

T.C.
DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

**DOUBLE REPRESSION OF BLACK WOMEN
IN THE BLUEST EYE AND COLOR PURPLE**

Elif ARSLAN

Danışman
Yrd. Doç. Dr. Nilsen GÖKÇEN

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- 4- Ten Rengi
- 5- Cinsiyet

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- 3- Black Community
- 4- Skin Color
- 5- Gender

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ÖZET

Tezli Yüksek Lisans

**The Bluest Eye ve Color Purple Romanlarındaki Siyahi Kadınların Üzerindeki
Çifte Baskı**

Elif ARSLAN

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi

Sosyal Bilimleri Enstitüsü

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Bu tezin amacı, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde süregelen ırk ve cinsiyet ayrımcılığını ve bu ırkçı ve cinsiyet ayrımcı politikaların siyahi topluluklarda, özellikle siyahi kadınlar üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini gözler önüne sermektir. Irkçı ve cinsiyet ayrımcı politikaların siyahi toplumu ne derecede etkilediğini göstermek amacıyla bu çalışmada Alice Walker'ın *The Color Purple* ve Toni Morrison'ın *The Bluest Eye* adlı romanlarından yararlanılmıştır.

İki romanın da incelenmesi sonucunda, Birleşik Devletler'deki ırkçı ve cinsiyet ayrımcı politikalar karşısında ten rengi ve cinsiyeti nedeniyle daha alt seviyede görülen siyahi kadının en çok ezilen grup olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Ancak, Walker'ın da romanında vurguladığı gibi, bu durum siyahi kadınların değiştirilemez kaderi olarak değerlendirilmemelidir. Çözüm, toplum içinde bir birlik ve destek ağı kurmakta yatmaktadır. Özetle, siyahi toplumdaki hoşgörü ve beraberlik inancı, nihayetinde ezilmiş bireylerin yükselmelerine olanak sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1- Irk Ayrımcılığı, 2- Cinsiyet Ayrımcılığı, 3- Siyahi Toplum 4- Ten Rengi, 5- Cinsiyet

ABSTRACT

Master of Arts Degree

Double Repression of Black Women in the Bluest Eye and Color Purple

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The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the prevailing racist and sexist practices in the United States, and particularly to examine the adverse effects of racism and sexism in black communities and specifically black women. The thesis uses Alice Walker's The Color Purple and Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye to examine to what extent racism and sexism have influenced black people's lives.

Upon examining the two novels, it becomes evident that in the face of racist and sexist politics in the United States, black woman is the one that suffers most due to her skin-color and gender that somehow put her into a subservient position. However, as Alice Walker in her novel points out, the designated position of black women should not be regarded as their unchangeable fates. The solution lies in creating a web of cooperation and support within the community. To summarize, tolerance and unity beliefs in black community can eventually enable the rise of the suppressed individuals.

KEY WORDS: 1- Racism, 2- Sexism, 3-Black Community, 4- Gender, 5- Skin Color

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INTRODUCTION

The struggle to keep American literature exclusively white has been a long one, but in reality American literature cannot be thought of independently of African-American literature, whose existence goes back to the earliest slave narratives of the 17th century. In all the years following the 17th century, African-American literature, specifically African-American novel, has had a matchless voice representing the unique experiences of blacks in America, though it was not until the 1960s that this voice could be appreciated by a wider range of readers.

Although in the 1960s', American slavery was past and supposedly equality between whites and blacks was finally achieved, in practice, discrimination towards blacks was still alive. In the midst of the 20th century, blacks were no longer able to tolerate the hypocrisy of American democracy which still forced the country's black population to feel as an inferior class and to accept the second-class treatment from all American institutions. This weariness combined with a new black-consciousness fueled black women and men to start the Civil Rights Movements of the 60s that keep its effects till today.

During the Civil Rights Movements of the 60s, black women initiated many sit-ins and protests, but most of the time their presence was ignored by black men. Even though black women initiated many organizations, they were never regarded as leaders—but merely supporters by black men. Despite the exclusion of black women from top positions in movement organizations and the little recognition they received from whites as well as blacks, many women activists claim that the movement gave women a sense of empowerment as Bernice Reagon, a woman activist, states: “I learned that I did have a life to give for what I believed. Lots of people do not know that. They feel they don't know anything. When you understand that you have a life it gives you a sense of power. So I was empowered by the Civil Rights Movement” (qtd. in Crawford et al., 1993; 185). Undoubtedly, the political and social

achievements they gained after the movements gave black women a renewed self-trust and hope for a better future.

It was after the 1960s that two black women novelists, stimulated by the free expression atmosphere which prevailed in social life as well as literature, could make their voices heard through their great literary accomplishments. In a century that witnessed the achievements of black female writers, the activist and woman of letters Alice Walker (1944-) was crowned with the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Awards with her book *The Color Purple* (1982), and writer and lecturer Chloe Anthony “Toni” Morrison (1931-) received the Pulitzer Prize with her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970). In their works, Walker and Morrison reflect the reality amongst black people, indicating the fact that sexism in black community is as widespread and harmful as white racism. Besides, both novels explore the true definitions of black womanhood. While going into the details of these themes, Walker and Morrison search for a female autonomy through their female protagonists, which can be regarded as black female writers’ attempts to liberate themselves from the standard European and male-dominated literary trends.

Walker and Morrison do not deviate from the oral and written tradition of African-American literature as they employ new themes and forms in their works. While exploring new themes such as woman’s cooperation, sexism, incest and even lesbian love in their novels, Walker and Morrison follow the earlier slave narratives in forming the structure of their works and adhere to the local-color tradition. Thus, it is a prerequisite to go back to the former products in African-American literature so as to comprehend the essence of these writers’ contemporary works and identify the characteristics of African-American novel, which is unprecedented due to a number of reasons.

First of all, African-American literature is a combination of indigenous black folklore and western literary genres. It is the creation of a group who was forced to feel ‘marginal’ by the Euro-centric American culture, and for blacks the novel, as well as other genres, provides a sense of wholeness, personal and social freedom. In

other words, the novel acts as a medium for blacks to portray their unique experiences that clash with the white-Americans' reality in the country. According to Bell, three key terms play a central role in Afro-American novels, and all of these terms represent the unique experiences of blacks in America:

Double-consciousness signifies the biracial and bicultural identities of Afro-Americans, *socialized ambivalence*, the dancing of attitudes of Americans of African ancestry between integration and separation, a shifting identification between the values of the dominant white and subordinate black cultural systems as a result of institutionalized racism, and *double vision*, an ambivalent, laughing-to-keep-from-crying perspective toward life as expressed in the use of irony and parody in Afro-American folklore and formal art. (1989; vi)

The dynamics Bell notes also determine the distinctions between Euro-American novel and Afro-American novel. The novel, as a genre, reflects the individual and collective experiences of its producer. Just like the experiences of whites and blacks in America differ, so do their novels. The unique experiences of blacks in slavery, in Southern plantations, emancipation, segregation, lynching and racism constitute a collective memory for African-Americans. These experiences that create the whole black reality do not comply with the ideals of white America and this clash is a recurrent theme in African-American novelists' works.

The foremost and perhaps most bitter African-American experience is slavery. Unlike other lighter-skinned indentured servants of the 17th century who could receive their freedoms after seven years of labor time, most African descendants were not given their freedom. Their indentured servitude was forever, involuntary and hereditary. That unjust attitude partly stemmed from the fact that black man, because of his dark skin, was always an outsider in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon majority despite the fact that black men's arrival in the continent was as early as the 17th century. Being both an outsider and an early settler inevitably created the "basic paradox underlying black American experience" (Horton & Edwards, 1974; 579). It was slavery, the most terrifying outcome of this paradox, which put permanent marks on the writings of African-American novelists in all decades. As a reflection of black people's resentment with their unbearable living conditions in the

continent, early Afro-American novel in the 18th and 19th centuries mainly dealt with the issues of slavery and the conflict between white masters and black slaves.

Early Afro-American novel, which greatly influenced the contemporary African-American black women novelists, has three periods: Antebellum Novels (1853-1865), Post-bellum Novels (1865-1902), Pre-World War I Novels (1902-1917). Novels belonging to the first period reflected the struggles of blacks in oppressive white society under the harsh conditions of slavery which dehumanized blacks in every possible way. What is noteworthy about this pre-civil war period is that blacks were denied the right to read or write by law since learning would mean trouble for the white plantation owners who regarded blacks most of the time as incapable of thinking and reasoning. Many blacks, like Frederick Douglass and Williams Wells Brown, however, managed to learn by themselves the English Alphabet in spite of all the hardships put on their way since they were firm in their beliefs that freedom came with knowledge. These black slaves were also aware of the fact that writing was the only instrument they could use so as to make their voices heard through generations. Thus, writing was more than a luxury for the early African-American writers; it was a necessity to announce their reality and the only way that they could claim autonomy in the face of oppressive white society. Words were, as they still are, the only weapons they had to declare their visions of life, which did not conform to the standards of whites.

Earlier black novelists put in writing their own memories mostly in the form of letters like William Wells Brown (Clotel, 1847) and female novelist Harriet E. Wilson. Wilson's novel Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two-Story White House, North. Showing That Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There (1859) reflects the common theme of the period: an appeal targeting the white conscience for the end of slavery. This appeal was quite common amongst the black-male novelists who believed that their troubles were merely direct results of white oppression. If slavery came to an end, black population would be free from all the miseries they had to go through.

Black-male novelists insisted on writing about the white-black tension, but female novelists did not restrict themselves in terms of subject matter. As Sandi Russell notes in Render Me My Song: African-American Writers from Slavery to the Present, slavery was not the only issue that came to the foreground in black-female novelists' works. In her novel, "[r]isking the possibility of hostile reactions, Harriet E. Wilson dared to confront the taboo on inter-racial marriage, of which she was an offspring" (1990; 14). While black-male novelists chose to narrate only the tension between whites and blacks, female novelists were more daring in their writings. In Wilson's age, inter-racial marriage was regarded as a taboo no one dared to write about. In the 20th century, similarly inter-racial rape is viewed as an 'unspeakable' thing, but courageous female writers, like Walker and Morrison, do not feel afraid to foreground this reality in their works.

Following Wilson, Maria W. Stewart is another important name representing the literature of the antebellum period. Her work Adam Negro's Tryalls is considered to be the earliest written account of an individual black person's life in America. In this work, Stewart declares that Christianity is not reserved to white people, blacks have the right and capacity to practice this religion as well. Reflecting this approach, Stewart's novel "argues for a revival of Christian morality and for social advancement through education and moral suasion" (Foster, 1993; 3), the very same ideas that echo in Alice Walker's The Color Purple through one of the characters, Nettie, who illuminates the reader with her arguments about the necessity for true Christianity and education for the uplifting of the race in general and women in particular.

Generally speaking, antebellum novels are like the first-hand documentations of black men and women's lives in slavery. These autobiographical works criticize the racist oppression and Christian hypocrisy practiced by whites, but their criticisms are often milder. The mild tone in their writings proves that the time for blacks to renounce their ideas boldly had not come yet. Instead of attacking whites openly, black writers of the period used Christianity as a tool in their works and demanded

whites to be real Christians both in act and mind and thus, treat blacks as real human beings.

Post-bellum novels were written after The American Civil War (1865), and significantly the chief cause of this war between North and South was slavery. The end of the Civil War brought freedom to four million slaves, but the reality of black people did not change radically: “For white America, it was an age of technology, commerce, and finance, while for black America it was an age of short-lived political freedom and long-term peonage, repressive laws, convict labor, and lynching” (Bell, 1989; 56). Indeed, black people’s long-term goals were not fulfilled with the abolishment. Besides, this relatively bright situation was valid only for the Northern blacks. In the South, blacks were still treated as life-time servants in whites’ plantations or houses. They could not enjoy the freedoms of ordinary white citizens. “The ‘slave’ work of sharecropping, Jim Crow laws, no voting rights, rampant racism, persistent poverty” (Russell, 1990; 116) forced many blacks to organize nonviolent riots against whites, but those blacks who were courageous enough to stand up for their rights were either lynched by white racist groups such as Ku Klux Klans or threatened in the most terrifying ways. Blacks were, in other words, still treated as lesser beings. The novels written after the Civil War show this apparent conflict between theory and practice. On the one hand slavery was allegedly over, but on the other hand blacks were still living at the bottom of society. Undoubtedly, black women because of their gender and skin-color were receiving the worst treatment.

Although black women were even in a worse position than black men in many arenas of life, they still managed to produce significant works. One of these women novelists of the post-bellum period, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, for instance, with her novel Iola Leroy; or Shadows Uplifted (1859) proved the literary accomplishments of black women. Harper’s novel is about the struggle of a woman in search of equality in the face of racist and sexist society, but besides that the most important thing about the heroine Iola is that she is a mulatto, representing mixed blood. By making such a choice, Harper wants to appeal to the desire of her white

audience who prefers to see some 'noble' blood in the main character. Harper is subordinated to the dominant white culture's tastes and desires to impress her white audience. Russell explains Harper's choice this way:

One particular factor that had to be faced was that black women were not considered beautiful by white American society. If Harper was to conform to the novel of the day then the story had to be based on a 'beautiful' heroine. The only choice open to African-American writers of the nineteenth century was to make the heroine a mulatto. To give her some white blood was tantamount to blessing her with 'beauty'. (1989; 16-17)

In nineteenth century' America, it is evident that beauty meant whiteness and darkness was matched with ugliness. Even in the 20th century, in Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970), the same definitions of beauty in white terms surface. The heroine of this novel Pecola, unlike the mulatto girl of Harper, does not fit into the beauty standards of the dominant culture, which eventually leads to her loss of identity. Her 'failure' to be 'beautiful' is a great sin not only in the eyes of white-dominated society but also in those of the black society. In the end, the internalization of the white beauty standards causes the destruction of an eleven-year-old girl, but generally speaking it causes the tragic falls of many 'others' like Pecola whose reality as poor, black female individual clashes with societal norms. In short, nineteenth-century novelist Harper's heroine saves herself thanks to her lighter-skin whereas Morrison's protagonist faces a terrible end since she is the darkest, poorest and 'ugliest' amongst all the other characters.

Alongside with Harper, another significant black-female writer of the 19th century is Anna Julia Cooper, one of the first black feminists. In her essay "A Voice From the South", she dared to voice her plea for the equality between not only two races but also two sexes. Next to other feminists of her era, Cooper believed that women were the agents of morality in the home and that the education of black women would uplift the entire race.

What makes these first black women writers unique is that even as early as the 19th century, they were aware of the inequalities in their lives, and despite the

constant struggles of white/black men to 'silence' them, they did not feel hesitant to break away from the constraints. Moreover, they were conscious of the fact that their designated position was somehow different from that of the white women: "African-American women writers knew that they faced great odds, that theirs was a particularly difficult test because they were confronting not only sexism but also racism" (Foster, 1993; 7). Black women, being an outsider both in the eyes of black men and white women, were aware that they could not identify with either of these two groups. A century later, it was Alice Walker who formulized a new identity for black women, in the concept of womanism, which embraced all the human beings regardless of their race or gender.

African-American novels belonging to the period between 1902 and 1917 deal with different issues apart from slavery or feminism. In those years, many blacks migrated from the South to the North where they hoped to lead better lives, but the reality in Northern cities did not offer them much. In the North, "the denial of civil rights and the patterns of white violence were equally widespread" (Bell, 1989; 77). The writers of this period, most importantly William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, reflect the turbulence amongst the black citizens whose demands for equality were still left unfulfilled. While exploring the values of American 'democracy', the writers belonging to this period did not however attack the system itself. Their criticisms were mostly directed at the institutions that corrupted the system.

By far the most influential period in African-American literature was the Harlem Renaissance, the cultural movement of African-Americans in the 1920s and early 1930s. It was a decade that witnessed the rebirth of African-American culture and literature which attracted significant attention from the nation at large. However, it was on the whole a male-centered movement excluding women in every possible way. The founders of this movement were educated middle-class black men who migrated to New York to take advantage of industrial North. In the novels of this period, new themes started to be woven in black men's works such as an interest in the roots, a strong sense of racial pride and desire for social and political equality. But the most significant characteristics of the Harlem Renaissance, which came to an

end with the Great Depression, was the diversity of its expression in different art forms such as painting, music, theater as well as literature. This lack of uniformity in expression actually contributed to the richness of African-American culture.

In literature, the most significant name in the history of black women writers is Zora Neale Hurston, the 'mother' of black women's literary tradition, who wrote during the Harlem Renaissance. Even though Hurston wrote in that period, she was unrecognized by the male literary community. Her writings remained in the shadows of the male novelists until they were rediscovered in the 1970s with great contributions of Alice Walker who admired Hurston greatly. Walker's role-model, Hurston, had a prolific writing career, in fact "she left no stone unturned" (Russell, 1990; 37). During her career as a writer, anthropologist, teacher, and journalist, she managed to write twelve short-stories, two dramas, countless numbers of essays and four novels. But according to Bell, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Hurston's best product ever owing to the fact that, "its language is poetic without being folksy, its structure loose without being disjointed, its characters stylized without being exotic, and its theme of personal wholeness centered on egalitarianism in living and loving, especially in heterosexual relationships" (1989; 121). These are the very same analyses that can be made regarding Walker's *The Color Purple* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. In both of these writers' novels, the language is poetic and embellished with black folkloric music, yet it is not simple. The characters are tangible and the protagonists are in search for identity. Finally, in the end, love offers the solution to all the problems that are possible to arise because of the racist and sexist practices of society.

Instead of writing about only the white community and showing it as the sole reason of blacks' troubles, Hurston held a mirror to the black community itself. Walker also followed Hurston's tradition and set her plot in the South where the black family is still patriarchal. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a novel that speaks for all the black women (like Walker's novel where the heroine is in a search of herself): "The heroine, Janie Crawford, is the first black woman in American fiction who is not stereotyped as either a slut, a 'tragic mulatto', a mammy or a

victim of racist oppression” (Russell, 1990; 40-41). In that respect, Janie is very much like Celie in Walker’s novel. For Walker, Hurston was “a genius of the South” (Russell, 1990; 45) who greatly inspired Walker, “her literary daughter, spiritual guide” (Bell, 1989; 127). Walker wrote two essays namely “Zora Neale Hurston” and “Looking for Zora” to celebrate the life and accomplishments of her mentor. Besides, about the racial and sexual politics in America, Walker projected Hurston’s message in her works, which is conveyed by Janie’s grandma in the novel:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh hind out. Maybe it’s some place off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don’t know nothin’ but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin’ fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, lawd, lawd. . . . You ain’t got nobody but me. . . . Ah got tuh try and do for you befo’ mah head is cold. (Hurston, 1937; 16-17)

According to this passage, at the top of the pyramid the white man stands and at the bottom the poor, black woman. The very same deduction is repeated in Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. In both novels, female protagonists receive the worst kind of treatment from whites in general and black men in particular because of their designated position as the lowest of all groups.

As it is evident in Hurston’s, Morrison’s and Walker’s novels, regardless of time and place, black women are always the ones who are most blatantly oppressed not only by white injustice but also by male hegemony. Unlike black men, who are victimized because of their skin-color, and white women because of their sex, a black woman is doubly oppressed due to her blackness and womanhood. Besides, her poverty adds a third dimension to that oppression since constructed race, class, and gender identities all cooperate to designate a person’s social status. Thus, a black woman experiences the utmost painful version of discrimination; a kind of oppression that puts her apart from the white women as well as black men and middle class black woman from lower class black woman.

Earlier slavery narratives and Harlem Renaissance, specifically Hurston, greatly influenced Walker and Morrison, but these were not all. Black Power Movement and The Women's Rights Movements in the 60s and 70s also shaped the form and content of contemporary black women writers. As Bell states, black power as a concept "expresses the determination of black people to define and liberate themselves" (1989; 236); it is a direct voice of black America whose needs and aspirations have been left out by whites for a long time. In the late 60s, Civil Rights Movements initiated by Black Power Movement had a significant outcome. The second wave feminism gained momentum during the civil rights movements of the 1960s, when the struggle by African Americans to achieve racial equality inspired women to renew their own struggle for equality. The liberation movements of the blacks and women followed a parallelism since both groups had a common heritage of suppression.

Race and gender definitions reflect the interests of the dominant group. In Walker's and Morrison's novels, race and gender roles attributed to black women are designated by whites in general and black men in particular. Walker and Morrison mainly criticize these patterns of racism and sexism still prevailing in the 20th century and these bold criticisms are by far the direct results of the free expression atmosphere that came to life after the Civil Rights and Women's Rights Movements of the 60s.

Thanks to the relatively free atmosphere that prevailed in the country after the 1960s, black female writers, most of whom were college educated, felt free to break away from the male-dominated literary canon in the United States. Bell explains the general trend in African-American Literature in the late 1960s this way:

In the late sixties, many Afro-Americans were encouraged by historical circumstances to continue resisting or rejecting Eurocentric models and interpretations of manhood and womanhood. They turned instead to non-Western, nonwhite communities and Afro-centric models to discover or create possibilities for autonomous selves and communities through a commitment to the development of a more, just, egalitarian social order. (1989; 240)

As Bell notes, black writers after the 60s turned to all-black communities to reflect the reality amongst black women and men. They did not follow the white definitions of manhood or womanhood and preferred to create authentic female characters like Pecola in Morrison's work and Celie in Walker's novel. Both characters are far from reflecting the general tastes of whites. They are all-black, 'ugly' and poor female characters whose realities clash with the white ideals of beauty and class.

