

Racism, Sexism and the Genesis of a “Womanish” Identity in Selected Novels by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison

Received: 16/02/2017 ; Accepted: 12/06/2019

Abstract

This article explores the genesis of a new meaning of black womanhood in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The four novels examine how racism and sexism define black women’s gender roles, categorize their beauty and mutilate their sexuality. However, both Morrison and Walker witnessed the genesis of a “womanish” identity which is primarily based on woman’s strength, love, and survival. Alice Walker’s Womanism is adopted as the basic analytical method. As a literary movement, Womanism tries to give black women the voice of liberty, empowerment, and equality in order to fight both race and gender prejudice.

Keywords: Racism, Sexism, Black Womanhood, Womanism, Gender Roles, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *The Color Purple*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.

Selma CHOUCANE *

Department of English
Language and Literature
Faculty of Letters and
Languages
Sétif 2 University
(Algeria)

Résumé

Cet article traite la genèse d'un nouveau sens de la féminité noire dans *L'œil le plus bleu* et *Sula* de Toni Morrison et *La couleur pourpre* et *Le secret de la joie* de Alice Walker. Les quatre romans examinent comment le racisme et le sexisme définissent les rôles du genre des femmes noires, classent leur beauté et mutilent leur sexualité. Cependant, Morrison et Walker tous deux ont vu la genèse d'un nouveau sens de la féminité noire. Le Womanisme d'Alice Walker est adopté comme méthodologie analytique. En tant que mouvement littéraire, le Womanisme tente de donner aux femmes noires la voix de la liberté, de l'autonomisation et de l'égalité afin de lutter contre les préjugés de race et du genre.

Mots clés: Racisme, Sexisme, Féminité noire, Womanisme, Rôles du genre, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, *L'œil le plus bleu*, *Sula*, *La couleur pourpre*, *Le secret de la joie*.

ملخص

يتناول هذا المقال نشوء مفهوم جديد للأنثوية السوداء في روايتي الكاتبة توني موريسون " [أكثر العيون زرقة](#) " و " [صولا](#) " و روايتي الكاتبة أليس ووكر " [اللون الأرجواني](#) " و " [امتلاك أسرار الفرح](#) ". تدور الروايات الأربع حول حياة النساء السود و الظروف الصعبة التي يواجهونها في مجتمع يسوده التحيز العرقي و الجنسي و الذي يحدد أدوارهن الجندرية، يصنف جمالهن ويشوه حياتهن الجنسية. يركز المقال على نشوء هوية جديدة مقارنة لمفهوم الأنثوية لأليس ووكر الذي يعطي المرأة السوداء صوت الحرية والتمكين والمساواة من أجل محاربة كل من التحيز العرقي و الجنسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحيز العرقي ، التحيز الجنسي ، الأنثوية السوداء ، الأدوار الجندرية ، أليس ووكر، توني موريسون ، أكثر العيون زرقة ، صولا ، اللون الأرجواني ، امتلاك أسرار الفرح

* Corresponding author, e-mail: selmachouchene@gmail.com

Introduction

In Toni Morrison's *Sula* [1] and *The Bluest Eye* [2] and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* [3] and *The Color Purple* [4], black women are struggling with both the white racist society and the black patriarchal one. Black womanhood, then, becomes an impossible task to achieve within a society controlled by race and gender prejudice which forces black women not only to accept their inferior positions in society but also to surrender to their defined roles, categorized beauty, and mutilated sexuality. According to hooks, "[a]s subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities and name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others and one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject" [5]. Morrison and Walker describe black women as an object being defined by the racist and sexist society. However, they provide the possibility for the object to become a subject and, thus, define his own identity.

Racism, Sexism and the Burden of Black Womanhood

Throughout Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's novels, black female characters suffer from femininity violation. The white racist society and the black patriarchal one set standards for womanhood that push the black woman apart; starting from physical appearance and beauty to roles performed in both family and society. In *The Color Purple*, Celie is a poor, uneducated black girl living in Georgia in the early twentieth century. She was raped by her step father, whom she thinks is her real father, and got two children; Adam and Olivia. Celie has been separated from her children. She has also been obliged to marry a cruel black patriarch, whom she called Mr. _____ and not by his name. Her beloved sister Nettie left her because of Mr. _____'s continuous harassment. Celie was subjected to different forms of oppression. She was obliged to do heavy work while Mr. _____ didn't work at all. She also suffers physical, emotional and sexual violence. Mr. _____/Celie relationship is similar to a master/slave relationship. Within that sadistic life, Celie finds herself paralyzed and accepts the status-quo. The only comfort she could find is in writing letters to God and later to her sister Nettie. However, with the coming of her husband's mistress, Shug Avery, Celie starts to change as she moved towards self-empowerment.

The African girl Tashi, who is a minor character in *The Color Purple* and the major character in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is also a victim of race and gender prejudice. Tashi lived in Olinka village. She lived with her sexist father, submissive mother and her sister Dura who bled to death because of genital circumcision. Tashi befriends Celie's children; Adam and Olivia who have been attracted to her cheerful face and vivid personality. Tashi, however, suddenly decided to endure genital circumcision -as her sister Dura- in order to resist the influence of white imperialists and Christian missionaries and, thus, to prove her true Africanity. Later, Tashi married Adam and moved with him to America. She even got a new name; Evelyn Johnson. However, the consequences of genital mutilation are too heavy to bear even in a new world with a new name. She could not have a healthy sexual relationship with her husband who finds refuge in the arms of his French mistress Lisette. She also miraculously gave birth to a child whom she could not love properly. Tashi, thus, suffers physical, emotional and sexual problems that trapped her into a complex trauma. Finally, Tashi could understand the crime she committed against her body and decided to take revenge from the circumciser M'Lissa.

Like Tashi, who suffers genital mutilation, Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* suffers emotional mutilation by being the stereotype of ugliness for both white and black societies. Pecola's suffering started from her unhealthy family. On the one hand, her mother treats her badly unlike the way she treats the small white girl for whom she works. The white girl calls Pecola's mother Polly, while Pecola calls her Mrs. Breedlove. On the other hand, her father is an alcoholic man who ends up raping and

impregnating her. Morrison shows the black community’s concept of beauty in the gifts that parents give to their daughters in Christmas; “[a]dults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasured” (*Bluest*, 18). Although black women could not fit that image of beauty, they see in Pecola’s dark skin a scapegoat in front of which they feel themselves beautiful. Being ostracized by the prejudiced beauty, Pecola’s longing for blue eyes becomes an obsession. Thus, she finds herself trapped in loneliness imposed by her inability to accept her blackness or get blue eyes. Finally, Pecola ends up mad by seeing herself with blue eyes and thinking of others jealousy of her beauty.

Unlike Pecola’s passivity, Morrison describes Claudia, Pecola’s best friends and narrator of the story, as a confident girl who later grows into a strong woman. Claudia loves her blackness and feels happy in her skin. She resents the white standards of beauty by dismembering white dolls in Christmas. Claudia wanted to save Pecola and her baby but unfortunately, she could not. She criticizes the black community’s adoption of the racist and sexist ideologies and blames it for being responsible for Pecola’s devastation. Through *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison stresses the importance of the community in the construction/destruction of black womanhood.

