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The Invisibility of Afro-American Female in Toni Morison's
The Bluest Eye

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D E D I C A T I O N

I express gratitude toward Allah omnipotent for the quality and tolerance he has offered me to compose this dissertation.

This dissertation is proudly dedicated to:

My beloved parents, my precious sisters, and to my dear little brother.

To my person Sihem

To all my friends

Thank you all for being part of my life...

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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Abstract

According to history, women were often marginalized and oppressed in patriarchal society. Through her writings, Toni Morrison depicted the hardships of many Afro-American women, and their struggle for equality. Using the Afro-American feminism, this research aims to expose the impact of Racism, Classism, and Sexism on the Afro-American female, taking Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as a case study. The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that, the invisibility of the Afro-American women is not simply due to the triple oppressions, but to their weakness and disunity as an Afro-American community.

Key Words Afro-American female, patriarchal society, Invisibility, Racism, Classism, Sexism, Afro-American feminism.

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General Introduction

Historically speaking, Afro-American Women have always been exploited and marginalized in a patriarchal society. They faced the worst kind of exploitation and oppression, losing their self-dignity and self-respect in the process. Black feminism has emerged in response to the racial oppression that Afro-American women have experienced in the Women's Movement, and to the sexual oppression which they suffered from in the Black Liberation Movement.

Toni Morrison, a talented Afro-American woman writer, portrayed the conditions of the Afro-American women in her novels. Her first book *The bluest eye* is mainly about Perceiving and receiving. It deals with the issues of Racism, Sexism and Classism, and their impact on the Afro-American women. Morrison clearly describes how different women characters react and respond differently to the triple oppressions. Her main purpose is to urge the black community to know the value of their culture, create their own identity and to unify their voices, in order to overcome the damage done by the oppressions. This thesis aims to analyze the condition of Afro-American women in the US, through literature and to unveil the real reasons which led to their status in the society.

In order to proceed, this thesis raises the following question:

- 1- What led to the Invisibility of the Afro-American female in Toni Morrison's the *Bluest Eye*?

The hypotheses proposed for the research question are as following

- 1-The triple oppressions are the only reason which led to the invisibility of the Afro-American female.
- 2-It is their internal weakness and disunity, which led to their invisibility in society.

In attempt to answer the previous research question, this thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is devoted to a background about the Afro-American literature and its characteristics. Moreover it deals with Toni Morrison an Afro-American women writer, and her writing style.

The second chapter is about the Afro-American feminism, which is the core tool used to analyze *The bluest eye* in order to expose the female status and conditions in the US. Furthermore it explores the Afro-American feminism in literature and how women are portrayed in the writings of Toni Morrison.

The third chapter aims to examine Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* in the light of black feminism in order to unveil the real reasons which led to the invisibility of Afro-American female in society.

This work is an attempt to shed light on the real reasons of the invisibility of the Afro-American female, therefore to refute the common view that Racism , Classism and Sexism are the only reasons.

The achievement of this work was not an easy task; neither the time table nor the library of the university provided the means required for the accomplishment of such work.

The referencing system of this research is MLA style7th edition.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

Historically speaking, the Afro-American community's ancestors were involuntarily moved away from their homeland Africa and brought to America in order to serve as slaves. They went through all kind of brutal circumstances; they were tortured, brutalized, oppressed and exploited beyond imagination. However the African women were the ones who suffered the most from slavery, they were robbed of their respect, dignity and identity.

The first chapter is devoted to show how the African-American Literature has emerged in the US and how it became accepted as an integral part of the American Literature, after a long path of struggle, including its characteristics. The second part of the first chapter deals with the role of women as Afro-American writers who allow Afro-American women to voice their grievance and fight for their rights, taking Toni Morrison as an example.

2. The Rise of the African-American Literature

African Literature is a literary genre produced by members of the minority community of African origins. Their literary works is regarded as a protest against the marginalization and the unfair way, they were treated by the white community; they chose writing as a refuge to escape racial oppression and to claim their own rights as human beings and citizens of the United States of America. Afro-American writers explore themes and issues such as freedom and equality, besides African-American culture, racism, religion, slavery, and sense of belonging, segregation, migration, identity, feminism, invisibility, alienation and more. The African-American literature is also composed of oral forms, such as spirituals, sermons; gospel music, blues or rap which the black community had inherited from their ancestors. After a long path of struggling and resistance, nowadays African-American literature has become accepted as an integral part of American literature.

In 1964 Malcolm X ¹states during one of his speeches:

When you deal with the past, you are dealing with history; you are dealing actually with the origin of a thing. When you know the origin, you know the cause. If you don't know the origin, you don't know the cause. And if you don't know the cause, you don't know the reason, you're just cut off, and you're left standing in midair. So the past deals with history or origin of an incident. And when you know the origin, then you get a better understanding of the causes that produce whatever originated there and its reason for originating and its reason for being (Malcolm).

Based on Malcolm's words knowing the history and the origins of a certain event is necessary to understand the reasons behind, it's impossible to understand something without having an idea about it, so a better understanding of the modern afro-American literary works requires a perfect background knowledge about the origins of the Afro-American literature.

2.1 Slave Narratives

Historically speaking, the slave narrative is somehow the starting point of the black literature's heritages; it began in the middle age of 19. At that time the oppressed people of African descent took a brave step toward their freedom, writing about their painful memories, where they could express their feelings of sorrow and pain, besides describing the inhuman circumstances they faced and how they cope with the brutality of slavery. The principal objective of their works was to show the immorality of slavery as an institution. The rise of this subgenre of black literature is the outcome of the conflict between the southern white who were supporters of slavery and the northern slaves who were craving freedom. Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass were prominent and distinguished in this period.

2.2 The Post-Slavery Era

¹ **Malcolm X** born Malcolm Little and later also known as el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz was an African-American Muslim minister and human rights activist.

The Post-slavery Era is the period that comes after the end of the civil war which put an end to the slavery, so African-American writers started writing about the life of the former slaves and their conditions. During this period many great writers had emerged, the prominent ones are W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and James Weldon Johnson. The above-mentioned authors of this era are the ones who paved the way for the new generation of Afro-American writers, especially Black women writers, who suffered the most from oppression. The literary works that belong to the post-slavery era writers became the Afro-American literature's backbone which gave structure to the new-born literature in the United State of America. Although most of the notable writers of post-slavery era have been Black men, African American women continued the movement in a more serious way, and eventually it resulted in the emergence of many famous Afro-American women writers such as Paul Marshall and many others. The black women writers not only have succeeded in achieving fame in American literature, but they have won the universal recognition and appreciation for their outstanding works.

2.3 Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance began just after the First World War and lasted into the early years of the Great Depression it was known as the New Negro Movement, it was a social and political movement, but also an artistic one, which means it inspired literature poetry, music, drama, ethnography, publishing, dance, fashion. As an attempt to explain the phenomena of Harlem Renaissance, in her book *Reading the Harlem Renaissance*, Sharon L. Jones writes:

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, began in the early 1900, and ended around 1940. Coinciding with modernist trends, the Harlem Renaissance was an interdisciplinary cultural movement that reflected literary, musical, dance, artistic, and dramatic developments in African American expression. Additionally, the civil rights movement and the rise of organizations for social justice als

o brought much to bear upon the Harlem Renaissance. This movement would have a wide-ranging impact on American literature, changing the growth and direction of what was valued and what was not (Jones 227)

Langston Hughes ²wrote about this time: "The negro was in vogue" all literary works whom belongs to the era of the Harlem Renaissance, often discuss the so-called double consciousness ³of the African American experience, which is a term coined by W.E.B. Dubois ⁴ in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* written in 1903. The Harlem renaissance involved a group of writers who truthfully aimed to represent the African American experience and believed in racial pride and equality. The Harlem Renaissance was the movement which marked the first time in American history that a considerable number of publishers and critics became interested in African American literature and took it more seriously, offering new ways of perceiving and understanding what it really meant to be "Black" at this crucial time in history.