Next to Bell, Russell also relates the flourishing of black literature to the 60s, and she notes the new possibilities that emerged specifically for black women in that period:

From the late 1960s, African-American women began to enter the economic mainstream of America. No longer just nurses, teachers, domestic workers, cooks, factory hands, dancers and singers, some became doctors, lawyers, professors, politicians and corporate workers. Educated, worldly, equipped with sass and strength, they took new directions. For the first time, some of these women had economic choices. In literature, the 'sister' stereotypes were being discarded, as African-American women writers uncovered the distinct yet common threads of black women's lives. (1990; 143)

This meant a separation of black women writers from the black men- or white women centered literature. Instead, they chose their protagonists, themes and plots from among the lives of black women in order to reflect the reality of black womanhood. Indeed, black women writers after the 60s created authentic heroines. These heroines like the plots of their novels did not stick to a male literary canon that reflected exclusively male desires and needs in general.

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are amongst these writers who centered their novels upon the lives of their original female heroines after the 60s. In this two-chaptered thesis, these black female writers and their two significant novels will be analyzed in terms of racial and gender issues.

The first chapter of this study is dedicated to a deeper understanding of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. This chapter mainly focuses on the womanist approach

of Alice Walker, who declares in an interview that for her “black women are the most fascinating creations in the world” (qtd. in O’Brien, 1973; 192). Walker adopted the term womanism to signify the separation of black feminism from white-women centered liberation movement and black-men centered Civil Rights Movement. Walker in her In Search of Our Mothers’ Garden: A Womanist Prose gives following descriptions for womanist: “a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually; committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.” Womanist to feminist is, in Walker’s words, “as purple to lavender” (1983; xi-xii). With these definitions, Walker points up the all-inclusive approach of womanism as opposed to white-women centered feminism that excluded minority women as well as all the men in general. Compared to the feminist approaches of the European origin, womanism is humanitarian since it aims to establish cooperation within the whole community not only amongst the women themselves.

Following her womanist approach, Walker in The Color Purple mainly deals with issues that are significant to help one realize the bitter reality of black womanhood which is greatly shaped by the racism and sexism in society. While portraying the troubles of black women, she offers womanism as the solution to all the problems possible to arise because of the racism in the country and sexism in black community by giving voice to all black women who have been “silenced” since slavery (Russell, 1990; 117).

In renaming and reshaping black women’s history from a womanist perspective, Walker does not hesitate to show the reality in patriarchal black community. Walker, who is “morally and politically unsympathetic toward what she considers anachronistic, chauvinistic conventions in the black family and the church” (Bell, 1989; 265), demonstrates in her novel that sexist practices of black community itself can damage first the women and inevitably the whole black community greatly. Thus she makes one notion clear: racism is not the mere and whole cause of the ills African-American people have suffered from, but undoubtedly it is largely responsible for the patterns of destruction they inflict upon each other. Next to

racism, sexism prevailing in patriarchal black communities is also responsible for the troubles blacks in general and black women in particular have had to confront.

As it is further advocated in the second chapter of this study, similar to Walker, Toni Morrison in her novel The Bluest Eye puts her finger on the pulse of black community and weaves the elements of racism and sexism skillfully, but her novel, unlike Walker's, does not have a merry closure. In Walker, racism and sexism can be easily overwhelmed with strong-willed individuals whereas in Morrison, these two oppressions drive the female protagonist over the edge. Racism, combined with sexism, leads to the destruction of both self and family. Apart from these themes, Morrison points to other destructive forces in the lives of black people, specifically black women. Class differences in black community which divide blacks in the novel as "propertied" and "renting" alongside with beauty definitions in the white-male dominated world are equally responsible for the tragedies that may fall upon ugly, poor, and neglected girls like Pecola who are members of black underclass.

In Morrison's novel, it is not only the black community or whites on the streets that dehumanize Pecola. The worst type of abuse is done to her by her own father, Cholly who is victimized by whites and who in turn victimizes her daughter. This is why Pecola's story is much more disturbing than Celie's. Incest that causes the final cut in Pecola's loss of self is a taboo even though it is a reality. Morrison herself confesses in an interview her reason for her relating such a disturbing incident: "I was not interested in the perceptions of the mainstream because I knew what they were. What was interesting to me were the things that were hidden, interiorized, private—having it read by people like me" (qtd. in Russell, 1990; 92-93). While narrating Pecola's tragic incest story, Morrison uses a language that is embellished with lyrical passages and short poetic dialogues, so the language itself acts as an instrument in softening the horrifying aspect of reality. According to Bell, Morrison's "poetic realism" has the following function:

By combining a concern for the truth of the lives of men and women in actual situations with a concern for the imaginative power, compression, and

lyricism of language, poetic realism calls attention to the problematics of reality and language while simultaneously insisting that reality is shaped by more consciousness than consciousness is by reality. (Bell, 1989; 269)

In poetic realism, metaphors and metonyms are significant to the writer, who avoids describing the reality as it first strikes the eye. Morrison prefers to use metaphors and metonyms to record the reality in The Bluest Eye. The title of the novel blue-eyes symbolize the imperial gaze that aims to dominate, and marigold seeds that do not blossom stand for the collapse in black families. Like the soil that does not let marigold seeds to blossom, racist and sexist American society does not let the ones like Pecola to survive.

There are yet other reasons why Morrison makes use of metaphors and tries new forms such as poetic realism in her novel. Mary Helen Washington explains:

Black women are searching for a specific language, specific symbols, specific images with which to record their lives, and, even though they can claim a rightful place in the Afro-American tradition and in the feminist tradition of women writers, it is also clear that, for purposes of liberation, black women writers will first insist on their own name, their own space. (1975; vii)

Therefore, Morrison's use of poetic realism may be regarded as an act of resistance to the established black-male and white-female literary canons. It is a manifestation of black women's specific existence and black cultural heritage.

Morrison, apart from using poetic realism, writes the way she hears words from black community, and thus she shows her commitment to her people and the way they speak English. She, in other words, reinvents English spelling and punctuation to prove her cultural ties with Africa. Similarly, in order to validate their existences, blacks insist on speaking non-standard English, and they do not feel any obligation to speak the way whites do. They are in search of their lost identities, and they aim to overcome with their feeling of self-hatred by turning back to the African roots and refuse the white exposure in their lives. Thus she makes it clear that in

black community, the way to salvation can only be achieved by embracing the old values, culture and beliefs.

By going into the details of the reality in black communities, Morrison proves that she is a part of her community. Unlike many artists, she does not keep herself away. Kate Fullbrook takes a similar stance concerning Morrison: “Toni Morrison rejects the romantic ideal of the artist as lone genius. She writes from the particular cultural position of a black American woman” (1990; 195). Being an objective member of black community, she avoids judging any characters. While portraying the lives and experiences of even the most disturbing males, she still gives them some good characteristics. She makes clear that black men are not inherently bad; they are actually made bad by the brutal past, so in the failures of black community, black men may be partly, but not wholly guilty. This approach has affinities with Walker’s concept of womanism which will be analyzed in the first chapter dealing with *The Color Purple*.

Overall, in this study, two eminent African-American woman novelists and their works where the effects of racism and sexism are most visible in the experiences of black female characters will be analyzed in two chapters. After analyzing the two novels, this study aims to demonstrate that rather than the individuals, it is the corrupted political system that dehumanized blacks since the 17th century which should be condemned. Its effects are, however, impossible to eradicate from black people’s lives. The marks of slavery which chained both black women and men literally and figuratively are still permanent in their lives and relationships between males and females.

In short, what is indicated in this work is that that even in the 20th century, the position of black women is still lower than black men and white women since they are the ones who suffer most from the race, class and gender politics in the United States. Studying these two novels, my principal goal will be to analyze the struggle of female characters who try to survive in a patriarchal and racist society which clearly does its best to put the burden of double-repression on women’s shoulders. Thus, the subordination of the black women in the face of racist and sexist American

society is at the core of this research paper. What is further advocated in this study is that tolerance, female bonding and reunion with society can overcome the ills of racism and sexism in black women's lives.

CHAPTER I

ALICE WALKER AND THE COLOR PURPLE

The contemporary African-American writer Alice Walker (1944-), crowned with Pulitzer Prize and American Book Awards, is best known for her book The Color Purple (1982). Soon after its publication, the novel created many controversies amongst black male readers due to its depiction of “negative” male characters and high valuation of female characters who try to survive in a racist and patriarchal society. In her earlier novels too, namely The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970) and Meridian (1977), Walker particularly focuses on the black women’s strategies of survival in a racist white society and patriarchal black community, but unlike The Color Purple, the former two novels mostly carry political messages that reflect Walker’s experiences as an activist during the Civil Rights Movements of the 60s. Despite the differences in tone and theme, all these three novels alongside with her poems, essays and short stories, clearly reflect the literary intelligence of activist and writer Alice Walker.

The origins of Walker’s literary genius can be traced back to her childhood years and the upsetting experience she went through as a child: “At the age of eight, Alice Walker lost the sight of one eye when her brother accidentally shot her with an air gun”, and this experience led to her alienation from her peers (Russell, 1990; 117). Walker, “a lonely, solitary child”, has cultivated a deep interest in literature so as to escape from the humiliating looks of people (Bell, 1989; 259). Therefore, this unfortunate incident she experienced at an early age urged Walker to stand as an observer of life rather than actively participate in it. Her personal observations as a black woman regarding the reality amongst black community and white-dominated American society are best reflected in her woman-centered novel: The Color Purple. “In The Color Purple, Alice Walker’s portrayal of Mister, a Black man who abuses his wife, Celie, explores the coexistence of love and trouble in African-American communities generally and in Black men specifically” (Collins, 2000; 157).

Therefore, Walker's work should be regarded as a 'realistic' portrayal of black society rather than as a negative portrayal of men in general.

Even though men were discontented with the novel, that does not alter the fact that Walker skillfully shows in her work that being a black woman is twice harder than being just a woman or just a black man because as Nancy A. Walker notes, "for minority women, the problems of selfhood and isolation have been compounded by cultural as well as gender barriers" (1990; 21), the barriers which are in the forms of racism and sexism.

In the West, racism emerged due to the white Europeans' belief in the inferiority of darker-skinned people. This unhealthy belief was used consciously by the white-European colonists to justify their act of enslavement of other races. American form of racism is also directly related to the superiority-inferiority perception in white-skinned Europeans' minds.

1.1 American Form of Racism:

Racism, specifically white racism towards African-Americans/blacks, obviously has been the biggest issue in the agenda of the United States since the very early years of Independence until today. Racism should not be regarded simply as dislike or prejudice towards African-Americans as it is not only a sentimental issue that surfaces when a black person and white one encounter. Jenny Yamato in her essay points out that, "racism is the same thing as oppression, and it requires with itself an element of power". It is the "systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by another for whatever reason" (1995; 85). In the case of blacks, this "institutionalized mistreatment" can be named as slavery which would have consequences for centuries to come after it was established.

In order to understand the roots of American racism, which resulted in the black anger that exploded in the 1960s, one must trace the history of the country back to the 17th and 18th centuries since, "the early failure of the nation's founders

and their constitutional heirs to share the legacy of freedom with black Americans is at least one factor in America's perpetual racial tensions" (Rothenberg, 1995; 297). With the betterment in England's economy during the 17th century, the number of poor English people willing to sell themselves into indentured servitude decreased. The decrease in the number of British indentured servants gave rise to an increase in the sum of indentured servants coming from Ireland, Wales and Germany, but they were not enough to serve the needs of early settlers whose demands boosted in parallel with annexing more territories in the continent. Therefore, the increase in early settlers' demands for more human labor forced the use of Africans as slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries. Slave trade, that made the forced migration of numerous Africans from their homeland to a totally new terrain possible, continued brutally in the two centuries.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, American racism was in the shape of slavery, in which institution master-victim relationship between whites and blacks in present-day started and which dehumanized blacks in every aspect. Taken from their homeland Africa, not knowing one single thing about their new destination, these people were hopelessly at the mercy of the white-European land-owners who had arrived in the continent earlier and realized that there was too much work to do but not enough human labor. Consequently, these African people were basically used in back-breaking farm labor which was kind of work whites believed they were "physically unable to adapt" (Rothenberg, 1995; 8). White men, too fragile to work on the fields, constructed black image as labor force in the 17th century and this image has continued till today.

The introduction of African-American slavery first started with the sale of 20 African descendants in Virginia in the 17th century. Compared to other labor forces—Native Americans and white indentured servants—these Africans were more profitable in the eyes of British colonists for a number of reasons. Unlike Native Americans who resisted working like slaves and ran away easily since they knew the territory well, Africans did not know the continent and could not escape easily when they were brutally forced to work in plantations. Thus, for the white settlers, it was

quite a difficult task to make a Native American work continuously while an African was comparatively easier to handle. Similarly, European indentured servants were not possible to be 'used' as permanent slaves because they had the right to receive freedom after serving four to seven years. There was a temporary slavery whereas Africans, who had no idea about the language or the life in America, could not escape from slavery easily and legally. Unlike other white-skinned labor forces, African slaves were regarded as the properties of their white owners. They had absolutely no rights; they were not even allowed to marry whom they wanted or could not even have the right to parent their own offspring. In short, most of the time, they were treated as lower than animals in slavery.

Slavery in the North declined with the rise in economic prosperity that flourished during the American Revolution (1775-1783). However, in the South, slaves were still forcefully used as labor force in big cotton plantations as the economy in the South depended mainly on agriculture. The tension between the North and the South about the continuation of slavery increased so much that it caused the most tragic and bloody war in American history: The Civil War (1861-1865). The victory of the North was a turning-point in the lives of African-American slaves. During the period called Reconstruction, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), the 16th president of the U.S. (1861-1865), declared Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and in the following years with the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, blacks gained the rights of full-citizenship and voting (only for the males). Yet, not all the whites in the continent were in full concord with the rights given to the black population. Their resentment and hatred, but more importantly their desire to preserve white supremacy over blacks, helped them to gather around racist groups such as Ku Klux Klan, The Knights of the White Camellia and The White League, which organized intimidating attacks towards blacks.

Whites continued their attacks in social life too by segregating blacks from using schools, restaurants and other public facilities. Known as "Black Codes", these laws segregated blacks in all areas of life and put them once again—even after the abolishment of slavery—into a subservient position. What those whites did was, in

Jenny Yamato's words an "aware-blatant racism" (1995; 86), which was supported by government acts such as 1857 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Dred Scott v. Sanford* that legally regarded slaves "as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in political or social relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect" (qtd. in Rothenberg, 1995; 70).

As a reaction to *de jure* (by law) and *de facto* (by fact) segregation, "uncivilized" African-Americans gave a civilized response by founding democratic organizations namely The National Afro-American League (1890), the Niagara Movement (1905) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910, which, unlike the KKK, were not racist but simply aimed to gain equal rights for blacks that should have been granted to them at the early stages of independence.

In the 1920s, the pressure that increased in Southern states, combined with the desire to lead an economically better life, gave rise to the migration of blacks from Southern states to Northern states where they looked forward to gaining an equal position. That migration and the rise in African-American middle class in the North account for the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement in art, music and literature. With the Depression of the 1930s, Harlem Renaissance came to an end, leaving behind the fact that, "the status, wealth and power offered by white America and radical black intellectuals before the economic disaster of 1929 were more shadow than substance" (Bell, 1989; 149). The quick end in black population's 'rebirth' proved that racial equality was still a long way ahead for the blacks in America.

Having experienced Civil War, Reconstruction and Harlem Renaissance, African Americans began to gain a new consciousness of their identity and feel the freedom to express their resentment towards the white-European dominated system in the country. However, it was not until the 1960s that they could actually make their voices heard by the whole American society. In the 1960s, slavery was already

over, allegedly ‘equality’ was achieved, but in practice discrimination was still alive. In the middle of the 20th century, blacks were no longer able to tolerate the hypocrisy of American democracy, which still forced the country’s black population to feel like an inferior class. This weariness combined with a new black-consciousness fueled them to start Civil Rights Movements of the 60s that keep its effects till present-day.

The events recounted in Walker’s novel take place between the 1920s and the 1940s before the beginning of the Civil Rights Movements. Even though in the 1920s and the 1940s, blacks were no longer slaves, they were not treated as ordinary white citizens yet. Discrimination towards blacks was so widespread that blacks were still not still feeling as a part of American identity. As Harpo, a black male character in Walker’s novel declares, blacks could not even feel that July 4th is for blacks too as it is for whites: “White people busy celebrating they independence from England July 4th. So most black folks don’t have to work. Us can spend the day celebrating each other” (Walker, 1982; 261). Harpo’s passage echoes Frederick Douglass’s—a slave-born abolitionist—description of Independence Day in 1852 from a black man’s perspective:

The Fourth of July is *yours*, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters to the ground illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. . . . I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary. . . . The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought you light and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. (qtd. in Rothenberg, 1995; 297)

Douglass worded his distrust towards American democracy and the Declaration of Independence which allegedly brought “liberty” and “equality” for all human beings as early as the 18th century. Harpo, approximately a hundred years after Douglass, expresses the very same ideas. Because of the racism in the form of slavery at first and in the form of segregation after the abolishment of slavery, blacks felt that they have been left out of American history since the establishment of the

country. The exclusion of blacks from American history inevitably led them to feel isolated and alienated from the majority. In Walker's novel, Harpo's reasoning makes clear that the gap between whites and blacks, which was created with the establishment of slavery three hundred years ago, is still apparent in the 20th century. In fact, this space between the two groups is so wide that even America's most celebrated day cannot unite the two races. The disparity Douglass mentioned a century earlier is not diminished yet. Even though both races live in the same country, blacks do not feel like belonging to the mainstream due to the ills of racism. This feeling of isolation is an expected reaction, remembering the fact that since the 17th century, blacks have been regarded as "outsiders" and "strangers" despite the fact that their arrival in the continent is as early as of the first settlers'.

Racism was not only practiced through slavery. As the events in Walker's novel clarify, racism is practiced even after the abolishment of slavery in different forms such as segregation and lynchings. Besides, this extended white-oppression in the forms of slavery, segregation and lynching has by and large had various consequences for the blacks. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's biological father was lynched by whites who were jealous of his success. One night his store was burned down; he and his two brothers were taken out of their homes and hanged (Walker, 1982; 157). According to Henderson, "while this episode exposes the economic bases of racial oppression, it also suggests the far-reaching consequences of violence directed toward black men. It is the murder of Celie's father which results in her mother's mental derangement and subsequent marriage to Alphonso" (1989; 70). The breakdown in black family structure because of racism leads to the breakdown in Celie's identity. Her father lynched and her mother crazy, Celie is left all alone in the hands of tyrannical Alphonso—her step-father whom she believes to be her father—from whom she receives the first sexual and physical violence. Racial violence that caused Celie's father's death in the beginning leads to another type of oppression, namely sexism, which Celie copes with in the following chapters. Thus, racism can by and large be regarded as the trailblazer of sexism in Celie's life.

1.2 Women's Rights Movements

Sexism is the systematic attempts of men to dehumanize women by claiming the 'inferiority' of females. Like racism, it involves in itself an element of power and inevitably a desire for submission from the victim. In the white-male dominated America, both blacks and women have been the ones treated as 'strangers'. Blacks have been facing discrimination in all facets of life on the basis of their skin color whereas women have been receiving an unjust treatment on the basis of their sex. Albeit sex is a biological, already-given feature, gender is a social construction. It is not an inseparable part of sex. Judith Butler explains in her book Gender Trouble the notion of gender:

If one is a 'woman', that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered 'person' transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (1990; 3)

A similar argument is put forward by Paula Rothenberg in her Race, Class, and Gender in the United States where she claims that gender is constructed politically and socially according to the needs and desires of the dominant group (1995; 9).

As Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins explains, "[a]s the 'others' of society who can never really belong, strangers [blacks and women] threaten the moral and social order. But they are simultaneously essential for its survival because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries" (Collins, 2000; 70). As Collins states, women as well as blacks have been facing discrimination from the white-male dominated society and they have been regarded as 'outsiders' and 'strangers' that imperil the system which is based on the rules of whiteness and manhood. The borderline in society is drawn by blacks and women who are seen as

the opposites of whites and men. Therefore, even though both blacks and women have been continually left out of history, they are indispensable since without blacks and women, there would not ever be such notions as whiteness or manhood.

Despite the fact that “women are a difference that cannot be understood as the simple negation of ‘other’ of the always-already-masculine subject” (Butler,1990; 18), just like blacks, they have been labeled as ‘other’ by the male-dominated society. Women too have had to struggle in order to gain equal rights and fair treatment from society and all social institutions. Despite women’s efforts to claim autonomy, men have justified their second-class treatment towards women throughout history by using every possible means, including the attribution of a biological and intellectual inferiority to women. Showalter has this to say about the prejudiced male thinking:

Victorian physicians believed that women’s physiological functions diverted about twenty percent of their creative energy from brain activity. Victorian anthropologists believed that the frontal lobes of the male brain were heavier and more developed than female lobes and thus women were inferior in intelligence. (qtd. in Lodge, 2000; 313)

Similarly, in the process of degrading blacks, whites too attributed intellectual, biological and moral inferiority to blacks on accounts of their skin-color. Black was the color of sin and evil while white was matched with purity and decency which legitimized their act of enslavement darker-skinned, “uncivilized” people. Besides, since Africans were not Christians, white European settlers believed that they were culturally inferior and thus in need of education.

In order to eradicate the deep-rooted prejudices that defined women as lower than men and establish the same social, economic and political status for women as for men, there have been revolts, open and most of the times secret cries in America, but women’s voices could not be heard widely and clearly till the 19th century since before that century American women lacked the necessary educational and financial power that would allow them to gather around an organized revolt.

