives, since they no longer need to protect themselves and one another from evil. For instance, Teapot's mother continuously beats her son, which causes him more pain than the day when Sula is accused of knocking him down the stairs. Sula's presence was crucial for the commonweal of the community. With her death, people fall into selfishness, carelessness, and violence.

Although almost all the community participates for the first time in Shadrack's national suicide day in the hope of having some fun, their gathering quickly turns into a disaster. They dance and laugh till they find themselves in front of the new river road. Their excitement and joy have quickly disappeared, and they have started destroying the tunnel. As Morrison writes, "[o]ld and young, women and children, lame and hearty, they killed, as best they could, the tunnel they were forbidden to build" (*Sula* 161). The tunnel collapsed, and a lot of them were killed.

Later, Morrison explains that the Bottom no longer exists as a community. The black families that used to live in the hills moved to the area near the Ohio River, and the white families moved up to the hills. By losing their land, the people of the Bottom have lost their sense of community.

> The black people, for all their new look, seemed awfully anxious to get to the valley, or leave town, and abandon the hills to whoever was interested. It was sad, because the Bottom had been a real place. These young ones kept talking about the community, but they left the hills to the poor, the old, the stubborn—and the rich white folks. Maybe it hadn't been a community, but it had been a place. Now there weren't any places left, just separate houses with separate televisions and separate telephones and less and less dropping by. (166)

The misery of winter and the collapse of the tunnel destroy the community's illusion of Sula as the personification of evil.

In such circumstances, to parallel Sula's death and the community's disaster gives a new interpretation to triumph. Although Sula is dead, she was able to make a remarkable social change in the Bottom. Before her return, Morrison describes the Bottom as a fragmented community. In addition to the broken families, people care less for one another. Shadrack tries to unify the community through his suicide day, but only a few follow his rituals. Morrison claims:

> I tried to represent discriminatory, prosecutorial racial oppression as well as the community's efforts to remain stable and healthy: the neighborhood has been almost completely swept away by commercial interests (a golf course), but the remains of what sustained it (music, dancing, craft, religion, irony, wit) are what the "valley man," the stranger, sees—or could have seen. It is a more inviting embrace than Shadrack's organized public madness—it helps to unify the neighborhood until Sula's anarchy challenges it. (*Sula* xiv)

With Sula's presence, the community members embrace a unity that they have never known before. They start loving one another, protecting their children and husbands and even repairing their homes. Sula is crucial to the stability of the town. According to Ogunyemi, "Sula's role in the novel is, therefore, messianic. She revitalizes Medallion through a sexual

revolution in an unconscious desire to make the town a better place […] since her presence encourages a holier-than-thou attitude in her antagonists and unites them against her" (*Sula* 130-1).

Sula succeeds in influencing some members of the Bottom, which makes change possible in a community that refuses change. Phillips argues that "the fundamental social-change process is to 'start where you are' and move one step forward. 'Forward' is defined by that which moves toward full humanization and commonweal" (xli). When Nel tells Sula that she has no friends and no one loves her, Sula replies, "they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me […]. And I know just what it will feel like" (*Sula* 145-6). Sula is aware of her controversial role in the community, but she "predicted she would be understood and would even become a culture heroine" (Middleton 380).

Although Sula has placed Eva in Sunnydale, Eva does not dislike her. She is the one who defends her against Nel's accusations of Chicken Little's death. When Sula returns to the Bottom and Eva sees her, she feels confused the same way she feels for BoyBoy. The tension between love and hatred persists in her. Eva's final words about Sula show that, unlike her final recognition of her hatred for BoyBoy, she loves Sula.

Another sign of Sula's social change is Shadrack, who meets her twice in the novel; the first time when she goes looking for help to save Chicken Little from drowning in the river, and the second when she comes back after ten years. Remarkably, in this second meeting, Shadrack tips his hat to Sula. The character Dessie describes Sula and Shadrack's meeting: "he was just cuttin' up as usual when Miss Sula Mae walks by on the other side of the road. And quick as that—she snapped her fingers—he stopped and cut on over 'cross the road, steppin' over to her like a tall turkey in short corn. And guess what? He tips his hat" (*Sula*

116). Although Shadrack does not wear a hat, Dessie argues that "he tipped it anyway. […]. He acted like he had a hat and reached up for it and tipped it at her" (116). Through tipping his imaginary hat, Shadrack shows his respect for Sula. He also recognizes her as a friend from the birthmark over her eyes, which raises different interpretations in the black community. According to McDowell,

> [Sula's] birthmark, which shifts in meaning depending on the viewer's perspective, acts as metaphor for her figurative "selves," her multiple identity. To Nel, it is a "stemmed rose"; to her children, a "scary black thing," a "black mark"; to Jude, a "copperhead" and a "rattlesnake"; to Shadrack, a "tadpole." The image of the tadpole reinforces this notion of SELF as perpetually in process. (81, capitalized in original)

Though Sula triumphs over the black community, she still needs her community. As Grant points out,

> In her rhetoric, sense of humor, earthiness, ironic intelligence, and willingness to take chances and make leaps, Sula seems superior to her constricting environment. Yet obviously, in some ways she needs the Bottom as much as the community needs and "feeds off" her and her antics. (98)

Morrison embraces the womanist perspective in her focus on the balance between the individual and the community. Phillips explains the way womanism seeks commonweal as the main goal of social change:

> [W]omanism views commonweal as the goal of social change. Commonweal is the state of collective well-being; it is the optimization of well-being for all members of a community. For womanists, community is conceptualized as a series of successively overlapping tiers, beginning with Black women or women of color (the level of the self or identity), followed by the Black community and other communities of color (the level of "tribe" or "kin"), followed by all oppressed people (the level of similarly situated others), and ultimately encompassing all humanity (the universal level).

> Thus, contrary to the way in which it has been characterized, womanism's main concern is not Black women per se; rather, Black women are the place where this particular form of thinking about commonweal originates. (xxv-xxvi)

Sula feels deep loneliness manifested in her multiple sexual relationships. Though sexuality is the only way in which "she met herself, welcomed herself, and joined herself in matchless harmony" (*Sula* 123), it is still "the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow" (122). After every sexual experience, Sula falls into a profound loneliness, which illustrates her inability to detach herself from the community. Her return to the Bottom suggests her inability to identify herself outside of it. In other words, "she fashions and sustains her unique identity as a 'rebel' only, and necessarily, in connection with the fairly orthodox and enclosed community of the Bottom" (Grant 99).

Though Sula claims that she does not need anyone, she does, in fact, need her community. The community also fails because of its inability to accept Sula's difference and quickly falls into prejudiced judgment. According to Phillips,

> [W]omanism is an ethnically and culturally situated (although not bounded) perspective that does not seek to negate difference through transcending it. Rather, as I explain in greater detail later, womanism seeks to harmonize and coordinate difference so that difference does not become irreconcilable and dissolve into violent destruction. (xxii)

The rejection of change by the Bottom community results in the destruction of not only the individual but the community as a whole.

Daughters' rebellion against traditional conventions is a healthy aspect for the black community. Their status as willing pariahs unites the black community and raises its

consciousness. Morrison insists on the interconnectedness of the individual and the community to make social change possible. Otherwise, it will be a failure.

3.4. Healing the Body, Mind, and Spirit

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi, in her challenge of race and gender prejudice, adopts a different and controversial method for social change. Although womanism advocates a non-violent approach to achieve change, in Tashi's case, it is violence that causes change. Before defying the patriarchal institutions that have destroyed her femininity, Tashi needs to heal from her trauma. Within the womanist discourse, "physical and psychological well-being provide a necessary foundation for social justice and commonweal" (Phillips xxvi). Tashi's individual and social change works through the womanist method of mutual aid and self-help. According to Phillips, "[m]utual aid and self-help are everyday 'do-it-yourself' methods that involve coming together as a group at the grassroots level to solve a common problem" (xxviii-xxix).

It is significant that this womanist approach to social change starts with mutual aid and ends with self-help, which implies Walker's view that the group or community helps the individual to stand up by himself and achieve social change. In Tashi's case, a number of psychologists and anthropologists work together to bring Tashi back to health. Men and women from different countries and continents work for the same purpose. Phillips explains that "[m]utual aid and self-help rely on the principles of strength in numbers, wisdom gained from life experience, self-education, and democratic knowledge sharing" (xxviii-xxix).

Mzee, who refers to the psychologist Carl Jung, brings Tashi to his house, to the secret place where he used to heal himself. Mzee's house is also therapeutic for Tashi. She claims: "I

did not fear him partly because I did not fear his house" (*Possessing* 52). Tashi regards Mzee as "an old African grandmother" (52-3). The relationship between Mzee and Tashi is not limited to a doctor and a patient but grows to be more friendly and more familiar. Mzee states:

> They, in their indescribable suffering, are bringing me home to something in myself. I am finding myself in them. A self I have often felt was only halfway at home on the European continent. In my European skin. An ancient self that thirsts for knowledge of the experiences of its ancient kin. Needs this knowledge, and the feelings that come with it, to be whole. A self that is horrified at what was done to Evelyn, but recognizes it as something that is also done to me. A truly universal self. That is the essence of healing that in my European, "professional" life I frequently lost. (84)

Mzee's close identification with Tashi's suffering is very significant. According to Phillips, "[w]omanist mutual aid and self-help begins with the survival wisdom of women of color, but does not end there—ultimately it welcomes and embraces all who can benefit from this body of knowledge without negating its source or denying the social conditions that created it" (Phillips xxviii-xxix).

Although womanism advocates strength in numbers, it insists on the individual's effort and responsibility to make change possible. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, when Tashi and Adam tell Mzee that he is their last hope, he replies: "[n]o, that is not correct. You yourselves are your last hope" (*Possessing* 53).

Walker not only includes Carl Jung as a character in the story but also embraces his therapy in healing Tashi's trauma. Mzee shows Tashi and Adam an old video in which some African girls are lying on the ground, about to perform a ritual, and a fighting cock. After that, Tashi starts drawing cocks, one bigger than the other, till she draws one on the wall because the foot is too large. When Mzee asks her whether it is a man or a woman's foot, Tashi feels puzzled

and cannot answer. Metaphorically, the foot refers to M'Lissa's. Tashi's inability to describe it as either a man's or a woman's foot is probably due to her role as a tsunga. In other words, though M'Lissa is a woman, she is the patriarchal tool used to subordinate other women. The next night, Tashi draws a pattern called "crazy road" (72) with crisscrosses and dots that African women make with mud on the cotton cloth they wove when she was a child. This pattern may refer to the practice of female excision, where women interlace young girls' vaginal openings. Tashi sleeps well after the painting.

Walker's depiction of Tashi's paintings as a way to reveal the unconscious refers to Jung's active imagination therapy, within which the picture method "points to the use of art materials to create symbolic paintings and drawings" (Chodorow 6). When Tashi wakes up, she starts crying for Dura. She remembers her sister but cannot speak. She feels a boulder in her throat and suddenly remembers a day as a child when she saw some girls lying beside an isolated hut in the grass field, and Dura was not with them. She hears their pain and imagines Dura's terror. Tashi claims: "[t]hey did not know I was hiding in the grass, I said. They had taken her to the place of initiation; a secluded, lonely place that was taboo for the uninitiated. Not unlike the place you showed us in your film" (*Possessing* 81). With her different dreams, Tashi is still confronting her unconscious; "[a]ctive imagination has two parts or stages: First, letting the unconscious come up; and second, coming to terms with the unconscious" (Chodorow 17).