As Claudia, Sula’s strong behavior is established from the beginning of *Sula*. Although she lived in a black patriarchal society, Sula shows her difference in her curious and adventurous behavior. She lives with her grandmother Eva, who portrays the black matriarch, and her mother Hannah whose only longing is a daily sexual experimentation. Although Eva and Hannah help in raising the feeling of independence in Sula’s behavior, Sula casts herself apart; not only by refusing to surrender to the community’s conventional definition of womanhood but also by making herself the center of everything. Nothing is worth for Sula except her self. Her best friend Nel, however, is a prototype of the traditional woman who is dedicated to marriage and child-raising. Sula’s difference could not be digested by the Bottom’s community which labeled her a pariah. She, nevertheless, wanted to educate Nel as well as the women of the community that black womanhood cannot be defined by a racist and sexist society, but by the woman’s own perception of herself, her independence and her growth. Unfortunately, the strong Sula declines when she met her first love Ajax. Her great love for him makes her a shadow of Nel. Sula wanted to possess him, but Ajax left her. Finally, she becomes sick and dies.

Through the different stories, both Morrison and Walker show the reader the damage of race and gender prejudice on black womanhood. However, both authors, being social activists, enhance the black woman’s struggle for self-realization and self-empowerment. They provide a new meaning of womanhood by ascribing womanist attitude to their female characters. Alice Walker describes the womanist/“womanish” woman as the one who embraces a number of characteristics. The “womanish” woman thinks about the well-being of both the individual and the community. Through love, survival and assertive behavior, the “womanish” woman could challenge the dominated conventions related to race and gender prejudice.

The “Womanish” Woman’s Outrageous, Audacious, Courageous and Willful Behavior

Alice Walker defines the “womanish” woman as the one who shows “outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior” [6]. Morrison describes Sula as a strong character from the very beginning of the novel. Sula is courageous to the point that she cuts her finger in order to protect her friend Nel from a group of Irish boys who caught Nel and “pushed her from hand to hand until they grew tired of the frightened helpless face” (*Sula*, 54). To avoid the boys’ taunt, Nel and Sula take the long way home until the day where Sula decides to “go on home the shortest way” (*Sula*, 54). Sula’s courageous behavior leads her to choose confrontation rather than escape. In fact, Sula and Nel encountered the boys who stepped in front of them to stop them from passing. Unlike her friend Nel, Sula shows both courage and determinism. She acted as a womanist in a courageous and willful behavior; cutting her finger was the only way to defeat the boys and to no more be afraid of their harassment. She raises

her eyes and looks at them directly and says: “[i]f I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you?” (*Sula*, 54-5)

Unlike Sula, Nel has always been secretly proud of her calm and controlled behavior (*Sula*, 170). For her, Sula was uncontrollable, irresponsible and always takes the wrong decisions. She claims: “Sula, like always, was incapable of making any but the most trivial decisions. When it came to matters of grave importance, she behaved emotionally and irresponsibly and left it to others to straighten out. And when fear struck her, she did unbelievable things. Like that time with her finger. Whatever those hunkies did, it wouldn’t have been as bad as what she did to herself. But Sula was so scared she had mutilated herself, to protect herself” (*Sula*, 101). Nel thinks that Sula’s behavior is wrong. According to her, they should let the boys humiliate them and it would not be worse than cutting her finger. Sula’s behavior was not her own at that time. For her, “Nel was the best. [And] she imitated her, or tried to, those long years ago, [however] it always ended up in some action noteworthy not for its coolness but mostly for its being bizarre” (*Sula*, 141). Nel could not see the great sacrifice of her friend as a courageous act in order to protect her and, thus, Sula does not earn “Nel’s gratitude but her disgust” (*Sula*, 141).

Sula also passed by two important experiences that played an important role in shaping her audacious and grown behavior. The first experience was when she heard her mother saying that she did not love her and the second experience was with Nel on the river where Chicken Little accidentally died and unfortunately Sula alone assumes the blame. The two experiences taught her two important lessons, “[t]he first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either” (*Sula*, 118-9). Although the two experiences have been difficult to Sula, she learned quickly the importance of assuming her own responsibility and to no more rely on others but to “let her emotions dictate her behavior” (*Sula*, 141).

Sula accepted the distance between herself and her mother and the fact that she has to grow by her own. She also accepted the blame of Chicken Little’s death although she knows that it was an accident and that if the blame should be assumed by someone, it will be by both Sula and Nel and not Sula alone. Nel takes a long time in order to know Sula’s great act of responsibility. At the end of the novel, she realizes “that what she had thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquillity that follows a joyful stimulation. Just as the water closed peacefully over the turbulence of Chicken Little’s body, so had contentment washed over her enjoyment” (*Sula*, 170). Sula’s reaction to the different experiences in her life shows her sense of responsibility and her grown behavior. She fits with Alice Walker’s definition of the “womanish” woman as “grown. Responsible. In charge” [7]. Being responsible and grown is important for a black girl to get full potential as an independent woman.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison also presents an example of responsible, grown and courageous girls. Although the story turns around Pecola Breedlove, Morrison introduces Claudia as the narrator of Pecola’s story. Pecola is described as a voiceless girl who accepted the society’s conventions of womanhood and tried to fit that definition. Her ultimate desire is to get blue eyes in order to be accepted by both white and black societies. Yet, finally, only madness could help her realize that impossible dream. Unlike Pecola, Claudia has voice throughout the novel. She narrates Pecola’s story from two perspectives; one as a child and the other as an adult. Claudia refuses the white hegemonic standards of beauty. She shows her resistance to such conventions from childhood. As an adult, Claudia can recount Pecola’s story with a focus on the circumstances behind Pecola’s weakness and devastation including the mother-daughter relationship and the black community’s complicity.

Morrison stresses the importance of the mother-daughter relationship in shaping the little black girl’s response to race and gender prejudice. Although Claudia belongs to a poor family as Pecola, she has a strong personality and could not accept the society’s beauty conventions. Claudia’s mother taught her with her sister Frieda the importance of self-worth and self-empowerment in order to resist and challenge both

racism and sexism. However, Pecola has been raped by her father and her mother could not provide her with neither love nor protection that she generously provides to the little white girl for whom she works.

Besides the lack of love and protection, Pecola’s mother plays an important role in her daughter’s weakness. Their relationship was so distant to the point that she calls her Mrs. Breedlove whereas the little white girl called her “Polly”. The mother-daughter relationship is an important womanist method for social change. According to Walker, the mother plays an important role in shaping her daughter’s will and ability to fight both racism and sexism. Cheryl J. Sanders claims that “it is evident that Walker’s concern is to include the mother in the womanist context by ascribing to her the role of teacher and interpreter, and by portraying her as resigned to the daughter’s assertion of her womanhood” [8]. The lack of a healthy mother-daughter relationship makes Pecola trapped in self-isolation and self-hatred.