Still, in Europe, women managed to make their voices heard even before the 19th century. In the 18th century, the ideas of Enlightenment, which stressed the necessity of freedom and equality for all human beings, fueled educated white women to demand their rights. One of these women, British Mary Wollstonecraft—who is believed to be the first feminist writer—wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1791), where she argued that education would equalize the status of women with men. Wollstonecraft was aware of the absurdity in the system that left no choice for a woman apart from being a mother and a wife. Parallel to Wollstonecraft, in America, well-educated women such as Abigail Adams, were well aware of the disparities between the two sexes. Her dialog with her husband John Adams illustrates the discontentment of American women with the Declaration of Independence since it entirely excluded women as well as blacks: “I cannot say that you are very generous to the ladies; for whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to men, emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives”. (qtd. in Rothenberg, 1995; 285). Still, even though American women were discontented with their designated position in life, they could not publicly demand equality in the 18th century. It was during the mid 19th century and Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s that American women could officially organize campaigns to demand equal rights.

In America, feminist movements can be divided into two periods: the first wave and second wave of women’s rights movements. The first wave of women’s rights movements lasted from the mids of 19th century until the 1920s when women in the United States gained the right to vote. That achievement owed much to organizations such as National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA) and American Women Suffrage Association (ASWA). These women-centered organizations held campaigns until the ratification of the 19th Amendment that gave American women the right to vote (Ruth, 1995; 482). After winning this right in 1920, many American women supposed that their combat was over since they had guaranteed their legal status as citizens. However, civil rights movements of blacks in the 60s awakened them to revise their conditions at work and all other arenas of social life. Inspired by the black movement for equality, they resolved to run a more women-centered

movement in the 1960s (Flexner, 1975; 143). That resolution and reawakening gave rise to the second wave of feminism.

The origin of the first wave goes back to the first women's convention that met in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The leaders of this convention, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, wrote Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, which is regarded as the first document of American women's rights movement (Flexner, 1975; xii). That document censured men for refusing to grant women the right to vote, the right to hold property, the right to get higher education and it also criticized the church for excluding women. The first proposition was put into practice with the 19th amendment that gave women the right to vote, but other inequities remained alive which inevitably forced women to focus on further issues. With the aim of eliminating all inequities between men and women, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, founders of National Women's Party (1916), hoped to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution which would make discrimination based on sex illegal (Freeman, 1975; 63). Even though the Congress introduced ERA in 1923, it did not get the expected support. ERA conflict was on the agenda once again in the second wave of the women's rights movements. Esther Peterson, director of Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, persuaded President John F. Kennedy to establish the first National Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 (Hartman, 1989; 50). It released a report about the prevailing inequities between men and women at work and proved that discrimination still existed. Yet, the Congress did not support ERA since men believed that equal rights had already been granted to each individual in the Constitution, and some women believed ERA would threaten the traditional American family structure.

Following the establishment of Commission on the Status of Women (1961), many significant acts such as Equal Pay Act and Civil Rights Act (Title VII) were passed by the Congress. The Equal Pay Act (1963) forbade wage differences between men and women who performed the same task at work. In 1963, an average female worker could earn half of a male worker, and it was not until the end of the 20th century that women could receive the same amount of money with men, and

they still cannot (Freeman, 1975; 63). Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made discrimination based on sex, race, color or ethnic origin illegal (Hartman, 1989; 57). Title VII also founded Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to implement the Act. Nevertheless, women were disillusioned with the EEOC since it mainly dealt with racial issues rather than focusing on discrimination based on sex. This realization helped them to establish their own group in 1966 so as to make their voices heard and thus National Organization for Women (NOW) focused only to the attainment of equal rights for women. Alongside with NOW, Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) forced the politicians to revise the applications of the previous acts in practice. Their cooperation helped the passage of Title IX of the Higher Education Act (1972), which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in any educational program.

Although there was much debate around ERA, it eventually won approval in 1972 as the 27th Amendment. The leader of this organization Betty Friedan became a phenomenon in the feminist world with her book The Feminine Mystique that questioned the gender roles attributed to women. In her book, she held a critical approach towards American culture that did not allow women to fulfill their potentials as human beings (Friedan, 1963; 69). That was an open cry against the social norms that regarded women as wives or mothers rather than individuals with their own free wills.

These overall changes that have taken place in the lives of women since the 19th century affected literature, and the position of female writers. Feminist critic Elaine Showalter explains that common identity is the reason behind the flourishing of women-centered literature: "Women's culture form a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space" (2000; 321). This collective experience gained voice through contemporary women writers who were encouraged by the first wave and second wave of movements. More than any other ways, literature itself became the most influential instrument in the hands of women artists and this is not surprising since

women have always had intimate relationship with words. Yet, the problem was that women were not used to formalizing their own thoughts in written form:

In the use of words, the tension arises between the anarchy and all-pervasiveness of talk and the order and formality of written words. We *all* talk *all* the time. Few of us distill from all our discussions and arguments, the theories and analyses presented in print. Of course the two (talk and text) are absolutely interdependent. We know that to participate in the public sphere of politics, action goes hand in hand with the power of the written word. It is a vital part of attracting more women to the ideas of the women's movement and also of challenging the male dominance of the media, education, the law and all the other apparatuses of the state. (McRobbie, 2000; 124)

Written literature is more significant than oral tradition since words exist so long as they are kept in a written form. Civilizations rise and fall with the written word, thus words testify the past as they enlighten the future. Many times words take the place of action. As McRobbie states, literature after the 60s served as a medium to spread women's ideas of equality in political arena. Women's rights movements also changed the perspectives of female writers in literature. Nancy Walker explains that it was the women's rights movements, "a movement that many of these writers have testified, provided them with the courage and motivation first to be writers, and then to break out of traditional forms and tell the stories of women in their own voices", that enabled women to explore their common heritage and reflect their own experiences as women in their works (1990; 15).

"The institutionalization of an exclusively white and an entirely or almost entirely male literary canon in the U.S.", finally came to an end with women writers' presence on the stage (Quirk & Scharnhorst, 1994; 28). American women writers who perceived themselves as excluded from the dominant literary tradition before the 60s found courage to challenge male-dominated literary tradition with the help of women's liberation movement. With the inclusion of women writers into the literary canon, feminist bookstores that emphasized upon "common identity" amongst women spread all around the country. Periodicals such as *Ms* released by Gloria Steinem and journals such as *Feminist Studies and Signs: A journal of Women in Culture and Society* supported women's rights movement via literature.

Still, even though women have achieved greatly in literary world, in social life there are still many disparities between men and women and even a wider gap between the type of discrimination white women have to confront and black women have to face. Women still earn less than men on the whole, they do not work as decision-makers but rather as clerks or assistant managers in many companies Their presence in legislative parties is quite little: “In the mid-1990s, women held only 8 percent of top managerial positions in U.S. corporations. Women comprised only 1 percent of executives in the 1000 largest corporations outside the United States” (Hartman, 1989; 49).

Women still receive second-class treatment not only in social life but also in domestic circle. At the turn of the 20th century, in the United States, tragically domestic violence is women’s leading cause of injury and about one-third of murdered women are killed by their male relatives, husbands or boyfriends (Rothenberg, 1995; 124). These data prove that, in spite of all the organized efforts of women from the 18th century till today, sexism, that places women in a position lower than men, is still dangerously alive in the United States.

1.3 The Case of Black Women

Feminism on the whole spread as a reaction to patriarchal values that claimed the inferiority of women because of their ‘gender’. However, as Butler makes clear, since gender is an identity which is constructed according to the needs and desires of the dominant group, gender roles attributed to women cannot be thought of independently from the society to which women belong (1990; 3). Each culture creates its own type of woman. Keeping that in mind, it would not be sensible to view all women as the same: “While feminism ensures thoughtfulness, sensitivity and sisterhood, it cannot bind all women together purely on the grounds of gender” (McRobbie, 2000; 128), due to the fact that in America for instance, the kinds of problems white women have had to confront differ in many aspects from the troubles of minority women, amongst whom Black women constitute the majority. The

failure of white feminism has been its inability to incorporate minority women to the movement and as a result, black women have felt the urge to separate themselves from white feminism.

Black women, fired by the Women's and Civil Rights Movements, yet eventually disillusioned with the outcomes of both of these organizations, soon realized the necessity of commencing their own campaign. As hooks argues, "race and class identity create differences in quality of life, social status and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share—differences which are rarely transcended" (1984; 4). Since race and class differences between white women and black women separated the two groups of women, black women felt that white-middle-class-women centered liberation movements paid no heed to the demands and experiences unique to blacks. As feminist critic Elizabeth M. Almquist alleges:

Despite all commonalities, minority women are likely to interpret their experiences within a different framework than white women do, to assign different priorities to feminist goals, and to view white women with some suspicion and feeling of apartness. Race (or ethnicity) and race discrimination erect enormous barriers between minority and white women. (1995; 573)

Black women have had to cope with different realities in the shapes of rape, separation from their children, slavery, segregation and lynching of their fathers/husbands since the 18th century and these traumatic experiences have created insurmountable barriers between white women and black women. White women have had to struggle with only sexism whereas black women, the "mules" of the world, have been fighting against the ills of not only sexism but also racism. Having realized the incompatibility between their own realities as black women, and white women's experiences, black women shifted from white-women-centered feminism to black-women originated womanism which is a concept that includes everyone regardless of race and gender.

As Carol White asserts, one of the core elements of womanism is culture: "Womanist honors the culture-specific feminism of black women that has existed from the 18th century to the present time" (1995; 540). "Culture-specific" feminism

stresses the double-consciousness of black people but being culture-specific does not make womanism a myopic movement which only focuses on the needs and desires of black women. On the contrary, compared to narrow perspective of white feminism which is based on the dichotomy between man and woman, it offers a more humanistic view, all-inclusive approach since it means “a commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire males and females” (Walker, 1983; xi-xii). With the use of the term womanist to signify the unique experiences of black women, black feminism clearly opened up a new page and cried out loud its separation from the white feminism.

In Black Feminist Thought, Collins categorizes black feminism’s core themes under three titles: work, family and oppression, which are significant to demonstrate the differences between black women and white women (2000; 45). As for work, starting from the days of slavery, black women have had to work outside under the same harsh conditions as black men while white women never have had such an obligation. White woman’s main space has mostly been her peaceful home, not outer world. Black women’s slavery hindered them from spending time with their own families. They did not even have the ‘luxury’ of nurturing their own kids since their primary duty was to work for the benefit of their white owners. Only with the abolishment of slavery were some lucky black women eventually able to direct all their energy and affection to their families, and ironically this was actually “an act of resistance in a world that defined African-American woman in so many other ways, rather than wives or mothers” (Collins, 2000; 55). Taking care of the family was an already-given gift for the white women even though white middle-class women regarded the house as a prison that hindered their full participation in life. White women wanted to get rid of the domestic chain which offered them no status apart from being wives and mothers, but for the black women even staying at home was the light at the end of the dark, dreadful tunnel—namely, slavery—for the black women who had to go through many sufferings just to have what white women had already had from the time immemorial.

In addition to work and family practices, feminine virtues ascribed to black women show dissimilarities from the four cardinal virtues attached to white women: “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity”(Collins, 2000; 72). In a black woman’s world, the equivalents of these images, created by white-male dominated society to dehumanize and stereotype black women are embodied in types such as *mammy*¹, *matriarch*², *welfare queen*³, *black lady*⁴, and *jezebel*⁵. Black feminists have been trying to eradicate these images from people’s minds since they are the products of a racist and sexist mentality, but this is hard to achieve as the media is continuously pumping these images and creating new ones like reducing black woman’s bodies to butts.

The first image, *mammy* stands for the ideal type of black woman in white men and women’s heads: asexual, all-giving, never-complaining, and full of love. Yet, it is important to note that white woman was asked to sacrifice her sexuality to reach purity, but mammy is already asexual which makes her somehow abnormal. Moreover, since for the dominant culture, purity means ‘whiteness’, ‘black’ woman has absolutely had no chance of being pure like her white equivalent. The highest position for a black woman to reach is asexuality since ‘purity’ is always-already reserved for the white woman.

The second image *matriarch* is the opposite of ‘selfless, good-old mammy’: a matriarch is a female patriarch. Just like men, she tries to rule, oppress those who do not obey her and uses every possible means to silence those under her. She is the dangerous, deviant and castrating mother. White men argue that matriarch women are the main reason that lies behind the poverty and all other depravities many black

¹ “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”(Collins, 2000; 72). In *The Color Purple*, Sofia is forcefully turned into a mammy type by the white major. At the first case, she is more like a matriarch.

² According to Patricia Hill Collins, “matriarch image created a wider gap between the worlds of black and white women” (2000, ; 77). White woman started to devalue black woman not only because of her race but also because of her ‘potentiality’ to ‘seduce’ white woman’s husband.

³ Welfare queens are labeled as ‘lazy’ black women depending upon the welfare system to lead their lives.

⁴ Black ladies are urban Professional women but unlike white women, their rise in business life has never been appreciated neither by whites nor by black men.

families suffer from. Allegedly, black women, unlike their white equivalents do not know their 'place' and try to patronize their husbands. Thus, a reversal in the traditional gender roles has led to a disastrous effect in black families. Yet, contrary to what white men propose, the fact that black woman has been the center of the family network—since they give birth—does not necessarily mean that they rule the house. Neither men nor women in black families are actually allowed to rule their own houses due to the fact that there is a higher power above all of them: white man! Thus, as Collins makes clear, claiming that matriarchy has been the devastating factor in black families is just another aspect of “scientific U.S. racism” (2000; 77).

Next to these aforementioned images, there is the *welfare queen* symbolizing single, materialistic, working-class black women who is believed to be an abuser of the welfare system in America. In the 21st century, professional middle-class *black lady*, who is greedy and ambitious, is created once again to empower the image of white women. Finally, the immoral *jezebel*, standing for lustful, greedy black whore, is an image that justifies the white man's rape of black woman since it is the black woman who seduces white, pure man with her flirtations. As Sally Robinson puts it, “[t]he discursive and social positioning of the black female slave as sexual and ‘immoral’ object becomes a strategy for safeguarding the position of the white male master as exempt from ‘moral’ responsibility” (1991; 140).

Taken all together, these images are clearly designated by white men, sometimes, with the cooperation of white women in order to represent their own interests in defining black women and safeguard the white men's ills inflicted upon black women. As these images suggest, black women have always been regarded as lower than not only white-black men but also white women. The differences between white women and black women have been greater than their commonalities, and it has been the realization of that disparity which fueled black women to stand apart from white women's liberation movement and to pursue their own liberation in the face of the two types of oppression.

⁵ Jezebel image served the desire of white women to claim the 'impurity' of black women who were

1.4 The Color Purple

When the two evils, racism and sexism, combine, black women in America appear to be the most defenseless group of people in the face of this mingled threat. As it is illustrated in Walker's novel The Color Purple, even in 20th century America, black women are still the ones who are most blatantly oppressed in all areas of social life firstly due to their skin color and secondly due to their sex.

The heroine of the novel Celie is the character who suffers tremendously from the ills of both racism and sexism, but in the end she reemerges as a woman with dignity and self-confidence. While relating Celie's transformation from a timid girl into an independent woman with the help of other female characters, Walker makes use of many historical references. A black feminist critic Sandi Russell explains this tendency in Alice Walker: "The African-American writer realized that in order to be 'herself' in the present, she had to re-capture and re-define her past" (1990; 90). Thus Walker's novel makes references to the slavery past of African-Americans so as to show the present situation of blacks and specifically black women in rural Georgia in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. While narrating these events, Walker connects the modern age with the past through Celie's and her sister Nettie's letters.

1.4.1 Analysis of Male Identity

The novel starts with "You better not never tell anybody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (Walker, 1982; 3), a threat coming from a man in an attempt to silence a woman. The man is Alphonso whom Celie believes to be her father, warning her while he is sexually violating the victim. According to Carla Kaplan in her The Erotics of Talk, "the ability to keep silent is an index among blacks, of trustworthiness and reliability" (Kaplan, 1996; 65). Keeping silent is a praiseworthy characteristic in patriarchal cultures, especially for women, since keeping silent also

believed to have excessive sexual appetites.

means being obedient. In *The Color Purple*, that silencing attempt of Alphonso is the starting point of sexism in the form of male control. Alphonso sees no evil in raping his daughter since he believes it to be a male privilege and still forces the victim to remain silent and keep that horrible secret to herself. This warning of Alphonso places the responsibility of the consequences of talking onto the woman. Celie is silenced by force resulting from her fear of losing the mother who is “too sick to last long” (Walker, 1982; 2). The heroine Celie submits to this male power since she has no other choice from the start.

This gender oppression that is narrated in detail in the novel is an adaptation of black history. The silencing attempt of men, both black and white, is directly related to the slavery days when “slaves were kept illiterate and uneducated, so that they could not tell of their lives in bondage” (Russell, 1990; 6). Despite society’s pressure upon slave women, female writers such as Phillis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Maria W. Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, and Harriet Jacobs managed to voice their opinions through diaries or letters in the 18th and 19th centuries. “Defying the laws and customs that imposed silence upon them, African-American women testified to their personal experiences and perceptions, and those they shared with their communities” (Foster, 1993; 2). Similarly the protagonist of *The Color Purple*, Celie, is following the example of the first black woman writers’ and activists’ writing tradition. “The act of a black woman telling her story is an act of resistance to oppression, both in a racist and sexist sense” (Tekinay, 2001; 128), thus Celie’s outcry against oppression first takes place with the act of writing.

As a matter of fact, Alice Walker herself believed “it is language that reveals and validates one’s existence” (Walker, 1989; 58), so it is not surprising that her heroine Celie is writing in the first person narration to validate her existence and growth of self consciousness: “The act of acquiring a voice through writing, of breaking silence with language, eventually moves her to the action of talking with others” (Collins, 2000; 119), and helps her rebirth as a free individual. Thus, for Celie writing functions as a second chance for life throughout the novel. The letters she writes break her silence and bind Celie closer to life.

Celie's first letters are written to God who is described as "all white, looking like some stout white man" (Walker, 1982; 85). According to Gates, "rather than representing the name of God as unspeakable, Walker represents Celie's words, her letters addressed to 'God', as unspeakable God is Celie's silent auditor" (Gates, 1988; 243). These letters to God, describing her troubled life in the hands of rapist Alphonso, are extremely sorrowful. However, since her troubles never come to an end even after she complains to God via letters, she feels abandoned by forgetful God, her "silent auditor". This is the time she changes her addressee: her reader is now her beloved sister Nettie who is a missionary in Africa.

Through Celie's letters to God and Nettie, it is possible to trace the evidences of racism and sexism in American society alongside with the struggles of female characters to stand up against both types of oppression. Besides, it is also possible through these letters to understand the unique experiences of black women in general. Black women, being members of a subordinated race and gender, have had unique experiences, radically different from white women's and even other minority women's experiences. Unlike other women, black women had to cope with the ills of the most degrading institutions of all, slavery, which labeled them as "mules uh de world" (Hurston, 1937; 16) whereas their white equivalents were "angels in the house", a Victorian term that describes best the domesticity of white middle-class, stay-at-home wife and mother.

In slavery, black females were regarded as commodities essential to enrich whites' plantations; they were not treated as honorable wives or mothers but simply viewed as reproduction machines. The only time they received some kindness from their masters was the time they got pregnant: "Techniques such as assigning pregnant women lighter workloads, giving pregnant women more attention and rations, and rewarding prolific women with bonuses were all used to increase black women's reproduction" (Collins, 2000; 51). This outwardly 'kind' attitude of whites was indubitably a mask to hide their greediness since the more children slave women gave birth, the richer their white masters would become, for slave mothers' children

were automatically slaves from the minute they opened their eyes to the world. Even after the abolishment of slavery, in the 20th century an extension of this practice is obvious in the case of Celie's children. Just as she is a slave in Alphonso's prison, her children are also slaves. Celie's father Alphonso demonstrates the threatening effect of men over women not only through rape but also through selling Celie's children Celie's children, born out of rapes by Alphonso without even letting her see them once. What he does is brutal, but it is not an unfamiliar experience for a black woman. He is simply reenacting the former white master's conduct. In slavery too, slave women's children were taken away from them by white masters. A slave woman's child was naturally a slave, another labor force for the white owner. Denied to have the right of nurturing her own kids, Celie is put into a position no more than a slave woman. In her own house she is like a captive and, "under conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not belong to the mother" (Spillers, 2003; 217).

Celie is left in a less powerful situation now. Rape put her in a desperate position earlier. Her children might act as lifeguards for her, motherhood could offer her the feeling of power she lacks. Not being able to nurture her own kids, she is left all alone, no one to talk to and rely on. "Motherhood offers women a site of both power and oppression, self-esteem and self-sacrifice, reverence and debasement" (1997; 3), argues Elaine-Tuttle Hansen in the preface to her book. Celie cannot experience any positive feelings that might arise with motherhood; furthermore, she cannot escape "oppression, self-sacrifice and debasement" either. Those negative feelings are all planted in her with the sexist and racist approaches of American society.

Rape, the worst type of male violence, is related to the slavery practices. White men's widespread belief in valuing slave women not a bit more than simple fertility objects inevitably led them to consider rape as an everyday reality in slavery days. That evil practice, in Collins' words, was "objectifying black women less than human because only animals can be bred against their will" (Collins, 2000; 135). What is even worse is that the sexual harassment of black women by white men

made them as 'fair game' for all men, including their black folks. The relationship between white men-black men in slavery is reenacted in patriarchal black families. Black men, mimicking whites, felt no shame in exercising control over black women by using the most humiliating ways; physical and sexual violence were the basic control mechanisms that they did not hesitate to use upon women. In likewise manner, Celie throughout the novel experiences the worst verbal, physical and sexual types of oppression from the black men around her. Even though she is not violated by a white man, she is raped by a man of her own race who is simply mimicking whites. Furthermore, the fact that in *The Color Purple* rape takes place in domestic circle makes Celie's story even more tragic. Incest, which is even worse than a stranger's rape, is the bomb that ruins her life from the beginning.