Before Mzee's death, he sends a middle-aged African American woman named Raye to help Tashi in her healing process. At the beginning, Tashi dislikes Raye. She claims: "I resented her. Because she wasn't Mzee. Because she was black. Because she was a woman. Because she was whole. She radiated a calm, cheerful competence that irritated me" (*Possessing* 113). Tashi "resents Raye because she is self-actualized and whole, with sound

mind and intact genitalia" (Cage 84). Her jealousy of Raye parallels Celie's jealousy of Sofia in *The Color Purple*. It seems difficult for subjugated black women in Walker's novels to accept other women's wholeness. Otherwise, they witness their own broken selves.

Despite Tashi's jealousy, it is only with Raye that she can break her silence. She starts telling her about Olinka's leader, who has been assassinated in jail. She praises him to the point that she describes him as Christ who suffered and died for their independence. While talking, Tashi feels a lie is beginning to form. She claims: "I could feel a boulder, twin to the one that suppressed the truth of Dura's murder, begin closing my throat. I felt a lie beginning to form" (*Possessing* 114).

In her therapy with Raye, Tashi starts a new phase. With Mzee, she does not feel the necessity to speak. When she first tells him her problem, that it is circumcision, he "seemed completely satisfied; as if he knew exactly what was implied" (118). Raye does not seem satisfied and seeks more details. Tashi and Raye's conversation about the ritual is meaningful.

> As for the thing that was done to me… or *for* me, I said. And stopped. Because Raye had raised her eyebrows, quizzically.
> The initiation…
> Still she looked at me in the same questioning way.
> The female initiation, I said. Into womanhood.
> Oh? she said. But looked still as if she didn't understand.
> Circumcision, I whispered. (117, emphasis in original)

Raye wants more details on the ritual. She asks whether it is the same for all women or if it has many types, and what makes Tashi's sister Dura bleed to death. Raye's questions seem clinical but help Tashi get rid of the boulder that she has had in her throat for many years.

Tashi claims: “the boulder rolls off my tongue, completely crushing the old familiar faraway voice I’d always used to tell this tale, a voice that had hardly seemed connected to me” (119).

Raye’s therapy makes Tashi confess her wish to marry Olinka’s leader, not Adam. She loved him as every Olinka woman does, and her only wish was to become his fourth wife. With this confession, “[t]he boulder now not only had rolled off [Tashi’s] tongue but was rolling quite rapidly away from me toward the door” (121). After breaking her silence, Tashi claims that she finally “grew to trust Raye” (130).

The relationship between the two women becomes closer. When Raye gets gum mutilation, Tashi tells her: “[y]ou shouldn’t have done it […]. It was stupid of you” (130-2). Raye replies, “[d]on’t be mad because my choosing this kind of pain seems such a puny effort […]. In America it’s the best I can do. Besides, it gives me a faint idea. *And* it was something I needed to do anyway” (131, emphasis in original). Raye sacrifices her body in an effort to feel the kind of pain Tashi has endured during circumcision. Tashi describes Raye’s mutilation as ancient medicine to heal her wounds (Cage 85).

Though Tashi blames Raye for enduring the operation, she is in fact blaming herself. The newly born relationship between the two black women makes Tashi very thankful to Mzee. She claims: “[s]uddenly, in that guise, Raye became someone I felt I knew; someone with whom I could bond. In my heart I thanked Mzee for her, for I believed she would be plucky enough to accompany me where he could not. And that she would” (*Possessing* 132).

Raye is the only person with whom Tashi can speak and break her silence. What connects the two women is not only gender but also race. It is this connection that makes Raye seek to feel Tashi’s pain. Through Tashi and Raye’s relationship, Walker insists on black women’s

bonding as an important aspect of their healing. In other words, a black woman can only communicate her pain to another black woman. Though Tashi has broken her silence, she has not yet healed from her trauma. It is only with Pierre that Tashi can come to terms with the unconscious and analyze it.

Adam has recounted Tashi's story only once to Lisette, but she and her son, Pierre, have been obsessed with Tashi's traumatic tower. Lisette reads many books, and Pierre has never put her suffering out of his mind. Tashi thinks:

> I am thinking of how I never met Lisette. How she tried to know me. Tried to visit me. Wrote me letters. Tried to interest me in French cooking—sent me cookbooks and recipes. Sent me clippings about wild mushrooms and where to look for them. (None of this is helpful, I used to mutter to myself, gazing into the mirror and sticking out my tongue.) Sent me her son. And how I refused her. How I thought she knew me too well. (159)

Pierre has been attracted to Tashi's story since childhood. Adam claims: "[e]verything he learns, no matter how trivial or in what context or with whom, he brings to bear on her dilemma" (175). When he comes to live with his father, he tries to reveal the secret behind her trauma.

Tashi thinks that female circumcision is used to eliminate the danger of the dual soul in order to preserve men and women's wholeness as males and females. Men do not endure circumcision in Olinka, but women, whose genitals can grow, should remove what is considered masculine to preserve their full status as women. Otherwise, they will be rejected, insulted, and even accused of betrayal.

Like Mzee, Pierre shows Tashi a film of termite hills. He explains that due to heat and humidity, Africans build houses like those of termites. What is noteworthy is that termites have specific places for males in their society. Pierre says to Tashi that she is the queen termite with broken wings: "[t]his, Madame Johnson, is your dark tower. You are the queen who loses her wings" (226-7). He further explains that African women are sacrificial breeders in a patriarchal society, which makes circumcision a sacred ritual.

Raye supports Pierre's opinion and explains that the village elders have instilled that in Tashi's mind through some code language:

> We think it was told you in code somehow […] Not told you directly that you, as a woman, were expected to reproduce as helplessly and inertly as a white ant; but in a culture in which it is mandatory that every single female be systematically desexed, there would have to be some coded, mythological reason given for it, used secretly among the village elders. (227)

Raye named these religious and mythological justifications used to guarantee the performance and continuation of the ritual "psychological circumcision" (165). Tashi, then, remembers when, as a child, she heard the men of the tribe describe women as queens whose wings should be clipped, otherwise they would fly.

> Woman is queen […] God has given her to us […] Since God has given her to us, we must treat her well […] We must feed her so that she will stay plump […] If left to herself the Queen would fly […] And then where would we be? […] But God is merciful […] He clips her wings […] Let us eat this food, and drink to the Queen who is beautiful, and whose body has been given us to be our sustenance forever" (231-3).

Pierre relates circumcision to enslavement, which is the root of the domination of women in the world. Finally, Tashi understands the source of her suffering. She realizes that she has

been a victim of a patriarchal society that created traditional rituals in order to subordinate women. She claims: “[w]hat surprises me is that I can hear Pierre, and even understand what he is saying. It is true my heart leapt painfully once, but now it is beating normally. I glance around the room at the faces gathered about me. They are each as intent as my own” (225).

It is important to note that Pierre is the one who has exposed the myth of the danger of the dual soul. On the one hand, he is biracial. He has the features of both the white and black races. On the other hand, he is bisexual. He claims that he loves both men and women. Thus, Walker presents Pierre as the embodiment of the dual soul, which does not present any danger, whether to the individual himself or the community. According to Moore, “[p]resenting what she appears to believe is a natural male/female duality, Walker subverts and exposes traditional Africa's rejection of this duality and the autonomous rights of pleasure and gratification for women as well as for men” (119). Pierre explains that the myth of the dual soul hides men’s jealousy of women’s sexual autonomy: “[m]an is jealous of woman’s pleasure … because she does not require him to achieve it” (*Possessing* 178). This echoes Parmar’s claim that the main aim of female excision is “to destroy women's right to autonomous sexuality in order to accommodate male fears and desires” (Walker and Parmar 110).

Tashi decides to take action to change the social conversions in Olinka. Significantly, she does not seek change through institutional structures. According to Phillips,

> [W]omanist activism does not focus on the confrontation of institutional structures so much as on the shaping of thought processes and relationships. For womanists, entrenched social and environmental problems originate from a psychological and/or spiritual first cause, only later manifesting in the material or institutional realms. (xxx)

Tashi comes back to Africa with the hope of raising women's awareness about the dangerous ritual. She quickly recognizes the difficulty of her mission. On her way to Olinka, she passes by a paper shop and asks for papers and markers. She writes in big black letters: "[i]f you lie to yourself about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoyed it" (*Possessing* 106). Later, when the proprietress of the paper shop is asked to give her testimony in court, the woman insists not on the task of lying but on lying to oneself, and therein lies the difference. The young woman's inability to grasp Tashi's message, though she understands it but pretends not to, makes Tashi think that change cannot occur pacifically and easily in Olinka society.

Tashi reads a year-old *Newsweek* issue in which she discovers that M'Lissa is not only alive but also a national icon. Though M'Lissa is also a victim of the ritual, her role as a tsunga makes her benefit from the government. She no longer lives in the dark hut but in a new sunlit home with a flag on top.

> [A] remarkable change had occurred. M'Lissa had stopped showing any signs of death, stopped aging, and had begun to actually blossom. "Youthen," as the article said. A local nurse, a geriatrics specialist, ministered to her; a cook and a gardener rounded out her staff. M'Lissa, who had not walked in over a year, began again to walk, leaning on a cane the president himself had given her. (148)

Tashi thinks that killing M'Lissa first, and then the divine image of M'Lissa, is the only way for change to take place in Olinka. She echoes the womanist standpoint, which foregrounds changing minds over changing institutions. Phillips points out that "changing social institutions is only a partial or temporary solution because, in the absence of changed minds and changed practices, dismantled social institutions will only re-form in newly oppressive ways" (xl).

Tashi is convinced that the death of the tsunga is not only necessary for achieving individual and communal justice but also the first step towards social change. According to Phillips,

> [Womanists] differ from many other critical theorists and social-justice activists is in the trust they place in nonelites to envision and accomplish social-justice ends, inside or outside formal structures like organizations or social movements. Womanists just act in the course of everyday life, and the nature of these actions varies widely from person to person. This diversity is not problematized; rather, it is viewed favorably. The assumption of womanism is that "it all adds up" to positive social change in the end. "Start where you are" might be the womanist credo, and "one step forward" is the standard for progress. (xxiv-xxv)

The womanist method of mutual aid and self-help advocates change behind institutions. Adam, Olivia, Benny, Pierre, Raye, Mbati, and even Lisette and Mzee have all worked together to end Tashi's trauma. It is only through this coming together and mutual support that social change becomes possible in Olinka society. Phillips argues:

> Mutual aid and self-help demonstrate two important things: first, that an underestimated genius for problem solving circulates among institutionally dispossessed populations and, second, that such marginalized populations will not be forced to succumb beneath institutional neglect, whether benign or malign. Indeed, at times, mutual aid and self-help are the only means by which intellectually marginalized groups can implement superior methods of problem solving that are either rejected or not acknowledged by the mainstream. (xxviii- xxix)

Although Tashi is executed for killing the tsunga, the process of social change will not end with her death. Many people advocate it. For example, Pierre promises Tashi that he will "rededicate himself to his life's work: destroying for other women—and their men—the terrors of the dark tower" (*Possessing* 276). Through both individual and communal change,

Tashi accomplished the healing process of her body, mind, and spirit. She clearly declared: "I am no more. And satisfied" (279).

Within the womanist discourse, black women's healing is fundamental to realizing social change. Healing is not limited to black women's bodies but transcends to their mental and spiritual conditions. Though healing is crucial for the well-being of the individual, it also contributes to the well-being of the whole community. In other words, black women's physical, mental, and spiritual health promotes their resistance to the different forms of oppression. Thus, it fosters the establishment of more egalitarian societies.