2.4 Realism, Modernism and Naturalism 1940-1960

The terms Realism, Naturalism and Modernism are commonly used by many literary historians in order to categorize the various writings produced during the period from 1940 to 1960. The three terms are defined as following Realism is defined as the faithful reproduction or illusion of materiel reality while Naturalism refers to the Franker, harsher treatment of that reality while, Modernism symbolizes a strong and intentional break of traditions the writers who belongs to this period, have always been concerned in pleasing white America, but eventually they changed their interests, focusing on the social protest.

²**Langston Hughes** a poet, novelist, fiction writer, and playwright, who is known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of black life in America.

³**Double consciousness** describes the feeling that you have more than one social identity, which makes it difficult to develop a sense of self.

³**Du Bois, W. E. B.** is an African-American activist, historian, and sociologist, who introduced the concept Double of consciousness

Realism and Naturalism were considered as a more modern form of writing used by writers during a particular period to reflect on the African-American past. A few of the most popular writers of this age were James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ralph Ellison, Robert Hayes, etc. They were mostly inspired by events that damaged African-American community in the Jim Crow South. As America Progressed, the African-American Naturalism, Realism and Modernism Movement became inspired and supported by many white youth.

2.5 The Black Arts Era to the Present

The Black Arts Movement began during the turbulent 1960s, that period witnessed a social chaos that existed both at home and abroad; for instance at the internal level there were the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power agitation, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., President John F. Kennedy, and Malcolm X; besides there were the Vietnam War and problems with Cuba at the external level. During that period was the emergence of writers who encouraged social revolution anyhow even by violent means, as an example of this violent tone in black literature, Amiri Baraka's signature poem, "Black Art": "We want 'poems that kill, Assassin poems, Poems that shoot" (Amiri) African Americans celebrated "Afro-centricity" by showing African pride through poetry, drama, and fiction, as well as through traditional African clothing and "Afro hairstyles".

The Black Arts Movement paved the way for a new era in the lives of many African Americans. The major objective of the African American writers was to produce a literature that glorifies blackness. They considered their pens as swords, portraying the injustices against the African American race and urge the black community to unite in order to face the white supremacy. However, African Americans resisted and fought roughly in order to prove that they were not, and would never be merely white Americans in blackface.

Lately, African American culture was represented in literature, in theater, television, and film

m. The 1990 witnessed a lot of successes for instance, Toni Morrison became a Nobel laureate and August Wilson won a second Pulitzer Prize in drama for *The Piano Lesson*. Writers of this period produced work that was “determined to cure what Morrison deemed the ‘national amnesia’ around the history of slavery”, besides slave narratives became a part of the American canon. Other African American authors reshaping the canon included Pulitzer Prize winners such as Rita Dove and Alice Walker in fiction and nonfiction.

3. Characteristics Of The African American Literature

The primary characteristic of African American literature is the main focus on the African-American experience in the United States, a country which is known by a long history of slavery and segregation laws. The main aim of the black writers is to write about the blacks who always struggled to understand themselves and find their true identity and belonging in a white-dominated society. Some of them have chosen their primary protagonists to be outlaws, such as criminals and tricksters who did not had a choice but to be bad persons, and the main purpose by doing so is to reveal how the blacks were marginalized in the African Americans society.

Besides, African-American literature has an oral component as a heritage which comes from the tradition of slave spirituals and poetry, for instance the rhythms and language of Black sermons, as well as elements such as repetition and circularity, which are commonly used by African American poets.

As another characteristic, music is also counted, for its clear influence on African-American literature, for instance Blues and jazz are influencing both the content of African-American literature and the style. The Afro-American authors had conceived and structured their work, based on the non-linear and improvisational style and also the structure of jazz music, for instance Toni Morrison’s works are widely known for the non-linear structure, producing novels that seem "free form" and composed spontaneously.

African American literature is also distinguished by the stories, which are based on real life of the black history, stories of slavery and racism, but those stories are more an American ones. The above mentioned issues have also been prominent in black literature. And many black writers have amazingly depicted life during slavery using their creative skills to imagine the brutal circumstances, which the black slaves had endure, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is the appropriate example.

3.1 The Role of Black Women in the Afro-American Literature

In the history of human race, right from the days of slavery to the present, no one has ever suffered more than the black women; they were silently suffering from the triple oppression of racism, sexism and classism in a civilized country like America, and trying their best to maintain their self-respect and self-identity. These black women faced racism from whites, including both men and women; they also faced gender discrimination, by whites and surprisingly by their black men; and classism for the fact that these black women were economically disabled as a result they were unfairly placed on the lowest rung of society.

In order to break the silence, the Afro-American women writers revolt and started to express themselves freely and genuinely for the first time, they considered their works as their manifesto, which portray their growth, struggle and accomplishment. They have given readers powerful insights into issues such as race, gender and class, which the black women had mostly suffered from. African American women writers did not just write about themselves only but all women. As a point of view about the African American women writers, in her book *Black Eyed Susan's*, Mary Helen Washington writes:

When I think of how essentially alone black women have been alone because of our bodies, over which we have had so little control; alone because the damage done to our men has prevented their closeness and protection; and alone because we have had n

o one to tell us stories about ourselves; I realize that black women writers are an important and comforting presence in my life. Only they know my story. It is absolutely necessary that they be permitted to discover and interpret the entire range and spectrum of the experience of black women and not be stymied by preconceived conclusions. . Because of these writers, there are more models of how it is possible for us to live, there are more choices for black women to make, and there is a larger space in the universe for us (Washington ix-xxii).

Interestingly, the first African American literary artist was not a man, but an African American slave woman known as Lucy Terry. *Bars fight* her first literary work was the starting point of the African American literature. On the other hand Francis Harper, was one of the most important nineteenth century African American women writers who openly advocated black women whom were suffering from oppression. The twentieth century witnessed a new age, both for African American women's literature and American literature.

The period is the starting point of the black women being liberated from their past, writing with a new self-awakening. They decided to start writing and defining themselves in their own way, rather than accepting the others' definition. They broke the boundaries of racism, sexism and class set by white patriarchal society.

3.2 Toni Morrison's Biography

Toni Morrison was originally named Chloe Anthony Wofford, She used as her literary first name "Toni" based on a nickname derived from St. Anthony after she'd joined the Catholic Church. She is one of the most widely known and highly respected afro-American writers and al

so the first black lady who received the Noble Prize for Literature. She distinguished herself as a writer at a very early age, for her profound passion for reading. The Woffords were keenly proud of their heritage, however Toni's parents do not share the same attitude toward the whites, she once said in an interview:

My father never trusted any white person at all, would not let them in his house, insurance people and so on. Luckily my mother was entirely different; she was always judging people one at a time. My mother talked about her childhood in the south, she left when she was about six - as if it was the most wonderful, romantic, nostalgic, lovely memory. And my father talked about it in diametrically opposed ways. But he went back every year to this place he hated Georgia, while my mother never went back to Alabama, the place she loved (Morrison).

Toni grew up in a house where black culture, songs, folktales and the language of their African-American heritage were cherished, becoming a deeply formative part of her childhood. Her perspective on whites was shaped based on her parents' beliefs; they instilled in their daughter the value of group loyalty, in order to survive the racial oppression they suffered from, during that era. She eventually studied English at Howard University. She attended Cornell University, where she earned a Master of Arts degree in English in 1955, and wrote a thesis on the theme of suicide in the writings of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. Morrison's adulthood coincided with the period when active opposition to racial segregation and other forms of oppression had developed into the Civil Rights Movement. During her professional life, her interest in political, social and artistic ramifications of race, continued to grow, though she never participated in this movement.

She became a university teacher, and then a senior editor at the prestigious publishing company Random House, where she promoted the work of many black authors in the 1970s and 1980s.

0s. She also focused on championing black writers in the publishing industry, besides her own writing which express many contemporary and historical realities of African American life. The content of these works was very much in line with what the Black Arts stood for.