According to Hortense J. Spillers, by starting her novel with an incest story Walker provides "an enclosure, a sort of confessional space between postures of the absolute, and in a very real sense it is only in fiction, that incest as dramatic enactment and sexual economy can take place at all"(2003; 231). By writing about a thing everyone knows but never talks about, Walker breaks open the taboo of incest as an "unspeakable" thing and enables the reader to realize that racial affinity between men and women does not create a safety bond for black women. Celie is not far away from danger just because she is far away from white society; in some cases even black community itself can be as harmful as the white society since black men are not less sexist than their white equivalents. Sexism, in the form of rape, reveals itself on the first pages of the book. Celie experiences the most destructive overt violence through her father, who threatens her "You better shut up and git used to it" (Walker, 1982, 3). This time he is not only silencing her but also making clear that he is going to commit this sin anyway, so the best thing for Celie is to accept this as an everyday reality. For Alphonso, rape becomes a habit, quite a normal deed. He is going to do it no matter how desperate Celie's position is; he is the cruel master while Celie is the defenseless target.

Sexism does not only appear in the form of rape. Many times in the novel there are incidents of beating. Beating and rape, two overt sexist acts dehumanize

Celie and lead to her objectification. Like rape, beating is almost an everyday reality; one day Celie is beaten for “dressing trampy” (Walker, 1982; 9), one day for not being more beautiful. Since she is regarded as no more than a commodity, her father Alphonso sees nothing wrong in selling her to Mr_ , known as Albert to everyone else, who actually has an eye on Celie’s beloved sister. Nettie. Celie conveys this: “He [Alphonso] act like he can’t stand me no more. He say I’m evil an always up to no good. . . . I see him looking at my little sister. She scared. But I say I’ll take care of you” (Walker, 1982; 4). Alphonso wants to keep Nettie for himself, so he offers Mr_ to take Celie even though in his words, “she ain’t fresh, she spoiled twice” (Walker, 1982; 9). In order to convince Mr_ to “get” Celie, Alphonso adds “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” (Walker, 1982; 10). Still, in Celie’s words “it took Alphonso the whole spring” (Walker, 1982; 11) to decide upon marrying Celie who, as Alphonso says “can work like a man” (Walker, 1982; 10). Walker gives detailed scenery of the awkward position Celie is put in when Mr_ comes to the house:

Pa call me. Celie, he say. Like it wasn’t nothing. Mr_ want another look at you.
I go stand in the door. The sun shine in my eyes. He’s still up on his horse. He look me up and down.
Pa rattle his newspaper. Move up, he won’t bite, he say. Turn around Pa say.
(1982; 12)

As the quotation above strikingly reveals, Celie is just like a slave in a slave market. She is treated by the men in the novel as a commodity, an object to look at and a good to be sold by auction. Her position designated by Alphonso and Mr_ calls to mind John Berger’s argument in Ways of Seeing:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. . . . The surveyor of woman is herself male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. . . . [T]he ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of woman is designed to flatter him. (1972; 47)

Alphonso manages to sell Celie to another sexist man Mr_ who is not different from Alphonso in his cruelty. Like Alphonso, he sees in himself every right to oppress women, especially if they are obedient like Celie who, only in her letters, expresses the brutality she receives from Mr_: “He beat me like he beat the children. . . . He say, Celie, git the belt. . . . 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” (Walker, 1982; 23).

Men of all ages can acceptably violate women in Walker’s novel. There is not an age limit for any men in the novel to feel himself authorized to violate women. Albert’s son Harpo, like his father and Pa Alphonso, sees nothing wrong in hurting women. Since “his mama died in his arms” (Walker, 1982; 14), Harpo cannot handle even the idea of a new mother. Celie’s arrival at Albert’s house is made even more tragic by the unwelcoming treatment of Harpo: “He pick up a rock and laid my head open. The blood all run tween my breasts”, writes Celie in one of her letters (Walker, 1982; 14). This incident foreshadows Celie’s future: her new life will not be less difficult than her life with the rapist Alphonso. In Mr_’s house too, beating occurs as just an unavoidable shape of sexism. What is more, in marriage it is considered as a legitimized act. It is accepted almost as the right of a husband to beat his wife. Celie records this male perspective as she conveys a dialog between Mr_ and Harpo: “Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr_ say, cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn” (Walker, 1982; 23).

What is even more problematic is that physical assault towards women seems never to come to an end. Albert’s advice to Harpo who marries an ‘amazon’ woman, Sofia, is striking: “Wives is like children. You have to let’em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating” (Walker, 1982 ; 35); this advice clearly demonstrates the hereditary nature of sexism. It is for certain that children copy the acts of their parents. Boys reenact their fathers’ sexist approaches and do not hesitate to beat the most available victim, their wives, once they have a chance. From father to son, sexism is growing generation after generation. Boys mimick men, sons duplicate their fathers, and soon after they start

to regard women as “inferior” and thus in need to being “educated” in every possible way, including beating, rape and other forms of violence. Just like Harpo’s mimicking his macho father, white kids copy the acts of their racist parents. Racist fathers and mothers raise racist children, and this poisonous oppression turns into a vicious circle as in Walker’s novel. Woman-oppressor fathers, like Alphonso, affect the future behaviors of their sons negatively. Parents’ failures are reflected in their children’s attitudes towards nonwhites or females. Racism and sexism are thus becoming hereditary evils in this novel as they are in real world.

Furthermore, even women regard male oppression normal after a while. Echoing Albert’s voice, Celie also advises Harpo to beat Sofia in order to make his wife obey him. However, in Celie’s position, it is apparent she says that because of her naiveté. She has been exposed to Albert’s insults so many times that that she has unconsciously internalized them and started to believe in the inferiority of her own sex. She has completely lost her self-trust but she has always kept her inner goodness. Her inner light forces Celie to regret in the following chapter for giving such advice. As Celie herself confesses later, she was just jealous of Sofia, of her strength to fight and stand up for her rights.

Celie’s jealousy of Sofia is significant as it helps one understand the male policy of divide and conquer. Women like Celie are so much accustomed to the second-class treatment that they label self-confident women like Sofia as ‘weird’. Since Celie does not have the courage Sofia has, and since Sofia does what Celie cannot, Celie simply falls into the trap of men and betrays her sister. Keith Byerman explains this:

Early in the story, Celie, who has largely accepted the male definition of woman’s place, advises Harpo to beat his new wife into submission. She does this in part because she has trouble with the concept of an independent woman, since such a figure implicitly calls into question of her own submissiveness. When Sofia confronts her with the consequences of her advice, she cannot adequately explain her action, but faces for the first time her hatred of her own womanhood. (1989; 61)

Later in the novel, with Shug Avery's guidance, Celie starts to love her womanhood and makes peace with herself as well as with other women.

Harpo, who listens to the advice coming from his father and Celie, beats Sofia but his attempts are futile. Sofia never hesitates to answer his fists even though these continuous fights make her tired and miserable. She resists Harpo's unceasing attempts to make her feel like a "dog" (Walker, 1982; 62). Consequently, her love turns into hate, and she makes up her mind to leave him. When Sofia decides to leave her foolish husband Harpo, her sisters all come and help her pack (Walker, 1982; 64), which is an incident that proves the power of sisterhood. A woman in trouble has no difficulty in getting help from other women. With the help of her sisters, Sofia goes through no difficulty in adapting to her own life without Harpo and goes out at night even though she is rebuked by her ex-husband who believes "a woman with five children should be at home, not outside" (Walker, 1982; 77).

It is no doubt that black men act hypocritically when they say that a woman's proper place is her home, for black women have always had to work both outside under the same harsh conditions with men and at home all by themselves since the early 18th century. Ironically though, the proper place for a woman is believed to be her house in which their safety is jeopardized by the men of her family: "Houses confine in *The Color Purple*, but Celie, Nettie and Shug all find a form of freedom in houses in which there are no men" (Gates, 1988; 253). Only houses without men can provide shelter for women in Walker's novel since men cause nothing but trouble in houses.

Still, houses with men are not the only places that women are violated. Physical violence goes so out of control that it even involves murdering women on the streets which is an incident that proves women's lives are metaphorically and literally in men's hands. Metaphorically, women are subjected to men since the kinds of lives women should live are decided by their fathers and later on, their husbands. In the literal sense too, as it is in the case of Harpo's mother, a woman's life depends upon the will of a man. Harpo's blood mother, Albert's first wife, was killed by her

lover. The lover's words, "You can't quit me now. You are mine" (Walker, 1982; 29), clearly show the position of women in the eyes of men. They are simple properties to be owned or got rid of.

Women are physically and sexually violated, even killed by the oppressive male power, but that is not the end of tyranny. Similarly, heavy loads of work are used by men to suppress women in another way. Sick and tired of having to work limitlessly, Celie cries at last: "If I was buried, I wouldn't have to work" (Walker, 1982; 19). Even death seems more appealing to Celie whose life is burdened with physical violence as well as back-breaking work loads. Neither Albert nor Harpo helps her at all while she is working outside and keeping the house clean. Both Albert and his son excuse their indolence by saying "women work, I am a man" (Walker, 1982; 22). Since they believe that women are the "mules" (Hurstun, 1937; 16), they see nothing wrong in exploiting women's bodies.

Likewise, in the days of slavery, work was a burden on the shoulders of blacks; however "despite slavery's burdens, African-Americans did not perceive work as the problem, but rather, the exploitation inherent in the work they performed" (Collins, 2000; 50). Blacks in general valued work a lot, but in the case of black women, work was used a means of exploitation by the white men. Besides, working outside did not eliminate black women's domestic duties at all. They were still the ones responsible for keeping the house in good order and providing the needs of the children. Like these slave women, female characters in Walker's novel are also expected to perform their attributed gender roles perfectly as Albert's sister says, "when a woman marry she spose to keep a decent house and a clean family" (Walker, 1982; 20). For Celie too, working in the fields does not lessen her domestic duties; she is the one cooking meals, cleaning the house and taking care of the kids on her own. Celie is the slave and Mr_ is the slave-holder now.

All the above mentioned outer, men-originated influences affect Celie's character negatively. She remains silent in the face of male threat as an act of self-protection. Since she cannot openly resist male oppression, she chooses "not to look

at men”, because they all look “pretty much alike” to her (Walker, 1982; 7-16). Indeed, the men Celie encounters in the novel are all victimizers, cruel abusers. In the beginning Alphonso makes life hell for Celie. Her next step Albert is a man good for nothing. Even little Harpo abuses Celie physically. As a consequence of the male abuses in her life, she has no remnants of affection towards men in her heart.

After all the miseries she goes through because of men, Celie starts to believe that “whenever there’s a man, there is trouble” (Walker, 1982; 186). This is quite a normal reaction for Celie who has been put off by men due to all kinds of mistreatments she received. However, there is not an open act of resistance in Celie’s part, either. She is timid not spiteful. She is not outspoken or furious. Since her childhood, she has been forced to keep silent and remain still by the men around her. Raised up in strict southern black female child codes, hatred or fury does not exist in her vocabulary: “Couldn’t be mad at my daddy cause he my daddy. Bible say, Honor father and mother no matter what” (Walker, 1982; 40), so she chooses to remain silent no matter how unbearable her life is. Most of the time, she just shrugs her shoulders and thinks about the next world so as to soothe herself. Even though she finds out at the end of the novel that her husband Albert has been hiding her beloved sister Nettie’s letters for thirty years, she is still not mad at him since she has never had enough courage to show her anger since her childhood. She has always been forced to comply with men and remain silent in the face of their verbal, physical and sexual violations. Even though all the male characters around Celie seem to be against her, female characters neutralize their adverse influences on Celie with their supportive conducts.

1.4. 2 Analysis of Female Identity: Womanism

All the female characters in *The Color Purple* cooperate in different ways to break Celie’s “silence” and help her reemergence as a free woman. Celie’s tragic fate drawn by male characters is transformed into a bright one in the end with the obvious female cooperation. Female bonding protects Celie from male violence and cruelty. When women’s lives get better, society inevitably receives its share from this

betterment. Thus, even though black women have been left out of American history and black women writers have been ignored by the white-male dominated literary circle, in Walker's novel black women bloom as the most significant and effective characters. They rewrite Celie's history:

In Walker's novel, African-American women are represented as both beset heroines and members of a redeemed community, a revision of the traditional white and male model of American essence that works to redress the exclusion of African-American women, both as writers and as subjects, from dominant forms of cultural representation. (Doane & Hodges, 2000; 66)

Despite the continuous efforts to exclude black women from all arenas of social life, in *The Color Purple* , as a reflection of Walker's womanist approach, Celie's forced compliance ends with the support of women around her; her teachers Shug, Nettie and Sofia, the counter images of the men that make Celie's life heartbreaking. There is an obvious female cooperation in the novel against male-dominance. Women support and teach one another in the face of oppressive male power. Celie's troubled life is saved thanks to her "sisters", each of whom contributes greatly to her awakening as an independent woman. In order to liberate themselves, women in this novel share sisterhood with each other. Barbara Christian has this to say about the bond of sisterhood in Walker's novel: "Celie liberates herself, that is she comes to value herself, through the sensuous love bond she shares with Shug, her husband's mistress, her appreciation of her sister-in-law Sophie's resistant spirit, and the letters from her sister Nettie which her husband had hidden from her for many years" (1989; 52).

The first woman who helps her gain self-confidence is her sister Nettie. Nettie has been physically absent for more than thirty years and her letters are all hidden from Celie by Albert. Still, even though she never receives an answer to her letters, Nettie keeps on writing incessantly which proves her devotion to Celie. Their spiritual togetherness never ends despite the distance between two sisters. In Celie's words "no matter what happen, Nettie steady try to teach me what go on in the world. And she a good teacher, too" (Walker, 1982;18). It is Nettie who first warns her to fight in order to stay alive. Nettie repeatedly reminds Celie that she should

fight for herself since in order to stay alive in the tyrannical Albert's house, it is a must to be a fighter. But the problem is Celie does not know how to fight: "All I know is how to stay alive" (Walker, 1982; 18) is Celie's confession, which proves that at that point in the novel, she has already accepted her victimized position, but in the end, with the help of women around her, her dark fate changes into a bright one. Even though Nettie and Celie are soon parted as a result of Alphonso's and Albert's attempts, Nettie, through her letters, make it obvious that spiritually she is always with her. Nettie's letters from Africa prove the fact that Celie is always on her mind, but these letters are significant on other levels too. Nettie's letters demonstrate that sexism and racism are dangerously alive. Nettie's former letters from America show the prevailing racism in the country while her next letters point to the universality of sexism.

As Nettie's initial letters reveal, racism is still practiced in America. Discrimination towards black race is apparent everywhere; in public accommodation, schools, libraries, cinemas, and trains. In the luxurious New York Train "only white people can ride in beds and use the restaurant. And they have different toilets from colored" (Walker, 1982; 121). Even though slavery is past and allegedly blacks and whites are equal, strikingly blacks are still the ones treated as second-class citizens while whites enjoy their rights as full American citizens.

Next to segregation, colonialism is also mentioned in Nettie's letters. Colonialism and racism are intersecting oppressions; both involve in themselves power elements. White-skinned people of European origins have viewed themselves as superior in intelligence and regarded themselves as capable of ruling over the powerless groups. This European originated master-victim scheme has been reenacted in American racism. With colonialism, racism has been institutionalized in America. In one of her letters from Europe, speaking of the evils of British colonialism, Nettie writes:

'Hard times' is a phrase English love to use, when speaking of Africa. And it is easy to forget that Africa's 'hard times' were made harder by them. Millions and millions of Africans were captured and sold into slavery—you

and me, Celie! Today the people of Africa—having murdered or sold into slavery their strongest folks—are riddled by disease and sunk into spiritual and physical confusion. They believe in the devil and worship the dead. Nor can they or write. (Walker, 1982; 124)

Nettie, the voice of common sense, illustrates with her words the continuing effects of slavery both for native Africans who are left in bewilderment in Africa and African-Americans who cannot belong to the white designated mainstream in America. What is more, an African-American woman or man is a stranger, the ‘other’ both in the eyes of the whites in the U.S. and blacks in Africa. The more time Nettie spends in white-dominated and sexist Africa, the more alienated she feels. Nettie, a black missionary serving the colonial-minded Christians, realizes that the Africans never asked any missionaries to come, so “there is no use in blaming them” for her feelings of alienation even amongst her own people. Her missionary partner Samuel’s comment about Africa is even more striking: “It is worse than unwelcome. The Africans don’t even see us. They don’t even recognize us as the brothers and sisters they sold” (Walker, 1982; 214).

It is apparent from these deductions that the worst thing about being an African-American is that it is impossible to feel comfortable in either continent. Nettie, a black missionary, ironically and strikingly serves the needs of whites by working for them in her homeland. Nettie’s blackness does not enable her to be embraced by the Olinkas, who are not blind to the fact that Nettie has already been Americanized by the whites. Replicating the colonial-minded Europeans, Nettie and Samuel are stuck in a belief that their religion, Christianity, is the best of all and African people’s advancement can be made through spreading it in the continent. Africans do not care at all about Christianity while missionaries regard themselves as the “soldiers of God” on a “backward” continent.

Nettie’s letters from New York and England demonstrate the continuing effects of racism and colonialism while her letters from Africa point to another fact: women are not oppressed only in the U.S.! Even in Africa, in their homeland, black women are still treated as second-class citizens, and this practice underlines the fact that sexism is not confined to America. The sexist practices in Africa make clear that

racism is not the mere cause of black female subordination. It is a powerful element but not the whole reason underlying the double burden on black women's lives. Sexism, which is even more widespread than racism, is not a problem unique to white-male-dominated America.

In Africa too, where there are no racist attacks towards blacks, still there exist sexist assaults. Amongst the Olinkas, the proper place for a woman is considered to be her house: "The men might hunt up to ten miles around the village but the women stayed close to their huts and fields" (Walker, 1982; 136). Olinkas do not believe that girls should be educated since, according to Olinka people, "a girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something" (Walker, 1982; 140). Educating girls would mean trouble for men so only boys are eligible for education. By denying women the right to learn, they act just like "white people at home who don't want colored people to learn" (Walker, 1982; 141). Blacks in the U.S. were refused to have the rights of equal education before the 60s because of their skin color, and women in Africa are denied the same right because of their sex. This draws a parallel between the racism of whites and sexism of black men.

In sexist Africa, a woman's highest duty is considered to please her husband. Olinka is a place where women are sold to traders if they are believed to be unfit for the village life. Even though Nettie believes that "the world is no longer a world just for boys and men" (Walker, 1982; 145), people in Africa think the opposite. The men in Olinka "listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don't even look at women when women are speaking" (Walker, 1982; 146). African men are indeed no different than the men in Walker's novel because similarly, "white people never listen to colored. If they do, they only listen long enough to be able to tell you what to do" (Walker, 1982; 176). The most extreme example to the practices of sexism in Africa is life and death power of husbands over their wives. A man has the right to marry more than one woman. Polygamy is quite an acceptable practice, and, "[i]f he accuses one of his wives of witchcraft or infidelity, she can be killed" (Walker, 1982; 151), writes Nettie in one of her letters to show the vulnerability of black women in Africa just as all the blacks in slavery days in America. Prevailing sexism in Africa

and racism in America point out one notion: both types of oppression are built upon one unhealthy notion, the supremacy of one group, whites or men, over the other, blacks or women.

Next to Nettie, who illuminates Celie with her teachings about the universality of sexism, Sofia comes to the scene as Celie's second teacher. Sofia is the "amazon" woman who in many ways characterizes the counterpart of Celie. Even though in her first meeting with her lover Harpo's father, Albert, she is labeled as a whore, she never loses her dignity but simply gets away from the house. Like Nettie, Sofia insists on claiming that a woman has to fight no matter how hard it is: "All 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 uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker, 1982; 38). When married to Harpo, Mr_'s son, she is the one out chopping wood and repairing roofs while Harpo is the one cooking and cleaning the house. Unlike Celie, she rejects traditional female roles, and by acting so, she fits well into the matriarch image, the image that is created by white-male dominated society. According to this white-designated image, a matriarch is a female patriarch who acts like a man: oppressive and selfish.

Even though Sofia has the courage to stand upright against sexism, still she is too powerless to resist racism's evils. Her wild, outspoken character is forcefully tamed by white oppressors, and she is forced to relinquish her masculine qualities. Matriarch Sofia is punished since as Judith Butler puts it, "we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (1990; 52). Thus, whites punish Sofia and transform her by force. In order to transform "matriarch" Sofia into "mammy" type, white oppressors use verbal and physical insults.

Language is used negatively in the hands of oppressive power to devise a feeling of lowness for the blacks. Sofia is verbally insulted in the mayor's house where she works as a domestic and treated as a slave. "Gal" and "colored" are Sofia's titles in the mayor's house. Patricia Hill Collins explains this approach in her book Black Feminist Thought:

Employers used a variety of means to structure domestic work's power relationship and solicit the deference they so desired. Techniques of linguistic deference included addressing domestics by their first names, calling them 'girls', and requiring that the domestic call the employer 'ma'am'. (Collins, 2000; 56)

Alongside with verbal insults, physical violation is also used by whites in order to domesticate matriarch Sofia and recreate her as a "mammy". Just because she resisted working as a domestic in white mayor's house, as a punishment she was beaten and even put into prison when she fought back. The brutal aspect of racism is most vividly seen on Sofia when she receives all kinds of physical violence in prison. Celie relates this to her reader:

When I see Sofia, I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skulls, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just about the color of an eggplant. (Walker, 1982; 82)

Both types of oppression intersect at one point, and black woman arises as the one that suffers most from this evil combination. In Sofia's case, sexism gives way to another destructive force, racism, whereas in Celie's story racism initiates the sufferings she goes through in the novel. As Celie says to Harpo, "If you hadn't tried to rule over Sofia, the white folks never would have caught her" (Walker, 1982; 181). Even though Harpo could not manage to rule over her, whites succeed in dominating Sofia. She is crushed and forcefully disciplined as she herself confesses: "Everytime they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you. I jump right up and do just what they say" (Walker, 1982; 83). She is taught to submit to the white power, and after spending dreadful years in prison, she is sent to work in the mayor's house, another prison for a woman like Sofia.

