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**THE RELEVANCE OF
FEMALE BONDS IN TONI
MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST
EYE* AND ALICE WALKER'S
*THE COLOR PURPLE***

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ABSTRACT

Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are two influential authors in the field of African American literature. Their respective novels *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* are characterised by the portrayal of the lives of two main female characters, Celie and Pecola, who suffer the consequences of patriarchal and racial oppression. Taking into account the happy and tragic ending of the novels, this research paper focuses on the influence of female characters upon Celie and Pecola's personal development. Taking female bonding as the basis for this dissertation, an analysis of female characters is carried out in order to determine the main reasons why, in *The Color Purple*, female relationships help Celie towards a process of self-transformation while, in *The Bluest Eye*, the relations between women do not contribute to the prevention of Pecola's final delusions.

Keywords: female bonding, African American literature, race, gender, oppression, community.

Alice Walker y Toni Morrison son dos autoras influyentes en el campo de la literatura afroamericana. Sus respectivas novelas *El color púrpura* y *Ojos azules* se caracterizan por la representación de sus dos personajes principales femeninos, Celie y Pecola, quienes sufren las consecuencias de una opresión patriarcal y racista. Teniendo en cuenta el final feliz y trágico de cada novela, este trabajo se centra en cómo influyen los personajes femeninos en el desarrollo personal de Celie y Pecola. Siendo los lazos afectivos entre mujeres la base principal de este estudio, un análisis de los diferentes personajes femeninos se lleva a cabo con el objeto de determinar las razones principales por las cuales en *El color púrpura* las relaciones de amistad entre mujeres ayudan a Celie hacia un proceso de transformación, mientras que en *Ojos azules* las relaciones entre mujeres no contribuyen a prevenir los delirios que Pecola sufre al final.

Palabras clave: lazos afectivos, comunidad, literatura afroamericana, raza, género, opresión.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION

Within the field of black feminist studies, race and gender has always been two interrelated and overlapping subjects in African American novels. Since the growth of African American literature, female authors have successfully portrayed the struggle of black women to overcome a twofold oppression, i.e. a racial and sexist discrimination. Thus, literature has become a means of expression with the purpose of giving presence to those silenced voices. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are major novelists whose narratives remarkably reflect the reality of black women's lives in the society and culture of the United States. Their novels *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple* provide powerful insights into the topics of racism and patriarchal dominance and the impact they have on their main characters, Pecola and Celie. Likewise, Morrison and Walker do not fail to develop significant aspects of black womanhood which somehow shape the daily lives of Pecola and Celie and which are determinant for their psychological and personal growth. In regard to these aspects, this Master dissertation focuses on the importance of female bonding and the implication of female relations in both novels.

Defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the formation of friendship and loyalty, female bonding is a recurrent theme in African American literature since it is considered a source of empowerment for female characters. By establishing relationships with one another, women can find the support they need to survive their particular ordeal and regain confidence. *The Color Purple* serves as an excellent example to study such women's connections since their influence upon Celie determines the happy ending of the novel. Nevertheless, not all female relations provide a positive outcome in the lives of all women; neither do they get to forge close ties. Hence, they may not be effective at saving someone from despair. In *The Bluest Eye*, there are female characters that support and take care of Pecola. However, these female relations do not improve Pecola's state of mind and her attitude towards social oppression. Moreover, other female characters even contribute to the oppressive and marginal status of the main character. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to determine the reasons why female relations in *The Bluest Eye* do not contribute to the well-being of Pecola, taking into consideration that, in *The Color Purple*, they are the pillars of Celie's self-transformation. By means of a contrastive analysis of *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest eye*, this paper studies both the positive and negative sides of female relationships and how they contribute to the individuality and mental health of Celie and Pecola depending on each other's situation. Both characters Pecola and Celie come from similar family backgrounds and are victims of gender

and racial oppression. Examining the differences between each other would help to shed some light on how female characters' behaviour exclusively affects the protagonists' inner selves and their subsequent actions.