3.3 Morrison's Literary Career

Morrison's literary career began with the publication of the *bluest eye* set in her hometown of Loraine, she start gaining the attention of both critics and a wider audience for her unique work, *Sula* her second novel was nominated for National Book Award and received the Ohioan Book award, later she wrote her third novel, *Song of Solomon*, winning two more awards. In 1987 Morrison published *Beloved* which received a hug success and was honored with the Pulitzer Prize. Morrison reentered the best sellers list with the publication of *Paradise*.

Through her works she clearly identified herself as an African-American writer, she has given voice to the unheard black women who never got the opportunity to speak for themselves, besides she depicted the harsh circumstances they encountered and urged the black community living in unjust society, to unify and support each other in order overcome the racial oppression.

In 1993 Morrison won the Noble Prize for Literature, becoming the eight women and the first African American to win such a prize, as a reaction she said, "What is most wonderful for me, personally, is to know that the Prize at last has been awarded to an African-American. Winning as an American is very special but winning as a Black American is a knock out" (Morrison) In 2001 Toni Morrison was given a National Arts and Humanities Award by President Bill Clinton in Washington, D.C. The president gave a speech during the award ceremony and said that Morrison had "entered America's heart." And in 2012 she also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barrack Obama, The medal of f

freedom is for individuals "who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors" (Obama White House)

4. Situating Morrison in the American Literature

Toni Morrison's writing stimulates her readers to think of black culture and subjectivity. She succeeded in creating a black presence and speaking the "unspoken", her novels are purely about the black experience and her narrative style is authentically black. Toni Morrison's literary works have been cases of inspiration or in other words, study fields for volumes of literary criticism. Normally critical approaches differ from one another, but they can be divided into two sections the first one consists of those who consider Morrison's work as existing apart from the body of American literature and the other one of those who consider it a part of this tradition. According to Peterson "Morrison has become the American and African American writer to reckon with" this statement highlights Morrison's achievement of .instance affiliated her with William Faulkner.

On the other hand, Ludigkeit argued that Kolmerton's perspective is nothing but a fail in appreciating Morrison's novel on its own terms, and ignores the text's unique cultural background. Regardless of their contradiction both critic's points of view are correct, and this is due to the coexistence of the white and the black culture that exist in Morrison's works. In fact there is a cultural hybrid in her narrative in order to meet the criteria of the dominant culture and by doing so her expression of the theme of cultural oppression would be easily done.

As a writer who belongs to the minority, she ought to make a compromise so her work; which foregrounds her own culture and its subjectivity; can be received, by using the aesthetic and ideological standard of the dominant culture. And this was a kind of a hard challenge for all the minority writers like her. Eventually Morrison's works, including the other black writers, are considered as a meditation between cultures.

4.1 Politics versus Aesthetics

Critics have always argued concerning African American writings to be categorized as political or aesthetic works. W.E.B Du Bois argues in his essay “The criteria of Negro Art” that aesthetics only have value if they further a political cause, on the other hand Zora Neal Hurston is one of the artist who dared to privileged the aesthetics over politics ,she argues that race is neither a restraint nor a burden to the artist. While Toni Morrison shared her own point of view, in the debate “Politics VS aesthetic” she clearly claimed that she does not privilege one over the other, she believes that “The best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time” she also said during the debate: “I don’t believe any real artists have ever been non-political. They may have been insensitive to this particular plight or insensitive to that but they were political because that’s what an artist is, a politician” (Morrison). Her upbringing in a house emphasizing the ethnic pride and the uniqueness of the black culture has profoundly influenced her style of writing.

Toni Morrison is more humanist than nationalistic, more visionary than didactic, but to some extent her editorial work is political, she states in her book *playing in the dark*:

“I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony and dismissive “Othering” of people and language...The kind of work which I have always wanted to do requires me to learn how to maneuver ways to free up the language from its...racially informed and determined chains” (Morrison x-xi).

According to the passage below the purpose of Morrison’s writings is revealed, it is clear that her aim is to continue the tradition which engraves both hegemony and oppression through her novel she convey her political message but in a explicit way.

However Morrison had successfully made her narrative both political and beautiful, as Wa

gnier said “To read Morrison without paying attention to her narrative structure and methods is to obscure her always careful relation of character to theme, shape to focus, voice to effect” her novels include aesthetics mixed with political messages, serving as a protest against American history, her works are more likably to be felt rather than known. As a result she unveiled the true stories of black America, because of her capability of writing the American history through feeling, sense, and blurred images, not through definitive, clear information and files of data. Reading Morrison’s novels makes the history of America becomes more than a history, it acts like a memory.

Commenting on the way Toni Morrison achieved her political purpose through her works, Line Hsu writes:

“The emphasis on form facilitates the expression and acceptance of Morrison's cultural message. From the perspective of western aesthetics, her adoption of African-American elements, is new to the tradition and interpreted as innovation and experimentalism. The work is deemed beautiful. On the other hand, the acceptance of the form leads the reader to recognize the values and knowledge that are originally “discredited,” as Morrison phrased and therefore excluded or suppressed in the dominant culture. Recognition of the values and knowledge leads to the recognition of the culture and the people. In this way, Morrison achieves her political purpose” (Hsu 155)

4.2 Morrison’s Narrative Strategies

Toni Morrison’s novels allow the voice of the oppressed Afro-American woman to speak in a way that they couldn’t otherwise. She is highly acclaimed literary writer of intense intellect with a sense of pride, which is quite evident in her writing. Her characters are complex and so are the settings. She is often called a “gifted story teller” due to her ability to connect her stories to readers. Being such a talented writer with such a gift, gave her to opportunity to earn a

canonical status in the world of American Literature. In her book *Black Women Novelist: The Development of a Tradition*, Barbara Christian states:

Toni Morrison's work is earthly fantastic realism. Deeply rooted in history and mythology, her work resonates with mixtures of pleasure and pain, wonder and horror. There is something primal about her characters, they come at you with the force and beauty of gushing water, seemingly fantastic but basic as the earth they stand on (Christian 24-25).

Basically, an author's style is his signature which defines his work. Toni Morrison's unique use of language and her profound love for words are the keys to distinguish her writing style. Reading her novels is not an easy task to do; due to her complicated style and non-linear narrative, besides the use of different techniques such as descriptive analogies, important historical references, and varied sentence structure.

One of the key elements of the work of Morrison is her frequent use of significant references to history, which serves as background information about the time period in which the novel took place. The use of the historical references gave more depth to the stories and makes them seem much more realistic. In order to give a further description Morrison utilizes similes in her writing to help the reader connect the content with alternate images and experiences.

Another element which is the sentence structure, Morrison includes a wide variety of different types of sentences, for instance balanced sentences, periodic and inverted sentences in order to make her writing much more fluid. In fact the real reason of including these types of sentences is to break the stream of monotonous reading by creating unexpected sentences. In order to convey the emotion and to express the tone she intends to, through her novels Morrison manipulates the sentence length and wording, this technique attracts her readers the most.

Through her works Morrison seeks to recreate the black speech, "to restore the language that black people spoke to its original power"(Morrison) her writings has the quality of speech;

she call her technique "aural literature." She declared that in the process of writing her novels she hears her prose, and if any phrasing sounds literary or written rather than spoken will be cut. She always responds to critics' assertions that her prose is rich; to those who say her prose is poetic saying that "metaphors are natural in black speech" (Morrison)

4.3 Toni Morrison and Language

In her lecture of Nobel Prize-giving, Morrison emphasized the important role of language on the level of cultural safety; she considers language as the symbol of a nation, she also believes that the existence and development of the language serves as the symbol of existence and development of a nation. Therefore the disappearance of the language will cause definitely the collapse of the nation, besides the independence of a language is the basis of the existence of a nation. According to Morrison language is:

The thing that black people love so much the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It's a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher's: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language. (Morrison 127)

According to Morrison all nations must think seriously about keeping their language independent, and then absorb the essence of other nations' language, in order to enhance and protect their own language. This will positively affect the safety of the nations' culture, especially for the weak ones, such as Negro's culture and even Chinese culture. Cultural safety is a crucial issue for the weak countries, in order to develop the nation's culture in attempt to maintain its safety, it's necessary to develop the language. Because language is the basis of the culture, and the existence and development of a nation's culture are mainly dependent on the role and function of its language, especially in the future history.