Although Frieda has a strong behavior, she shares with Pecola the love of the young white star Shirley Temple. Claudia recounts how both Pecola and Frieda have loving conversations about how “cu-ute Shirley Temple was” (*Bluest*, 17). The two girls could not resist the white beauty and find it difficult to affirm their own one. However, Frieda could accept her blackness whereas Pecola could not. Unlike Pecola and Frieda, Claudia shows both independence and confidence. Her rejection of the prejudiced beauty is seen in her rejection of the blue-eyed dolls at Christmas, Shirley Temple and even her light-skinned classmate Maureen Peal.

Claudia complains how adults never asked her what she would like to have as a gift because her last wish ever is to get a blue-eyed doll. She dismembers them to see what they are made from to perhaps understand why all people love them. She claims: “[t]he indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say, “Awwwww,” but not for me?” (*Bluest*, 20). Claudia also hates Shirley Temple because she is the idealized image of beauty for both white and black girls. She claims: “I couldn’t join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me” (*Bluest*, 17). Although Bojangles is one of Claudia’s favorite African-American performers, she cannot understand the reasons that led him to dance with Shirley Temple and not with her.

As Sula’s protection of Nel, Claudia is both Pecola’s friend and protector. When a group of black boys used racial language to victimize her, Claudia acted in a courageous and audacious behavior and yelled at one of the taunting boys named Bay Boy. Although the black boys met Pecola with Claudia, Frieda, and Maureen, their target was the one with the darkest skin. Maureen, however, could never be taunted by the boys because of her light skin. She is valorized in both white and black societies. Morrison claims that: “[w]hen teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn’t trip her in the halls; white boys didn’t stone her, white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls’ toilet” (*Bluest*, 60). Through the preferential treatment given to Maureen, Morrison shows that besides white prejudice, interracial prejudice also exists.

Although Maureen first sympathizes with Pecola and even expresses her wish to befriend her, she quickly begins to tease her. Claudia tries to defend Pecola by punching Maureen in the face with her notebook. Maureen quickly embraces the white racist ideology when she stresses the racial prejudice. She claims: “I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly” (*Bluest*, 71). Claudia and Frieda quickly respond to Maureen’s racist words by an insult of their own; “six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie” (*Bluest*, 71). Pecola, however, responds quite differently, as Claudia describes: “Pecola stood a little apart from us, her eyes hinged in the direction in which Maureen had fled. She seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing. Her pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that

hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets. But she held it in where it could lap up into her eyes" (*Bluest*, 71-2).

The courageous behavior experienced in Morrison's novels is also described in Walker's texts. Before getting wholeness, Tashi and Celie are described as passive characters due to their devastation by patriarchy. However, they both show a kind of courage and responsibility from the beginning of Walker's novels. As a teenager, Celie has been repeatedly raped by Alfonso; her step father whom she thinks is her real father and called Pa. She also gives birth to two children, [Olivia](#) and [Adam](#). Pa gives away the two children who have been raised by a missionary couple. Celie could not tell anyone of her suffering because of Pa's instructions: "[y]ou better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (*Color*, 1). Celie, thus, finds herself trapped in a silent circle of sexual abuse and the only refuge was writing letters to God. In fact, for a long time, God is the only being she can communicate her fear, shame, and isolation. Celie, then, married Mr. _____, who treats her much more as a slave than as a wife and beats her regularly. Although Sofia and Shug advice Celie to stand up for herself, Celie feels paralyzed and submits to the status-quo. Even Mr. _____'s sister Kate tells her: "[y]ou got to fight them [...]. I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself" (*Color*, 22). Yet, for Celie submission is the only way to survive.

Despite her passivity, Celie shows courage when she plays the role of the protector as both Sula and Claudia. She helps [Nettie](#) to run away first from Pa and then from Mr. _____ when both try to rape her. Celie sacrifices herself and accepts physical and sexual violence in order to keep Nettie safe. She also secretly fights for Shug by spitting in the water of Mr. _____'s father when he harshly criticizes her. Celie could not accept the humiliation and suffering of her beloved ones. However, she starts to behave in a more courageous way when she knows from Shug that Mr. _____ has been hiding Nettie's letters for many years, leading her to believe that her sister was dead. For the first time, she expressed her rage and wanted to cut Albert's throat with his razor, but Shug stopped her because killing Mr. _____ is not the solution.

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

Mr. _____ as the black patriarch could not accept that his submissive wife could leave him and he tries to beleaguer her free will by telling her that she will get a bad reputation if she runs away from his house. For Celie, however, getting freedom from Mr. _____'s patriarchy is much necessary than thinking of others' view of her. Thus, Celie fits with Walker's definition of the womanist as courageous, audacious with willful behavior [9]. Her change in behavior is described by Celie herself when Sofia's mother dies and she comes back to see her in Harpo's house. She claims: "I feels different. Look different. Got on some dark blue pants and a white silk shirt that look righteous. Little red flat-heel slippers, and a flower in my hair. I pass Mr. _____ house and him sitting up on the porch and he didn't even know who I was" (*Color*, 220). Mr. _____ could not know Celie not because of her appearance, but because of the change that affected her behavior. He could not see the submissive Celie, but a new woman whom he never knew before. Celie's internal growth becomes visible to Mr. _____ when he met her in the funeral of Sofia's mother. she claims: "I see he

feeling scared of me. Well, good, I think. Let him feel what I felt” (*Color*, 225-6). Celie, finally, succeeded in reversing the power-relationship with Mr. _____.

Tashi is described at the beginning of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* as a young girl with a vivid personality and a cheerful face. She befriends Celie’s children Adam and Olivia when they come to Africa with their family and Celie’s sister Nettie as missionaries. Although girls in Olinka village were dedicated to help their mothers and learn homework, Tashi was always with Olivia trying to learn a new way of life. Morrison writes: “Tashi’s mother and father were just here. They are upset because she spends so much time with Olivia. She is changing, [...]. She is becoming someone else; her face is beginning to show the spirit of one of her aunts who was sold to the trader because she no longer fit into village life. This aunt refused to marry the man chosen for her. Refused to bow to the chief” (*Color*, 161). Tashi tries to forge a new way of life which seems difficult to live in Olinka’s patriarchal society.

Tashi’s father is against girl’s education. When Nettie told him that Tashi is very intelligent and that she could be a teacher or a nurse and, thus, helps the people in the village, he replied that there is no place here for a woman to do those things and then he asked her to teach only the boys (*Color*, 162-3). Tashi’s father knows that education is the proper way for young girls to develop their full potential as independent women. However, as a patriarch, he has to disapprove it. He told Nettie that if Tashi comes to her house, she has to “send her straight home [... and] her Olivia can visit her, and learn what women are for” (*Color*, 163). For Nettie, however, this is an opportunity for Olivia who “must learn to take her education about life where she can find it”. (*Color*, 163)

Tashi’s audacious behavior is also shown in her lovemaking with Adam in the fields, which is considered as a great sin. As Adam’s description: “this way of loving, among her people, the greatest taboo of all (*Possessing*, 28). Making love in the field is prohibited because the crops would not grow. Adam, however, claims that “[n]o one ever saw us and the fields produced their harvest as before” (*Possessing*, 27). Tashi and Adam experienced the intense feeling of pleasure. Adam states that: “[e]ach time we made love, she’d wanted me as much as I’d wanted her. She had engineered most of our meetings. Whenever we held each other she was breathless in anticipation. Once, she claimed her heart nearly stopped. Such pleasure as ours was difficult for us to believe. Was it a pleasure of which others knew? we often asked ourselves” (*Possessing*, 32).