Conclusion

Womanism provides different methods for social change related to black women's everyday lives and relationships, their major as well as minor activities, and their individual and/or collective efforts. Within the womanist discourse, black sisterhood constitutes an important site for black women's bonding and empowerment. Despite Walker's emphasis on sexual and non-sexual sisterhood, she does not call for the separation of men and women only for health. *The Color Purple* illustrates a womanist model of sisterhood that Walker calls celibacy. This celibate sisterhood helps black women move from marginalization to empowerment. Walker rejects lesbianism as synonymous with celibacy. She argues that celibate sisters embrace both sexual wholeness and spiritual holiness. In *The Bluest Eye*, motherhood is an important method for social change. Black mothers' creativity can be expressed through both artistic and non-artistic works and in minor as well as major activities of daily life. This creativity works in promoting their daughters' consciousness, resistance, and even self-perception. Yet, daughters should reject passivity and participate in the process to make change possible. Rebellion against traditional conventions in *Sula* is a healthy method to

raise the black community's consciousness about the different forms of oppression. To achieve social change, both the individual and the community should participate in the process. The community's rejection of change results in the destruction of both the individual and the community itself. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, healing is an effective aspect of social transformation. Healing is dissociated from its pure clinical meaning. It can be fulfilled through clinical or personal therapy, with individual or communal efforts, and through pacific or violent means. Finally, black women, through a womanist therapy, succeed in defying race and gender prejudice and making social change possible.

Chapter Four

The Genesis of the "Womanish" Identity

Introduction

Black women have been programmed to define themselves in relation to white womanhood or white interpretations of black womanhood. Their challenge of race and gender prejudice enables them to define themselves outside the limitations of the prejudiced meanings of womanhood. This chapter examines the new concept of femininity in Morrison and Walker's selected novels, which is closely identified with "womanish" womanhood. Walker describes the womanist or "womanish" woman as the one who embraces specific characteristics that foster her self-realization and self-empowerment. This chapter focuses on strength, self-love, and other love, survival, and knowledge as the main components of black women's womanist identity in the four selected novels. It argues that Morrison and Walker's "womanish" characters finally succeeded in breaking the traditional mold of womanhood and the stereotypical images of black womanhood.

4.1. "Womanish" Woman: Courage, Audacity, and Willfulness

Walker defines the "womanish" woman as the one who shows "outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior" (*In Search* xi). In *Sula*, Morrison describes the protagonist as a strong character from the very beginning of the novel. Sula is courageous to the point that she cuts her finger in order to protect her friend Nel from a group of Irish boys who caught Nel and "pushed her from hand to hand until they grew tired of the frightened helpless face" (*Sula* 54). To avoid the boys' taunts, Nel, accompanied by Sula, takes the long way home until the day when Sula decides to "go on home the shortest way" (54). Her courageous behavior

leads her to choose confrontation over escape. Sula and Nel encounter the boys who step in front of them to stop them from passing.

> They were going to try and fight back, and with a knife. Maybe they could get an arm around one of their waists, or tear . . . Sula squatted down in the dirt road and put everything down on the ground: her lunchpail, her reader, her mittens, her slate. Holding the knife in her right hand, she pulled the slate toward her and pressed her left forefinger down hard on its edge. Her aim was determined but inaccurate. She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh, like a button mushroom, curling in the cherry blood that ran into the corners of the slate. (52)

Sula shows both courage and determination; cutting her finger is the only way to defeat the boys and put an end to their harassment. In an interview with Robert Stepto, Morrison describes Sula as "totally outraged" because she has the qualities of masculinity. For instance, she is adventuresome, curious, and trusts herself. She is not scared and leaves and tries anything (Morrison and Stepto 487).

Unlike Sula, Nel has always been secretly proud of her calm and controlled behavior. For her, Sula is uncontrollable, irresponsible, and always makes the wrong decisions. She claims:

> Sula, like always, was incapable of making any but the most trivial decisions. When it came to matters of grave importance, she behaved emotionally and irresponsibly and left it to others to straighten out. And when fear struck her, she did unbelievable things. Like that time with her finger. Whatever those hunkies did, it wouldn't have been as bad as what she did to herself. (*Sula* 101)

Nel thinks that Sula's behavior is wrong. According to her, they should let the boys humiliate them and it would not be worse than cutting her finger. She goes further by claiming that Sula

has “mutilated herself, to protect herself” (101). Joseph Wessling comments on Sula’s self-mutilation:

> As in the case of Eva's missing leg, self-mutilation is the price of survival. Sula cuts herself off from whatever incipient human sympathy and sense of responsibility may have been developing. Only toward Nel could Sula act with generosity, as toward the one neighbor whom she could love as herself. (290)

Nel cannot see her friend’s self-mutilation as a courageous act to protect her. Sula then does not earn “Nel’s gratitude but her disgust” (*Sula* 141).

Sula also goes through two experiences that play an influential role in shaping her audacious and grown-up behavior. The first experience is when she hears her mother saying that she does not love her, and the second occurs with Nel on the river, where Chicken Little dies accidentally and Sula alone takes the blame. The two experiences teach her two meaningful lessons: “[t]he first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either” (118-9). Although the two experiences have been difficult for Sula, she quickly learns to take responsibility and to no longer rely on others, but to “let her emotions dictate her behavior” (141).

Sula accepts the distance between herself and her mother and the fact that she has to grow on her own. She also accepts the blame for Chicken Little’s death, although she knows that it was an accident and that if the blame should be taken by someone, it should be by both Sula and Nel and not just Sula alone. It takes Nel a long time to comprehend Sula’s great act of responsibility. When Eva accuses Nel of throwing Chicken Little into the river, Nel tries to correct her and insists that it was Sula. Eva replies, “[w]hat's the difference? You was there.

You watched, didn't you? Me, I never would've watched" (168). Although Nel keeps trying to convince Eva that it was Sula's fault, Eva refuses to listen to her.

By the end of the novel, Nel realizes that "what she had thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquillity that follows a joyful stimulation. Just as the water closed peacefully over the turbulence of Chicken Little's body, so had contentment washed over her enjoyment" (170). While Sula is distraught and frightened, Nel feels a strange joy in watching the scene. She remains calm and collected, in contrast to Sula, who runs to Shadrack to ask for help. Despite her panic, Sula's reaction to Chicken Little's drowning shows her sense of responsibility and mature behavior, which are necessary for a black girl to achieve her full potential as an independent woman.

Sula also shows her audacity when she defies the community's conventions and expresses her sexual freedom. According to Sanders, being "'womanish' or 'grown' […] bears a hint of self-assertion in a sexual sense, where sexual freedom is a sign of moral autonomy" (131). hooks explains that "Sanders focuses on the aspects of the definition that connect womanist with audacity, rebellion against authority, and/or affirmation of black women as desiring subjects asserting autonomous choice to engage in varied sexual practices" (148). Sula engages in varied sexual relationships, which enhance her moral autonomy. She is independent of any feelings or property that may restrict her selfhood. She is "completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments—no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself—be consistent with herself" (*Sula* 119).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison also presents an example of a responsible, grown, and courageous girl. Although the story turns around Pecola, Morrison introduces Claudia as the

narrator of Pecola's story. Unlike Pecola, the voiceless girl who accepts the social conventions of womanhood and whose ultimate desire is to get blue eyes in order to be accepted by both white and black societies, Claudia has a voice throughout the novel. She narrates Pecola's story from two perspectives: one as a child and the other as an adult. She refuses the white, hegemonic standards of beauty from childhood. When Claudia grows up, she recounts Pecola's story with a focus on the circumstances behind her weakness and devastation, including the mother-daughter relationship and the black community's complicity.

Claudia shows both independence and confidence. She is "adventuresome, mischievous, witty, suspicious, trusting, and, above all, curious about life" (Bloom, *Guides* 22). Her resistance to prejudiced beauty is seen in her rejection of the blue-eyed dolls at Christmas and her hatred of Shirley Temple and her light-skinned classmate Maureen. She dismembers the blue-eyed dolls to see what they are made from in an attempt to understand why all people love them. She argues: "[t]he indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say, 'Awwwww,' but not for me?" (*Bluest* 20).

Claudia hates Shirley Temple because she is the idealized image of beauty for both white and black girls. She claims: "I couldn't join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me" (17). Bojangles is one of Claudia's favorite African American performers. Claudia cannot understand the reasons that led him to dance with Shirley Temple and not with her. Bojangles' dancing with Shirley Temple illustrates black men's preference for white beauty. Also, as

Debora Werrlein notes, it epitomizes white culture's attempt to take profit by putting Shirley Temple's white face on the black music and culture embodied by Bojangles (205).

Like Sula's relationship with Nel, Claudia is both Pecola's friend and protector. When a group of black boys uses racist language to victimize Pecola, Claudia acts in a courageous and audacious way. She yells at one of the taunting boys named Bay Boy. She also defends her by punching Maureen in the face with her notebook when Maureen teases her. Claudia shows her rejection of Pauline's mammy figure and her sympathy for Pecola when she witnesses the Fishers' little daughter calling Pauline "Polly". She becomes furious and even wants to hurt the little white girl. She says: "[t]he familiar violence rose in me. Her calling Mrs. Breedlove Polly, when even Pecola called her mother Mrs. Breedlove, seemed reason enough to scratch her" (*Bluest* 106). Claudia's anger shows her ability "to interpret signs produced by hostile culture" (qtd. in Heinert 30).

The courageous behavior experienced in Morrison's novels is also described in Walker's texts. In *The Color Purple*, although Walker presents Celie as a passive character at the beginning of the novel, Celie shows courage and responsibility when she, like Sula and Claudia, plays the role of protector. She helps Nettie run away, first from Alfonso and then from Mr. _____ when they try to rape her. She sacrifices herself and accepts physical and sexual abuse in order to keep Nettie safe. She also secretly fights for Shug by spitting in the water of Old Mr. _____ when he harshly criticizes her. Celie cannot accept the humiliation and suffering of her beloved ones. When she learns from Shug that Mr. _____ has been hiding Nettie's letters for many years, leading her to believe that her sister was dead, she starts to behave in a more courageous way. For the first time, she expresses her rage and wants to cut Albert's throat with his razor, but Shug stops her because killing Mr. _____ is not the solution.

The most important scene that exemplifies Celie's womanist behavior is when she confronts Mr. _____ and decides to leave him and start a new life. Celie revolts against Mr. _____ at a dinner where all the members of the family and friends are present. Shug first announces that she and her husband are leaving and taking Celie with them to Tennessee. Mr. _____ cannot believe Shug's words because, to him, the submissive Celie is too weak to confront him. Celie finally breaks her silence. She insults Mr. _____ and shows her determination to leave him. She says: "[y]ou a lowdown dog is what's wrong, […] It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (*Color* 202). Celie accuses him of intentionally separating Nettie from her. She even confesses that she has two children who will come back from Africa to live with her. Mr. _____ tries to stop Celie by slapping her. The "new" Celie could no longer accept humiliation and jabs at him with her dinner knife.

Celie explicitly displays courage and audacity. Mr. _____ tries to beleaguer her free will by insisting that she will get a bad reputation if she runs away from his house. Yet, she is convinced that getting freedom from Mr. _____'s domination is much more important than others' views of her. The change in her behavior is described by Celie herself, when Sofia's mother dies and she comes back to see her in Harpo's house. She claims: "I feels different. Look different. Got on some dark blue pants and a white silk shirt that look righteous. Little red flat-heel slippers, and a flower in my hair. I pass Mr. _____ house and him sitting up on the porch and he didn't even know who I was" (*Color* 220).