To sum up, the protection and creation of a nation' culture is highly important for a nation's

existence and development.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, The African-American literature has emerged as a protest against the injustice done against the black community. They used literature as a tool to prove their existence and to shape their own identity, in order to be able to face the feeling of alienation imposed by the American community.

Toni Morrison is one of the pioneers of the African-American literature, who advocates the black females, using her unique and sophisticated writing style, which evokes almost all the reader's senses. As a result she could deservedly earn a respectful status in the American Literature. Toni Morrison does not write just for the sake of writing, she has her own perspective, and all her works are beautifully written containing a deep political message placed explicitly.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Introduction

According to The Bible, Eve is the one who tempted Adam to disobey God's word to eat the forbidden fruit. So people think that women are most of the time the cause of misery as a result they mistreated them and consider them as an objects rather than human beings. Women are frequent victims of violence and oppression; they are often treated as property or as sources of pleasure for men. In many countries, rape and sexual violence, are practiced as displays of supremacy.

The Second Chapter will deal with Feminist Theory, its waves and the purpose of this theory, moving to Afro-American Feminist movement which emerged in the US, in response to racism and sexism, then explaining the black Feminist thoughts. One the other hand, the second part is devoted to deal with Afro-American feminism in literature and the role of the Afro-American female writers in depicting the condition of the black women, more specifically Toni Morrison.

2. Feminism

The movement of feminism or the more commonly used term "Women's Lib" played a major role in the process of human liberation, it was initiated by politically committed women, first by Elizabeth Cady Stranton ¹way back in 1848, and it supports the argument of men and women being equal economically, socially and politically. Feminism has several purposes; it seeks to highlight and to fight against oppression, and to protest against the patriarchal ideologies. It provides strategies for change. According to Julia Wood the change is the best solution of gender inequality she states:

Realizing that inequality is socially constructed empowers us to be agents of change.

We don't have to treat light skin, heterosexuality, maleness, and middle class

¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an early leader of the woman's rights movement, writing the Declaration of Sentiments as a call to arms for female equality.

economic status as superior or normal. Instead if we choose to, we can challenge social views that accord arbitrary and unequal value to people and that limits human opportunities' and lives" (Wood 2)

The aim of feminism is to understand women's oppression keeping in mind race, gender, class and sexual preference. However; there is no specific definition of feminist theory, In *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, Bell Hooks shares her simple definition of feminism: "Simply put Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression"(Hooks 1) Basically, the concept of feminism is to criticize the supremacy of male for the sake of making women equivalent to men. Besides it examines women's social roles and experience in a variety of fields, such as education, home, and the workforce. Obviously the main goals of feminism are to reinforce the importance of women and to protest against gender equity.

In the United States, it is commonly known that feminism as a movement is an attempt to make women the social equal of men, but in fact feminism as a movement has its root in the social structure and social circumstances. As an attempt to correct this idea, Bell Hooks² in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* explains:

My awareness of feminist struggle was stimulated by social circumstance. Growing up in a Southern, black, father dominated, working class household, I experienced (as did my mother, my sisters, and my brother) varying degrees of patriarchal tyranny and it made me angry- it made dominance and enabled me to resist sexist socialization. Frequently White feminist act as if black women did not know sexist oppression existed until they voiced feminist sentiment. They believe they are providing black woman with the analysis and the program for liberation. They do not understand, cannot even imagine, that black women, as well as other groups of

² Gloria Jean Watkins (born September 25, 1952), better known by her pen name *bell hooks*,

women who live daily in oppressive situations, often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience, just as they develop strategies for resistance even though they may not resist on a sustained or an organized basis (Hooks 10)

Feminist theory looks beyond the more common male-based perspective to focus on the gender inequalities in society. Specifically towards women there is a discrimination which is the unjust treatment against a minority of people who do not belong to the majority. There is also objectification, which is when someone is regarded as an object, and can then be treated as less important. Oppression, where women are treated unjustly and strongly encouraged to occupy gender based social roles. Stereotyping, where all women are viewed under the same oversimplified image, and even in art history, art was made primarily made for men by men, obviously there were differences between men and women.

2.1 Types of Feminism

There are different types of Feminism, one focuses on the socially constructed Gender Differences that are created through the process of socialization, each society creates and passes down norms, customs and expectations from generation to generation, which includes expectations for gender, and a system that rewards and punishes those expectations, this perspective examines how women's experience and position in social situations differs from men's. There are different values associated with femininity and being a woman, than are associated with men and masculinity. Women are often viewed as soft, caretakers, emotional, submissive while men are tough, aggressive, workers and warriors, each is assigned different gender roles.

Women are expected to stay at home and take care of the family while the men go to work and war. Women have been defined as something other in patriarchal societies and have been

marginalized, which means that they have been confined to a lower limit in society than men, and because of social gender differences, women have been objectified as sexual instruments or just something pretty.

The second type of feminist theory focuses on Gender Inequality, which is the central to all behavior and organization in society power, responsibility, and gender biases permeate every aspect of the capitalist society where women subordination is viewed as an inherent feature. Our society is patriarchy, which means that men constitute the governing body as the heads of families, and communities, according to some activists in the feminist movement, marriage itself can be a site of gender inequality they think that married women on average have much higher stress levels than married men or unmarried women. Women are expected to focus on the private sphere at home and have less influence in the public sphere. There's even a gender division of labor men usually occupy the higher paying, more prestigious positions.

The third type of feminist theory focuses on Gender Oppression, according to this perspective women are not only different from or viewed as unequal to men, and they are actually oppressed and subordinated and even abused. It all comes down to power the positive state of being a woman is not acknowledged in patriarchal societies, which gives men more power by the simple fact of their gender. The institution of family is especially beneficial to men with the coming of the industrial revolution; the family was split into two types of labor, domestic labor was done by women including taking care of the house and family for no pay, while men worked outside home and industries in order to make money and provide for the family, because without the men working, the family's survival would be impossible. These split roles created both an economic and educational gap between men and women, lending men more social power. Sometimes this power is expressed by physical violence, which some feminists believe can be confronted if women recognize their own value and strength.

The fourth type of feminist theory focuses on Structural Oppression, which states that

women's oppression and inequality are due to capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. The direct parallel to conflict theory became easy to notice, women like the working class are exploited because of the capitalist model of production but not all women experience oppression in the same way. Gender inequalities are linked with other social inequalities and hierarchies, like race, class, sexual orientation, age and disability. There are differences in social gender characteristics in a patriarchal society; men are associated with the mind, while women are associated with the body, this is used as justification so that women can be seen as property or objects. Women's bodies are often objectified throughout history, from the act of child bearing, to fashion, to modern trends like diet programs. While women are objectified, men are viewed as responsible for working or fighting. Men are also restricted to some socially defined category but the difference is that men haven't been oppressed because of their categorizations, as women have. Gender³ and sex⁴ categories are used to define what is socially acceptable for every individual. Men are expected to be active participants in society, while women are expected to be more passive.

To some extent even English language is male gendered, for instance, mailmen and policemen and firemen are used, as a reaction some feminists choose to reclaim language by using gender neutral terms like mailperson, police officer, or firefighter. Two of the most important works of contemporary feminist theory Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* derive their ideological premise from the twentieth-century philosophical movement, Existentialism. Being a Feminist does not necessarily mean being a woman; man also can be a feminist according to the huge feminist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her speech "*we should all be feminists*" in Ted Talk, she defines a feminist as: "A feminist is a man or a woman who says, "Yes, there's a problem with gender as it is

³ Gender refers to one's psychological sense of oneself as a male, female, gender transgressive.

⁴ Sex refers to the physiological and anatomical characteristics of maleness and/or femaleness with which a person is born

today, and we must fix it. We must do better”.