Outwardly Sofia does not, or cannot, complain, but deep inside she wants to kill all the whites to set herself free. Celie, upon hearing Sofia's desire, claims: "Too many to kill off. Us outnumbered from the start" (Walker, 1982; 93). From the start, blacks have been a minority and treated so by the outnumbering whites. But even

though Sofia knows that black people's chances of survival depend upon whites' desires, she still cannot help thinking that something is rotten in the system. Sofia thinks that even though whites try to impose their belief in white race's 'superiority', nothing is 'super' about whites:

They have the nerve to try to make us think slavery fell through because of us. Like us didn't have enough sense to handle it. All the time breaking hoe handles and letting the mules loose in the wheat. But how anything they build can last a day is a wonder to me. They backward. Clumsy, and unlucky. (Walker, 1982; 95)

As it can be inferred from Sofia's passage above, white people still want to continue practicing slavery. In likewise manner Sofia's position in the mayor's house is just like that of a slave. The labor system that is imposed upon blacks today shows similarities with the slave system in the past. Sofia, who is treated as a prisoner herself, expresses the brutality of white power: "They won't let me see my children. They won't let me see no mens. Well, after five years they let me see you—Celie—once a year. I'm a slave" (Walker, 1982; 95). Thus the matriarch Sofia is "castrated" by whites, and she is forcefully turned into mammy type, which stands for the ideal type of black woman in white men's and women's heads. For whites, a mammy is the best nanny ever who is willing to sacrifice her own family for the sake of whites.

Ironically, although Sofia-the-mammy is continuously degraded by the white Fisher family, she is still forced to look after the mayor's son and daughter Eleanor Jane at the expense of her own children. However, what should be noted here is that what the black men fail to do because of the demands of whites—to create a family circle—is done forcefully by white men and women. The family process and motherhood feeling lacking in black woman's life are completed even if it takes the cooperation and enforcement of the two powers above the black woman.

After taking care of major's son and daughter, Sofia's mission does not come to an end. Sofia even looks after Jane's son Reynolds whom Jane believes to be the sweetest and smartest kid in the whole world. What is more ironical is that she wants Sofia to think the same too about her son's cuteness, but to her surprise Sofia at one

point cannot tolerate the incessant questions of Ms. Eleanor Jane about her son's sweetness and sincerely admits: "No ma'am, I do not love Reynolds Stanley Earl. Now. That's what you been trying to find out ever since he was born" (Walker, 1982; 239). Sofia continues expressing her feelings which have been repressed until that specific moment: "I don't feel nothing about him at all. I do not love him, I don't hate him. I just wish he couldn't run loose all the time messing up folks' stuff" (Walker, 1982; 240). Sofia does not hide her apathy anymore, puzzling Ms. Jane who has believed "all the colored women love children" (Walker, 1982; 240). The truth she cannot grasp is that not all the black women actually love white children and they do not have to. They, most of the time, act like they do since "some colored people so scared of white folks they claim to love the cotton gin" (Walker, 1982; 240). Self-enforced faith in the mammy image causes the blindness of the whites who mistakenly assume that for a black woman, even her own children mean less than white children. By assuming so, whites remain blind to the reality of motherhood. For a mother, black or white, generally her baby is what matters most in her life since black woman's motherhood has not been recognized by whites since slavery. Even though white women have this freedom, black women have been forced to neglect their own kids at the expense of white children since slavery.

Due to the racist discipline of oppressive white society, Sofia the "amazon" woman turns into a domestic in the end. Yet, even though whites defeat her, Sofia teaches Celie greatly in her way to independence. Sofia teaches Celie that submission is not or should not be a woman's highest duty in man-woman relations. Ernece B. Kelly writes that Sofia has acted as an important role in Celie's life as a path to liberation. According to Kelly, by depicting Sofia as a character rejecting traditional female roles, "Walker makes an important point about a woman's abilities as equal to a man's, critiquing men's resistance to women's competence" (2003; 76).

Alongside with Sofia and Nettie, Shug Avery contributes greatly to Celie's rise as a totally new woman. Shug stands as the most powerful figure in the chain of sisterhood which represents the counterpart of the male circle, the circle that degrades women in every possible way. This sisterhood chain enables Celie's rise as

a free individual despite the oppression of male-dominated system. Shug, a jazz singer who, like her music, “embodies both love and trouble” (Bloom, 1989; 63), acts as the most influential teacher in Celie’s life. Celie’s troubled life, full of insults and violence, finally starts to change in a positive way with Shug’s arrival. Her arrival in town is the turning point in Celie’s life. Once Celie sees Shug’s photo, she acknowledges her admiration: “The most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. She more pretty than my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier than me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like something tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motorcar. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some” (Walker, 1982, ; 8). Upon hearing that the woman whom she admires greatly is in town, Celie becomes so curious about her that she says she would be “thankful just to lay eyes on her” (Walker, 1982; 26). In fact, up to that page Celie has never been heard to desire anything so strongly. Her strongest wish so far has been this plea to see her once.

Shug is the one that helps Celie’s discovery of her own sexuality. Social awareness is only completed—for a woman—with an awareness and acceptance of womanhood and sexuality. This is the last ring in the chain of self-confidence. In the novel, Celie’s awakening also begins with this discovery. The first time Celie feels sexually aroused is the time she washes Shug: “I wash her body, it feel like I am praying. My hands tremble and my breath short” (Walker, 1982; 47). Shug and Celie have a physical and emotional love affair. Shug Avery, “in her bi-sexualism, may be symbolic of an absolute being who is struggling to resolve the gender and social limitations imposed upon her” by society’s definition of ‘normal’, ‘natural’ beings. The problem is less a sexual one than an existential one,” writes Christophe about the nature of this love affair (1999; 105-106).

Indeed, the sexual relationship between Shug and Celie goes beyond the narrow definition of bi-sexualism and embraces a wider perspective. Her physical contact with Shug enables Celie’s discovery of her own metaphysical and spiritual existence. For the first time, Celie realizes her individuality and what is more significant is that she starts to feel alive in every sense. Thus, Shug’s “touch” makes

Celie's "existence" possible. As soon as Celie values herself as a human being, this awakened self-discovery enables her rise as an independent woman.

Shug's physical contact paves the way for Celie's self-realization, and "Miss Celie's Song" Shug writes and sings in a bar in the company of other black folks helps Celie's acquisition of self-love. This is an important episode in the novel since it is the very first time Celie feels herself as a valuable human being. Up to that episode, no one—apart from Nettie—has ever shown her any kindness and nobody ever loved her (Walker, 1982; 117). She has been humiliated persistently by the black men because of her "ugliness" and "womanhood" and degraded by whites because of her "blackness", but never has she been appreciated by any of the characters. Shug is the only character who makes Celie feel valuable for the first time.

Although Shug treats Celie as a real human being, Albert continues beating her for not being as beautiful as Shug. Yet, Celie does not feel hatred towards her at all; having realized that Albert—not Shug—is the real enemy, she overcomes her initial feeling of jealousy. The real threat for her, as it is for many women, is not another woman but the man who is devising the scheme that makes it easy for women to see other women as enemies. Celie does not fall into this trap. Shug is far from being an enemy; on the contrary, she is the one that restarts Celie's life as Celie herself expresses: "My life stop when I left home, I think. But then I think again. It stop with Mr_ maybe, but start up with Shug" (Walker, 1982; 77). Her earlier tragic life transforms into a new form with Shug's teachings.

"You have to git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything at all" (Walker, 1982; 177) is Shug's solution to claim autonomy for women. Celie, guided by Shug boldly cries to Albert's face: "It is time to leave you and enter into the Creation" (Walker, 1982; 180). For Celie to start a new page in her life can be possible only by getting rid of Albert who has done his best to oppress her throughout the novel. For the first time in her life, she feels like a real human being with Shug's presence. When she receives some kindness and affection from Shug,

she realizes also the necessity of self-love in order to be strong. Consequently, Celie's declaration of independence in the end is directly related to her relationship with Shug: the most exceptional character who stays true to herself in spite of the society who labels her as "a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin" (Walker, 1982; 47).

Shug does not merely enlighten Celie with her teachings about sexuality and equality of sexes. With her, the concept of God in Celie's mind also transforms. Like many other blacks, Celie's God figure in mind has been white since it is the all-powerful one like the whites. Celie's description of God as "God all white too, looking like some stout white man work at the bank" (Walker, 1982; 85) illustrates her initial helplessness which changes with Shug's entrance into her life. Before Shug, Celie is unable to imagine her own God as a black being since blackness means powerlessness in this white male dominated society. Celie dreams of God as a white being and by doing so, she takes her 'inferiority' for granted. As Mae Henderson states, "In linking her notion of divinity to a white, male figure, Celie accepts a theology of self-denial. It is a theology which validates her inferior status and treatment as a black woman in a racist and sexist culture" (1989; 71). Feeling abandoned by God, Celie starts to feel that God is a man as well: "The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (Walker, 1982; 173).

By defining God as a "white" and "male" presence, Celie puts a barrier between herself and God since neither whites nor men seem to be on her side. Similar to Celie, Shug also believes that men are "trifling, forgetful and lowdown": "Man corrupt everything. He on your box of grits, in your head and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't." (Walker, 1982; 177). Shug, however, believes that even though men try to act like God, God is a much more affectionate being. Reflecting a transcendentalist belief, Shug asserts that "God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them 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” (Walker, 1982; 176). Shug’s God is a benevolent being unlike men. It is the men who “corrupt” everything, so according to Shug it is no use in blaming God for the mishaps that befall Celie in this novel. Men alone are the guilty ones.

1.4.3 Celie’s Metamorphosis

The female bonding and economic independence enable Celie’s metamorphosis. From a passive Southern girl, she transforms into a self-confident, independent woman who is even able to guide others just as she was guided earlier by the female characters in the novel. Celie, enlightened with the teachings of her “sisters”, Nettie, Sofia and Shug, transforms into a totally new woman capable of counseling other people around her. So far Celie had been a student, but once she manages to stand up for her rights, she does not hesitate to advise other women to speak for themselves. Her first student in the novel is Squeak, Harpo’s new girlfriend, who, as opposed to stubborn Sofia, meekly obeys Harpo’s demands. But Celie, with her ultimatum to “make Harpo call you by your real name” (Walker, 1982; 81), enables Squeak to demand autonomy in the face of male authority. Squeak’s awakening and self-formation start with Celie’s teaching while Celie herself was awakened with Shug’s guidance. Mary Agnes or –Squeak in Harpo’s language—starts to question Harpo’s love once she is awakened by Celie’s guidance. She is not a black woman but a yellow-skinned one, and this color difference in her skin makes her feel suspicious of Harpo’s love. That is why she asks him “Do you really love me, or just my color?” (Walker, 1982; 90). Before Celie’s guidance, she has taken Harpo’s love for granted but once she is helped by Celie, she starts to question her place in Harpo’s world and soon after, she deserts him to pursue her goal to be a singer.

Celie’s teaching goes beyond women to include also men. Celie’s second student in the novel is Albert who has darkened Celie’s life with all his insults, threats and beatings. Towards the end of the book, even self-centered Albert confesses that he finally understands Celie’s “good company” (Walker, 1982; 250).

What they have in common now is that they both loved Shug and both are left by her. They are “two old fools left over from love, keeping each other company under the stars” (Walker, 1982; 279). This mutual experience, this common love-pain experience finally enables Albert to see Celie as a real human being and similarly Mr_ gains an identity for Celie, too. Mr_ becomes Albert now. Nancy Walker explains this change in Feminist Alternatives: “In her last letter to God, Celie refers to him as Albert, a fact that marks not only her sense of self-confidence, but also Albert’s new understanding of love that allows her to grant him an identity” (1990; 63). Albert is an individual in Celie’s eyes now since he finally understands the meaning of love.

Metamorphosed Celie, who is relieved to learn that her children are not the fruits of incest, meets Alphonso, who is now a rich man. She now has enough self-confidence to confront the man who ruined her childhood with his tyranny. In their meeting years later, he explains the reasons for his wealth: “The trouble with our people is as soon as they got out of slavery, they didn’t want to give the white man nothing else. But the fact is, you got to give ’em something. Either your money, your land, your woman or your ass” (Walker, 1982; 164). Alphonso managed to ‘make it’ by paying some tribute to the whites; otherwise he could never be so rich. Alphonso says: “What I did was just right off offer to give them money. Before I planted a seed, I made sure this one and that one knowed one seed out of three was planted for *him*. And when I opened up your old daddy’s store, I bought me my own white boy to run it” (Walker, 1982; 164). If Alphonso, like Celie’s father, had insisted on running his business without giving anything to greedy whites, he would most probably have failed in his enterprise. Alphonso’s case also testifies to the fact that in order to be strong and rich, even alive in the racist American society, blacks have to give something to the whites all the time. Black man’s survival strategy is closely linked to satisfying white man’s demands.

In racist America, the white man occupying the top of the pyramid continually requires from the ones below him: black man and black woman. Poor black man, who has nothing to offer, does not hesitate to trade for his wife, daughter

or sister since woman is already a “property” in the eyes of men in general. Earlier in Walker’s novel, Celie was also treated as a property and sold literally to another man by her step-father. Even though Celie herself has been regarded as no more than a simple object, she, in the end, becomes a property owner and saves herself from being a “property” in the eyes of men.

For Celie, property brings with itself a sense of self-empowerment that is related to economic independence. As Gates indicates, for women “the possession of property seems to preclude the domination of men” (Gates, 1988; 253). Once she obtains money and property by pants-making business she started with Shug, she immediately finds the power in herself to break the male chain around her neck. Economic independence paves the way for her individual independence and ultimate happiness: “I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time” (Walker, 1982; 194). She has no ‘man’ and she is much happier than before.

It is not unusual for Celie to feel that men are good for nothing if one remembers the fact that all through the novel men like Alphonso, Mr_ and Harpo have done their best to dehumanize Celie in every possible way. Beatings, rapes and insults are all men’s weapons in this novel to suppress women. Thus, without any men, Celie is much more comfortable and self-confident since the source of violation is away from her. Even though Albert still attempts to reduce Celie into nothingness, “you black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman . . . you nothing at all” (Walker, 1982; 187), he cannot make her unhappy since he is speaking in an unknown tongue to Celie who feels more powerful now since she has work and money as well as friends.

At the end of the book Celie is transformed from a timid girl into an independent woman and even Albert changed from a macho to a sensitive companion. To generalize, a positive change in the living conditions of women leads to betterment in society as well. For Walker, the black woman can transform a society all together: “Walker’s hope for change in the future rests with the young, old, and outrageously bold black woman” (Bell, 1989; 267).

Celie's change from a timid Southern black girl into an "outrageously bold" black woman directly enabled a positive change in Albert's character. This is not an unusual element in African-American novel tradition. As Michael G. Cooke explains: "While modernism in white literature took the form of hothouse virtuosity and detachment (if not revulsion) from the human, in Afro-American Literature it took the form of a centering upon the possibilities of the human and an emergent sense of intimacy predicated on the human" (1984; 5). Walker's novel puts emphasis on the possibilities of human beings while at the same time it focuses on the societal problems as well. Besides, old age gains a positive meaning in Walker's heroine's body since old age brings wisdom and self-confidence for Celie. This is also a challenge to white beauty norms which prioritize youth over age, specifically in women. In white value system, the older a woman gets the less desirable she becomes, but in black aesthetics, as it is obvious in Celie's metamorphosis, old age brings wisdom and power.

According to Cooke's point of view, Walker does not deviate from the modernist Afro-American tradition by creating a novel that emphasizes the optimistic nature of life. The transformation in the main character is not surprising since the novel is the product of a writer who declares her optimism saying, "Even death, being part of life, must offer at least one moment of delight" (Walker, 1989; 74). Life is a celebration for Walker, so it is for Celie regardless of all the troubles she goes through because of the racist and sexist practices of society. At the end, the novel is transposed into the feminine key that is tender and warmer compared to the world outside. Thus, by creating a feminine and hopeful world, Walker posits an alternative universe in which both racism and sexism can be overwhelmed with the strength of individuals in general and women in particular.

The Color Purple shocks and depresses the reader with the tragic incest story that is told at the outset, but in the end the entire pessimistic atmosphere changes into a pleasant, magical scene. Perhaps in order to understand the "magic" and success of this novel, one should take note bell hooks' comment about the peerless style of this work:

The magic of *The Color Purple* is that it is so much a book of our times, imaginatively evoking the promise of a world in which one can have it all; a world in which sexual exploitation can be easily overcome; a world of unlimited access to material well-being; a world where the evils of racism are tempered by the positive gestures of concerned and caring white folks; a world where sexual boundaries can be transgressed at will without negative consequences, a world where spiritual salvation is the lot of the elect. (1989; 223)

What Celie and other black female characters have to suffer throughout the novel, because of their skin-color and their sex is brutal, but Walker's optimism and her elegant style make *The Color Purple* unique and "magical". As Barbara Christian notes in her article "The Black Woman Artist as Wayward", "few contemporary American writers examined so many facets of sex and race, love and societal changes, as has Walker, without abandoning the personal grace that distinguishes her voice" (1989; 40). Thus, despite all the tragic incidents told, thanks to the "personal grace" in Walker's voice, what is left in the readers' minds after reading the novel are hope and delight rather than despair: that is the real "magic" of *The Color Purple*.

Amongst these "few contemporary writers" who have interwoven the sexual, racial and societal matters brilliantly, another significant name should be mentioned next to Walker: Toni Morrison. Similar to Walker, Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* focuses on the continuing racist and sexist practices in white-male dominated American society and patriarchal black community as picturing the victimized position of black women. While illustrating the depressed and oppressed lives of black women, she—like Walker avoids judging any character subjectively and preserve her graceful style.

CHAPTER II

TONI MORRISON AND THE BLUEST EYE

Writer, editor and university lecturer Chloe Anthony “Toni” Morrison’s (1931-) first novel The Bluest Eye (1970) earned her an acclaimed position amongst the best of contemporary world literature, owing to her lyrical descriptions of the black community with its failures and accomplishment in the 1940s. In her following novels, namely Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977), Tar Baby (1981), Beloved (1988), Jazz (1992), Paradise (1998), and Love (2003), she continued her tradition of writing about the relationship between the individual and black community to whom she feels strongly connected as she states in an interview:

When I view the world, perceive it and write about it, it is the world of black people. It is not that I won’t write about white people. I just know that when I’m trying to develop the various themes I write about, the people who best manifest those themes for me are the black people whom I invent. (qtd in Tate, 1983; 118)

Within the black community, Morrison specifically focuses on the question of black identity and the suppressed position of black women designated by patriarchal society in her works. Through her works, Morrison fights against two types of oppression: racism and sexism in black women’s lives. Besides, she emphasizes the need for a reunification with the old values as she does in Song of Solomon, which is “about black history and the need for African-Americans to be aware of that history in order to become ‘whole’” (Russell, 1990; 96-101). While stressing the necessity of remembering the past and embracing the old values in order to be “whole” in the present, Morrison intentionally evolves her stories around female characters. Still, her works are not simply feminist manifestations as they are not black nationalist works, either. Nellie McKay, the editor of Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Toni Morrison notes:

Although [Morrison] makes it clear in the essays that her experience as a black person and a woman in a Western society shape her intellectual perspective and her artistic vision, she does not subscribe to traditional

feminist ideology. Similarly, she rejects a black nationalism that dispenses easy answers to difficult questions regarding the human condition. Even so, she writes passionately in the defense of black women and the heritage of black people, she excoriates racism and other forms of injustice, and she revels in her love of great literature. (1999; 5)

In her gender- and race-based novels that condemn racism and other forms of violation, Morrison's language is dense with connotations: "For Morrison, language is thick with meaning and she is aware of the power it confers as those American slaveholders who stripped their black slaves of the rights to read, to write and to name themselves as signs of their dehumanization" (Fullbrook, 1990; 205). For the black slaves, words were their only weapons in the face of white power that did its best to silence them. Morrison is aware of the power of the words for the black community who has been treated as second-class citizens and most of the time as inhuman beings since the 18th century. Just like her ancestors, she believes that literacy is their only tool to claim autonomy in the face of racist white surroundings. While following her ancestors' strong faith in the need and significance of literacy, in order to deepen the meanings of words, Morrison employs metaphors in The Bluest Eye while developing the themes of beauty, incest, racism, and lack of unity in black community.

2.1 Metaphoric Language in The Bluest Eye

The central metaphor in Morrison's work is the blue eyes that give the book its title. In the novel, the blue eyes that the protagonist of the novel—an eleven-year-old black girl—desperately desires stand for the white power which defines beauty in white aesthetics. The protagonist Pecola is strong in her belief that in order to be accepted into the white world, she has to have blue eyes. This fantasy stems from the fact that she is not satisfied by her racial identity. For Pecola, the only way to claim autonomy in the face of oppressive power is possible through modifying her body according to the white norms. Thus, her body becomes a "subject to all kinds of power and control" (Lloyd et. al, 1999: 111). The body is the only thing that she owns and has the authority to exercise control. Dreaming herself with blue eyes and thus changing her body in the way the dominant culture wants, is surrendering to the

superiority of the white race. Therefore, her lack of self-confidence and her internalization of white definitions of beauty lead her to imagine an alternative body with blue eyes.