Mr. _____ cannot recognize Celie, not because of her appearance but of the change that has affected her behavior. He does not see the submissive Celie, but a new woman he has never met before. Celie's internal growth becomes visible to Mr. _____ when he meets her at the

funeral. She claims: “I see he feeling scared of me. Well, good, I think. Let him feel what I felt” (225-6). Celie successfully reverses the power relationship with Mr. _____.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi’s courageous behavior is illustrated when she decides to take action and stop the ritual that breaks her physically and psychologically. The only way to regain her lost soul is to punish the one who has stolen it. Revenge becomes the only way to regain selfhood. Tashi returns to Africa to “[kill the one] who, many years ago, killed [her]” (*Possessing* 272). She cannot accept that the woman who has deprived her of her womanhood not only enjoys her life but has also become a national icon. Tashi’s determination in killing the tsunga is described in the fast way she reaches M’Lissa’s house. She claims: “I had flown direct, as if I were a bird, from my house to hers, and that this had been accomplished with the directness of thought: a magical journey” (149).

Tashi buys three razors that she keeps under her pillow, and every night, she swears to mutilate M’Lissa’s body to the point that “her Own God wouldn’t recognize her” (204). She wants to kill M’Lissa with the same tool she uses to circumcise girls. The three razors, not one, suggest that Tashi wants to fulfill the task properly. Her answers in court show her determination.

> I bought three razors.
> Why three? he asks.
> Because I wanted to be sure.
> Sure of what?
> To do the job properly.
> You mean to kill the old woman?
> Yes. (36)

M'Lissa knows from Tashi's first visit that she wants to kill her. She states: "[t]he very first day she came I could see my death in [her] eyes, as clearly as if I were looking into a mirror. Those eyes that are the eyes of a madwoman. Can she really think I have not seen madness and murderers before?" (205). In addition to mastering genital mutilation, M'Lissa is capable of mutilating women's wills for revenge and of diverting their objective of murdering her. M'Lissa starts recounting stories. Tashi claims: "[b]ut each morning, like the storyteller Scheherazade, M'Lissa told me another version of reality of which I had not heard" (203). Surprisingly, M'Lissa tells Tashi that "it was only the murder of the *tsunga,* the circumciser, by one of those whom she has circumcised that proves her (the circumciser's) value to her tribe. Her own death […] would elevate her to the position of saint" (204).

M'Lissa's stories and lies could not decrease Tashi's will to kill her. Although Tashi knows from M'Lissa that she herself was a victim of the ritual, and M'Lissa admits her crimes as being no more than a torturer of children, Tashi does not change her mind about killing her, but only on the manner of doing it. She claims that M'Lissa's "sad stories about her life caused me to lose my taste for slashing her" (274). Tashi is determined to free women from pain and suffering and, since women are not bold enough to resist, she acts as a heroine for them (Sedehi et al. 58).

Tashi cannot forgive M'Lissa for her devotion to the patriarchal tradition. She is the instrument used by patriarchal society to strip women of their sexuality. Finally, Tashi kills M'Lissa mercifully by "plac[ing] a pillow over her face and lay[ing] across it for an hour" (*Possessing* 274). Her determination is also illustrated in the court when she declares: "even before the Bible was brought, I said loud and clear so there could be no mistake: I did it" (264). Tashi "commits a suicidal murder, which she does not try to hide but, on the contrary,

confesses. And her confession will speedily lead to her execution" (Fabi 232). The tsunga's death is necessary for Tashi to achieve wholeness and for other girls and women to survive.

By portraying black females' audacious and courageous behavior, both Morrison and Walker destroy the image of black women's passivity and acceptance of traditional conventions that enhance their invisibility. Black women's assertive behavior is not only necessary for their self-realization but also for the continuity of their resistance to the different forms of oppression.

4.2. "Womanish" Woman: Self-love and Other Love

According to Walker, the "womanish" woman is the one "who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually […]. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually" (*In Search* xi). Besides loving women and/or men, Walker insists on the importance of self-love. She claims that the "womanish" woman is the one who "[l]oves herself. Regardless" (xii). Walker regards love as an essential component in shaping the self and the relationship with the other. Love is necessary for women's empowerment and independence. To be able to love others, women should love themselves first. Both Morrison and Walker have explored the theme of love in their novels by shedding light on black people's ability or inability to love themselves and/or others. They insist on the deep effects of that love on both the individual and the community.

In *Sula*, the protagonist's self-love is manifest in her autonomy. When Eva reproves her for not being married or having kids, Sula declares: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (*Sula* 92). Again, when Eva tells her that she has hellfire inside her, she responds that "[w]hatever's burning in me is mine" (93). Sula "presents herself as a self-

invented and self-defined woman" (O'Reilly 63). She does not want anyone to define her or determine her behavior; she wants to create her own identity and control her life.

Sula's self-love surpasses any other feeling. Unlike Nel, who cannot define herself outside of the need to please her husband and the whole community, "Sula was distinctly different […] she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full rein, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her (*Sula* 118). Although the whole community dislikes her, Sula shows her self-love in her acceptance of herself. She explicitly declares: "I like my own dirt" (142), which refers to her shamelessness about her sexual expression. Morrison presents Sula as the seemingly shameless opposite of Pecola, who is the racially shamed and passive victim (Bouson 47).

Nel cannot understand Sula's point of view. She has never felt love or lived for herself. It is impossible for her to understand something she has never tasted. She thinks that Sula is showing off and tries to humiliate her. She claims: "I always understood how you could take a man. Now I understand why you can't keep none" (*Sula* 143). For Sula, "[men] ain't worth more than [her self]" (143). As a womanist, Sula's love for herself is much more important than the conventional need to dominate a man.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia also shows her self-love when she revolts against the beauty myth that stereotypes anything white as beautiful. Unlike Pecola, whose deepest desire is to get blue eyes, and Frieda, who loves Shirley Temple, Claudia shows her hatred of light-skinned Maureen. She thinks that "[i]f [Maureen] was cute—and if anything could be believed, she *was*—then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but lesser" (*Bluest* 72). Claudia also does not accept the blue-eyed dolls as beautiful or lovable, because if she believes that they are beautiful, she has to acknowledge that she is

not, and if she loves their whiteness, she has to hate herself. Claudia hates the blue-eyed dolls in order to preserve her self-love. She even asks herself: "[w]hat was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important?" (72). What Claudia, Frieda, and Pecola lack is the light skin and/or blue eyes that Shirley Temple, their classmate Maureen, and even the dolls have.

Unlike Pecola, Claudia and Frieda create their own model of beauty, primarily based on their self-acceptance and self-love. They are content in their darkness and love themselves as they are. They claim: "we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars" (72). Pecola thinks that getting blue eyes is the only way to survive in a racist and sexist society, but for Claudia and Frieda, loving oneself is the secret of beauty, and it is what makes a black girl survive and grow. It is important to note that Morrison mentions black girls' admiration of their own "dirt" in both *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*. Although the word refers to black women's blackness, it also refers to their sexual freedom. Through Sula, Morrison foreshadows what "the Claudias and the Friedas, those feisty little girls grow up to be" (qtd. in Bouson 74).

In *The Color Purple*, Celie's experience with love has been a complex one due to the different kinds of violence she faces in her life. Celie has not received any love in order to give love. The only person who loves her is her sister, Nettie, who has been forced to leave her because of Mr. _____'s continuous harassment. The lack of love and the violence that Celie endures make her hate not only Mr. _____ but also his children. She says: "Mr. _____ marry me to take care of his children. I marry him cause my daddy made me. I don't love Mr. _____ and he don't love me" (*Color* 64). She further explains:

> Everybody say how good I is to Mr. _____'s children. I be good to them. But I don't feel nothing for them. Patting Harpo back not even like patting a dog. It more like patting another piece of wood. Not a living tree, but a table, a chifferobe. Anyhow, they don't love me neither, no matter how good I is. (30)

Later, Shug fills Celie's emotional emptiness. Celie states: "[h]ard not to love Shug, […] She know how to love somebody back" (287). Walker insists on the necessity for love to be reciprocal in order to survive.

Celie's self-love starts the day she confronts Mr. ____ and revolts against patriarchy. When Mr. ____ tells her: "[l]ook at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. […], you nothing at all!" (209), she replies by shouting from Shug's car: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, […]. But I'm here" (210). Mary O'Connor comments on Celie's statement as follows:

> The nothing, then, is transformed and defeated by existence, by I'm here […] I am, therefore I am not nothing, or not an object to be battered, possessed, exploited, and abused. The fact of her presence resists formulations and implies a reality beyond the labels of one man's discourse. (205)

Celie explicitly expresses her self-love when she claims her subjectivity. She is finally "able to translate her murderous rage into powerful speech and to meet Mr. on the battlefield of language" (Froula 640).

Celie frees herself from physical, emotional, and psychological submission in order to forge a new life as an independent woman who can enjoy self-love and self-esteem. Before, Celie never looked at herself in the mirror. After leaving Mr. _____, she has reconciled with herself. She looks and even talks to herself in front of the mirror. She claims: "I talk to myself a lot, standing in front the mirror" (*Color* 263).

Although Celie loves Shug, she understands the freedom of love. In the beginning, Celie tries to possess Shug. She becomes jealous of Mr. _____ and then of Shug's husband, Grady. What makes her wish to die is Shug's relationship with the nineteen-year-old Germaine, because he brings a sparkle to her eyes. Shug feels sorry for Celie. She promises to return after six months, and the two will resume their life together as it was. She sits on her knees, her tears falling, and asks Celie if she loves her. Although her heart is hurting, Celie replies: "I love you, […]. Whatever happen, whatever you do, I love you" (255). Celie's love for Shug is more similar to the love of a daughter than that of a lover. It is full of understanding and forgiveness. When the six months pass and Shug does not come, Celie acknowledges that "Shug got a right to live too. She got a right to look over the world in whatever company she choose" (273).

Celie starts seeing Shug more as a friend than as a lover. She claims: "I miss her. I miss her friendship so much" (273). She adds: "[i]f she come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content. And then I figure this the lesson I was suppose to learn" (288-9). Celie finally understands the lesson when she declares: "I try to teach my heart not to want nothing it can't have" (272), which means that she puts an end to her suffering for others. What is worth it for her is her self.

The womanist love between Celie and Shug is also manifested by Sula, Tashi, and Claudia. They show their devotion to the womanist non-sexual sisterhood, with which they can fight race and gender prejudice. Although Sula has no clear conception of love, she loves her friend Nel. As young girls, Sula and Nel were like one person. When Sula returns to the Bottom after ten years, she has realized her full potential as an independent woman and cannot bear to see Nel and the women of the community submit to patriarchal rule.

Sula's lovemaking with Jude is not a betrayal of Nel, but a message of love. She cannot bear Nel's devotion to the conventional role of the submissive wife. She wants her to love herself instead of being subordinated to her husband, a message that Nel does not understand until the very end of the novel, when she realizes that she misses Sula, not Jude.