The development of this dissertation commences with the presentation of the main theoretical framework that encompasses the main subject of this study. The first subsection of the literature review provides a general outline of how African American literature came to be considered a liberating instrument for expressing black women's struggles in a gender and racialized society, thus focusing on the manner in which this literature fostered the creation of Morrison and Walker's novels. In the second part of this section, previous research regarding the topic of female bonds and community is laid out by offering a critical view and expounding the major contributions to the object of study. In subsequent sections, a qualitative and interpretive analysis of every female character in each novel is carried out with the objective of pinpointing their main influences on the protagonists' psyche. Lastly, the final consequences of these relations and their impact on Celie and Pecola are revealed prior to the conclusion, in which the main ideas and findings of this research paper are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. African American literature as a form of expression

The conception of woman as a marginalised being in society has been a major object of study for the last decades of the 20th century. The dominance of patriarchy in Western civilization has overshadowed the role of women in political, economic, social and cultural fields. As a result, women felt the necessity of standing up for themselves and began a series of activist movements in order to proclaim their rights and fight for gender equality. In literature, this attempt to liberate themselves from sexist restraints gave place to feminist criticism and a rich production of literary works by female authors. Defined by Maria Lauret as a liberating literature, feminist fiction represented "a female body of texts which sought to liberate both women and writing from the constraints of masculinist double standards in literature and in life" (2002, p. 1). These writings enabled them not only to challenge the canonical literary standards imposed by men at that time, but also to embark on a journey in quest of female authenticity. According to Lauret, the development of this liberating feminist fiction encompassed three chronological phases or trends. Dating from the early to late 1970s, the first phase was "characterised by fictional representations of what feminism was fighting against" (2002, p. 86). From the mid-1970s onwards, feminism began to be considered an

“agent of change,” thus becoming a naturalised subject that led to exploration and discussion. Finally, a third phase in the 1980s made feminist writings draw back from their present concerns to focus on the past in order to depict or reconstruct certain elements of history.

The emergence of African American women’s literature coincides with Lauret’s classification. The rise of black female writers was increasingly influential from the 1970s. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *The Color Purple* (1982) provide its readers with distinguishable features concerning these trends. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker created female characters that poignantly depict the lives’ adversities of black women. Their novels feature women whose lives comprehend the struggle of being victims of a patriarchal system. These are women who grow in dysfunctional homes, are sexually assaulted, give birth to children as a result of rape, struggle to make ends meet due to their poor economic situation and are oppressed by a society which views them as inferior and worthless of recognition. Through their characters, Morrison and Walker transmit black women’s oppressive status and submissive roles by addressing particular aspects of black womanhood. Notwithstanding, their female representations do not correspond to the ones portrayed by western women. Whereas all women as a whole wanted to confront gender issues, their feminist struggles highly differed. Firstly, the life’s conditions and experiences of black women contrasted to a considerable extent in aspects such as inferior housing, education, economic exploitation as domestic workers, sexual exploitation and motherhood. And secondly, apart from gender oppression, they also had to deal with issues of race and class. “As black people, black women were subject to the forces of racism. As women, black women were subject to the forces of sexism. [As poor women, they] were consequently exploited” (Wall, 2016, p. 18). These oppressions were interrelated and could not go separate ways in black feminist studies. In fact, they are major themes in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*. Morrison and Walker interconnect these elements which gradually shape the lives of the main characters, Pecola and Celie. From different perspectives, they criticise a gender and racialized society in an attempt to raise social consciousness and invite the reader to ponder about their characters’ circumstances. Thus, whereas Morrison portrays black women’s marginalisation in its most extreme form, Walker’s characters break gender stereotypes and social conventions.

Although Toni Morrison and Alice Walker’s books are influenced by cultural and social movements such as the Civil Rights movement, Second Wave Women’s Movement or Black Aesthetic Movement, these black female writers seem deeply concerned with African-American history. According to Alice Walker, “the black woman novelist cannot view herself

as extraordinary” (as cited in Pryse, 1985, p. 2); she is but a medium between her predecessors and her fictional characters:

Through years of listening to my mother’s stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life— must be recorded. (As cited in Pryse, 1985, p. 3)

By listening to their foremothers, black women writers had the opportunity to give these women the voice they were not able to place on record and that they orally told their younger generations. Likewise, for Alice Walker, the artistic connection between these ancestral figures in forms of quilting and/or gardening made African American female writers pass on their “creative spark” (Awkward, 1989, p.3). Critics such as Barbara Smith, on the contrary, were more concerned with literary manifestation: “Thematically, stylistically, aesthetically, and conceptually Black women writers manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social, and economic experience they have been obliged to share” (as cited in Awkward, 1989, p. 3). Examples of this literary expression are those literary records composed before emancipation such as slave narratives or autobiographies. The scholar Stephen Butterfield “identifies slave narratives as the building bricks of black American literature” (as cited in Birch, 1994, p. 13):