Blue eyes show the “ironic distance between dream and reality” (Walker, 1990; 149). The reality makes clear that as a black child, she can never have real blue eyes, but this truth does not prevent her from dreaming of herself with blue eyes. Denying this reality, she starts to believe she has “the bluest eyes in the whole world” (Morrison, 1970; 150). However, this fantasy or acceptance of white beauty definitions leads her to insanity in the end. The title of the novel, blue eyes then stand for the white superiority prevailing in society, thus probably the major reason that drives Pecola to insanity can be read as racism in the form of ‘blue eyes’: “The bluest eye of the title signifies the monovision of American society that perceives minority people as the ‘other’ and privileges only a white physical standard” (Feng, 1998; 56).

In the Euro-centric model, the beauty standard is closely associated with whiteness. In order to validate their beauty, whites feel an urge to label the ‘other’ as ‘ugly’. Likewise, the dominant culture pumps white features as desirable characteristics whereas the same culture constantly degrades the ‘others’. Blue eyes are valued as a must in order to enter to the white world. According to hooks, this bluest eye represents “the imperial gaze—the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and to colonize” (1991; 7). The gazer is always the one holding power, the one in control of the system. Gaze is the designated territory of the powerful only. Whites are the ones holding power, which gives them the privilege to gaze and dominate. But Pecola, a member of an oppressed race and class, is not strong enough to cope with this gaze. As a resistance, she chooses the self-denial process: “In the course of the self-denying process of internalizing the master narrative that equates beauty and desirability with light skin and blue eyes”, Pecola sees herself the way dominant culture sees her: ‘ugly’. (Moses, 2000; 37). She gradually and unconsciously internalizes white definitions of beauty and starts to desire for blue eyes so as to save herself from being the ‘gazed’ one. So as to resist the white-oppression, she reconstructs her body in her fantasies as a blue-eyed girl.

According to Russell, Pecola's desire for blue eyes is "the painful kernel of a black girl's dream of acceptance in a world that doesn't want her" (Russell, 1990; 94). Indeed, neither the white nor the black world wants 'ugly' and poor Pecola. Naively, Pecola believes that once she fits into the beauty standards, the whole society will finally let her in. Thus, it can be inferred that Pecola does not ask for blue eyes merely to break loose of her inferiority complex, hers is not an egoist desire but a plea for social acceptance and equality. Blue eyes, she believes, would erase the mark that labeled her as 'other' and put her into a subservient position. Having blue eyes would equalize her status with the white men, women and children.

Blue eyes standing for the white standards of beauty play quite a significant role in the tragic fall of Pecola: "The prevailing standards of beauty claim that no matter how intelligent, educated, or 'beautiful' a black woman may be, those black women whose features and skin color are most African must 'git back'" (Collins, 2000; 71). Pecola, whose skin color is the darkest, always "gets back" since her reality does not fit into white idealism. "Within the binary thinking that underpins intersecting oppressions, blue-eyed, blond, thin white women could not be considered beautiful without the Other—Black women with African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair" (Collins, 2000; 89). Thus, in order to be regarded as 'beautiful', white women desperately need the 'ugliness' of black women. Otherwise, there would not be such notions as 'beauty' and 'superiority' of the white race if there were not the 'ugliness' and 'inferiority' of the blacks.

Blue eyes are also "magic passport to affection" (Fullbrook, 1990; 199). Affection is what a child naturally needs most, but Pecola lacks the affection she is desperately in need of since her parents fail to love her, owing to their self-hatred arising from their past experiences. Pecola frantically believes that having blue eyes will open the locked doors in front of her. In her fantasies, by having blue eyes she believes that she will be beautiful, and this in turn will change her parents' and society's hostile attitude towards her. In Pecola's fantasy, her undesirable ugliness will come to an end once she fits into the desirable blue-eyed image of white-

dominated society. As a result, in order to attain not only white acceptance, but also parental love and affection, blue eyes are, for Pecola, what she needs above all.

Next to the central metaphor, blue eyes, there are a number of minor metaphors in the novel. The first one is the dandelions that stand for the hostility of society towards the 'ugly' ones. The dandelions which Pecola believes "are ugly like her" do not love her either (Morrison, 1970; 37). Love is what Pecola desperately needs but not one single character in the novel is capable of teaching her the meaning and importance of it, even her own mother. Thus, just like people who keep dandelions out of their yards, black community does its best to keep Pecola out from their world, and they succeed. This rejection and indifference, alongside with other reasons, inevitably paves the way to her loss of self. The second metaphor is the marigold seeds which do not blossom at all. The soil is America that does not let certain flowers—certain individuals to survive. Finally, fallen tooth of Pauline-the-mother represents her own fall. It is the climax of the novel since just like her tooth, Pauline too starts to fall into a deep despair in the aftermath of this incident. Moreover, she passes on her own inferiority complex to Pecola who has nobody else to take as a role-model.

2.2 Forms and Strategies of Oppression

Blue eyes as representatives of the white racism in general is probably the major factor that drives Pecola to insanity. There are some other incidents that reveal racism in the novel. Whites regard blacks as horrifying beings and even an eleven-year-old girl, Pecola, can easily sense the aversion in the "blue" eyes. What Pecola experiences at the candy store and what happens later illustrate the negative attitude of whites clearly. The white storekeeper in the candy shop Pecola goes avoids looking her in the eye:

She has seen it in the lurking eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her

blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes. (Morrison, 1970; 37).

In Beloved, Morrison notes white prejudice: “White people believed that whatever the manners, under every [dark] skin was a jungle” (1988; 198). Evidently, this white man regards Pecola as an abnormal being that does not deserve a humanitarian treatment. His hatred towards her blackness is so obvious in his eyes that this aversion makes Pecola feel hatred towards her own existence as a black person. Thus, rejected by both blacks and whites, Pecola is unable to find peace neither at home where the blacks are indifferent nor outside where the majority of whites regard her as abnormal.

Next to white racism, sexism, the exploitation of the female body verbally and physically, acts as a significant determinant in Pecola’s fall. The causes behind sexism are parallel to men’s gaze of the female body as a possession, a commodity with which they believe they have the right to do anything they desire. At this point, incest emerges as an inevitable result of the male gaze that seeks to victimize.

Incest is the most tragic experience that initiates Pecola’s physical and emotional collapse and it is closely related to Pecola’s persistent desire for blue eyes. It is after her father Cholly’s rape, Pecola desperately desires for blue eyes to reconstruct her disrupted self. Blue eyes are the symbols of power. Pecola believes that once she has blue eyes, her father will regard her as untouchable, just like the other white-skinned, blue-eyed girls. But Pecola, the darkest-skinned and thus the ‘ugliest’ girl, cannot escape her father’s rape.

Toni Morrison, by writing about an incest taboo actually illustrates the reality of black womanhood. In black women’s lives, incest has been a recurring theme since slavery. In slavery, their bodies were regarded as properties and reproduction machines by their white masters, and this inevitably legitimized the sexual violation of their bodies. Furthermore, that evil practice of white men made black women ‘fair game’ in the eyes of black men as well. Thus, black men copying racist and sexist attitudes of white men, regarded raping their daughters or nearby female relatives as

quite normal. For black men, who were made to work on plantations as slaves and whipped by their ‘masters’ brutally, black women were always already-available victims at home. In order to get rid of their inferiority complex created by the oppressive, white-dominated society, they violated the most available victim nearby: woman at home. Similarly, Cholly, representing the black man’s self-hatred and lack of self-esteem, victimizes his own daughter Pecola.

In The Bluest Eye, where incest emerges as the immediate cause of Pecola’s loss of self, Pecola’s body metaphorically represents the outcomes of a universal threat: sexism and racism. According to Spillers in the products of ethnic writers, “the human body becomes a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material, an abstract phase, a resource for metaphor” (2003; 204). Pecola’s body is the metaphor representing the danger of being a black-female child in a sexist community filled with self-hatred because of the ills of racism. Pecola’s pathetic fate becomes a symbol of the vulnerability of all young girls and of the devastating effects of sexism and racism.

Pecola’s incest trauma leads to her loss of identity and fragmentation of the self. Yet, her rapist Cholly is himself a victim as well. As Morrison notes in her paper “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature”, “the trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self” (2000; 38). Due to the ills of racism, there is already a crisis in collective black memory and black individual’s self. Slavery, a collective trauma is then echoed in incest, an individual trauma. Cholly, being a victim of racism, loses his self-trust and starts to deny his racial-identity. Furthermore, he sees nothing wrong in projecting his own self-hatred on to the most defenseless victim, his daughter Pecola. Similar to Cholly, Pecola is filled with self-hatred and goes through an identity crisis first because of the white values of beauty and superiority and then the incest trauma. Her final culmination, insanity, is the direct result of racism as well as sexism. She is raped ideologically by white society which degrades non-whites and biologically by her own father who himself has been a victim of racism as well.

Being a victim of rape, Pecola seems to be the character that deserves the utmost pity, but there have been different comments from male critics regarding the vulnerability of Pecola in the act of rape. Because Pecola does not fight back against Cholly, Donald Gibson goes so far to assert that “Pecola was not a victim, but a participant in the rape” (1993; 171). As a matter of fact, Gibson’s comment makes just one notion clear: he too fails to understand the psyche of an eleven-year-old girl who knows absolutely nothing about sex and who has to keep silent in such matters. Pecola in the rape scene cannot resist Cholly because she just does not understand what is going on. Because of the aching, she faints and lies unconsciously on the kitchen floor, trying to understand the cause of the unbearable pain she is feeling. She also copes with her mother’s blaming eyes when she finds her daughter lying unconsciously on the kitchen floor. Pecola, however, remains silent as she has been taught to do since her childhood.

Silenced by the oppressive powers, Pecola cannot tell the story of incest and her own violation, so her story is told by a third person narrator, Claudia Macteer, Toni Morrison’s alter-ego in the novel. She tells Pecola’s story to confess her own inability to help Pecola. By narrating her story she may hope to find some relief: “Claudia cannot reach a certain maturity without first coming to terms with the disintegration of Pecola, and, moreover, her own helplessness to revoke Pecola’s tragic fate” (Feng, 1998; 68). Next to Claudia, there are also third-person narrations of Pauline, Soaphead Church, Cholly, and Geraldine, which add to the credibility of their stories.

The sexist practices of the patriarchal black society are not confined to grown-up males, like Cholly. There is not an age limit for men to feel themselves capable of harassing women in the novel. Even little boys too, duplicating whites’ attitude towards blacks in general, regard harassing little girls as normal. The poor-black-female child Pecola is the one who is susceptible to all types of oppressions, including beatings of the little black boys. Black boys see no evil in harassing poor Pecola whenever they get an opportunity. They insult her, throw stones at her, but in

fact it is not Pecola they are fighting against. As Claudia-the-narrator makes clear, they are fighting against their own split identities. Their self-hatred is reflected in their attitudes towards Pecola:

It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult to its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds-cooled-and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was on its path. (Morrison, 1970; 50)

Sadly and ironically, they see nothing wrong in despising a girl of their own race since raised as boys, they see in themselves every right to victimize girls, especially if the girl is ugly, poor and vulnerable. When they grow up, they have the high potentiality of being future Chollies. Cholly and other black men are full of self-hatred since they have been taught to think of themselves as inferior a long time. They have heard so many insults from white men about their racial identity that they have eventually internalized white superiority. By accepting the superiority of the white race, they have alienated themselves from their own reality and grown hatred towards their own blackness.

It is not only Pecola in Morrison's novel who has had to cope with male violence and sexual harassment. In fact, in The Bluest Eye all the girls are potential preys in the eyes of men since men regard female bodies as properties they own. A woman, especially a black girl child is not safe in a sexist society where they are viewed as simple commodities. Pecola's friend Frieda, Claudia's sister, is another victim but unlike Pecola she can quickly overcome the trauma of sexual abuse thanks to her affectionate parents. She is "touched" by their white landlord Mr. Henry but upon finding out this event, Frieda's father "knocked him off the porch" (Morrison, 1970; 76-77).

Frieda is saved from sexual abuse with her parents' help whereas Pecola, after being raped by her own father, is beaten by Mrs. Breedlove, her own mother. The different reactions of these two parents' account for the differences in the future lives

of the two girls. Frieda quickly overcomes the trauma of this tragic incident, but abandoned by her mother, raped by her father and ignored and ill-treated by her own people, Pecola slowly sinks into insanity.

2.3 Class Divisions

Racial depravity in general has not been the mere cause of black women's problems. It is undeniable that being black and woman puts double repression on black women's shoulders, but class factor is as significant as race in determining a black woman's social status. In a society that values whiteness, maleness, and richness Pecola is the one who suffers most due to her blackness, womanhood, and poverty. In other words, poverty adds a third dimension to Pecola's already-present double repression.

Class, race and gender are intimately intertwined to designate a person's social status. Like race and gender, class is a structure where the rights and duties of individuals are determined by birth. Racist and sexist hierarchy of privilege and oppression continues on the class system as well even though America has praised itself on grounds of being a 'classless' society where every one has equal access to power and opportunity. But in Morrison's novel, as it is in the real world, class structures next to racism and sexism prohibit the ones like Pecola from ever attaining the status associated with whiteness and maleness:

It is clear that being born a woman, a person of color, or both, in addition to being poor, makes it far more likely that an individual will have less education, inferior health care, a lower standard of living, and a diminished set of aspirations compared with those who are born white, wealthy, and male. (Rothenberg, 1995; 282)

Accordingly, Pecola does not ever have any chances of attaining the status of a white male/female or a middle-class black male since her existence as a poor, black female child puts an insurmountable barrier in her rise. As Rubenstein explains in Boundaries of The Self, "what makes growing up black, female, and poor particularly problematic is that the white definitions of 'reality' do not correspond

with either black or female experience” (Rubenstein, 1987; 128). According to white definitions of reality, the passport to respect goes together with whiteness and richness. But the reality in Pecola’s life is quite different. She is not white, not male and moreover she is not a member of the middle class. In fact she is a member of black underclass. “Being a minority in both caste and class”, Pecola has not many options to choose or any opportunity to live the way she wants (Morrison, 1970; 11).

Racism and sexism’s adverse effects are increased with the class structures that force those who are poor like Pecola to a life-time subordination. Besides, class divisions do not only separate whites and blacks. As it is reflected in The Bluest Eye, it is an effective power in black community as well. Class structures undermine the unity in black community since it divides the blacks according to their wealth.

In Morrison’s novel, class divisions in black community are best exemplified by houses. Houses are the metaphors that stand for the class stratifications in black people’s lives: the lower one’s class standing, the poorer his/her housing. Houses, the symbols of wealth, put barriers between poor and rich blacks. This inevitably causes a breakdown in black communal life. It creates two groups of blacks in the novel: “propertied blacks” and “renting blacks”. While “propertied blacks” enjoy the outcomes of their wealth, “renting blacks cast furtive glances at these owned yards and porches” (Morrison, 1970; 12). The distinction between “propertied” and “rented” blacks accounts for the development of different fates for two groups of blacks, as in the case of Pecola who herself is the daughter of a “renting” black, Cholly. In short, next to fragmentation of self caused by racism and sexism, this time there is another fragmentation on a social level which is related to class stratifications.

2.4 Analysis of the Male Characters

The two male characters in the novel, Cholly and Soaphead Church are the ones that contribute most to Pecola's process of loss with their acts. Cholly's literal rape and Soaphead Church's emotional rape accelerate Pecola's journey to insanity, but their past lives account for their failures in present-day. Therefore, Morrison gives detailed analyses of the past experiences of these two male figures so as to save the reader from a prejudiced judgment and enable an objective conjecture.

The first male character in Pecola's story, Cholly has had a life that is not less tragic than his daughter Pecola: "When Cholly was four days old, his mother wrapped him in two blankets and one newspaper and placed him on a junk heap by the railroad" (Morrison, 1970; 103). From the time he opens his eyes to the world, he is not welcomed even by his own mother, who is naturally expected to love her child more than anyone else in the whole world. It is his mother that rejects him from the beginning; later he will be rejected by the white society because of his race and left out by the black community because of his poverty.

He is saved from death by his aunt Jimmy who "took delight in telling him of how she had saved him" (Morrison, 1970; 103). Although Aunt Jimmy saves him from death, her incessant attempts to make him feel low make her an unsympathetic character both in the eyes of Cholly and the reader. Moreover, Aunt Jimmy "whipped" Cholly, replicating the treatment blacks received in slavery from their white masters. Her beating clarifies that physical violence is not a characteristic of the males only, it evolves into a vicious-circle. For black women living at the bottom in the chain of hierarchy, the children are the most available victims just as she is the most available prey for the black man. The black child's body is the only place black woman has the authority to do what she wants, including beating. For women like Aunt Jimmy who are accustomed to receiving second-class treatment from whites as well as black men, everyone, except black children, is superior. Claudia-the-narrator explains this designated status of black women:

Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, “Do this.” White children said, “Give me that.” White men said, “Come here.” Black men said, “Lay down”. The only people they need not to take orders from were black children and each other. But they took all of that and re-created it in their own image. They ran the houses of white people, and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. (Morrison, 1970; 108)

The passage above best illustrates the destructive effect of racism in black people’s lives. White man occupies the top of the pyramid and abuse white woman and black men below him. Black man, being abused every single day by white men, immediately abuses the most available victim nearby: his wife, sister, mother or daughter at home. Black woman, being harassed by black man directs her anger at the black children, the only group that dwells below her. Thus, Aunt Jimmy’s beating of Cholly is an outcome of this chain reaction. In the end, black child directs his or her hatred at animals since she or he has nothing else to dominate. Thus, no one is actually innocent but still, the prevailing racism outside is largely responsible for the breakdown in black individuals’ identities in particular and black families in general.

Aunt Jimmy’s death forces Cholly to look for his father who was “nowhere around when Cholly was born” (Morrison, 1970; 104). At the age of fourteen, after making a long and tiresome journey, he meets his father only to discover that he is no more than a stranger to him. That bitter discovery makes him “dangerously free” (Morrison, 1970; 125). He has no one to depend upon; no relatives—since Aunt Jimmy is dead—no friends, and no parents: “Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him” (Morrison, 1970; 126). When society casts him out, he becomes freer and braver than ever. He has no one to explain his acts and even if he wants to give an explanation, he feels nobody will care. He has absolutely nothing to lose which makes him not only brave but also dangerous, dangerous enough to rape his own daughter.

In a desperate position, Cholly feels all alone and regards God as “white”, whereas he believes “devil is black” (Morrison, 1970; 105). These are the hints of his

hatred towards his own identity and a feeling of great respect for the white race. Grown up in a racist society, he has been taught or forced to learn the power of whiteness. This lesson has been repeated so many times that he has consciously or unconsciously internalized this fake 'reality'. In a little while, he begins to devalue himself. Furthermore, he grows hatred towards himself and everything representing his racial identity.

Cholly has his most devastating experience, a trauma he never forgets, at the age of fourteen. Two white men watch him with their flashlights while he is making love to a black girl. Unable to protect his girl, he directs his anger at Darlene, an available victim (Morrison, 1970; 116). He is too powerless in front of white men, "sullen, irritable, he cultivated his hatred of Darlene. Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless" (Morrison, 1970; 118). This is the most traumatic insult he has ever received but since "the insults [are] part of the nuisances of life" (Morrison, 1970; 120), many times he chooses not to hear white men's insulting words. Sometimes the best thing seems to ignore a threat if there is no way to stop it. Cholly, too, in order to defend himself, remains silent in the face of white oppressive power because even if he talks back, nothing much will change in a positive way. Moreover, he may lose his life if one takes into account the fact that in the 40s even though slavery was over, lynchings were something quite common so by breaking his 'silence' he might be killed easily by the white voyeurs.

Cholly, being victimized by his own family and by the white majority, has no concepts of family and fatherhood in his mind: "Having no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he couldn't even comprehend what such a relationship should be" (Morrison, 1970; 126). Thus, "dangerously free" Cholly sees no evil in raping her own daughter Pecola with whom he never had an intimate father-daughter relationship earlier. Spillers traces back Cholly's paternal deficiency to slavery:

The father and the daughter of these configurations are missing historically because the laws and practices of enslavement did not recognize, as a rule, the vertical arrangements of their family. From this angle, fathers, daughters, mothers, sons, sisters, brothers spread all across the social terrain in horizontal display, which exactly occurred in the dispersal of the historic African-American domestic unit. (2003; 249)

Slavery indeed has left incurable damages in black men and women's lives. Because of the rapes, beatings and all types of dehumanizing experiences they went through, blacks feel cut off from their history. Their past is a 'tabula rasa' since upon their arrival to America, blacks were completely separated from their African roots. Their history is broken, no heritage is left. This is why Cholly is "dangerously free". He has no past and no hope for the future. Cholly, who has been a victim in the hands of white dominated society just like his ancestors, takes revenge this time by victimizing his own daughter. In that respect, the motives that initiated Cholly's rape could be traced back to the slavery days: "Rather than black families 'doing it to themselves', this incest metaphor points to something else: the mixings caused by slavery in which the culturally dominant white patriarch is deeply implicated as a source of violent, sexual abuse" (Doane & Hodges, 2001; 35).