Claudia also learns the lesson of love when she transcends the boundaries of race and accepts the white dolls and Shirley Temple. She states:

> When I learned how repulsive this disinterested violence was, that it was repulsive because it was disinterested, my shame floundered about for refuge. The best hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love. It was a small step to Shirley Temple. I learned much later to worship her, just as I learned to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement. (*Bluest* 21)

According to T. Walters, "as Claudia matures she fails to maintain her repudiation of whiteness and learns to love the white dolls as much as Pecola does" (106). In contrast to T. Walters, Jennifer Heinert argues that Claudia's love lesson is a defense mechanism against her incapability to escape the hegemonic ideology that makes anything white lovable. She states:

> [T]he education represented by the repetition of the word "learned" in this quotation is actually a defense mechanism. Learning is contrasted with "knowing," as if learning is patterned acceptable behavior and knowing is the truth behind how and why one engages in the behavior in the first place. (31)

Nevertheless, Claudia does not show her endorsement of the dominant culture and still hates the racist and sexist ideology that stereotypes black women's ugliness. She shows her "womanishness" in her acceptance of the other. Walker defines the "womanish" woman as the one who is "[t]raditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow,

and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented" (*In Search* xi). Claudia accepts Shirley Temple's whiteness, Maureen's yellowness, and the blue-eyed dolls, but never their idealized beauty.

Claudia realizes that she does not really hate light-skinned Maureen, but hates the thing that makes Maureen beautiful. She states: "all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us" (*Bluest* 72, emphasis in original). She also recognizes that it is the white racist ideology and the African American adoption of that hegemonic ideology that bestow beauty on Maureen. Claudia's "ability to survive intact and to consolidate an identity derives from her vigorous opposition to the colorist attitudes of her community" (Rosenberg 440).

Like Claudia, Celie also portrays the womanist universalist love when she transcends the boundaries of gender and starts a new relationship with Mr. _____, in which conversation and understanding can take part. Mr. _____ tells Celie that it "[t]ook [him] long enough to notice [her] such good company" (*Color* 281), and Celie thinks: "[h]e ain't Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to" (281). Mr. _____ and Celie's conversations do not exhibit any kind of domination, violence, or hatred. What makes their friendship possible is Mr. _____'s new conception of manhood. Celie states:

> After all the evil he done I know you wonder why I don't hate him. I don't hate him for two reasons. One, he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him. Plus, look like he trying to make something out of himself. I don't mean just that he work and he clean up after himself and he appreciate some of the things God was playful enough to make. I mean when you talk to him now he really listen, and one time, out of

> nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience. (264)

Celie leaves Mr. _____ for her own well-being. She fits with Walker's definition of the "womanish" woman as being "[n]ot a separatist, except periodically, for health" (*In Search* xi). Celie needs to break with Mr. _____ in order to gain her self-esteem and self-worth. Mr. _____ now learns how to "listen to his own heart" (*Color* 227). He shows a change of mind and is able to accept Celie's independence and wholeness.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi transcends the boundaries of race and gender when she learns to love Pierre. At first, she hates him because he reminds her of her husband's betrayal. On his first visit to his father's house in America, the moment he gets out of the taxi, Tashi starts throwing stones at him. Her behavior is not spontaneous. She began to collect stones the day she learned of his birth.

Pierre plays an influential role in Tashi's healing by making her see the hidden face of patriarchy. He has developed a close relationship with her as he moves inside her to heal her. Before her execution, Tashi expresses her love for Pierre in a letter to his dead mother, Lisette. She writes:

> Pierre has been such a gift to me. You would be proud of him. He has promised to continue to look after Benny when I am gone. Already he has taught him more than any of his teachers ever thought he could leam. I wish you could see Pierre - and perhaps you can, through one of the windows of heaven that looks exactly like a blade of grass, or a rose, or a grain of wheat - as he continues to untangle the threads of mystery that kept me enmeshed. (*Possessing* 275)

Tashi recognizes her body when she finally understands the illusion behind ideal Olinka womanhood. The only reality that she knows is that her autonomy has been tightened. Before

enduring the ritual, she, like Celie, ignores her body. She claims: “[m]y own body was a mystery to me” (119). She manifests her self-love when she kills M’Lissa and achieves justice. She then breaks from the victimized image that she has internalized for many years and moves towards self-correction. She finally understands how the patriarchal community influenced her to commit such a crime against her body. She argues: “[h]ow had I entrusted my body to this madwoman” (148).

After killing M’Lissa, Tashi recovers herself. She states: “I have the uncanny feeling that, just at the end of my life, I am beginning to reinhabit completely the body I long ago left” (108-9). According to Jasmin Cori, “[f]or victims of multiple trauma, reinhabiting the body is something that happens slowly and gradually. It happens as we come to know and trust the body and can protect ourselves from invasion. It happens as we recognize the body as a safe haven” (183). By reinhabiting her body, Tashi regained self-possession. Although she has been executed for killing the tsunga M’Lissa, she is satisfied.

Within the womanist discourse, love is an influential component of black womanhood. Women who do not love themselves are unable to love others. Both Morrison and Walker affirm self-love through black women’s acknowledgment of their bodies, selves, and worth. Both authors insist on the importance of other love by describing black women’s ability to surpass race and/or gender barriers and move towards a more universalist love. The two kinds of love improve black women’s selfhood and strength, as well as the community's well-being.

4.3. “Womanish” Woman: Survival and Wholeness

Another important feature of the “womanish” woman is being “[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female” (Walker, *In Search* xi, emphasis in original).

Morrison and Walker have depicted survival in different ways. Through life or death, the two authors call for the survival of both the individual and the community.

In *The Bluest Eye*, when Claudia learns that Pecola has been raped and impregnated by her father and that the community wants her baby dead, she embraces Walker's survivalist tenet and wants Pecola's baby to survive. Claudia and Frieda recount the community's overheard conversations about Pecola.

> "She be lucky if it don't live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking."
> "Can't help but be. Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground."
> "Well, I wouldn't worry none. It be a miracle if it live." (*Bluest* 187-8)

Claudia thinks of the community's hatred for the unborn baby and claims: "I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live—just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals" (188). Claudia believes that the baby's survival is necessary to challenge the hegemonic knowledge that relates blackness to ugliness. According to Collins, "resistance consists of loving the unlovable and affirming their humanity. Loving Black people (as distinguished from dating and/or having sex with Black people) in a society that is so dependent on hating Blackness constitutes a highly rebellious act" (*Black Sexual* 250).

Claudia and Frieda decide to attempt a miracle to save Pecola's baby. They agreed to plant marigolds. They claim: "[w]e'll bury the money over by her house so we can't go back and dig it up, and we'll plant the seeds out back of our house so we can watch over them. And when they come up, we'll know everything is all right" (190). They also sing and "say the

magic words" (190). Ruth Rosenberg comments on the two sisters' maternal role toward Pecola's baby:

> Defiantly alone in their protective impulses toward the unborn baby, they assume a maternal role toward it which is far beyond their capacities to fulfill. Their touching efforts to make a miracle on its behalf and their celebration of its blackness, which no one in their "unyielding" community shares, enhance the book's poignancy. (442)

Claudia and Frieda hope that the marigolds bloom for Pecola's baby to survive. However, the girls' magic words fail to save Pecola's child; the flowers never bloom, the baby dies, and Pecola descends into madness.

Although Claudia feels guilty for Pecola's insanity and her baby's death, she blames Pecola herself for her passivity; "she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt" (*Bluest* 203). Pecola absorbed all the "waste which [the community] dumped on her" (203). Claudia demonstrates how "Pecola became the depository not only of her father's seed, but of a racist discourse that equates black skin with moral degeneracy" (Scott 98). Pecola's survival is impossible due to her weakness and submission to prejudiced beauty.

According to Toni Cade Bambara, "[a] new person is born when he finds a value to define an actional self and when he can assume autonomy for that self" (133). Pecola's passivity and dependence on the white, racist conventions of beauty make her lose everything, including her mind. Morrison shows that survival needs, at least, resistance to and rejection of oppression, but through passivity, you can never survive. Claudia "does not have to step into madness in order to create a life that can transcend the self-hatred that gnaws away at Pecola and Pauline Breedlove. She can participate in the creative act of storytelling and maintain a positive self-

image" (L. Williams 81). Claudia uses her positive image and creative storytelling, as a survivalist perspective, to prevent other black girls from total devastation.

Sula is also a survivalist. Although she dies by the end of the novel, she portrays the example of the "womanish" woman that Morrison embraces. When Sula returns to the Bottom many years later, she "acknowledged none of [the community members'] attempts at counter conjure or their gossip and seemed to need the services of nobody" (*Sula* 113). She is totally different from her friend Nel, and although she has something of Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence, she creates a twist that is all her own imagination (118).

Sula wants Nel and the women of the community to acknowledge their subjugation and free themselves from the patriarchal rule.

> When she had come back home, social conversation was impossible for her because she could not lie. She could not say to those old acquaintances, 'Hey, girl, you looking good,' when she saw how the years had dusted their bronze with ash, the eyes that had once opened wide to the moon bent into grimy sickles of concern. The narrower their lives, the wider their hips. (121-2)

Sula tells the truth about their situation, which has not been revealed through speech but through exposing her freedom and autonomy. In this regard, Sula demonstrates a sense of sisterhood toward the black women of the Bottom. Minna Salami defines sisterhood as "a notion that reflects love for women. Love for women is not the same as everybody getting along—we don't have to be friends with every feminist—but we need to love women, and women's specific history, knowledge, and traditions, to want an end to their oppression (97). Thus, Sula engages in black sisterhood despite her distance.

Sula loses control over herself when she meets Ajax. At first, Ajax was attracted to her strong behavior, which piqued his curiosity. He has seen in her the free and strong mother he had. She also finds herself attracted to him because he is different from the men she has known in her life. Unlike Jude and Nel's relationship, Ajax does not want to protect Sula. Barbara Omolade argues that "protecting black women was the most significant measure of black manhood and the central aspect of black male patriarchy" (qtd. in Collins, *Black Feminist* 157). Sula falls for Ajax, and in a moment of weakness she wishes to possess him. Sula "began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it" (*Sula* 131). She becomes Nel's shadow. She starts putting ribbons in her hair and playing the housewife's role. Ajax quickly abandons her, and his absence leaves a great void in her life.

Besides her despair at Ajax's leaving, Sula faces another hidden reality about him when she learns that his true name is Albert. She shouts: "I didn't even know his name. And if I didn't know his name, then there is nothing I did know and I have known nothing ever at all since the one thing I wanted was to know his name" (136). Sula acknowledges her mistake; that she is herself the reason behind her failure. She claims:

> When I was a little girl the heads of my paper dolls came off, and it was a long time before I discovered that my own head would not fall off if I bent my neck. I used to walk around holding it very stiff because I thought a strong wind or a heavy push would snap my neck. Nel was the one who told me the truth. But she was wrong. I did not hold my head stiff enough when I met him and so I lost it just like the dolls. (136)

Sula feels guilty towards herself and recognizes that a woman should never surrender to a man. Morrison, like Walker, is not a separatist. She believes that women's love for men is

important for the wholeness of the black community. Women, however, should never forget that their first allegiance is to self-love.

Sula is not sad while dying; rather, she "felt her face smiling" (146). She is satisfied with her life and all the experiences she has endured. She says that she knows how every black woman is living and that they are dying just like her, but what makes her different is that she surely existed in the world (143). Nel feels "embarrassed, irritable and a little bit ashamed" (146). She decides to go, and when she opens the door, Sula asks her: "'[h]ow you know?' […] About who was good. How you know it was you?' […] 'I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me'" (146). Sula implicitly claims that she is the prototype of black womanhood.