Although Tashi shows a will to forge a new life as Olivia and an audacious behavior in her field lovemaking with Adam, she still has an internal conflict about her African identity. When the M’bele’s detained leader sends a message to his people to make them remember their origins and “return to the purity of [their] own culture and traditions” (*Possessing*, 115), Tashi abides to the leader’s call and decides to stop the influences of both white imperialists and Christian Missionaries. The only way to do that is to come back to traditional rituals and specifically to female genital circumcision. M’Lissa, one of the village circumcisers, described female genital circumcision as “the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinka tradition” (*Possessing*, 63). Tashi leaves the Olinka village and joins the Mbeles camp in order to undergo female genital circumcision. Although the ritual causes the death of her sister Dura, Tashi shows great courage and determinism for her African identity. She tells her psychiatrist Raye that she gives up her sexual pleasure in order “to be accepted as a real woman by the Olinka people” (*Possessing*, 120-1).

Tashi does not only experience ritual circumcision but also has a tribal sign, a scar marked on her face. Both scars are painful, but for Tashi, they are signifiers of her African identity. She claims the importance of rituals in one’s identity: “[w]e had been stripped of everything but our black skins, here and there a defiant cheek bore the mark of our withered tribe. These marks gave me courage I wanted such a mark for myself” (*Possessing*, 24). However, the rituals bring her physical, mental and even emotional problems. Although she married Adam and moved with him to America where she is known as Evelyn Johnson, the effects of genital circumcision still persist her. Tashi acknowledged her big mistake. She claims: “[h]ow had I

entrusted my body to this madwoman” (*Possessing*, 148). Her legs are unbound and she could not have a healthy sexual relationship with her husband who finds refuge in the arms of a full woman; his French friend Lisette. In addition, she gives birth to a mentally retarded boy due to her infibulated vagina which results in his brain damage. It is only later that Tashi understands that she has been a victim of a patriarchal society who tried to submit women by controlling their sexual desire. In a courageous behavior, she decided to take action and stop the ritual by killing the circumciser M’Lissa who becomes a national icon. Although Tashi knows from M’Lissa that she herself was a victim of the ritual, she could not stop her determinism. In her trial, Tashi declares: “even before the Bible was brought, I said loud and clear so there could be no mistake: I did it” (*Possessing*, 264).

The “Womanish” Woman’s Commitment to Love the Self and the Other

According to Walker, a “Womanish” woman is the one “who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually [...]. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually” [10]. Besides loving women and/or man, Walker insists on the importance of self-love. She claims that the “womanish” woman is the one who “[l]oves herself. Regardless” [11]. Love, then, becomes necessary in shaping both the self and the relationship with the other. Morrison’s *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* and Walker’s *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* illustrate the importance of loving the self and the other in order to resist race and gender prejudice.

Sula loves herself and that love is shown primarily in her independence. When Eva reproves her for not being married or having kids, Sula declares, “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (*Sula*, 92). Also, when Eva tells her that she has hellfire inside her, she replies: “[w]hatever’s burning in me is mine” (*Sula*, 93). Sula wants to create her identity and control her life. She does not want anyone to define her or determine her behavior. The last conversation between Sula and Nel shows how Sula’s behavior is seen by Nel as well as the community as a man’s behavior. Nel claims: “[y]ou *can’t* do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man. You can’t be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don’t” (*Sula*, 142-3). Sula refused to be compared to men. She said that every man she knew left his children. Rather, she is an independent woman. Moreover, she is independent from any feeling or property that could restrict her own selfhood. Morrison writes: “[s]he was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments—no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself—be consistent with herself” (*Sula*, 119).

Sula’s self-love surpasses any other feeling. Unlike Nel who cannot define herself far from the need to please her husband and the whole community, “Sula was distinctly different [...] she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full rein, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her” (*Sula*, 118). Sula’s self-love is also shown in her acceptance of her self as it is, despite the opposition of the whole community. Sula told Nel: “I like my own dirt” (*Sula*, 142). Nel cannot understand Sula’s point of view. She has never felt love or lived for herself. It is impossible for her to understand something she has never tasted. She thinks that Sula is showing off and tries to humiliate her. She claims: “I always understood how you could take a man. Now I understand why you can’t keep none” (*Sula*, 143). For Sula, however, “[men] ain’t worth more than [her self]” (*Sula*, 143). As a womanist, Sula’s love for herself is much important than the conventional need to dominate a man.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia also shows her self-love when she revolts against the beauty myth that prototypes anything white as beautiful. Unlike Pecola whose almost desire is to get blue eyes and Frieda who loves Shirley Temple, Claudia shows her hatred of light-skinned Maureen. She thinks that “[i]f [Maureen] was cute—and if anything could be believed, she *was*—then we were not. And what did that mean?

We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but lesser” (*Bluest*, 72). Claudia also does not accept the dolls as beautiful/lovable because if she has to believe the blue-eyed dolls as beautiful this means that she is not and if she has to love their beauty this means that she has to hate herself. However, Claudia hates the blue-eyed dolls in order to preserve her self-love. She could not digest racial and gender prejudice. She even asks herself: “[w]hat was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important?” (*Bluest*, 72). What Claudia, Frieda and Pecola lack is the light skin and/or blue eyes that Shirley Temple, their classmate Maureen and even the dolls have.

Pecola’s need for blue eyes becomes an obsession especially because she is seen as the symbol of ugliness by her black community. Toni Cade Bambara points out that, “we make many false starts because we have been programmed to depend on white models or white interpretations of non-white models, so we don’t even ask the correct questions, much less begin to move in a correct direction. Perhaps we need to face the terrifying and over-whelming possibility that there are no models, that we shall have to create from scratch” [12]. Unlike Pecola, Claudia and Frieda created their own model of beauty. A model shaped primarily by loving and accepting the self. Claudia and Frieda feel happy in their blackness and love themselves as they are. They claim: “we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars” (*Bluest*, 72). If Pecola thinks that getting blue eyes is the way to survive in a racist and sexist society, for Claudia and Frieda, loving the self is the secret of beauty and it is what makes a girl/woman survive and grow.

Celie’s experience with love in *The Color Purple* has been a complex one due to the different kinds of violence she faced during her life. Celie has not received love in order to give love. The only person who loved her was her sister Nettie. Yet, Nettie was forced to leave her due to Mr. _____’s continuous harassment. The lack of love and violence that Celie endured make her hate not only Mr. _____ but also his children. She says: “Mr. _____ marry me to take care of his children. I marry him cause my daddy made me. I don’t love Mr. _____ and he don’t love me” (*Color*, 64). She also claims: “[e]verybody say how good I is to Mr. _____’s children. I be good to them. But I don’t feel nothing for them. Patting Harpo back not even like patting a dog. It more like patting another piece of wood. Not a living tree, but a table, a chifferobe. Anyhow, they don’t love me neither, no matter how good I is” (*Color*, 30). Through Celie’s words, Walker shows the consequences of racism and sexism on love and relationships.