2.2 Feminist Movements

The history of feminism is often described in waves. This concept was coined by with the Irish activist Frances Power Cobbe in 1884, who shared those movements “Resemble the tides of the ocean, where each wave obeys one more uniform impetus, and carries the waters onward and upward along the shore” (Cobbe). Feminism has so far three waves, each one differs from the other ,they shared their own focus, goals and achievements, but they all resemble in seeking gender equality and women freedom in the patriarchal society.

2.2.1 First Wave Feminism

The First Wave occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, at that time women had no right to vote and no right to hold public offices, surrounding all property rights to their husband. It began with the Seneca Falls Convention⁵ in 1848. It involved some of the foremothers of liberal feminism such as Elizabeth Candy Stanton who drafted the Seneca fall declaration which clearly outlined the movement. The First wave Feminism’s main focus was on women gaining the right to vote, it was also known as women’s suffrage. Women finally gained the right to vote in the United States in 1920. However first wave feminism was not inclusive, which means it was focused mainly on rights for upper or middle class white women.

2.2.2 Second Wave Feminism

The Second Wave was prominent from the 1960’s through 1990’s, It occurred out of the Civil Rights Movement and its main focus was on issues like sexuality and reproductive rights. Whereas the First Wave was inclusive, The Second one is different, it “drew in women of color and developing nations, seeking sisterhood and solidarity” (Rampton).Second wave

⁵ Seneca Falls Convention is the first women’s right convention.

Feminists valued sisterhood proclaiming “women struggle, is class struggle” they hardly tried to demonstrate how issues of race, class and gender oppression are all related. The second wave had also its own achievement; by differentiating between the two concepts; sex and gender, Feminists of that wave saw typically “feminine” objects such as lipstick and high heel as forms of male domination.

2.2.3 Third Wave Feminism

The Third Wave began in the late 1980’s and is still continuing today, Feminists who belong to that wave believes that every woman should define her own femininity for herself and that women should not have given up stereotypically feminine traits in order to be treated equally. Third wave feminism is very distinctive from the other waves, according to Judith Lorber:

Third wave feminism played with sex, sexuality and gender. In that sense, it is similar to post-modern feminism. It is inclusive of multiple cultures and men, and so continuous multicultural/ multiracial feminism and feminist studies of men. But it is rebellious when it comes to radical feminism. It rejects the sense of women as oppressed victims and heterosexual sex as dangerous. It does not valorize mothers or the womanly qualities of nurturance, empathy, and care taking. Instead, third wave feminism valorizes women’s agency and female sexuality as forms of power (Lorber186)

Rebecca walker is one of the most important Feminist of that period and the first one who used the phrase Third Wave Feminism. She states in an article “*Ms. Magazine*:

Let this dismissal of a woman’s experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not bake bread with them, and do not nurture them if they don’t

prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives. I am not a post-feminist feminist. I am the Third Wave. (Walker)

The movement third movement's main focus is on the individual identity than the first and the second waves; it promotes ideas such as sex-positivity and queer theory⁶.

2.3 The Importance of Feminism

Being a feminist requires a person who is on board with one idea, which is all human, whether male or female, should obtain equal political, economic and social rights, being a feminist means believing that women have the right to be treated the same as men, because they belongs to the human race exactly as the men do. Unfortunately the misunderstanding of the term Feminism led to limiting the real focus of feminism; feminism is not just for women, men need feminism too, because men also on the other hand suffered from gender role assumption. Feminism is mainly about greater equality not about giving women a leg up over man like some people think.

Adopting feminism is necessary in daily life, because it allows people to take up the roles they want, do things based on merits rather than gender, and being generally freer. As a proof of a male-based society, girls were told to be respectful, in order to be respected, whereas boys were not told to respect girls, and instead of warning boys of raping girls, girls are told to choose their clothes properly so they will not seduce boys, as if it is their fault in the first place. people judge divorced women because she did not succeed in maintaining the peace of her family, ignoring the fact that she didn't create problems herself, the society blame her simply because she is a woman. People all around the world need to change their mentality and start thinking about women in a positive way, woman deserves to be respected and

⁶ **Queer theory**, in part, is a reaction to a school of 1970s feminism that believed each sex comes with its own essential characteristics

treated in a gentle way, because she represents almost all members of the society, woman is a mother, a sister, a wife and a daughter. Women play an important role in the society, yet she deserves to obtain a respectable status.

Yet, society needs feminism, in order to coexist in a just world where everyone is freer and more equal.

3. The Emergence of Afro-American Feminist Movement in the US

The Afro-American Feminist Movement has emerged as a reaction to the racial oppression that women of African origins have experienced in the Women's Movement and the sexual oppression in the Black Liberation Movement. The Feminist Movement focused on the problems faced by white women. For instance, earning the power to work outside of the home was not an accomplishment for black feminists; they had been working all along, so they felt that they were an invisible group whose existence and needs were totally ignored, in response they created their own movement in order to claim their rights and to prove that they are also a part of the society. All too often, black was equated with black men and woman was equated with white women. As a result, black women were an invisible group whose existence and needs were ignored. The main focus of the movement was to develop theory which could propose solution concerning the way race, gender, and class were interconnected in their lives and to take step to eliminate racist, sexist, and classist discrimination. Gloria Steinem an American feminist told the reporter Stacy Tisdale in an interview with Black Enterprise published on March 19 that Black women "Invented the Feminist Movement".

The American Black women's contribution in women's liberation all around the world is undeniable, black feminism distinguishes itself from the European American feminism, in its center upon the concurrence of abuses that influence Black and other women of shading, particularly prejudice, sexism, and class persecution, issues of specific concern to Black

Women, for example, lynching, issues that influence all ladies, for instance, battering, are all the while molded by racial character, class status, and sexual introduction and also by gender.

To sum up Feminism in the United States never rise up without the participation of women who are most exploited by sexist mistreatment; women are always underestimated and beaten down, mentally, physically, and psychologically, as a sign of their exploitation is their acknowledgement of the present circumstance without unmistakable inquiry, without composed dissent, without aggregate outrage or fury. (Hooks 1)

3.1 Black Feminist Thoughts

Black feminists argue that American democracy can only be realized when the most oppressed and marginalized members of society are free from the burden of oppression. During the fulfillment of her duty as a mother at home and a worker outside home, the Afro-American women suffered from the triple oppression, which led them to develop a specific perspective on the relationships between multiple types of oppression. Black women did not experience just racism, but classism, sexism and other forms of oppression. This struggle widened the horizon for more humanistic view of community encouraging each person in order to develop his or her own individual, unique human potential. Such a community is based on notions of fairness, equality and justice for all human beings, not just for Afro-American women. Black Feminism is a part of wider struggle for human dignity; empowerment and social justice. The legacy of struggle, the search for voice, the interdependence of thought and action, and the significance of empowerment in our daily life, are core themes in Black Feminism.

First, despite of the period, age, social class or sexual orientation, the legacy of struggle against racism and sexism is the main factor which keeps Afro-American women bound. The struggle against racism is the reason which makes black feminism different from the white

feminism in the United States. Therefore, the main focus of Afro-American feminism has been the change of social relations based on race, class and gender. On the other hand, the search for voice or the refusal of black women to remain silent is regarded as a second core theme of black feminism. The male-based society has adopted controlling and stereotyping images by claiming that black women are inferior, as a means to exploit black women. Facing these stereotypes has been an important key element of the search for voice. According to Afro-American women, the search for voice came out from the struggle against controlling images and embrace knowledge essential to their survival.

The theme of the interdependence of thought and action unveiled the connections between black women's ideas and their actions. Due to interrelationship between thought and actions, black women became able to see the connections among concrete experiences with oppression, in order to develop a self-defined voice concerning those experiences and to enact the resistance that entails.