Sula peacefully dies and wants Nel to survive and learn the lesson about the meaning of womanhood. It is only at the very end of the novel that Nel learns the lesson. Nel cannot cry for Jude, though his absence fills her life with sadness and emptiness. Yet, she cries for Sula. She finally realizes that the emptiness in her heart is due to Sula's absence, not Jude. She claims: "'[a]ll that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude.' […]. 'We was girls together', […] 'girl, girl, girlgirlgirl'" (174). According to Rachel Lee, Nel's final cry

> [E]choes [the] triple intersection of words, people, and desires. The variable referent of "girl" (Nel's invocation to Sula or to herself) points to language's plurisignifying potential to evoke missed people (others), the missed self, missed meanings, and all the desire encompassed in those yearnings for the "missed". (576-7)

Nel realizes that a woman's self-possession is much more important than her desire to be dominated by a man. Middleton also interprets Nel's cry as an acclamation of Sula's choice to live for herself. She argues:

> Nel's own final cry is an acclamation of Sula's undaunted experimental life. It confirms Sula's choice to live for her-self, giving nothing but also asking nothing and yet, in her freedom, enabling others to be themselves as freely - liberating all from the web of guilt and need […] In acting, Sula realizes her dreams; in suffering and comprehending, passionately rather than passively, Nel finally does too. Nel becomes a revisionist critic, rereading women's experience in their culture. (379-80)

It is noteworthy to mention that when Sula describes death as something that does not hurt, she claims: "Wait'll I tell Nel" (*Sula* 149). Sula's narrative continues beyond her last breath, which reinforces her striving after supplementation (Lee 276). By asking the reader to wait, Sula reveals that her death does not mean her end and announces her continuity through Nel. Therefore, Nel misses Sula not only as a friend but also as a prototype of black womanhood.

In a moment of weakness, Sula becomes the shadow of Nel and dies, but now it is time for Nel to become the shadow of Sula and survive, which is clearly illustrated in Eva's last conversation with Nel when she starts calling Nel by Sula's name and declares that there is no difference between the two. Sula fits with Walker's womanist discourse when she promotes change for other women. Walker claims that "each woman is capable of truly bringing another into the world" (*In Search* 39). Nel's cry, which has no top and no bottom, just circles of sorrow, shows her process of development that "begins with releasing the static and coherent conception of SELF and embracing what Sula represents: the self as process and fluid possibility" (McDowell 85, capitalized in original). Despite her death, Sula will always survive as a womanist prototype. It is relevant to mention that when Sula meets Shadrack for the first time, he tells her: "[a]lways" (*Sula* 62). Although Shadrack forgets everything and everybody, he remembers Sula as the only friend he has and, in fact, his statement "convince[s] her, assure[s] her, of permanency" (62).

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, despite the fact that Tashi dies at the end of the novel, she is, like Sula, a womanist survivalist. Tashi's "murder of the tsunga was committed partly in the name of freeing future generations of African girls from suffering" (Golubeva 40). Before her execution, Tashi expresses her happiness in helping other women to survive. On the day of her sentence appeal, she refuses the blindfold and wants to wear a red dress. She claims: "I want to wear red anyway, she says, regardless of what happens. I am sick to death of black and white. Neither of those is first. Red, the color of woman's blood, comes before them both" (*Possessing* 199).

The clear example of Tashi's survival is the character Mbati. Tashi knows Mbati, the tsunga's secretary, the day she returns to Africa to kill M'Lissa. Tashi and Mbati quickly developed a strong relationship. They can be seen as mother and daughter. Tashi claims: "[s]he is the daughter I should have had. Perhaps could have had" (155). Mbati has also endured the ritual, and is able to understand Tashi's suffering. Tashi says: "Mbati has never asked whether I murdered M'Lissa. She doesn't seem to care" (270).

Through Tashi and Mbati's relationship, Walker portrays the importance of the mother-daughter relationship in fighting prejudice. In contrast to Nafa's passivity and complicitous motherhood, Tashi is able to nurture Mbati through mother-daughter conversations that can defy all boundaries. In the court, Tashi takes Mbati's hand and tells her, "[i]f you take my hand before all of these people, all of these judges, all of these policemen and warders and rubbernecks in the audience, you will discover that the two of us can fly" (155). In response, Mbati puts her other hand into Tashi's. Walker suggests that survival necessitates the interconnectedness of both the mother and the daughter.

The call and response between Tashi and Mbati are very strong. The two women create a code, "Aché Mbele", which is, in fact, a survival code. Mbati explains: "*Aché* is Yoruba and means 'the power to make things happen.' Energy. *Mbele* means 'Forward!' in KiSwahili" (271, emphasis in original). Mbati will go forward to make women's wholeness possible by making her daughter, as well as other girls and women, aware of the patriarchal power behind female circumcision. Mbati also "promised not to let [Tashi] die before she has discovered and presented to [her] eyes the *definitive* secret of joy" (270, emphasis in original). On the day of Tashi's execution, all those who love her come to her support with a large banderole on which they imprint in large capital letters: "RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY" (279).

It is necessary to clarify that resistance here does not mean following Tashi's path and killing tsungas. Rather, "resistance to lies (imposed through silence upon suffering women in a patriarchal social order) is the real secret of joy" (Moore 114). In other words, in order to put an end to the practice of the ritual and its devastating effects on black women's bodies, minds, and spirits, it is integral to break the silence about black women's pain. According to Moore,

> It is not for M'Lissa's murder, however, that Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul is executed. Although a tsunga and a "national monument," as a woman M'Lissa is expendable. Tashi dies for breaking the silence surrounding the misery of women's lives in general and their circumcision in particular. (121)

Tashi finally possesses the secret of joy because she sees, with her death, the survival of hundreds, thousands, or perhaps millions, of girls and women. She says, as she dies, "I am no more. And satisfied" (*Possessing* 279). Her satisfaction stems from her ability to reach wholeness and make other black women survive. She describes the moment of her execution as "eternity" by which she will be "[r]eborn" (277).

The physical death of Tashi, like Sula's, will not obliterate her presence in the community's mind. Benny's conversation with Pierre about his mother's death shows how, in fact, Tashi's soul will never die.

> I can not believe my mother is going to die—and that dying means I will never see her again. When people die, where do they go? This is the question with which I pester Pierre. He says when people die they go back where they came from. Where is that? I ask him. Nothing, he says. They go back into Nothing. He wrote in huge letters in my notepad: NOTHING = NOT BEING = DEATH. […]. BUT EVERYTHING THAT DIES COMES AROUND AGAIN. I ask him if this means my mother will come back. He says, Yes, of course. Only not as your mother. (193)

Pierre's idea of Tashi's resurrection suggests that, besides being a survivalist for the girls and women of her community, Tashi will also survive in others' minds. Her death will not prevent her from surviving as a womanist prototype, which rejects both race and gender prejudice and seeks to preserve women's physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness. One day, when the community puts an end to the bloody ritual, Tashi will certainly become iconized in place of the tsunga M'Lissa.

In *The Color Purple*, Celie also plays an important role in the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Her rebellion against patriarchy makes her a womanist prototype that women should follow and men should accept. Celie's wholeness does not stop at achieving freedom from Mr. _____'s dominance but transcends it to seek equality with men. She starts by wearing pants. Then, she sews them for others.

When Celie knows that Mr. _____ has been hiding Nettie's letters for years, she responds in the same way Tashi does and tries to seek revenge. In order to murder M'Lissa, Tashi buys razors, the same tool used by the tsunga for circumcising girls. Celie takes Mr. _____'s razor,

the tool he uses for shaving, and intends to kill him with it. Like Tashi, who feels sorry for M'Lissa's sad stories and changes her mind about the way to kill her, Celie is stopped by Shug, who teaches her that violence is not the proper way to resolve problems. Instead, Shug advises Celie to start sewing, as Celie claims: "everyday we going to read Nettie's letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think" (*Color* 147). Cutter argues that "sewing does more than enable conversation: sewing is conversation, a language articulates relationships and connects and reconnects networks individuals to create a community" (172).

While the combination of sewing and reading helps connect people, sewing and writing destroy the traditional borders between genders. Cutter explains how the conflation of the discourse of the pen and the needle destroys gender norms in *The Color Purple*:

> [I]t is finally and most incisively through conflation and confusion that Walker's text achieves its most radical aims. After all, the pen has typically been an instrument of male empowerment, a phallic substitute instantiating men's control over women, while the needle has typically been associated with femininity, demarcating the contours and limits of women's sphere. When Walker's text conflates needle and pen, then, it undermines the most basic binary structures of patriarchal society: male versus female, public versus private, empowered versus disempowered, spoken versus silent. For if the needle has become the pen and the pen has become the needle, if the feminine and the masculine cannot in fact be separated, if patriarchal discourse has been replaced by a discourse that admits of both masculine and feminine subject positions, what pedestal remains for the subjugation of women and other "minorities" within culture? (176)

Celie also closes the gap between genders when she develops her talent into business, which guarantees her economic autonomy. As De Beauvoir's assumption, "[i]t is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom" (qtd. in Mussett and Wilkerson 49).

When Mr. _____ asks Celie, “what was so special bout [her] pants” (*Color* 276), she replies: “[a]nybody can wear them” (276). Celie’s pants do not only symbolize her economic independence but also the destruction of gender prejudice that accentuates the difference between men and women’s roles and clothes. Celie sews pants that both men and women can wear to emphasize gender equality. Mr. _____ believes that “[m]en and women not suppose to wear the same thing, […]. Men spose to wear the pants” (276). Celie later convinces him of her genderless pants and makes him sew them with her.

Celie becomes “an instructress of mankind who bestows the gift of consolidating fragments” (Baker and Piece-Baker 165). She, then, does not only create a community of sisterhood but also a community in which men can participate. King-Kok Cheung argues:

> Celie and Albert, sewing amicably together, are not engaged in a “feminine” (and therefore “un- manly”) activity. Although they envy Shug and Sofia's aggressiveness, they do not consider it un- womanly or specifically masculine-or intrinsically superior. Both sexes are allowed to craft their different lives, fashion their own destinies. (171)

Walker emphasizes this conflation of gender roles when she describes Celie and Albert sitting together, smoking pipes.

Metaphorically, Celie helps Albert, whom she calls Mr. _____ throughout the novel, accept men and women’s equality. He joins Celie in communal acts that help eradicate the differences that lead to sexual domination (Ross 14). Albert changes a lot. He is no longer the black patriarch portrayed at the beginning of the novel. He starts working instead of exploiting his wife and son. Harpo tells Celie how his father works very hard in the fields “from sunup to sundown” (*Color* 225). He adds: “[a]nd clean [the] house just like a woman. Even cook, […]. And what more, wash the dishes when he finish” (225). Christine Froula argues that “Walker's

novel creates temporary separate spheres for women and men in which gender hierarchy breaks down in the absence of the 'other,' enabling women and men eventually to share the world again" (640). Albert finally accepts Celie's independence. He even asks her to marry him again. Celie refuses his proposal, but they stay friends. Celie succeeds in achieving wholeness and imposing gender equality on men. By sewing her genderless pants, Celie acts as a survivalist for her community.

Black women's role as survivalists contributes to the well-being of the black community as a whole. Both Morrison and Walker advocate black women's commitment to save lives, help others define themselves, blur the lines between genders, and achieve justice, which enables future generations to survive.

4.4. "Womanish" Woman: Deeper Knowledge

Within the womanist discourse, Walker acknowledges the importance of knowledge when she calls black girls to search for their mothers' gardens, in which "a garden becomes a symbol for knowledge production" (Salami 20). Walker describes the "womanish" woman as the one who wants to "know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one" (*In Search* xi). The "womanish" woman's commitment to knowing more is necessary for her self-realization and self-empowerment. Walker, then, insists on the interconnectedness of knowledge and womanhood.