Celie lived in the invisibility. She was not only invisible to Mr. _____ and his family but also to herself. She did not feel her existence. She had no dreams, no desire and she did not even know her body. She only accepted the status-quo of Mr. _____’s submission. Being a weak woman, Celie wants all women to be like her. Although she said that “[she] like Sofia” (*Color*, 36), however, she could not hide her hatred of Sofia’s strong behavior. When Harpo asks his father “what to do to make Sofia mind” (*Color*, 36), Mr. _____’s answer was brief and clear: “[w]ives is like children. You have to let ’em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating” (*Color*, 36). Mr. _____’s advice for Harpo to beat Sofia is not surprising. He is a black patriarch who beats his wife every day and for any reason. Women for him are not worth except the strong Shug Avery whom he loves.

Yet, what is surprising is Celie’s response to Harpo/Sofia conflict. She agrees with Mr. _____’s view and asks Harpo to “beat her” (*Color*, 37). Celie acted in this way due to the violence she endured at the hands of her father then her husband whom she called Mr. _____ and not by his name. Celie, however, recognized later her guilt towards Sofia when she acknowledged that “[she] sin[s] against Sofia spirit” (*Color*, 39). When Sofia confronts her, she first denies everything, then she admits her sin and the reasons behind it. She claims: “I say it cause I’m a fool, [...]. I say it cause I’m jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can’t. [...]. Fight” (*Color*, 40). Celie felt ashamed of herself and Sofia was able to understand and forgive a submissive woman’s jealousy. The two women’s conversation “open the way for [their] talk to turn another way” (*Color*, 40). Celie and Sofia, then, start a new relationship.

With the coming of Shug Avery, Celie starts to know herself, to discover her body and wants to know the meaning of desire that she never knew with Mr. _____. Celie's self-love started the day she confronted Mr. _____ and revolted against patriarchy. At that moment, she explicitly expressed her self-love. When Mr. _____ told her: "[l]ook at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. [...], you nothing at all!" (*Color*, 209), she replied by shouting from Shug's car: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, [...]. But I'm here" (*Color*, 210). Celie frees herself from the patriarchal physical, emotional and sexual submission in order to forge a new life as an independent woman who can enjoy self-love and self-esteem.

Shug plays an important role in Celie's empowerment. She is the one who makes her discover her body by asking her to see herself in the mirror. They had conversations on sexuality and desire that Celie never felt with her husband. Shug comments that Celie is "still a virgin" (*Color*, 78) since she has never experienced desire. Celie told Shug about her loneliness and lack of love. She says: "[n]obody ever love me" (*Color*, 114). Shug replies: "I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss [her]on the mouth" (*Color*, 114). Celie, in her relationship with Shug, fits Walker's definition of the "womanish" woman "who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually" [13].

Although Shug/Celie relationship developed into a sexual one, it is still similar to a mother/daughter relationship. Shug nurtures Celie as the mother who nurtures her daughter. She makes her learn the meaning of life and the way she could get self-strength until the day she reaches full wholeness and independence. Celie wanted first to possess Shug. She becomes jealous of Mr. _____, then of Shug's husband Grady. Yet, what makes Celie wish to die is Shug's relationship with the nineteen-year-old Germaine because he brings sparkle in Shug's eyes. Shug feels sorry for that and asks Celie to give her six months and she will try to make their life together like it was. Shug sits on her knees, her tears falling and asks Celie if she loves her. Although her heart is hurting, Celie replied: "I love you, [...]. Whatever happen, whatever you do, I love you" (*Color*, 255). Celie's love for Shug is much more a love of a daughter than of a lover. It is a love full of understanding and forgiveness.

When the six months passed and Shug did not come back, Celie acknowledged that "Shug got a right to live too. She got a right to look over the world in whatever company she choose." (*Color*, 273). Celie understands that love does not mean possession. She starts seeing Shug more as a friend than as a lover. She claims: "I miss her. I miss her friendship so much" (*Color*, 273). Moreover, she claims that "[i]f she come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content. And then I figure this the lesson I was suppose to learn" (*Color*, 288-9). Celie could finally understand the lesson when she states: "I try to teach my heart not to want nothing it can't have" (*Color*, 272), which means that she put an end to her suffering for others. What is worth for Celie is her own self. She claims: "we all have to start somewhere if us want to do better, and our own self is what us have to hand" (*Color*, 276). Shug, then, accomplished her role as a mother/nurturer for Celie who could now stand by herself as a whole woman.

The womanist love between Celie and Shug is also manifested by Sula, Tashi, and Claudia. They show their devotion to the womanist non-sexual sisterhood by which they can fight race and gender prejudice. Although Sula has not a clear concept of love, she could love her friend Nel. Sula's childhood was different from Nel's one. Her grandmother Eva was unable to show her love for her children. Despite that she loves her son Plum so much, Eva cannot bear his reality as a drug addict. Instead of waiting and watching his slow death, Eva killed him. Morrison's depiction of Eva's killing of her son out of love and protection parallels her depiction of Sethe's killing of her crawling daughter in order to free her from the burdens of slavery in *Beloved* [14]. Sula's mother Hannah could not feel her mother's love. After Plum's death, Hannah asked her mother if she loves them and Eva's answer was: "I stayed alive for you" (*Sula*, 69). Hanna's lack of love makes her unable to provide it to her daughter. Sula even hears her saying that she "[doesn't] like her" (*Sula*, 57). Morrison describes

the effects of the lack of love on the mother/daughter relationship. The very significant example is Sula’s coldness when she watches her mother burn.

Sula, however, could provide love for her friend Nel. As young girls, they were like one person, in Morrison’s words: “[t]hey never quarreled, those two, the way some girlfriends did over boys, or competed against each other for them. In those days a compliment to one was a compliment to the other, and cruelty to one was a challenge to the other” (*Sula*, 84). Sula was happy when Nel married Jude. Yet, when she comes back to Medaillon after ten years, she has developed her full potential as an independent woman and could not see Nel as well as the women of the community submissive to the patriarchal rule. Sula’s lovemaking with Jude is in fact not a betrayal of Nel. Rather, it is a message of love for a person she could not accept her weakness. She wants Nel to love herself instead of being exploited by her husband, a message that Nel could not understand until the very end of the novel when she realizes her missing of Sula and not of Jude.

Claudia also learns the love lesson when she transcends the boundaries of race and accepts the white dolls. She also realizes that she does not really hate light-skinned Maureen, but hates the thing that makes Maureen beautiful. She claims: “all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us” (*Bluest*, 72). Claudia realizes that the white racist ideology and African-Americans’ adoption of that hegemonic ideology that make Maureen appear beautiful. She, also, learns to love Shirley Temple. Morrison, then, suggests that love is something learned and not natural or inherent. Claudia could accept Shirley Temple’s whiteness, Maureen’s yellowness, and the blue-eyed dolls but never their idealized beauty. She still hates the racist and sexist ideology that stereotypes the black woman’s ugliness. Claudia is a “womanish” in her acceptance of the other. Walker defines the “womanish” woman as the one who is “[t]raditionally a universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?” Ans. “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented” [15].