Black feminism is unable to stand up against the triple oppression without empowering black women to become pro-active. Black feminist thought considers black women's oppression and their resistance to oppression as inextricably linked. Thus, oppression responds to human action. Black feminism argues that black women always have the choice and the power to act, regardless of how bleak a situation may appear to be. It also shows that although the empowerment of black women is important, only collective action can effectively eradicate long-standing political, social and economic inequalities.

3.2 Womanism

Originally, Womanism is a feminist term coined in 1979 by Alice Walker in her short story, *Coming Apart* whereby the protagonist was a womanist. A prominent black feminist critic Patricia Hill Collins in her book *Black Feminist Thought* comments that the primary guiding

principle of black feminism is a recurring humanistic vision. She states that:

Black feminism is a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanistic vision of community. Many African- American intellectuals have advanced the view that Black women's struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity and empowerment. Alice Walker's preference for the term "womanist", address this notion of the solidarity of humanity (Collins 39)

According to Collins "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender". She believes that "womanist" is a person who's committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, whether male or female." Besides a Womanist is a woman who loves women and appreciates women's culture and power as something that is incorporated into the world as a whole. She further adds that "the colored race is just a flower garden with every color flower represented" Womanism came out to allow black female, to affirm and celebrate their color and culture in a way that feminism does not allow them to.

The term "womanism" was inspired by Walker's real life experience of multiple oppressions as an Afro-America woman and writer, she declares that the reason of her replacement of the term "Feminist" with "Womanist" is an attempt to give expression to a specifically "Black Feminity" which she does not see reflected in American feminism dominated by white women. In her preface to her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, She explains the origin of her term "womanist"

From womanish: (opposite to "girlish" which means frivolous, irresponsible, and not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color from the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You're acting womanish" which means like a woman...Interested in grown up doings...acting grown up, being grown-up, interchangeable with another black folk expression." You are trying to be grown

up, responsible, in-charge. Serious (Eagleton158)

3.3 Black Feminism and Intersectionality

The concept “intersectionality” was coined by the Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her insightful 1989 essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. Crenshaw talks to Bim Adewunmi about how both feminist and anti-racist campaigns have left “women of colour invisible in plain sight”(Crenshaw) She claimed that Intersectionality already exists and it’s not new, in a speech she gave in Ted-Talks she says:

Well, a lot of things aren’t new, Class is not new and race is not new. And we still continue to contest and talk about it, so what’s so unusual about intersectionality not being new and therefore that’s not a reason to talk about it? Intersectionality draws attention to invisibilities that exist in feminism, in anti-racism, in class politics, so obviously it takes a lot of work to consistently challenge ourselves to be attentive to aspects of power that we don’t ourselves experience (Crenshaw)

Basically, the concept Intersectionality serves as a close description of the way which multiple oppressions are experienced. In fact it is the theory which shows how different types of discrimination, Racism and Sexism, interact in the lives of minorities, specifically black women.

4. Afro-American Feminism In Literature

The time period from 1980s to 1990s, saw a major growth in black feminist writers. They succeeded in spreading their voices, in order to be heard in published works and in academia. They focused on criticizing gender, white male supremacist patriarchy and other structures of domination. However a concrete definition and process of Black feminist criticism has not yet been given by the black female scholars. In her book *New directions for Black Feminist*

Criticism, the Black feminist critic Deborah Mac Dowell, says that she uses the term “ Black Feminist Criticism “ in order to:

...simply refer to Black female critics who analyze the works of Black female writers from a feminist or political perspective. But the term can also apply to any criticism written by a Black woman regardless of her subject or perspective - a book written by a male from a feminist or political perspective-a book written by a Black woman or about Black women author4s in general or any writings of women. A black feminist critic is considered to be one who is fully aware of the political implications of her work and would assert the connection between it and the political situation of all Black women in real life (Dowell191)

Black feminist approach to literature focuses mainly on the realization that the politics of both sex and race are interlocking factors in the works of black women writers. Obviously black women writers manifest common approaches in the creation of literature as a direct result of the specific political, social and economics experience they are obliged to share (Barbara smith), for instance, the use of specifically black female language by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker; which breaks the boundaries of established white and male literary structures.

The motif of the journey is considered as another major theme that recurs in the novels of Black women writers. Regardless of the fact that, the theme already exists in the works of black male writers, women used it in a different way. For example, the journey of the Black male character in the works by Black men, takes him underground. It is a descent into the underworld and is primarily political and social in its implications. On the other hand, though the black female’s journey seems to have political and social implications too, yet it is basically a personal and psychological one, moving from victimhood to self-realization.

4.1. Toni Morrison and Black Feminism

Through her novels, Morrison focuses on the experience of the African Americans, more specifically emphasizing women's experience in patriarchal society and the search for cultural identity. As a means of racial, gender and class conflict's depiction, she uses fantasy and mythic elements along with realistic. Morrison's style is characterized by her ability to combine these unrealistic elements with a realistic presentation of life and characters.

In spite of the fact that, her novels typically concentrate on Afro-American women, yet Morrison does not identify her works as feminist. She states:

It is off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I'm involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don't subscribe to patriarchy and I don't think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it's a question of equitable access and opening doors to all sorts of things (Morrison141)

4.3 Representation of Women in Morrison's novels

Toni Morrison has given voice to the marginalized Afro-American female. In Justine Tally's words, "Morrison was hardly the first non-white, non-male author to challenge the hegemony of the white-male center canon" Morrison has involved herself with revaluing femininity and destroying the foundations of patriarchy through creative writing. In her works, Morrison depicts lives of women who live in a patriarchal society which is poisoned by racism, sexism classism.

In her novels Morrison portrayed how racism and poverty had worsened things for the Afro-Americans, making life almost unbearable in an unjust society like America. She creates characters that struggle to overcome all kind of oppression, as an attempt to urge other black female to react in the same way, and to show to the world the huge amount of pain which black female was obliged to handle. Morrison's *fiction* explores the condition of women in a

patriarchal society, for instance in *Sula She* explores two black characters' relationship which involves the clash between two different identities, one formed by white defined values, the other by black folk values.

According to the Feminist theory, female writers' main concerns are to understand and locate the role of women in the society and analyze every aspect that affects women in a male-dominated world. Through her novels, Morrison portrayed the experience of women who live in a male-based society. Furthermore, she opened doors for women to exist and live, liberated from binary system of thought, operating in the society.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, Feminism movement emerged in response to inequality. It serves a protest against the patriarchal society; the movement's essential goals are to establish social, economic and political equality between sexes. However it is not an attempt to replace men; it is a different perspective on society to point out the inequalities that exist between men and women because of institutions in our society. Inequality in general is a central part of our society, and feminist theory sheds light on the gender inequalities that permeate our everyday life.

On the other hand black feminism supports its own case; black feminist's struggle is against both Racism and Sexism which black female suffered from. Their main aim is to fight for their rights as human being and citizen of the US.

Traditionally, literature was used as a tool to reflect the patriarchal ideology, which proves that through history women were always considered as inferior. However, the emergence of feminism allows women writers to protest against ideologies imposed by male-based society. Toni Morrison's works portrayed the struggle of the Afro-American women, facing all kinds of oppression. She urges women to cherish their culture and identity and to love themselves.

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She created characters that react to oppression in different ways, to show the result of each reaction. Morrison's main focus is to show black women the best way to face the triple oppression in order to avoid self-deconstruction.

CHAPTER Three

1. Introduction

In the third chapter, Toni Morrison's *the bluest eye* is taken as a case study, in attempt to show the impact of the triple oppression on the Afro-American female, and to expose the real reason behind their invisibility in the American society.

2. The Bluest Eye

The bluest eye is Morrison's first, brave step to enter the world of literature, published in 1970. Her book is regarded as a protest against the racial oppression in the US, which the black community suffered from. Through her novel she urges the Afro-American women to cherish their own culture and identity, and to love themselves instead of imitating the white women. Morrison tried to convince black women that, it is better to get rid of self-hatred and low self-esteem, in order to overcome the feeling of invisibility and alienation, which will only damage them mentally and psychologically. The bluest eye is a novel which is beautifully written, containing political messages. It explores delicate issues such as Racism, Classism and gender.