Like Walker, Collins considers knowledge as a crucial aspect of both black women's oppression and empowerment. She refers to the hegemonic ideology as the hegemonic power domain that validates knowledge through its ability to shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies (*Black Feminist* 285). This knowledge

works to oppress minor groups, specifically black people, and mainly black women. It validates their inferiority and shapes their lives.

In *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *The Color Purple*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, black society adopts hegemonic gender roles, though it seems difficult for black people to fit within its standards. The four novels portray black girls' struggles with the hegemonic knowledge of womanhood. Pecola, Sula, Celie, and Tashi are bombarded by definitions of "true" womanhood and stereotypes of black womanhood, which not only cast them apart but also have deep effects on their bodies and souls. Knowledge is important since it validates black women's submission, ugliness, and works towards erasing their sexuality and autonomy. In this regard, Walker calls on black females to search for new knowledge in order to challenge the existing truth. Salami argues:

> [P]erceiving knowledge as something we are in a race to acquire is just as crucial. To acquire means "to gain possession of," and this precisely is how we approach knowledge—as a quantifiable thing to be controlled and possessed in vast quantities, at all costs. Our politics, economics, laws, media, education, and policy are all formed around the fundamental position at the heart of [hegemonic] Knowledge, namely, that *the purpose of amassing knowledge is ultimately to rank, compete, and dominate*. (14, emphasis added)

Knowledge, then, is crucial in the power relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Collins explains how black women can use the hegemonic domain of power to craft new knowledge:

> As Black women's struggles for self-definition suggest, in contexts such as these where ideas matter, reclaiming the "power of a free mind" constitutes an important area of resistance. Reversing this process whereby intersecting oppressions harness various dimensions of individual subjectivity for their own ends becomes a central purpose of resistance. Thus, the hegemonic domain becomes a critical site for not just fending off hegemonic ideas from dominant culture, but in crafting counter-hegemonic knowledge that fosters changed consciousness. Regardless of the actual social locations where this process occurs—families, community settings, schools, religious institutions, or mass media institutions—the power of reclaiming these spaces for "thinking and doing not what is expected of us" constitutes an important dimension of Black women's empowerment. (*Black Feminist* 285)

Collins suggests that the first step towards black women's empowerment is to understand epistemology, or "*why* we believe what we believe to be true" (*Black Feminist* 252, emphasis in original). Black women then should assess the hegemonic truth about womanhood in order to create their own truth. As Salami argues, "demystifying knowledge is a process of redefining knowledge" (55). Black women's inability to question the dominant truth results in their inability to change their lives or even resist oppression.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola cannot understand the epistemology that relates her blackness to ugliness. She succumbs to the white definition of beauty and continuously prays to get blue eyes. Otherwise, her only wish is to disappear. Pecola is obsessed with white beauty to the point that she descends into madness to earn blue eyes. Her inability to question the hegemonic knowledge in the real world makes her validate her beauty in a world of fantasy.

Unlike Pecola, Sula rejects the hegemonic truth of women's submissiveness. She "fights against her race to promote her gender. She does not want to follow a traditional role where she is dependent on men for her success" (Cecchini 90). Sula's escape from the hegemonic

definition of womanhood breaks her relationship with both Nel and the black community. What distinguishes Sula from Claudia, Celie, and Tashi is her ability to comprehend epistemology without others' help.

Claudia requires her mother's assistance in understanding hegemonic beauty and its discrimination against blackness. She realizes that acknowledging white beauty means validating her ugliness. Similarly, Celie and Tashi need assistance to come to terms with their own suffering. Collins suggests that black women sometimes need the attendance of other black women in order to find their way towards empowerment. She claims: "[o]ther Black women may assist a Black woman in this journey toward personal empowerment, but the ultimate responsibility for self-definitions and self-valuations lies within the individual woman herself" (*Black Feminist* 119).

The construction of a new meaning of womanhood is necessary for black women to define themselves far from the racist and sexist prejudices. Sula, Claudia, Celie, and Tashi all find a new meaning to their womanhood, which is the outcome of personal experiences. Salami explains:

> When you change the dominant narrative, everything changes along with it. That's exactly why there is so much propaganda to uphold it. Defeating [hegemonic] Knowledge is therefore a challenging process. It involves a completely new way of thinking and being in the world. It means seeing knowledge not as static but as a creative project, something that grows and advances—a human activity, an artwork. But that's precisely what makes it worthwhile. (16)

It is critical to recognize that counter-hegemonic knowledge is not static and is dependent on the black woman's individual experiences and responses to these experiences.

Although black women as a group face common challenges, they do not have identical experiences. Differences among black women's experiences produce different patterns of experiential knowledge (Collins, Black *Feminist* 27). Moreover, black women's lived experiences enhance their credibility in crafting counter-hegemonic knowledge. Collins claims:

> [T]hose individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus lived experience as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by U.S. Black women when making knowledge claims. (*Black Feminist* 257)

The black woman, then, can develop her knowledge in different fields and disciplines such as education, work, social issues, and relationships. She "may use multiple strategies in her quest for the constructed knowledge of an independent voice" (Collins, *Black Feminist* 119).

Black women use different strategies to express their free voice because of the difficulties they may face if they use the hegemonic ones. Also, the diversity of strategies makes knowledge construction possible for every woman and in any place. Despite that there is "no single 'women's way of knowing,' but one thing is for sure—knowing that is socially situated in womanhood is antipatriarchal" (Salami 4).

Sula crafts her own counter-hegemonic knowledge when she leaves the Bottom. The last thing Sula does is attend Nel's wedding. Nel follows what she believes to be the ultimate woman's job, that of a wife and a mother. Sula sets herself apart. She refuses to be a replica of her grandmother Eva, her mother Hannah, or even her best friend Nel. Morrison writes:

> Hannah, Nel, Eva, Sula were points of a cross—each one a choice for characters bound by gender and race. The nexus of that cross would be a merging of responsibility and liberty difficult to reach, a battle among women who are understood to be least able to win it […] And the only possible triumph was that of the imagination. (*Sula* xi-xii)

Sula follows her imagination and crosses the boundaries of the Bottom to develop her full potential as an independent woman. She graduated from general school. Then, she gets an education in Nashville. She also travels to "Detroit, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Macon and San Diego" (120). Sula's education and experiences help her develop her wholeness as a strong black woman.

When Sula becomes sick and Nel visits her, the two former friends have a debate on women's roles and purposes in life. Nel accuses Sula of acting like a man. She claims: "[y]ou *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, taking what you want, leaving what you don't" (142-3, emphasis in original). For Sula, Nel is repeating herself because "a woman and colored [is] the same as being a man" (142), and "every man [she] ever knew left his children" (143). Sula highlights black women's contradictory gender roles. Since black men leave their households, black women become the breadwinners for their families. Though they are playing men's roles in society, they are afraid of independence, which makes them reject Sula and label her a pariah. Sula refuses to be compared to men. She, rather, sees herself as an independent woman. This last conversation stimulates Nel's awakening and validates Sula's knowledge of womanhood.

According to Collins, "[f]or Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other

members of a community" (*Black Feminist* 260). Dialog is a platform on which people interact, exchange ideas, express points of view, and arrive at conclusions. Dialogue is also important in the womanist discourse. Phillips explains that

> Dialogue is a means by which people express and establish both connection and individuality. Dialogue permits negotiation, reveals standpoint, realizes existential equality, and shapes social reality. Dialogue is the locale where both tension and connection can be present simultaneously; it is the site for both struggle and love. (xxvii)

Dialogue makes the individual's contribution to hegemonic knowledge a communal belief.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's destruction makes Claudia develop a counter-hegemonic knowledge through which she understands both Pecola's weakness and victimization. On the one hand, Pecola's passivity makes her responsible for her own devastation. On the other hand, Pecola is a victim because everything is against her; the hegemonic knowledge that puts her at the bottom of the beauty scale, her community's adoption of the hegemonic beauty, and even her mother, who legitimizes her ugliness through hatred. Claudia and Frieda decide to give up all that they own and ask God to save Pecola's baby.

> "Let's ask Him to let Pecola's baby live and promise to be good for a whole month."
> "O.K. But we better give up something so He'll know we really mean it this time."
> "Give up what? We ain't got nothing. Nothing but the seed money, two dollars."
> "We could give that. Or, you know what? We could give up the bicycle. Bury the money and . . . plant the seeds." (*Bluest* 189-190)

The two sisters' hope for the baby's survival fails due to the community's refusal to participate in the survival process. According to Collins, black people should not only participate in dialogue but should be active in order "for ideas to be tested and validated"

(*Black Feminist* 261). Otherwise, "[t]o refuse to join in, especially if one really disagrees with what has been said, is seen as 'cheating'" (qtd. in Collins, *Black Feminist* 261).

Black people's passivity is not acceptable because it validates the hegemonic truth. The black community cheats on Pecola, and no miracle can save her from this devastating fate. Claudia claims:

> I talk about how I did *not* plant the seeds too deeply, how 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. (*Bluest* 204)

Claudia understands the values of the dominant culture and analyzes the effects of internalized racism. She insists on the black community's role in devastating Pecola's life. Its adoption of a white discriminatory ideology prevents Pecola and her baby's survival.

Later, when Claudia becomes a grown woman, she recounts Pecola's story from her own perspective. She is able to judge and explain what is wrong in Pecola's life:

> [W]e were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life. We substituted good grammar for intellect; we switched habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the Revelation and the Word. (203-4)

Claudia criticizes the black community's adoption of the hegemonic ideology, where habits change and lies become truth. Although she could not save Pecola and her baby, her role as a

storyteller helps in revealing the lie of Pecola's ugliness, which devastates her life. According to L. Williams,

> Claudia affirms that there are melodies in grief and to write and speak of those experiences that have remained unrecorded is to begin to heal the invisible wounds created by silence. Claudia is connected to the oral tradition of her ancestors, which is communicated to her through her mother's songs. (76)

Claudia, as a storyteller, recounts Pecola's story to prevent black girls from becoming replicas of Pecola.

In *The Color Purple*, Celie broadens her business and educational knowledge. On her arrival in Memphis, she starts thinking about how to make a living. Celie understands that economic independence is necessary to achieve full independence. She establishes her own folk-pants business, which conveys a message of gender equality to counter the hegemonic belief in inequality.

In addition to work, Celie starts learning to develop her speaking skills. Darlene corrects Celie's speech until she speaks the right way. Celie states: "Darlene trying to teach me how to talk. She say US not so hot. A dead country give-away. You say US where most folks say WE, she say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amuse" (*Color* 218). Berlant comments on the importance of education in both Celie and Nettie's lives:

> What saves Celie and Nettie from disenfranchisement is their lifelong determination to learn, to become literate: Nettie's sense that knowledge was the only route to freedom from the repressive family scene gave her the confidence to escape, to seek "employment" with Samuel's family, to record the alternative and positive truth of Pan-African identity, to face the truth about her own history, to write it down, and to send it to Celie, against all odds. Writing was not only the repository of personal and national hope; it became a record of lies and violences that ultimately produced truth. (44)

Like Nettie, Celie moves away "from an existence as a victim in a patriarchal plot toward a linguistic and narratological presence as the author/subject of her own story" (Cutter 163). Letters, for Celie, are no longer a way to communicate her shame but to assert subjectiveness and presence. In her final letters to Nettie, Celie uses two signatures: "[y]our loving Sister, Celie" (244), and "[y]our Sister, Celie, Folkspants, Unlimited" (217). The two signatures illustrate her status as a loving, nurturing sister and her profession as a folk-pants designer, which "contrast sharply with her earlier inability to say 'I am'" (Cutter 152).