As Claudia, Tashi also portrays the womanist universalist love. She transcends the boundaries of race and gender when she learns to love Pierre, her husband’s son from his French mistress Lisette. At first, Tashi hated Pierre because he was the fruit of her husband’s betrayal. When Pierre comes to see his father in America and at the moment he gets out of the taxi, Tashi starts throwing stones on him. Her behavior is not spontaneous. She had begun to collect stones the day she had learned of Pierre’s birth. When Lisette gets sick and dies, Pierre comes to live with his father. Pierre has been attracted to Tashi’s story from childhood and while living with her, he tried to reveal the secret behind her trauma.

Pierre through his anthropological research helps her understand the reasons behind the traditional circumcision. As an African ritual, female genital circumcision is used to ensure that what is considered masculine in women is removed and, thus, preserve the full status of the African woman. Pierre, however, related circumcision to enslavement. He states: “[a]t last, I recognized the connection between mutilation and enslavement that is at the root of the domination of women in the world” (*Possessing*, 137). Finally, Tashi could understand the source of her suffering. She realizes that she has been a victim of a patriarchal society which created traditional rituals in order to subordinate women. Pierre explains that men are jealous of women’s sexual autonomy. He states: “[m]an is jealous of woman’s pleasure, [...], because she does not require him to achieve it” (*Possessing*, 178).

Pierre plays an important role in Tashi’s healing by making her see the hidden face of patriarchy. He was able to develop a close relationship with her as he moved inside her self to heal her. Tashi expresses her love for Pierre in her letter to his dead mother Lisette before her execution. She writes: “Pierre has been such a gift to me. You would be proud of him. He has promised to continue to look after Benny when I am gone. Already he has taught him more than any of his teachers ever thought he could learn. I wish you could see Pierre - and perhaps you can, through one of the windows

of heaven that looks exactly like a blade of grass, or a rose, or a grain of wheat - as he continues to untangle the threads of mystery that kept me enmeshed" (*Possessing*, 275).

As Tashi who could love Pierre, Celie also transcends the boundaries of gender and starts a new relationship with Mr. _____, a relationship in which conversation and understanding can take part. Mr. _____ told Celie that it "[t]ook [him] long enough to notice [her] such good company" (*Color*, 281) and Celie thinks: "[h]e ain't Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to" (*Color*, 281). Mr. _____'s and Celie's conversations show the lack of domination, violence, and hatred. Among Walker's womanist methods for social change, dialogue is a means by which people express and establish both connection and individuality. It permits negotiation, reveals standpoint, realizes existential equality, and shapes social reality [16]. Celie leaves Mr. _____ for her well-being. She is as Walker's definition of the "womanish" woman "[n]ot a separatist, except periodically, for health" [17]. Celie needed to break with Mr. _____ in order to gain her self-esteem and self-worth. When she left Mr. _____ she told him: "I curse you. [...]. Until you do right by me everything you touch will crumble" (*Color*, 209). Mr. _____ now learns how "to listen to his own heart" (*Color*, 227). He shows a change of mind and could accept Celie's independence and wholeness. She builds with him a new relationship not as a husband, but as a friend.

Tashi also manifests her self-love when she rebels against the traditional African rituals. She breaks from the victimized image that she has internalized in herself for many years and moves towards self-correction. She could finally understand how the patriarchal community influenced her to commit such a crime against her body. Tashi could no more bear the weight of trauma and guilt. The only way to regain her lost soul is to punish the one who has stolen it. Revenge becomes the only way to regain selfhood. Tashi comes back to Africa in order to "[kill the one] who, many years ago, killed [her]" (*Possessing*, 272). She cannot accept the fact that the one who has deprived her of her womanhood not only enjoys her life but also becomes a national icon. Tashi wanted to kill M'Lissa with the same tools she used in circumcising girls. She bought razors that she kept under her pillow and every night, she thinks and swears to mutilate M'Lissa's body to the point that "her Own God wouldn't recognize her" (*Possessing*, 204). Tashi was determined. In the court, she claims:

I bought three razors.

Why three? he asks.

Because I wanted to be sure.

Sure of what?

To do the job properly.

You mean to kill the old woman?

Yes. (*Possessing*, 36)

M'Lissa knows from Tashi's first visit that she wants to kill her. She states: "[t]he very first day she came I could see my death in [her] eyes, as clearly as if I were looking into a mirror. Those eyes that are the eyes of a madwoman. Can she really think I have not seen madness and murderers before?" (*Possessing*, 205). In addition to mastering genital mutilation, M'Lissa was also capable of mutilating women's will for revenge and diverts their objective of murdering her. She wants to do the same thing with Tashi when she told her that: "it was only the murder of the *tsunga*, the circumciser, by one of those whom she has circumcised that proves her (the circumciser's) value to her tribe. Her own death [...] would elevate her to the position of saint" (*Possessing*, 204).

M'Lissa tries to convince Tashi that she will not gain anything with her death. Rather, it will give her a greater position in society. In fact, M'Lissa's "confession, or lie, stayed [Tashi's] hand for many a day" (*Possessing*, 204). Moreover, Tashi knows M'Lissa's sad story and how she has been also a victim of the patriarchal tradition. Her physical scars make Tashi feel pity for her. She, in fact, changes her mind not on

the killing of M'Lissa, but on the way of killing her. She claims that M'Lissa's “sad stories about her life caused me to lose my taste for slashing her” (*Possessing*, 274). Nevertheless, the *tsunga's* death is necessary for Tashi to get wholeness and for other girls and women to survive. Although M'Lissa is a victim, Tashi could not forgive her devotion to the patriarchal tradition. M'Lissa was the weapon that patriarchal society used to strip African women's secret of joy. Finally, Tashi killed M'Lissa mercifully by “plac[ing] a pillow over her face and lay[ing] across it for an hour” (*Possessing*, 274).

After killing M'Lissa, Tashi finds her self. She states: “I have the uncanny feeling that, just at the end of my life, I am beginning to reinhabit completely the body I long ago left” (*Possessing*, 108-9). According to Jasmin Lee Cori: “[f]or victims of multiple trauma, reinhabiting the body is something that happens slowly and gradually. It happens as we come to know and trust the body and can protect ourselves from invasion. It happens as we recognize the body as a safe haven” [18]. In fact, by reinhabiting her body Tashi gained self-possession. Although Tashi will be executed for killing the *tsunga* M'Lissa, she is satisfied because, finally, she proved her self-love and self-esteem.

The “Womanish” Woman's Commitment to Survival and Wholeness of Entire People

Another important feature of the “womanish” woman is being “[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female” [19]. Morrison and Walker have depicted survival in different ways. Through life or death, the two authors call for the survival of both the individual and the community. In *The Bluest Eye*, when Claudia learns that Pecola has been raped and impregnated by her father and that the community wants her baby dead, she embraces Walker's survivalist tenet and wants Pecola's baby to survive. She thinks of the community's hatred for the unborn baby and claims: “I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live—just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals” (*Bluest*, 188). Claudia thinks that Pecola's baby should live in order to challenge other's idealized view of light skin and/or blue-eyes beauty.