2.1 The story behind the Bluest Eye

Every action has a reaction, and everything happens for a reason. All situations that people encounter in daily life affect them in a way or another, as is the case for the story of the bluest eye. Toni Morrison states in her book *The Bluest Eye* that the idea of writing the novel came out of an incident happened during her childhood, she states:

The origin of the novel lay in a conversation I had with a childhood friend. We had just started elementary school. She said she wanted blue eyes. I looked around to picture her with them and was violently repelled by what I imagined she would look like if she had her wish. The sorrow in her voice seemed to call for

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sympathy, and I faked it for her, but, astonished by the desecration she proposed, I “got mad” at her instead (Morrison x).

Though time has passed but Toni Morrison remained astonished by her friend’s desire, she have always wondered how come a child ever think to pray for the sake of having blue eyes and what are the reasons behind such a dream. But eventually she realized that her friend’s desire was nothing but a result of a damaged soul which suffered from triple oppression.

2.2 Plot summary

This novel takes place in The United States in Lorain, Ohio. The story opens in the 1940's just after the Great Depression. The Protagonist is a little girl named Pecola Breedlove. Pecola belongs to a devastated family, her parents argue all the time and sometime they even fight. Her father cholly burnt the house, so they found themselves outdoors. Fortunately, the Macteer family takes in peccola where she met Claudia and her sister Frieda.

Pecola’s mother has a lame foot which makes her lose her confidence. She loses herself in movies, where she learnt that she is ugly and only the beautiful white women are worthy of love. Through flashbacks the narrators reveals pecola’s parents tragic life, which has led to their dysfunction.

One day pecola’s father returns home drunk, he finds her washing dishes. He raped her with mixed motives of tenderness, hatred and guilt. Then her mother came home she found her unconscious on the kitchen floor, and when Pecola tells her about the rape she denied and started beating her instead of consoling her. Pecola asks Soaphead Church, to help her so she can have blue eyes, but instead of helping her, he uses her to kill a dog he hates.

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Claudia and Frieda learnt that Pecola has been impregnated by her father, so they planted marigold seeds, believing that if the marigold seed grow and live, it means that god had answered their prayer and Pecola's baby will live. But eventually Pecola's baby dies and the flowers refuse to bloom. Cholly, who rapes Pecola a second time and then runs away, dies in a workhouse. Pecola goes mad, believing that she has the bluest eyes. Her madness is a bliss, she is at least able to live in her own world, fulfilling her wish.

3 The Triple Oppression of Afro-American Women Portrayed in the Bluest Eye

According to Morrison Racism, sexism and classism are the main factors which led to the black women's dehumanizing, suffering and invisibility in the American society. They were obliged to face all kind of oppression both by the whites and their black males. As a result women remained silent and invisible, living a life where they are only imitating white women and submitted to their men.

3.1 Racism

According to history Racism traces its roots way back to the time when white masters brought the Africans to America in order to serve as slaves. Based on The Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia the term Racism is defined as "beliefs practices and institutions, which negatively discriminate against people based on their perceived or ascribed race". A racist is a person who associated blackness with dirt, ugliness, sin, stupidity and cultural inferiority, on the other hand he perceives white person as superior, beautiful, intelligent and above all worthy of love. Black community had immensely suffered from racism more specifically women which they are the ones who suffered the most.

3.1.1 Beauty Standards and the Idealization of the White Community

According to the American culture beauty standards, are associated with blond hair, blue eyes and white skin, whereas ugliness is associated with blackness. Black women were considered as ugly creatures; surprisingly they also adopted that idea, as an example, Pauline Breedlove profound love for movies, she goes to the cinema in attempt to escape from her real life in order to live the life of the whites, creating her own fantasy. She imitates the white actress, but in the process she lost her front tooth at that moment she realized that being beautiful like white women is something that she can never reach.

Pecola Breedlove also inherited the same attitude from her mother, she always pray to have blue eyes; she believes that having blue eyes will make her beautiful and loved in the eyes of the others. She also have an addiction of drinking milk in Shirley Temple's cup, she thinks that drinking from that cup will make her beautiful like Shirley Temple and milk which is equated with whiteness will make her skin white. In the novel there is a scene when Pecola drinks three quarts of milk and Mrs. Macteer get mad at her, I quote:

Three quarts of milk. That's what was in that icebox yesterday. Three whole quarts. Now they ain't none. Not a drop. I don't mind folks coming in and getting what they want, but three quarts of milk! What the devil does anybody need with three quarts of milk?" The "folks" my mother was referring to was Pecola. The three of us, Pecola, Frieda, and I, listened to her downstairs in the kitchen fussing about the amount of milk Pecola had drunk We knew she was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley's face (Morrison 23).

Pecola was also addicted to Mary Jane Candy, Mary Jane is a little girl with blue eyes, blond hair and white skin. Pecola thinks that eating the candy will make her eyes blue and will m

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ake her look exactly like Mary Jane. I quote “To eat a candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane” (Morrison50).

Pauline Breedlove was always craving to live like the whites, but since it is impossible she decided to work as a maid in the house of a white family, so she can feel more cultured. She cared for their children more than she does with her own. She considers herself part of the white family rejecting the fact that she belongs to a black one. She found happiness in the white family, forgetting the misery that she lives in her own house.

3.2 Classism

Capitalism is a system which divides the society into two different classes; The masters and the working class or in other word Proletariat. The white community belongs to the first class whereas the Afro-American people are the Proletariat. Though they worked under risky circumstances, yet they suffered from poverty, since they obtain only low wages. Black women worked on plantation farms and as maids in the houses of white families, whereas white women had the most respectful jobs.

3.2.1 The Primer Dick and Jane

In Toni Morrison’s the bluest eye, she used the primer Dick and Jane, in order to depict the class conflict in the US. The Primer is about the American Dream Family where everything is almost perfect; all the family members are super white with blond hair and blue eyes, they live happily in fancy house. One of the family members is a girl named Jane, her parents offered her three dolls in her birthday, and that is kind of lot of dolls. The family looks prosperous, and this kind of life is impossible for the Afro-American community.

3.3 Sexism

Women in general had suffered from Gender issue, but the Afro-American suffered the most. They were abused by the white male and the men of their community, besides they were considered as object rather than human beings. In the novel there is an incident which shows how Afro-American women were victims of violation committed by men of their community, when Cholly Breedlove was having his first sexual experience with a girl of his community named Darlene, suddenly two white men show up and start mocking, using guns they forced him to continue what he started while they watch, I quote:

He hated her. He almost wished he could do it—hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much. The flashlight wormed its way into his guts and turned the sweet taste of muscadine into rotten fetid bile (Morrison 163).

During the incident Cholly breedlove felt ashamed and paralyzed due to his inferior status in the society comparing to the white men, but instead of hating them he blamed his partner, a woman of his community, as an attempt to compensate his feeling of inferiority. Just because she is a witness of his painful experience she took all the blame.

To Sum Up, The Afro-American women were victims of Racism, classism and Gender issue. They lost their self-esteem, self-dignity and their true identity. They seek only to imitate the white women, which led to their self-deconstruction and invisibility in the society.

4 The Invisibility of the Afro-American female

Every woman who belongs to the Afro-American community faced all kind of oppression, but what really led to their invisibility is the way they faced oppression. In Toni Morrison's the bluest eye each character has his own way in dealing with oppression, only few of them resisted, but the rest refused to.

4.1 The Parental Influence

Basically, the parents have an important role and a big responsibility toward their children, the mother is the mirror of her children, and their source of tenderness and love, and the father is the man of the house, therefore he should protect his family. Parents should provide their children with a house in order to feel secure, beside they have the most influential role in forming the personality of their children, in order to be able to overcome hard times, which they are going to face in life, but sometime they are the main reason of the child self-deconstruction and invisibility in the society.