Celie succeeds in approving her language and style, which is clearly illustrated in her depiction of her sorrow after Shug has deserted her:

> I talk to myself a lot, standing in front the mirror. Celie, I say, happiness was just a trick in your case. Just cause you never had any before Shug, you thought it was time to have some, and that it was gon last. Even thought you had the trees with you. The whole earth. The stars. But look at you. When Shug left, happiness desert. (263)

Cheung comments on the previous passage by claiming:

> Celie's changing style reflects her growing knowledge. Her letters progress from a simple recording to a sophisticated re-creation of dialogues and events, charged with suspense, humor, and irony […] Although the passage expresses the pains of a lost love, the contemplative tone, the ironical perspective, and the metaphorical language show us how far Celie has traveled as a writer and how much more in control she has become than when she first wrote to God for help. Her dialect, once broken, has assumed a lyrical cadence. The woman who was "too dumb" to learn now creates poetry. (171)

Celie moves from the bottom to the highest level of self-empowerment. She has finally reached her wholeness. She claims: "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time" (*Color* 218). Celie crafts new knowledge about gender roles and gender-relations that can serve as a model for future generations. As Priscilla Walton argues, "[t]he womanist utopia of the conclusion signifies a renewal of the initial social order because it is more accessible and more humane. Walker's utopia is 'humanist' as well as womanist in the sense that it offers a revivification of humanity as a whole" (76).

Throughout *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi wants to know more about the reasons behind female circumcision. She eventually realizes that the ritual is not a means of expressing national identity, but rather a patriarchal tool that has killed her sexuality, her sister, and many other girls and women in various ways. Tashi is convinced that little girls are infected by the "unwashed, unsterilized sharp stones, tin tops, bits of glass, rusty razors and gringy knives used by the tsunga" (*Possessing* 247).

She has cultivated an individual consciousness about the devastated body and soul of the circumcised woman. Tashi gives Mbati a doll with full genitals named Nyanda. Tashi states:

> I have kept the little sacred figure of Nyanda—I have named her, choosing a word that floated up while I held her in my hands—carefully wrapped in my most beautiful scarf. The one of deep blue with gold stars scattered over it, like the body of Nut, goddess of Africa, and the night sky. I take it from my pocket, where I have been keeping it since I learned I would be executed, and place it in Mbati's hands.
> This is for my granddaughter, I say.
> Your little doll! she says, touched. You know, she says, unwrapping it, it looks like you.
> No, I say, I could never have that look of confidence. Of pride. Of peace. Neither of us can have it, because self-possession will always be impossible for us to claim. But perhaps your daughter. (*Possessing* 270-1)

The doll shows the woman's body, which sexism tries to strip away from the black woman. According to Moore, the clay fertility dolls are "symbolic of a magical, strong autoerotic matriarchal society, which is now denounced by the males for political purposes" (115-6). The doll summarizes the secret of joy. It implies the necessity of resisting the sexist ritual and preserving women's bodies in order to survive and achieve wholeness.

Tashi succeeds in crafting counter-hegemonic knowledge about female genital mutilation. Despite her death, she ensures the continuity of black women's resistance to the bloody ritual. Mbati "serves as continuation of Tashi, she is an interlink between generations of African women" (Golubeva 40). Also, women who attend her execution bring "ancient fertility dolls, 'wild flowers, herbs, seeds, beads,' and 'ears of corn' in a feminist celebration of women's harvest [which suggests] the coming of age, the coming of consciousness" (Moore 121).

Both Morrison and Walker encourage black women's search for knowledge to resist the conventional definition of womanhood and dismantle the stereotypical images of black womanhood. As Salami argues, "knowledge is both the seed and the fruit of the culture it

produces. To produce nourishing fruit, we need to plant sublime seeds" (3). Knowledge is not limited to black women's education but transcends to their work, social issues, and relationships and depends on black women's living experiences to ensure its credibility. Accordingly, both Morrison and Walker make self-realization and self-empowerment possible for every woman.

Conclusion

The genesis of a "womanish" identity in *The Bluest* Eye, *Sula, The Color Purple*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* gives black women an alternative way to define themselves, far from the hegemonic womanhood and the controlling images of black womanhood embedded in both white and black societies. Both Morrison and Walker embrace the womanist identity by portraying black women's courage and audacity. The womanist advocacy of assertive behavior is mainly to challenge women's traditional passivity, which enhances their submission and subordination. Black women's strength is necessary to guarantee the continuity of their resistance against race and gender prejudice. Morrison and Walker emphasize womanist self-love and other love that benefit both selfhood and communal well-being. They portray black women's self-love through their physical and emotional self-possession. The two authors insist on breaking down racial and/or gender barriers to achieve the more universalist love required to build healthy communities and societies. Survival is also an important component of womanist womanhood. Through their contributions to others' physical and emotional well-being and their advocacy of gender equality and justice, black women show their commitment to the survival and wholeness of the entire people. Both Morrison and Walker have illustrated how knowledge works in destroying and redefining black womanhood. Hegemonic knowledge manipulates ideas and images of black women,

which strip away their independence, sexuality, and beauty. In order to counter this hegemonic knowledge and foster their self-definition and self-empowerment, black women must be committed to knowing more.

General Conclusion

This thesis tackled black women's struggle to give a new meaning to their womanhood within the larger context of racism and sexism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The study has shown that the controlling images of the matriarch, the mammy, the mule, the jezebel, the unprotective mother, and the ugly black woman do not only make black women the antithesis of white women but also distort their conception of femininity. Although black women seek to fulfill their wifely and motherly duties, these images are so powerful that they cannot escape them. It has been indicated that both Morrison and Walker have portrayed distant mothers who are unable to take care of their children and even participate in their daughters' torture. However, both authors insist that mothering is not linked to women's chastity by presenting black women who are capable of mothering despite their sexual freedom.

This research has revealed that race and gender prejudice seeks to control black women's sexuality by insisting on their excessive sexual appetite and suppressing their sexual freedom, which intensifies their moral autonomy. Black women are viewed as bad wives whose authority and position as head of the household emasculate black men. The thesis has reached an important finding: that of the regretful matriarch, which refers to the black woman's remorse for her inability to perform the traditional role of the domestic, submissive wife. Also, no prior studies have deeply discussed the controversial image of the mule in *The Color Purple*, which degrades the black wife's position and legitimizes her labor exploitation. The specific physical traits required to be regarded as a "beautiful" woman not only reduce black women's self-esteem but also increase their self-hatred. Despite the black community's

emphasis on the "true" black blood, they still strive for lighter skin, which divides the community according to skin color hierarchy.

This study argued that black men's physical, sexual, and emotional dominance has a great impact on the distortion of black femininity. Hegemonic masculinity influences black men's behavior towards black women in which they exert power over their bodies and control their sexualities. This study also shows its importance in tackling the issue of the lack of love in the mother-daughter relationship and its transgenerational devastating effects on both the mother and the daughter. It has been demonstrated that the mother's negligence, passivity, and complicity maintain the daughter's objectification. Besides, the black community's adoption of different forms of silence to hide black men's sexist oppression of black women contributes to preserving unjust black sexual politics.

The main benefit of this research stems from its deep examination of the main characteristics of the "womanish" woman in Morrison and Walker's selected novels. The "womanish" identity is not limited to some features ascribed to black females but encompasses all black women's activities and roles in everyday lives and everyday experiences that contribute to the social change process. This research has shown that both Morrison and Walker embrace the "womanish" prototype in their selected novels through emphasizing black women's assertive and survivalist behaviors, which are noticeable in their resistance to oppression, self-definition, and self-empowerment.

Black women display the "womanish" woman's outrageous, audacious, courageous, and willful behavior in their commitment to protecting other black women from physical, sexual, and emotional hurt. Morrison presents strong black girls who reject social conventions and show their ability to grow alone. In Walker's novels, black women revolt against oppression

and exhibit a determination to achieve justice. Both Morrison and Walker address the issue of self-hatred and the way it whittles down black women's resistance. Due to the different forms of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, black women fall into the dispossession of their bodies and even wish to disappear. This study has indicated that to challenge oppression, these women have embraced the womanist tenet of self-love. They start loving their bodies and blackness, reclaiming their subjectivity and asserting their autonomy.

Black women demonstrate their ability to love others. They engage in sexual and non-sexual sisterhood in which they assist other women in their struggle against subordination. Morrison and Walker shed light on the issue of rape and female genital excision to show that black women's sexualities lie at the heart of their subjection. To promote sexual assertiveness, Morrison urges black women to engage in a variety of sexual experiences, while Walker enhances celibate sisterhood, which encompasses sexual wholeness and spiritual holiness. It is important to note that no prior study has tackled Walker's womanist conception of celibacy. Black women also display a universalist love that surpasses the boundaries of gender and/or race. They finally accept white women, but never their prejudiced beauty. They reconcile with both white and black men who share equal relationships with them and improve their empowerment.

The "womanish" woman is committed to the commonweal through different roles and strategies, which are primarily based on her wellness. Womanists "inherently recognize the principle of 'as above, so below.' As such, bodily health is an indicator of and conduit for societal and environmental health" (Phillips xxx). Both Morrison and Walker espouse the womanist perspective in considering the necessity of black women's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to achieve social justice and commonweal. This research has shown that

black women in the four selected novels are committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison concentrates on the importance of the physical and mental survival of black people to challenge the white and black communities' hatred of blackness. She criticizes the black community's refusal to participate in the survival process, which resulted in a tragic failure.

This study has looked at the way Morrison followed the womanist flexible conception of motherhood, which shifts from blood-mothering to other-mothering, where both men and women are engaged in the process. Morrison insists on mothering as a constructive way to achieve commonweal by focusing on black mothers' creative spirits, which shape black girls' consciousness about race and gender prejudice. Although other studies have tackled the mother artist in *The Bluest Eye* by focusing on Mrs. MacTeer's songs and storytelling, this study shows its uniqueness through its deep investigation of Walker's conception of creative motherhood, which includes the mother's artistic productions as well as the minor and major activities of her daily life. The black mother's creative spirit works in enhancing her daughter's self-acceptance, realization, and worth. Otherwise, she participates in her weakness, which threatens the commonweal of the black community.

In *Sula*, Morrison shows black women's ability to influence other women to come to terms with their domination and start living for themselves. She presents black women who rebel against the dominant conventions of womanhood and become social outcasts. Rebellious daughterhood is an important finding in this research. Rebellion, in the womanist context, is a healthy aspect since it questions existing conventions and raises the black community's consciousness. Morrison considers the pariah as a stimulus to the community's union and change. The community's rejection of change results in the destruction of both the individual

and the community itself. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker urges future generations to resist the ritual of female genital excision and preserve the wholeness of their bodies. In *The Color Purple*, she emphasizes the conflation of gender roles, which is fundamental to the survival of black men, black women, and the black community.

Black women in Morrison and Walker's novels display their "womanishness" in their devotion to knowing more than what is considered good for them. They understand the hegemonic knowledge that manipulates ideas and images of their femininity. This study has demonstrated that black women's exclusive experiences of race and gender prejudice foster their self-empowerment in different fields and disciplines such as education, work, and social issues, through which they establish a new truth about their womanhood.

Future academic research may investigate the womanist theology in Morrison and Walker's selected novels. Although this research has investigated spirituality in *The Color Purple*, a lot more remains unexplored. Both Morrison and Walker give specific importance to spirituality in black women's lives. It is necessary, then, to shed light on the relationship between spirituality and black womanhood. Still, the flexibility of womanism may allow other readings of black womanhood in Morrison and Walker's fiction.

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