Claudia, with the help of her sister Frieda, decided to do a miracle to save the poor baby. The two sisters agree on planting Marigolds. They claim: “[w]e'll bury the money over by her house so we can't go back and dig it up, and we'll plant the seeds out back of our house so we can watch over them. And when they come up, we'll know everything is all right” (*Bluest*, 190). They also sing and “say the magic words” (*Bluest*, 190). Claudia and Frieda hope that the Marigolds bloom for Pecola's baby to survive. However, the girls' magic words could not save Pecola's child. The flowers never bloom, and Pecola's baby dies. The survival of Pecola and her baby is impossible in a community that adopts the white racist and sexist ideology. Claudia assumes the responsibility for Pecola's tragic life and accuses the community of playing the major role in Pecola's devastation. She claims how the community makes of Pecola its scapegoat:

All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares. (*Bluest*, 203)

Although Claudia felt guilty for Pecola's madness and the death of her baby, she blames Pecola herself for her passivity. Claudia claims: “[a]nd she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt” (*Bluest*, 203). Pecola absorbed all the “waste which [the community] dumped on her” (*Bluest*, 203). Her weakness and submission to race and gender prejudice make the survival process impossible for her and her baby. Her baby died and she is trapped into madness where she sees herself with blue eyes. According to Toni Cade Bambara, “[a] new person is born when he finds a value to define an actional self and when he can assume autonomy for that self” [20]. However, Pecola's passivity and dependence on the white racist conventions of

beauty make her lose everything including her mind. Morrison shows that survival needs common work at least resistance and rejection of oppression but through passivity, you can never survive.

Sula is also a survivalist. Although she dies by the end of the novel, she remains the example of the “womanish” woman that Morrison embraced. When Sula comes back to the Bottom after years, she “acknowledged none of [the community members’] attempts at counter conjure or their gossip and seemed to need the services of nobody” (*Sula*, 113). She was totally different from her friend Nel and although she has something from Eva’s arrogance and Hannah’s self-indulgence, Sula created a twist that was all her own imagination (*Sula*, 118). The community rejected Sula’s image of womanhood and considers her a Pariah. However, for Sula, “[t]he real hell of Hell is [...] doing anything forever and ever” (*Sula*, 107-8). Sula wanted Nel as well as the women of the community to end the hell of submission and to be independent from patriarchal rules. According to Morrison, “Sula never competed; she simply helped others define themselves” (*Sula*, 95). She comes to tell the truth about women’s situation and her reaction to their dominated status. Morrison writes: “[s]he could not say to those old acquaintances, ‘Hey, girl, you looking good,’ when she saw how the years had dusted their bronze with ash, the eyes that had once opened wide to the moon bent into grimy sickles of concern. The narrower their lives, the wider their hips.” (*Sula*, 121)

However, Sula loses control over her self when she met Ajax. He was attracted to her womanist behavior which raised his curiosity. He has seen in her the free and strong mother he had. She also finds herself attracted to him because he was different from the men she knew in her life. Unlike Jude’s and Nel’s relationship, Ajax does not want to protect Sula. Barbara Omolade argues that “protecting black women was the most significant measure of black manhood and the central aspect of black male patriarchy” [21]. However, Sula falls for Ajax and in a moment of weakness she wants to possess him. She starts putting ribbons in her hair and playing the housewife’s role. She becomes Nel’s shadow. She “began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it” (*Sula*, 131). Ajax quickly abandons her and his absence left great emptiness in her life.

Besides her despair with Ajax leaving, Sula faces another hidden reality about him. She knows that Ajax’ true name is Albert. She shouts: “I didn’t even know his name. And if I didn’t know his name, then there is nothing I did know and I have known nothing ever at all since the one thing I wanted was to know his name” (*Sula*, 136). Sula, however, acknowledges her mistake that she has been the reason behind her fail. She claims: “[w]hen I was a little girl the heads of my paper dolls came off, and it was a long time before I discovered that my own head would not fall off if I bent my neck. I used to walk around holding it very stiff because I thought a strong wind or a heavy push would snap my neck. Nel was the one who told me the truth. But she was wrong. I did not hold my head stiff enough when I met him and so I lost it just like the dolls” (*Sula*, 136).

Sula felt guilty towards herself. She knows that a woman should never surrender to a man. Morrison, as Walker, is not a separatist. According to her, women’s love for men is important for the wholeness of the black community. However, they should never forget that their first love is the self. Sula is dying, but she is happy with all the experiences she endured. Being a pariah in the eyes of Nel and the community is not important for her. What is important is that she truly existed in the world. Not like the submissive women who did not exist, but only remain shadows of their dominating men. Sula insists that she has been right. She is the example that black women should follow. Her last words with Nel show how Sula is the true prototype of black womanhood. She clearly asks Nel how she knows she is the good example. Then, she claims: “maybe it wasn’t you. Maybe it was me.” (*Sula*, 146)

Sula died not in sadness, but she “felt her face smiling” (*Sula*, 146). She is satisfied with her life and what she accomplished as a womanist. She says: “it didn’t even hurt. Wait’ll I tell Nel” (*Sula*, 149). Sula wants to tell Nel that dying as a womanist did not

hurt because of the satisfaction with one’s life. She peacefully died and wanted Nel to survive and learn the lesson about the meaning of womanhood. In fact, it is only at the very end of the novel that Nel learns the lesson. She realizes that what is important for a woman is her feeling of herself as a girl and a woman rather than her feeling to be dominated by a man. Nel claims: “[a]ll that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude.’ [...] ‘We was girls together’, [...] ‘girl, girl, girlgirlgirl’” (*Sula*, 174). Nel is not only missing Sula as a friend but also as a prototype of the African-American woman. In a moment of weakness, Sula became the shadow of Nel and died, but now it is time for Nel to become the shadow of Sula and survive.

Although Sula’s death was welcomed by the black community who thinks that the devil finally died and life will certainly be better without a pariah, the black community’s economic and social situation becomes worse than before. Sula, then, was not the source of their suffering. At least, with the presence of the pariah, mothers care of their children and wives care of their husbands. Yet, with the pariah’s death no one cares of the other. Therefore, Sula’s death could not be seen as a failure. Nevertheless, Sula will always survive as a womanist prototype. She meets Shadrack, the guide mentor of the Bottom, only one time when she wants to ask help for saving the drowned Little Chicken. She was afraid and could not talk, but Shadrack told her: “[a]lways” (*Sula*, 62). Shadrack remembers her as the only friend he has and, in fact, Sula will always exist.

Despite the fact that Tashi died at the end of the novel, she is also a womanist survivalist as Sula. Before her execution, she expressed her happiness for helping other women to survive. The day of her sentence appeal, she wants to wear a red dress. She claims: “I want to wear red anyway, she says, regardless of what happens. I am sick to death of black and white. Neither of those is first. Red, the color of woman’s blood, comes before them both” (*Possessing*, 199).