4.1.1 The Macteer Family's Resistance

The MacTeer family is an example of a happy family; Mr. and Mrs. MacTeer are loving and caring parents. Mr. Macteer works hard in order to provide a decent life for his family. Mrs. Macteer is a loving mother, who cares about her daughters Claudia and Frieda. She devoted herself to protect and nurture her daughters, and to guide them in order to make them strong and outstanding. In the novel there is a scene when Claudia is sick and her mother takes care of her, I quote:

My mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness "take hold." By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. But for now I am crying. I know I am making more snot, but I can't stop
(Morrison11)

Everyone has its own way to love and Mrs. MacTeer's love is tough, she take care of her daughter blaming her for being weak, because she wants her to be strong. But still Claudia appreciate her mother's way of caring I quote: "So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody w

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ith hands who does not want me to die” (Morrison12).

As mentioned before the father must protect his child, so when Frieda was sexually abused by Henry, in response her father almost killed him, he acts like a real father and this made Frieda feel secure and loved.

They say what does not kill you makes you stronger, as is the case for the MacTeers, the racist community strengthens them, and therefore it led to their rejection of the white domination and their unity in order to overcome racism.

4.1.2 The Breedlove Family’s Submission

In contrast, the Breedlove Family is totally different from the MacTeers. Cholly is the father, an abusive alcoholic, and Pauline is a neglectful and self-righteous mother. They fight almost all the time and they live in a storefront with old and nasty furniture, I quote:

There is nothing more to say about the furnishings. They were anything but describable, having been conceived, manufactured, shipped, and sold in various states of thoughtlessness, greed, and indifference. The furniture had aged without ever having become familiar. People had owned it, but never known it (Morrison35)

The house means that you are somebody; it is a measure of safety, having a house makes a person feel that he belongs to somewhere. Cholly Breedlove burnt the house putting his family outdoors, and this makes them feel the loss sense of belonging, I quote:

That old Dog Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife’s head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors. Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life. The threat of being outdoors surfaced frequently in those days (Morrison17)

One other hand, Pauline Breedlove the neglectful mother who never loved her daughter, du

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e to her ugliness, I quote: “But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (Morrison 126). Polly perceives her daughter as an ugly creature, using the standards of beauty which she acquired from movies. She rejected her daughter, distancing herself from her daughter, and never showed her love and affection. When Pecola goes to the house where her mother works, in order to help her, she accidentally drops blueberry on the floor; surprisingly Pauline curses her daughter out instead of comforting her, I quote:

“Pecola’s fingers and fell to the floor, splattering blackish blueberries everywhere. Most of the juice splashed on Pecola’s legs, and the burn must have been painful, for The Bluest Eye she cried out and began hopping about just as Mrs. Breedlove entered with a tightly packed laundry bag. In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again” (Morrison 109)

Pauline preferred the daughter of the white family she works for, over her own daughter I quote: The little girl in pink started to cry. Mrs. Breedlove turned to her. “Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don’t cry no more. Polly will change it.....” “Hush. Don’t worry none,” she whispered, and the honey in her words complemented the sundown spilling on the lake” (Morrison 109)

Cholly defines himself as “free man” an outsider in the society, during his childhood his father abandoned him, so he grew up with no father. This affected him psychologically, in response he never knew what means to have a father and to act like a father. Therefore he never supplied Pecola with the love and protection she needs. But to some extent he was the only one who loved her, in attempt to show his love he raped her “he loved enough to touch her” (Morrison) but his love was tremendously wrong, he loved his daughter like free man does, I quote:

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Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye (Morrison206)

To sum up, the Macteers overcame oppression and rejected the feeling of inferiority therefore they survived; whereas the Breedloves' self-loathing and disunity, led to their submission to the white community, I quote:

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious, all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people. They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it was a mantle over them, and went about the world with it (Morrison39).

4.2 Self-loathing and self-esteem

Pecola has the worst luck comparing to the other characters in the novel, she is rejected by her family, her friends and even by strangers, due to her ugliness I quote: "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (Morrison 39). Pecola didn't find the acceptance and the understanding she needs. She always view herself as an ugly girl, and she pray god to give her blue eye, she feels so extremely isolated and she honestly believes that if she were beautiful, she would be worthy of love, I quote:

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Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time (Morrison 40)

Pecola knows only a life of traumas and rejection which reaches its peak being raped by her father who interprets his attitude as an act of love. The rape occurs in their own house, where she is supposed to feel secure, and by her father who is supposed to devote himself to protect her, and it increases the damage done by the incident. Pecola's madness is a bliss, she can at least believe that she got the blue eyes she always craved for, identifying herself with Shirley Temple.

On the other hand, Pecola's weakness is contrasted to Claudia's strength; Claudia clearly distinguished herself from girls like Pecola. In a conversation between her, Frieda and Pecola she declared that she hates Shirley Temple, I quote:

Frieda and she had a loving conversation about how cute Shirley Temple was. 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. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels (Morrison 19).

Claudia is a character who is able to consciously reject the way beauty is so strongly linked to Shirley Temple and whiteness. She seemed to know that those white images denied her reality by forcing her to judge herself based on them. Claudia has a physical confidence, she believes that everyone is beautiful in his own way and no one is ugly, I quote: "we felt comfortable in our skins" Claudia also is a brave courage girl; She defends herself and Pecola when kids at school tried to mock them, unlike Pecola who remains silent. Pecola is an extreme example of

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a total destruction of herself; she refused to protest against the society where beauty standards predominate, therefore she was not able to thrive in her society.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is mainly about perceiving and receiving, which means it is about how Afro-Americans see themselves and how the whites see them. Toni Morrison depicted the impact of the triple oppression on the Afro-American female. Each character has his own way to deal with oppressions, and every reaction leads to a different end.

The invisibility of the Afro-American female is not only due to the Racism, Classism; and gender issues, but it is due to the way they chose to deal with those issues, therefore it is their weakness which led to their invisibility, as an example Claudia who survived because she resisted the oppressions in a brave way, whereas Pecola who ended up a mad girl, chose to remain silent. But it doesn't mean that Claudia is not an invisible element in the society, but at least she doesn't see herself as invisible because that is what matters the most.

General Conclusion

This work's main purpose is to expose the real reason, which led to the invisibility of the Afro-American female, taking Toni Morrison's *the bluest eye* as a case study.

In *the bluest eye*, Toni Morrison explores motifs of interlocking racism, sexism and class oppression. Afro-American female is portrayed as victim, who could not reach her personal autonomy. The characters of the novel differ in the way they responded to the triple oppressions. The main theme of the novel is about Perceiving and Receiving, which means that it is about the way the Afro-American see themselves, and the way they were seen by the whites. Afro-American women suffered from marginalization and oppression in patriarchal society. Some characters believe that their blackness is the source of ugliness, whereas the others found beauty within themselves, believing that beauty is something they learn not something they were born with. There are many incidents in the novel which show the way some characters resisted the oppression, and refused to submit to the white dominance, besides how other characters remained silent, trying to imitate and adopt the ideals of the white culture.

In this study, the intention is to examine *The Bluest Eye* in order to explore the way Morrison depicts women, through the approaches of black feminism. The novel reveals how Racism, Sexism and Classism had a deep negative influence in the female's internal world, and how her weakness disables her to overcome the damage done to her. The disunity of the Afro-American community is another fact of their submission to the white domination. In this study, the characters that differ in their reaction toward triple oppression were compared, as an attempt to expose the reason which led to the invisibility of Afro-American female.

This research draws the conclusion that, Racism, sexism and Classism are the reasons which led to the self-deconstruction of the Afro-American female, and the latter response to the

triple oppression which increased the damage, leading to her invisibility in society. In other word the Afro-American female has been susceptible to be oppressed and marginalized, due to her internal weakness.

As long as no research reaches its aim, this research did not reach all the objectives, however it can pave the way for exploring another areas of investigations and queries like how does applying the Marxist Theory on the *Bluest eye* help to explain, how racism is in fact a pillar of the ideology of Marx?

Appendix1 Toni Morrison was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2012.



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