Doane and Hodges' comment above makes clear that even though on the surface Cholly seems to be the one totally guilty, a deeper analysis of the motives lying behind his act reveals the hidden secret: slavery haunts black men and women's lives every single day. Black men, who cannot forget the trauma of slavery, project their suppressed anger and hatred on to their women. Women and children are, as they always have been, the easiest preys for them. And especially, a woman child is the most available victim for the black men.

Cholly's own parental relationship is also another cause of the child abuse as Rubenstein points out: "Generally the abuse is symptomatic of disturbed family relationships as well as of a parent's excessive dependence upon a child for emotional release from intolerable circumstances" (1987; 146). For Cholly, poor Pecola is a medium for "emotional release", an instrument he uses to eradicate his memories blurred with racism and slavery. Taking into account all the reasons,

namely racism and lack of parental heritage, that drive Cholly over the edge, it is not so simple to make Cholly as the only reason causing Pecola's fall.

Morrison obviously does not put all the blame on Cholly for Pecola's tragic fate. In Claudia's voice, Morrison even justifies Cholly's act by saying: "Cholly loved her. . . . He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her" (Morrison, 1970; 163). He indeed gives something of himself to her, but this does not make Pecola any better. In fact, his love is the ultimate poison that kills her soul and mind.

In Morrison's novel, the second male character that has a hand in the fall of Pecola is Soaphead Church (Elihue Micah Whitcomb), "a reader, adviser, and interpreter of dreams" (Morrison, 1970; 131), who actually hates all humankind. "Since he was too diffident to confront homosexuality, and since little boys were insulting, scary, and stubborn, he further limited his interests to little girls. They were usually manageable and frequently seductive" (Morrison, 1970; 133). Child molester Soaphead Church, deserted by Velma, whom he believed "could rescue him from the nonlife he had learned on the flat side of his father's belt" (Morrison, 1970; 135), grows hatred towards all women. However, he turns to little girls because "with little girls it is all clean and good and friendly, [and] there wasn't any long funny Velma look afterward" (Morrison, 1970; 144). Once again, female children and their bodies are regarded as the easiest preys for the men. For Soaphead Church, girls are easier to cope with, and if the female child is black, like Pecola, it is even more comfortable since no one would ever question his right to exercise control over a little, poor, black female child.

Being a mulatto, Soaphead Church learnt as a child to separate himself from all that suggested Africa. Morrison gives the full details of racist approaches in America while she explains the nature of Soaphead Church. His white forefathers taught him that "all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it" (Morrison, 1970; 133). They were strong in

their beliefs that in order to preserve their 'superiority', they should not mix with the blacks.

This man, who justifies his wickedness with his sick belief that "evil existed because God had created it" (Morrison, 1970; 137), is the one from whom Pecola asks for "blue eyes". Upon learning this desire of hers, he thinks that "it was at once the most fantastic and the most logical petition he had ever received" (Morrison, 1970; 138). Promising to fulfill her desire of blue eyes, he uses Pecola as an instrument to carry out his filthy wish, killing the dog he hated but never dared to get close. The rules of hierarchy work here once again. Pecola can only dominate an animal since there are no other groups of people below her. She is at the bottom of the pyramid and everyone else is in a position to give her orders, white men, women, children and even black men and women. If Soaphead Church asked her to get close to a white girl or boy, she would most probably not dare to commit such an act. Animals, not people, are the only living existences she can feel touch and harm. Still, this incident reveals another distinguishing characteristics of Pecola. The very first time she plays the role of a victimizer, she breaks apart like a crystal vase. She has internalized her status as a victim and cannot, unlike other characters, handle being a victimizer.

Even though Soaphead Church uses Pecola as an instrument, ironically he feels himself "good" since he does not sexually abuse her. In fact, this is related to her 'ugliness' in his eyes, not his goodness. Unlike the other female children, she is too ugly for him to touch. Thus, he does not rape or sexually harass her not because of his goodness but because of his loftiness. In his letter to God who he believes "forgot when and how to be God" (Morrison, 1970; 144), he praises himself and the 'goodness' he does for Pecola. Yet, his 'good' act causes Pecola's loss of mind. Fallen into Soaphead's trap, she starts to believe that she has "the bluest eyes in the world" (Morrison, 1970; 161).

These two good-for-nothing men cooperate to accelerate Pecola's fall. Cholly initiates the first paralysis with his rape which leaves incurable damages on Pecola's

mind and body. After experiencing such a terrifying trauma, she slowly sinks into insanity. Rape indeed tears her apart piece by piece. The next man, Soaphead Church continues this 'rape' in another level by emotionally playing with her. He brutally takes advantage of her naiveté and makes her believe that she has the bluest eyes ever, which certainly has nothing to do with reality. Pecola, being physically and emotionally raped by these two male characters, not only loses her self-confidence but also her mind.

2. 5. Analysis of the Female Characters

Unlike the strong connection amongst female characters in *The Color Purple*, in *The Bluest Eye*, there are not even the slightest hints of such strong female cooperation in the face of male hegemony. In fact, women in Morrison's novel are indifferent to one-another's problems, and they remain silent in the face of oppressive powers. The only female characters that seem to be on Pecola's side are Claudia and Frieda, but they cannot offer much help either since they are little black girls who are also entangled to some extent by the dominating white and male norms. This is why Pecola, unlike Celie, cannot save herself from the heartbreaking end she nears step by step.

2.5. 1 Claudia-the-narrator: Morrison's Voice

Every character in the novel, except Claudia, seems to agree upon one notion: the Anglo-Saxon model of beauty which defines them as 'ugly': "The dominant culture defines Morrison's characters in terms of what they lack (whiteness, light skin, youth, and social standing), and confronting this 'lack' is their primary task" (Moses, 2000; 39-40). In order to confront this 'lack', they all consent to take the Euro-centric identity as a universal standard. Rafael Perez-Torres explains in his essay "Tracing and Erasing: Race and Pedagogy in *The Bluest Eye*" that "white in the *The Bluest Eye* is not a race but an ideal, a natural state" (1997; 24). Whiteness is regarded as a normality whereas blackness is viewed as a deficiency, a distortion. Alice Walker comments on this paradox: "I believe that the worst part of being in an

oppressed culture is that the oppressive culture—primarily because it controls the production and dispersal of images in the media—can so easily make us feel ashamed of ourselves, of our sayings, our doings, and our ways” (1989; 32). Pecola, a member of the oppressed class, is ashamed of her racial features, just like her mother Pauline, who is ashamed of everything representing her racial identity. Only Claudia resists this white-beauty cliché, and ultimately because of her resistance, she is labeled as “incomprehensible” even by her own people (Morrison, 1970; 13).

Claudia is “incomprehensible” since she is a distinct child who has unfamiliar opinions which do not comply with the traditional patterns: “I had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in humans my own age and size, and could not generate any enthusiasm at the prospect of being a mother. Motherhood was old age, and other remote possibilities” (Morrison, 1970; 13). When the history of black woman is reconsidered, Claudia’s response to motherhood is an expected reaction. For black women, the concept of motherhood has always been a slippery subject because in slavery they were denied the freedom to nurture their own children. Slave mothers’ children were born slaves as well because of the laws that applied maternal heritage to the newborns. Consequently even though for white women motherhood has been one of their cardinal virtues next to piety and purity, for black women who have been regarded as “mules”, motherhood has always been a problematic subject.

Claudia’s reaction to the white-baby dolls given her as Christmas presents also exemplifies her deviation from the traditional standards. Under normal circumstances, a girl child is expected to cuddle her doll and nurture it as a replica of the grown up females, but unlike other girls, Claudia has only one desire, to dismember the doll and to see what makes it so beautiful in the eyes of everyone else (Morrison, 1970; 14). Ann duCille in her article “Black Barbie and the Deep Play of Difference” points out that even in the 20th century, when there are black barbies available, black children continue to prefer white dolls, and continue to identify themselves with white images. In a study that was aimed to demonstrate the negative effects of racism and segregation on blacks, black dolls were used. The results

showed that “when given a choice between a white doll and a black doll, nearly 70 percent of the black children in the study chose the white doll” (1999; 111-118). These results clearly demonstrate the destructive effects of racism in black children who internalize white definitions of beauty and grow hatred towards their racial-identity.

As opposed to the majority of black children who prefer white dolls, for Claudia white dolls are not so desirable outwardly, so she hopes to find inside the reason for which everyone admires them. White beauty norms are also available on the candies black children love best: “A picture of Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes, looking at her out of a world of clean comfort” (Morrison, 1970; 38). Thus, white culture imposes its beauty definitions by taking advantage of the most naïve customers: little girls.

As a resistance to white standards of beauty, Claudia destroys the white dolls. “Though her refusal to credit false standards results in misplaced animosity toward the white baby doll, Shirley Temple, and Maureen Peal, it is nonetheless a bold affirmation of self” (1997; 33), writes Kathryn Earle in her article. By tearing these dolls apart, she declares her refusal to give credit to the white standards of beauty. Yet, when she finds out that destroying the dolls cannot solve the conflict between her reality as a black child and white ideals of beauty, she directs her anger at little white girls, which also results in dismay. As a child, she is too powerless to change the ascribed beauty in Shirley Temples or Maurine Peals: “Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maurine Peals of the world” (Morrison, 1970; 57). Even though she is strong in her belief that what makes her ugly and white girls beautiful cannot be logically explained, she is very well aware that this will continue as long as grown-ups act the way do.

Unlike both grown-ups and little black children, who have unconsciously internalized white definitions of beauty, Claudia is an intelligent, self-confident

female character who accepts her racial-identity as it is. She is the voice of common sense but in sexual matters, she is as naïve as Pecola who, upon having menstruation, asks fearfully: “Am I going to die?” (Morrison, 1970; 19). The dialogs between Claudia and Frieda demonstrate further their ignorance about sexuality since they believe that “ruined” women get fat (Morrison, 1970; 78). Their knowledge about their own bodies is shallow since there is always a distance between themselves and their mothers. Thus, the reason for this naiveté is directly linked to the distant relationship with their mothers.

Susan Willis notes that “the black woman’s relation to history is first of all a relationship to mother and grandmother” to prove the connection between black mother figures in the present-day and the past (Willis, 1987; 5). In *The Bluest Eye*, mothers call their daughters as “girls” while daughters are made to call them as “ma’am” as a sign of respect (Morrison, 1970; 20). This is a replica of the practice in slavery days when blacks were to address their female owners as ma’ams. Next to this distance, there is not any physical contact between the daughters and the mothers. Their relationship is more like an employer-employee association lacking any intimacy. By putting a barrier between themselves and their children, the mothers in Morrison’s novel are simply reflecting what they or their foremothers went through earlier. Thus, a fragmentation within female communities is created due to the problematic mother-daughter relationship in the families.

On the other hand, even though Pecola cannot have the privilege of addressing her mother as ‘mother’, the white girl Mrs. Breedlove looks after can call her “Polly” (Morrison, 1970; 84). Pauline loves this pink-faced, blue-eyed child more than her own daughter. She represents everything Pauline wishes but cannot ever get since she is black, poor as well as ‘ugly’. Due to her denial of love and affection to her daughter, she is as guilty as Cholly and Soaphead Church, but her past life, which has also been a life of pain, makes her somehow a pathetic rather than a monstrous monster. All these characters’ past and present experiences are underscored by the remnants of slavery and racism

2.5. 2 Pauline, the Mother

Pecola's parents are the ones that deserve the most significant attention since their failures in being good role-models give rise to Pecola's downfall. Their stories are told in first-person narration, which adds to the credibility of their personal accounts. In fact as Feng asserts, "Pauline and Cholly's narratives serve as a discursive return of the repressed past to show how the parents' traumatic experiences with a racist society are visited upon the children" (1998; 57-58). It is through Pauline and Cholly's narratives that the reader is able to grasp the dynamics of racism and sexism. Past and present intersect in black people's lives. In slavery they were repressed in the most dehumanizing ways. In the 1940s when the story takes place, they still cope with the trauma of slavery and unfortunately they reflect the same kind of treatment they received as slaves on to their children. At this instance, blacks take the roles of whites and victimize their children, like Pauline-the-mother.

In her childhood, Pauline had a slightly crippled foot which led to her alienation in the family. Not an active participant in life, she chose a hobby for herself: arranging things in shelves or rows (Morrison, 1970; 86). Even though she was talented in arranging everything neatly, nobody recognized or encouraged her talent. Apart from arranging things, she spent her time dreaming of her future which she hoped would be better than her present-day. Like her existence, her dreams were also peaceful:

In none of her fantasies was she ever aggressive; she was usually idling by the river bank, or gathering berries in a field when someone appeared, with gentle and penetrating eyes, who—with no exchange of words—understood; and before whose glance for her foot straightened and her eyes dropped. The someone had no face, no form, no voice, no odor. He was a simple Presence, an all-embracing tenderness with strength and a promise of rest" (Morrison, 1970; 88).

This "simple Presence" however, was far from being a life-time companion who could offer Pauline affection and love she desperately needed. He was a loveless

man that had a troubled childhood: Cholly. Married to Cholly, she moved from the South to Ohio where her troubles started. Pauline herself writes about the problems she confronted when they moved to this totally new environment:

Everything changed. It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks. The ones I seed before was something hateful, but they didn't come around too much. . . . Up north, they was everywhere. . . . Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count. . . . That was the lonest time of my life. (Morrison, 1970; 91)

In Pauline's words, the difference between South, where there is a more united black community and the North where there are white-like blacks, becomes more obvious. Even though racial segregation is not alive in the North, another threat is still available. Here in the North, black community's lack of unity causes the loneliness of individuals. Pauline tried hard to overcome her loneliness by turning to her husband for some affection but this was all in vain. Instead, they kept fighting and fighting with each other. As a result of these fights, Pauline's white ma'am, for whom she worked as a domestic, asked her to leave him, but later on Pauline decided that "[i]t didn't seem none too bright for a black woman to leave a black man for a white woman" (Morrison, 1970; 93).

Pauline's reasoning above is significant since it shows that black women do not trust white women for support, either. Even though women have had a common past filled with subjugation, this shared experience cannot eliminate the difference between the white woman's past life as the "angel" in the house, and black woman's as the "mule of the world". Their differences have been greater than their commonalities. Rape, for instance, has been regarded as an everyday reality for black women since slavery days while a white woman's rape has always been recognized as non-excusable:

Rape and other acts of violence that Black women have experienced, such as physical assault during slavery, domestic abuse, incest, and sexual extortion, accompany Black women's subordination in intersecting oppressions. These violent acts are the visible dimensions of a more generalized, routinized system of oppression. Violence against black women tends to be legitimated

and therefore condoned while the same acts visited on other groups may remain non-legitimated and non-excusable. (Collins, 2000; 146)

Morrison, by using Pauline as her medium, illustrates the gap between white- and black women in the hospitals. There is a difference in doctors' approaches to white and black women even while they are giving birth. Black women, according to doctors, deliver just like "horses" (Morrison, 1970; 97) while the same doctors flatter white women with questions such as "How you feel? Gonna have twins?" Just because black women did not shout and cry, since from the days of slavery they were taught to suffer and be still, white doctors believed that they did not have pains in birth. Thus, the reason Pauline prefers her oppressive husband to a white woman is the realization of the gap between her reality as a black woman bearing a slavery heritage and white woman's experiences specific to her race. Black woman thus felt closer to black men since white women, in the same way as white men, never have had to deal with the troubles of racial identity thanks to their non-blackness. As Elizabeth M. Almquist notes, "[white women's] whiteness is a given, an established fact that is comfortable and never questioned" (1995; 595), and this "established fact" makes black women feel closer to black men while it separates them from white women.

Even though black women turned their faces to black men for support, most of the time they confronted a hostile attitude from their comrades. Pauline too went through this experience but got totally disappointed. Crippled with a feeling of alienation—since her husband did not understand her and she had no friends, black or white, so as to escape from the troubles of her marriage, Pauline started spending all her time in theatres which feed her with not only alternative lives but also images of beauty. Only via the movies was it possible for Pauline to imagine an optional, better life than her own: "There in the dark her memory was refreshed, and she succumbed to her earlier dreams. Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another—physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion" (Morrison, 1970; 95). Movies made her discover her 'ugliness', which was irreversible: "She 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” (Morrison, 1970; 95). In that scale, she put herself and her children to the bottom.

In the dark atmosphere of the theater, she lost her front tooth while biting an apple. Gurleen Grewal comments on this scene: “Sitting in a cinema, mimicking Jean Harlow from a vantage point of assimilation, Pauline erases her identity. Her fallen tooth represents this abject loss of self” (1997; 125). Pauline’s fallen tooth may also symbolically represent her own fall. After her front tooth was gone, she lost all her interest in herself as she declared: “Look like I just didn’t care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly” (Morrison, 1970; 95). In the aftermath of this incident, her life started to seem to her absolutely meaningless and dull. Having a child could not bring any light to her passive existence either. As soon as she saw Pecola “a black ball of hair” (Morrison, 1970; 96), she believed it to be ugly just like she believed herself to be.

Pecola’s birth did not change Cholly’s attitude either just as her birth brought no light to Pauline’s dull life. Cholly’s indifference towards Pauline, his alcoholism, unemployment, and lack of responsibility as a husband and father continued even after their baby’s birth. Still, Pauline did not actually complain about her husband’s indifference and alcoholism since deep down she believed him to be the key to Heaven for her: “She needed Cholly’s sins desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became” (Morrison, 1970; 31). Thus, as a matter of fact she was content with her husband’s wickedness since she was convinced that Cholly’s “sins” would be her passport for a better world after her death. Pauline saw her salvation in Christianity, hoping that in the next world, her “maker” would take care of her. With this conviction, she proves that she has willingly accepted her victimized position in the “real” world. She submitted voluntarily to her subjugation at home, hoping that her troubles in this world would secure her a better position when she dies. Out of total desperation, she gave up fighting for this world and for the betterment of her present situation. This calls to mind Victorian wives in 19th century England who believed to be morally

superior to their husbands. Pauline, too, acts like a strictly religious Victorian lady who stands firm in her trust to God's justice.

Pauline relinquished her contact with her family but her fights with Cholly never came to an end. These continual fights, however, left their children Pecola and Sammy in a desperate position. The reactions of these two children to their parents' fights were also gender-differentiated. Sammy frequently ran away from home as a way of resistance, as Cixous notes turning away is, "a male privilege, which can be seen in the opposition by which it sustains itself between activity and passivity" (2000; 265). Sammy, the "active" male child, could have the freedom to express his anger but Pecola, the "passive" female child could merely "pray for disappearance" (Morrison, 1970; 33). Unlike her brother, Pecola could not make a radical move and leave everything behind her. All she was able to do was to pray and hope for a better future.

Pecola's prayers for disappearance later transformed into prayers for blue eyes since she believed "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'" (Morrison, 1970; 34). Her passing as "beautiful" would prevent others, including her mother Pauline, who offered Pecola no love at all, from demeaning her. However, the troubles in the Breedlove house never came to an end.

Since home offered no peace, "no memories to be cherished", the only place for Mrs. Breedlove to find relief was white Fisher family's house which offered her "power, praise and luxury" (Morrison, 1970; 99) lacking in her own home. In this house "she became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs" (Morrison, 1970; 98). With her complete devotion to her 'master', she fit well to the 'mammy' stereotype, all-giving and never complaining. She never questioned the reason why she was still poor even though she was supposedly loved and appreciated deeply by the Fisher family. Instead of questioning the sincerity of her white employers, she neglected her own children at the expense

of the blue-eyed, pink-faced Fisher girl who represented the opposite of Pecola in appearance:

Pauline kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into her storefront, or to her children. Then 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 liked by God, fear of madness like Cholly's mother. 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. (Morrison, 1970; 100)

Collins explains the reasons why Pauline never showed any affection to any of her children as follows: "For far too many black mothers, the demands of providing for children are so demanding that affection must often wait until the basic needs of physical survival are satisfied" (1991; 55). Pauline, who is in Feng's words "the female uncle-Tom" (Feng, 1998; 60), provided for her kids to the best of her ability, but while doing that she completely forgot when and how to be a mother.

What is even more devastating is that she passed on her own belief in the 'beauty' of white race to her daughter. According to psychoanalytic theory, "the development of feminine behavior results from the girls' identification with adult female role models" (Bell-Scott et al., 1991; 52). Elaine Showalter too states the same notion: "A girl's core gender identity is positive and built upon sameness, continuity, and identification with the mother" (2000; 321). The closest role-model for Pecola was her mother, and by identifying herself with the mother figure, she started to internalize white values at the expense of her blackness. Once her mother, her closest role-model, rejects her, Pecola is left on her own in a totally hostile world which she does not know how to fight back against.

Furthermore, next to Pauline, black society as well reinforced Pecola's belief in her own ugliness. They all stood firm in their beliefs that the Breedloves were desperately ugly. The Breedloves were similar to other blacks in their poverty but much different from them in their appearance. Their ugliness was 'unique' in Claudia's words:

The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. (Morrison, 1970; 28).

In reality, Breedloves were not aware that their ugliness actually arose from their self-contempt. Instead, they took their ugliness for granted, which was actually the main reason lying behind their failure in challenging the white beauty norms. Claudia calls attention to this internalization process: “You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction” (Morrison, 1970; 28). Commenting on this issue, Michael Wood notes the cultural, rather than natural construction of beauty and its internalization:

Each member of the family interprets and acts out his or her ugliness differently, but none of them understands that the all-knowing master is not God but only history and habit; the projection of their own benumbed collision with the mythology of beauty and ugliness that oppress them beyond their already grim social oppression. (1998; 121)

Like race, class and gender, beauty is also a constructed identity but regarding white race as the utmost beauty is so widespread that it becomes something of nature, especially for those who do not have it. The problem with Breedloves is that “they are trapped in a world where their feelings of helplessness and rage turn in upon themselves” (Doane & Hodges, 2001; 116). Helpless and loveless Pauline fails to love her own daughter as well.