The clear example of Tashi’s survival is the character Mbat. Tashi knows Mbat the day she returns to Africa in order to kill M’Lissa and Mbat was the tsunga’s secretary. Tashi and Mbat quickly developed a strong relationship. They can be seen as mother and daughter. Tashi claims: “Mbat has never asked whether I murdered M’Lissa. She doesn’t seem to care” (*Possessing*, 270). Tashi gives Mbat a significant gift; a doll with full genitals named Nyanda. The doll shows the woman’s body that sexism tries to strip from the black woman. It also summarizes the necessity of resistance in order to survive and achieve wholeness. Tashi tells Mbat: “I could never have that look of confidence. Of pride. Of peace. Neither of us can have it, because self-possession will always be impossible for us to claim. But perhaps your daughter” (*Possessing*, 271).

Through Tashi/Mbat relationship, Walker portrays the importance of the mother/daughter relationship in fighting prejudices. The code between the two women which is “Aché Mbele” is, in fact, a survival code. Mbat explained: “Aché is Yoruba and means ‘the power to make things happen.’ Energy. *Mbele* means ‘Forward!’ in KiSwahili” (*Possessing*, 271). In other words, Mbat will go forward to make woman’s wholeness possible by teaching her daughter the patriarchal power behind female genital circumcision. Mbat, also “promised not to let [Tashi] die before she has discovered and presented to [her] eyes the *definitive* secret of joy” (*Possessing*, 270). In fact, Mbat fulfilled her promise. The day of Tashi’s execution, all those who loved her come to support her with a large banderole on which they imprint in large capital letters “RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY” (*Possessing*, 279). Tashi got finally the secret of joy because she sees with her death the survival of hundreds, thousands or perhaps millions of girls and women. She claims: “I am no more. And satisfied” (*Possessing*, 279).

Tashi, as Sula, her physical death will not stop her presence in the community’s mind. Benny’s conversation with Pierre about his mother’s death shows how, in fact, Tashi’s soul will never die.

I CAN NOT BELIEVE my mother is going to die—and that dying means I will never see her again. When people die, where do they go? This is the question with which I pester Pierre. He says when people die they go back where they came from. Where is

that? I ask him. Nothing, he says. They go back into Nothing. He wrote in huge letters in my notepad: NOTHING = NOT BEING = DEATH. [...]. BUT EVERYTHING THAT DIES COMES AROUND AGAIN. I ask him if this means my mother will come back. He says, Yes, of course. Only not as your mother. (*Possessing*, 193)

Pierre's idea of Tashi's resurrection is very significant. It means that besides being a survivalist for her community's girls and women, Tashi will also survive in others' minds. Her death will not keep her from surviving as a womanist prototype. The one who refuses both race and gender prejudices and sacrifices her life for the well being of girls and women of her community. One day, when the community puts an end to female genital circumcision, Tashi will certainly become a national icon instead of the circumciser M'Lissa.

In *The Color Purple*, Celie also plays an important role in the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Celie's revolt against patriarchy makes her a womanist prototype that women should follow and men should accept. Her wholeness does not stop in getting freedom from her patriarchal husband but transcends to seeking equality with men. She starts by wearing pants. Then, she sews them for others. Shug played an important role in Celie's story with pants. When Celie knows that Mr. _____ was hiding Nettie's letters for years, she responds in the same way Tashi did and tries to seek revenge. In order to murder M'Lissa, Tashi bought razors, the same tool used by the tsunga in circumcising girls. Celie takes Mr. _____'s razor and wants to kill him with it. Yet, as Tashi who felt sorry for M'Lissa's sad stories and changed her mind on the way to kill her, Celie has been stopped by Shug who taught her that violence is not the proper way to resolve problems. Instead, Shug advises Celie to start sewing as Celie claims: "everyday we going to read Nettie's letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think" (*Color*, 147).

Celie, later, developed her talent into a business. When Mr. _____, asked her "what was so special bout [her] pants" (*Color*, 276), she replies: "[a]nybody can wear them" (*Color*, 276). Therefore, pants do not only symbolize Celie's economic independence, but also the destruction of gender prejudice that casts the difference between men's and women's roles and clothes. Celie sews pants that both men and women could wear to stress the equality between genders. Mr. _____ first opposes Celie's view. He claims: "[m]en and women not suppose to wear the same thing, [...]. Men spose to wear the pants" (*Color*, 276). Celie, later, not only convinces Mr. _____ of her genderless pants but also makes him sew them with her.

Metaphorically, Celie helps Albert, whom she called Mr. _____ throughout the novel, accept man's and woman's equality. Albert changes a lot. He is no more the black patriarch that we knew at the beginning of the novel. He starts working instead of exploiting his wife and son. Harpo tells Celie how his father works very hard in the fields "from sunup to sundown" (*Color*, 225). He adds: "[a]nd clean [the] house just like a woman. Even cook, [...]. And what more, wash the dishes when he finish" (*Color*, 225). Albert could accept Celie's independence. He even asks her to marry him again. Yet, although Celie refuses his proposal, they stay friends. Celie succeeds in proving her wholeness and imposing gender equality on men. By sewing pants to both men and women, Celie acts as a survivalist for the wholeness of her community.

Conclusion

This article explored the genesis of a "Womanish" identity in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The womanist identity can serve as a protective factor against the racist and sexist stereotypes that plague both white and black societies. Sula, Claudia, Celie, and Tashi embrace the womanist tenets through loving the self and loving the other. They show outrageous and courageous behavior and they are committed to survival and wholeness of entire people male and female. Morrison and Walker embrace the "Womanish" identity for black women in order to refuse playing a secondary role in

society or settling for anything less than the right to fulfill their dream as black women free of race and gender prejudice.

References

- [1]- Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. New York: Vintage, 2005.
(All quotations are from this edition)
- [2]- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. London: Vintage Books, 1999.
(All quotations are from this edition)
- [3]- Walker, Alice. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.
(All quotations are from this edition)
- [4]- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harvest, 2003.
(All quotations are from this edition)
- [5]- McWhorter, Ladelle. *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. p 318.
- [6]- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Phoenix, 2005. p xi.
- [7]- Ibid xi.
- [8]- Phillips, Layli. *The Womanist Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006. p 128-9.
- [9]- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Phoenix, 2005. p xi.
- [10]- Ibid xi.
- [11]- Ibid xii.
- [12]- Bambara, Toni Cade. "On the Issue of Roles." *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. Ed. Bambara. New York: Washington Square Press, 2005. p133.
- [13]- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Phoenix, 2005. p xi.
- [14]- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1987.
- [15]- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Phoenix, 2005. p xi.
- [16]- Phillips, Layli. *The Womanist Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006. p xxvii.
- [17]- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Phoenix, 2005. p xi.
- [18]- Cori, Jasmin Lee. *Healing from Trauma: A Survivor's Guide to Understanding Your Symptoms and Reclaiming Your Life*. Ed. Da Capo Press. New York : Marlowe and Company, 2007. p 183
- [19]- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Phoenix, 2005. p xi.
- [20]- Bambara, Toni Cade. "On the Issue of Roles." *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. Ed. Bambara. New York: Washington Square Press, 2005. p133.
- [21]- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000. p 157.