Pauline’s inability to love her own daughter leaves Pecola in a desperate position. For Pecola, love is an obscure idea, far from her world filled with self-contempt. Since her mother fails to love her, Pecola is left alone to learn the meaning of love on her own. The questions such as “what did love feel like, how do grown-ups act when they love each other?” always occupy her mind (Morrison, 1970; 44). There is absolutely nobody around Pecola that can explain her meaning of love by showing some affection to her. Her closest relatives, her parents, are far from

offering her anything positive. Outdoors, there are whites who despise her, inside there are blacks who reject her.

There is only one place where Pecola can find affection and sympathy to some extent: the house of three whores. These women, in other words, act as alternative mother figures for Pecola who is left on her own. Like Pecola, these whores are the outcasts of society in general. Since they too are regarded as “other”, they feel closer to Pecola and treat her nicely but they cannot prevent her fall either. Being outcasts limits their capacities to change Pecola’s fate. Still, these women call attention to themselves since they are the most outspoken female characters in the novel:

These women hated men, all men, without shame, apology, or discrimination. They abused their visitors with a scorn grown mechanical from use. Black men, white men, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jews, Poles, whatever-all were inadequate and weak, all came under their jaundiced eyes and were the recipients of their disinterested wrath. They took delight in cheating them. (Morrison, 1970; 43)

Reflecting the attitudes of the male figures who take delight in dehumanizing women, the three whores enjoy victimizing men. Men are simply objects for them. As opposed to Pauline or Pecola, they themselves are the victimizers avenging themselves not on the lower social categories, but on categories which are supposed to be higher. Thus, by dominating the ones above them, they subvert the chain reaction upside down.

2.5. 3 Maurine Peal versus Pecola

Maurine Peal is another powerful female figure in the novel. Yet, her power arises from the fact that her physical attributions comply with white definitions of beauty and superiority. She represents the counterpart of miserable, poor, and ‘ugly’ Pecola in every aspect. Maurine’s arrival in town is the opening of a new period in the lives of Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, who are “bemused, irritated, and fascinated by her”. In Claudia’s words, she is “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, swaddled in comfort and care” (Morrison, 1970; 47-48). For lighter-skinned girls, like Maurine, life is easier. As opposed to Pecola who is disdained by everyone because of her poverty, blackness and ugliness, Maurine is adored by both blacks and whites:

Maurine enchanted the entire school. Black boys didn’t trip her in the halls; white boys didn’t stone her, white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls’ toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. (Morrison, 1970; 48)

White-male dominated society worships white beauty standards and causes the destruction of ‘ugly’ Pecolas while it pampers girls like Maurine. As in the case of Pecola who is “the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk”, ugliness brings with itself loneliness while for Maurine beauty leads to popularity (Morrison, 1970; 34).

Maurine, who can pass as white, is no better than the boys when it comes to insults. Upon hearing the rumor about Cholly’s sexual abuse of his daughter, Maurine starts to disturb Pecola with her questions, which cause Pecola to shout “I never saw my daddy naked!” (Morrison, 1970; 56). In the aftermath of this fight, Maurine shouts at the girls: “I am cute! And you are ugly! Black and ugly!” (Morrison, 1970; 56). In Maurine’s mouth, blackness once again becomes a symbol of lowness and ugliness. Confused by Maurine’s insults, Claudia begins to contemplate on the definition of beauty: “We were sinking under the wisdom, accuracy, and relevance of Maurine’s last words. If she was cute—and if anything could be believed, she *was*—then we were not. And what did that mean?” Finally she finds the answer on her own: it is not Maurines or Shirleys that she should blame but “The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made her beautiful, and not us” (Morrison, 1970; 57-58). Claudia’s final conclusion makes it clear that the system, prejudiced, white-male dominated system that labels blacks as “ugly” is the main source of growing self-hatred amongst black people. This corrupted system hampers the non-blacks like Maurine whereas it does its best to victimize the ones like Pecola: the darkest, poorest and ‘ugliest’ ones.

2.5. 4 Geraldine versus Pecola

Maurine Peal is not the only pampered female character by the system. Next to her, there is another privileged female character, Geraldine, privileged because unlike dark-skinned Pecola, she is a mulatto. As Elaine K. Ginsberg states in Passing and The Fictions of Identity “a minute degree of blackness functions as an absolute arbiter of identity” (1996; 103). The lighter the skin-color, the easier life is as in the case of brown girls:

They are thin brown girls. . . . Such girls live in quiet black neighborhoods where everybody is gainfully employed. . . . They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man’s work with refinement. . . . They never seem to have boyfriends, but they always marry. Certain men watch them, without seeming to, and know that if such a girl is in his house, he will sleep on sheets boiled white, hung out to dry on juniper bushes, and pressed flat with a heavy iron. . . . Her hips assure them that she will bear children easily and painlessly. (Morrison, 1970; 63, 64, 65)

These brown girls can be seen as the extensions of Victorian ladies in 19th century Britain. A Victorian woman was believed to be pure, untouched by those sexual desires that marked her husband, her moral inferior. Her predominant ideology of life was chastity and complete devotion to her family. Victorian ladies were the ones responsible for the moral education of their children and keeping the household functioning properly. These women were also expected to be intellectual; some general knowledge of reading, writing, painting, and history were the qualities of high class Victorian ladies. These Victorian lady definitions of the 19th century reflect the attributions of brown girls in 20th century America.

In The Bluest Eye Geraldine is the model brown lady, she is asexual and still very beautiful. Geraldine is, in Luce Irigaray’s words a “regulation Athena, perfect model of femininity, always veiled and dressed from head to toe, all very respectable”. Geraldine is, by this token: “extraordinarily seductive, which does not necessarily mean enticing, but isn’t in fact interested in making love” (2000; 417).

Geraldine-the-Athena is not only uninterested in “making love”. The act of loving her own family is also a remote possibility for this woman who passionately cares for her black cat more than her son and her husband. Yet, outwardly she is the super mom caring for the needs of her son and home. This is true to some extent that she does her best to meet the physical needs of her family, but she is incapable of showing affection to her son. The only living being she loves deeply is the black cat and even though Geraldine plays the role of perfect model in appearance quite well, her son Junior soon “discovered the difference in his mother’s behavior to himself and the cat” (Morrison, 1970; 67).

The son’s anger towards his mother transforms into a different shape. Since he does not have the courage to express his anger to the mother figure who keeps her distance all the time, he directs his hatred at little girls. Loveless Junior loves bullying girls; however, only white girls can he hurt because, “[t]he nigger girls he did not pick on very much. They usually traveled in packs, and once when he threw a stone at some of them, they chased, caught, and beat him witless” (Morrison, 1970; 68). Unlike other black girls, Pecola, left alone by even her own race, cannot escape the evil assaults of Junior: “And he threw a big black cat right in her face. The cat clawed her face and chest in an effort to right itself, then leaped nimbly to the floor” (Morrison, 1970; 70). Junior uses the black cat, the originating source of his hatred, as his tool to punish Pecola who has done absolutely nothing wrong to feed his anger. She is the most available target for this brown-skinned boy that takes revenge on her mother by using the cat, her love object, as an instrument.

Moreover, of the black cat’s death, Junior accuses Pecola, who is already a potential felon in the eyes of Geraldine: “Grass would not grow where they lived. Flowers died. Shades fell down. Tin cans and tires blossomed where they lived” (Morrison, 1970; 72). With that prejudice in her mind, she does not hesitate ordering her away with these insulting words: “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (Morrison, 1970; 72). She does not bother to question the innocence of her light-skinned son since she has already an available target, defenseless Pecola,

2.6 Black community versus Pecola

Barbara Christian notes in “Trajectories of Self-Definition” that in Morrison’s novel, “the black community itself becomes a major threat to the survival and empowerment of women” (1985; 234). The unsympathetic black community does not help the rise of Pecola at all. Pecola is defenseless in the eyes of whites and blacks to the same extent due to the failure of black community.

By telling the story of Pecola, Morrison actually points to a more significant issue: “Toni Morrison tells not only the story of a black girl’s desperate attempt of self-definition, but also brings out the need for the black community to embrace their own culture and beliefs. For in not doing so, not only do they ‘lose’ their Pecolas, they lose themselves” (Russell, 1990; 96). Instead of helping Pecola, the black community in the novel simply gossips after her and puts the blame on her negligent parents. Moreover, some of them go as far as blaming Pecola: “Well, they ought to take her out of school [;] . . . she carry some of the blame” (Morrison, 1970; 149). Paradoxically, she is marked as the scapegoat for her tragic fall. As Claudia asserts:

They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would say, ‘Poor little girl,’ or, ‘Poor baby’, but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been. We looked for eyes caressed with concern, but saw only veils. (Morrison, 1970; 149).

As a result of the indifferent, even hostile attitude of society, Pecola cannot save herself: “The damage done was total. She spent her days, her tendrils, sap-green days, walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear” (Morrison, 1970; 162). Pecola’s madness is the ultimate act of the novel, as a culmination, it solved her problems and fulfilled her needs and it opened the eyes of Claudia to a bitter truth:

We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. . . . We

honed our egos on her, padder our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (Morrison, 1970; 163)

Claudia makes clear that other blacks desperately need Pecola's ugliness in order to justify their 'health', 'eloquence' and 'health'. Yet, Pecola's rape and insanity make Claudia feel guilty. That is why she tells the story of Pecola. Feng states that, "Claudia's sense of guilt for not saving Pecola and her child is the albatross around her neck that propels her to repeat the story. She actually goes through a process of self-healing when retelling this woeful experience of her past" (Feng, 1998; 67). In order to relieve her sense of guilt and show the failures of black community, Claudia tells Pecola's story. After witnessing Pecola's tragic fall, Claudia also realizes that "the soil is bad for certain kind of flowers" (Morrison, 1970; 164). The soil, America, is bad for the 'others' like Pecola; poor and 'ugly' blacks:

In classic fashion, macrocosmic nature is meant to be a metaphor for a microcosmic social order: the marigold seeds that do not bloom in Lorain, Ohio are figures for the beliefs planted in African-Americans that inhibit the production of healthy self-images. Through incest, what is left behind in Pecola is her father's seed that fails to thrive. Through white patriarchal ideology, what is left in her is a desire for bluest eyes that devalues as it eradicates her racial identity. (Doane & Hodges, 2001; 42)

It is not only Cholly, Pauline, Soaphead Church or whites in the novel who perpetuate Pecola's fall. It is the community as a whole that is responsible for the ends of many Pecolas: "In The Bluest Eye, the community is the backdrop to the lives of Claudia and Frieda MacTeer and the Breedlove family, asserting itself primarily in its moral castigation of the Breedloves' misfortunes" (Rubenstein, 1987; 149). The community and its failure in incorporating the ones like Pecola to the system accounts for the loss of Pecola. As Feng notes "Morrison writes to challenge the readers' literary imagination and social consciousness. She also writes to open the eyes of both dominant and minority communities" (1998; 73).

While aiming to enlighten both black and white communities, however, Morrison does not conceal her empathy and grace. In The Bluest Eye, she depicts all

of her characters, even the most appalling ones, with sympathy. She neither romanticizes nor avoids showing their ignorance and failings since it is actually the system Morrison criticizes and in parts both blacks and whites seem to get involved in this double-faced system. Black community's failure lies in their internalizing the values of oppressive power, and this leads to a fracture in both individual psyche and community as a whole. Consequently, it is not only the individuals but the political system which feeds the racist-sexist culture that brings characters like Pecola to the point of regarding insanity as the only path to salvation.

CONCLUSION

The discussions in the previous chapters testify to the fact that racism and sexism have been the most controversial issues in American history since even the existences of these terms in the dictionaries—let alone their practices, do not comply with the ideals of that “free” country where supposedly every American citizen has limitless access to equal rights and opportunities. Theoretically, this belief might have validity but in practice for many centuries, American ideals of liberty and equality have been reserved to the use of rich and white males exclusively, leaving both blacks and women out of American history since the differences in color and sex have led to an understanding of deficiency in the eyes of white males.

As both Walker’s and Morrison’s novels demonstrate, these two outcasts, blacks and women have had a common past filled with subjugation since the early years of independence till present-day. Labeled as “other” by the male and Euro-centric majority because of their differences, these two groups have had to fight against the prejudiced gazes and practices in American society. Their histories have been written with revolts, movements and organizations that were all made to enjoy the same rights as the white-male citizens of the country.

In Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* examined in this thesis, the struggles of black women, in a racist and sexist American society are illustrated through the experiences of the female characters. The troubles female characters have to put up with prove that racism and sexism are intertwining oppressions and when these two oppressions combine, the black woman emerges as the one most susceptible to the ills of this combined repression. While portraying the outcomes of the double repression on black women’s lives, these novels celebrate the values of love, beauty, female bonding and reunion with society. Yet, the transformation that the main characters go through in the end differs greatly even though their troubles resemble strongly. Intensely painful experiences of Celie offer hope and illumination, but Pecola’s ending is far from offering any positive feelings.

The three key terms double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence and double-vision that Bell defines are all available in both novels where the characters live in the two worlds, black and white, and in order to stay alive in white-supremacist America, they either have to make sacrifices including their African heritage or they end up in despair. Yet, Walker offers a solution by portraying the female cooperation and its healing effect on not only individuals but also the whole society. However, Morrison does not seem to offer an obvious solution to the problem through the lives of her characters. The solution can only be inferred by the objective reader. In short, Morrison's novel is constructed upon the fragmentation in individuals and society whereas Walker focuses on the unification and collaboration. Still, both novels deal with common themes such as racial and sexual oppressions in the lives of the poor and ugly black girls.

The violence towards the black heroines in each novel is related to her gender. Rape is the most obvious theme that surfaces in both novels. In *The Color Purple*, the heroine is a thirteen-year-old girl who is a victim of inter-racial rape. In the early chapters of the novel, her victimization by the sexist attitudes of her step-father, whom she believes to be her biological father, continues in a shocking way. Later, as a replica of the white master's attitude, the rapist father sells Celie-the-victim's children without letting her enjoy the feeling of motherhood since her position is not different than that of a slave woman who has no rights on her own body and her children. In the following chapter, Celie herself is sold to another oppressive force, Mr_ who darkens her life with many types of physical insults and assaults. Her new life in tyrannical Mr_'s house is absolutely not even slightly better than her previous life. In short, first her step-father and then her 'husband', or more correctly her abuser, replace the position of white slave owners of the past and thus make life hell for Celie.

Similarly, in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the main character, this time an eleven-year-old girl, goes through the same kinds of misfortune. First of all, she is raped by a man of her own race like Celie, but even more tragically, her rapist is her blood-father while in Walker's novel the rapist is the step-father of the protagonist.

Adding to the rape, Pecola, like Celie, is prone to many sexist practices in society. Still, even though Celie's children are sold as a replica of the white master's practice in slavery days, Pecola does not have to deal with that kind of misfortune since her offspring does not live at all.

Despite the similarities in the types of abuses they are exposed to, Celie in *The Color Purple* saves herself and re-emerges as a character with self-confidence and self-esteem in the end whereas Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* slowly and dreadfully sinks into insanity. Both girls are described as timid, shy and 'ugly' in the early chapters, but at the end only one of them manages to survive. The reason that lies behind the different fates of these two characters is closely related to societal factors that prepare the falls and rises of individuals.

As it is demonstrated in both chapters, when racism and sexism combine, women like Celie, "the most silenced and abused voice in American literature, that of a poor, black, ugly, uneducated, beaten-down woman" in Walker's novel and Pecola in Morrison's work suffer most (Russell, 1990; 130). The outcomes of racist and sexist practices in America hurt the poor, black woman occupying the bottom of the pyramid because of her race, gender and poverty.

Even though black woman is the one that suffers most from racism and sexism, that does not necessarily mean that there are no possibilities for rebirth. As Walker points in *The Color Purple*, an oppressed woman can save herself and can enlighten the whole society once she finds the support of other individuals around her. All the female characters help Celie's transformation from a timid girl into an independent woman. Celie's transformation in turn alters the male characters. This is a chain reaction; the improvement in women's lives lead to a betterment in men's worlds, which eventually changes the whole black community in a positive way. To conclude, in *The Color Purple*, there is an organized reaction to the victimizer, but in *The Bluest Eye*, there is not such an open outcry against the oppressive male hegemony. Only the whores in *The Bluest Eye* have the courage to resist the system, but since they are also outcasts, they are not capable of changing Pecola's fate.

In Walker's work, society in general and women in particular help Celie's rise as a completely new human being with empowered selfhood. In the first chapters of the novel, all the male characters seem to be doing their bests to degrade Celie for being "ugly" just like Pecola. They try hard to make her feel useless, less than even an animal. But Celie has friends who warn her to fight no matter how hard it can be in this male-dominated and racist environment. Celie's first reactions to these warnings are "I don't know how to fight. All I know is how to stay alive" (Walker, 1982; 18). She is intimidated, limited by the oppressive male forces around her. Yet the female characters teach Celie the necessity to fight for her rights unless she wants to be crushed under Mr_'s fist. Besides, it is Shug, the most influential character in Celie's life, who opens Celie's eyes to the beauties of life: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple and don't notice it," and teaches her how to claim autonomy, "you have to git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything at all" (Walker, 1982; 177).

In short, all the female characters in *The Color Purple* function as life-guards for Celie, whose life is paralyzed with beatings and insults. These women, in other words, weave a protective garment around Celie's body against the male threat in her world. In the end, Celie opens a new page in her life with the help of her sisters. She "unlearns" earlier definitions of white-male superiority and thus focuses on her new, independent life. Once she changes from a shy, dependent girl into an independent woman, she discovers her ability to love and even the power to change and educate the man who abused her in every possible way earlier in the novel. Thus, when saved from a terrible fate with female cooperation, she immediately gains her self-confidence, which leads to a betterment in not only herself but also her surrounding.

However, in *The Bluest Eye*, there is not one single woman that the heroine can fall back on. First of all, the nearest people in her life, her parents, are not supportive. She has a rapist father whose own life is darkened with the trauma of racism and a negligent mother who cares for the white girl she looks after more than her own daughter. Pecola's mother, whom the reader naturally expects to be the

closest woman in her life, is far from offering her any love or affection. In fact, even after her father's rape, without asking any questions to her daughter, Pauline accuses her of bringing her boyfriend home once she finds her lying unconsciously on the kitchen floor. Thus, Pecola is left all alone with her troubles. Celie in *The Color Purple* does not have any good parental figures either, but unlike Pecola, she has a sister who keeps on writing to her incessantly even though she never gets an answer from Celie since Mr_ hides her letters for thirty years. Despite the physical distance between two sisters, their spiritual contact never ends.

The two novels differ in terms of not only female relationship but also beauty definitions. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's hatred towards her own race is an inheritance from her mother who naively and willingly dedicates herself to the service of whites. Her mother Pauline's self-discontent poisons the self-trust of her daughter and leads to her isolation. Pecola not only reflects her mother's belief in the beauty of the white race but also her belief in her 'ugliness'. Mimicking her mother, she considers herself extraordinarily ugly and worthless. Her subordination to the dominant culture starts as she feels hatred towards her own body. Moreover, black community as well nourishes her self-hatred by treating her as if she were a freak.

Celie unlike Pecola does not hate her blackness; she does not deny her real identity. Race is not the utmost problem for her. Basically, she is having her troubles because of the sexism in black community; thus she prefers to spend time with women because she is not "scared of them" (Walker, 1982; 7). The appreciation of black beauty and black womanhood is apparent in Walker's novel. Unlike Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Celie finds beauty in a woman of her race. But in *The Bluest Eye*, the heroine does not realize that a black person can be "beautiful" as well, which is largely connected to her internalization of white aesthetics.

While considering the pervading problems in black women's lives, Morrison and Walker hold a mirror to the interiority of black family and society in general. This mirror reflects that Celie and Pecola, the ugly and poor black girls, suffer from the racist and sexist practices of society equally. But Celie awakens with Shug's

arrival in her life and finds the power in herself to determine her own destiny rather than let others do it. Walker's womanist approach, which embraces not only women but men as well, saves Celie. Thus, Celie is free to make her own choices since the female bonding and later society itself offer her possibilities for a new life. Pecola cannot make any choices in a society that does not let the ones like her lead the life they want.

The same notion of chain-reaction apparent in Walker's novel is repeated in The Bluest Eye as well. The destruction in an individual's life causes a collapse in family structure and later in societal structure. What happens in Pecola's microcosmic universe is a replica of a general truth. Unlike the society in Walker, Pecola's community does not offer her anything apart from a victimizing attitude that becomes a tradition. In Pecola's society, first one is subordinated as a victim and then one transforms into the role of a victimizer and starts to oppress others in order to stay alive. In short, society in The Bluest Eye does not offer Pecola any choice apart from being a victim first and later victimizer.

Overall, after examining these novels, it appears that identity problem of black women, as well as their relationship with the patriarchal black community, constitutes a big problem. Societal forces in the forms of racism and sexism shape black women's lives and make them realize the falsity of American idealism, which only protects the rights of whites and males and forces blacks to deny their racial identity in order to survive.

Both Walker and Morrison depict the negative and positive aspects of their community from a female protagonist's point of view while exploring the complex inner problems that a racist/sexist America can create. In their works they place their fingers on the pulse of black women's lives who have been left out not only by white history but also by black history while asserting that women should always stand firm despite and united regardless of all the oppressions. As both novels demonstrate, salvation is possible only through a female bonding and reunification with

community. To conclude, all that is needed is toleration since it is always in the hands of human beings to alter evil and transpose it into beauty.

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