And little by little, book by book, they construct the framework of a black American literature. Autobiography in their hands becomes so powerful, so convincing a testimony to human resource, intelligence, endurance, love in the face of tyranny, that, in a sense, it sets the tone for most subsequent black American writing. (As cited in Birch, 1994, p. 14)

Eva L. Birch confirms these narratives share the suffering of female slaves carrying out harsh physical tasks, being sexually exploited and meeting the demands of child-bearing (1994, p. 14). Transmitting the history of these women’s tradition as literary “mediums” “have made it possible for readers and for [black novelists themselves] to recognise their common literary ancestors...and to name each other as a community of inheritors” (Pryse, 1985, p. 5). As Morrison identifies, the black female voice roots in the “struggle for a self-definition and self-love whose nourishment comes from a reclamation of ancestry” (Birch, 1994, p. 150).

Nonetheless, the road to literary expressivity came with obstacles. The fact that a woman became a writer was not considered very appropriate and let alone if this woman was black;

the chances of success were reduced to a tiny percentage. African-American women writers strived against a two-fold marginalisation, i.e. a racial and gender-based exclusion that unfortunately prevailed in a patriarchal white society that also determined the white and male canon in literature. In the same way as activities such as reading, writing and thinking were considered opposite to women's nature, western society also deemed these capabilities unsuited to black people. They were "described as natural, emotional, close to the earth, as hewers of wood and drawers of water, as tainted by reasoning if they ever tried to do it" (Christian, 1997, p. 145). Even when black writers used literature as an escape route and for claiming their identity, women were living in the shadow of literary production. They were labelled as intruders in a domain whose access was denied because it should be exclusively for men.¹ It is for this reason that their struggle revolves around two colonialisms: "the domination of their people by the West [and] the domination of themselves by their men" (Christian, 1997, p. 148). Notwithstanding, being the Other in terms of sex and race did not restrain these women from reacting and "creat[ing] a literature of presence and voice [through which they became] not so much as authentic, unified and universal female selves but as authentic and legitimate political subjects hungry for change" (Lauret, 2002, p. 81). These writings resulting from socio-political movements from the 60s onwards poignantly capture racial and sexual restrictions along with the difficulties of trying to eke out a living; themes that, according to Barbara Christian, "call into question the pervasive mythology of democracy, justice, and freedom that American projects itself to be" (1997, p. 160).

Despite the attempts to break old stigmas and transform a society replete with prejudices, Barbara Christian criticises the fact that Afro-American literature is still either neglected or denigrated by the use of labels such as "minority" literature, which minimise the significance of such writings in western society (1997, p. 160). In that sense, it is pivotal to highlight the tenacity of some writers like Pauline Hopkins, who never ceased to use literature for leaving a mark and challenging the western canon:

Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political, and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. No one will do this for us: we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the

¹ The access to education for black women was very limited and black male writers considered that they were not qualified enough to become writers. Moreover, they believed they posed a threat to the real struggle of black people against discrimination since their writings dealt with topics such as marriage, motherhood or sexuality which, from a phallogocentric perspective, played down the importance of racial oppression and provoked the undermining of black men.

Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history, and, as yet, unrecognised by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race. (As cited in Carby, 1987, pp. 128-129)

Following this line, the use of the word “denigration” to belittle, in this case, Afro-American literature is completely transformed by Michael Awkward, who decides to grant it a new connotation. Taking its Latin origin from the verb *denigrare* (from de-, ‘away, completely’, plus *nigrare*, ‘niger’, ‘black’)², Awkward defines denigration as “those appropriative acts by Afro-Americans which have successfully transformed, by the addition of black expressive cultural features, Western cultural and expressive systems to the extent that they reflect...Afro-American “intention” and “accent”” (1989, p. 9). Introducing elements of black culture enabled black female writers to forge their own identity and shape their own writing style, thus making Afro-American literature distinct from the rest of Western literary material. As Lauret states, “an oppositional culture of non-dominant groups has to define itself against the practices and ideology of the dominant group” (2002, p. 5).

This search for authenticity in literature has resulted in new forms and narrative strategies that have contributed to the uniqueness of the works, among others, of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. As Lorraine Bethel observes, black women have a folk-culture characterised by a language full of symbols and modes of expression that reflect their life’s experiences in patriarchal dominant society (Birch, 1994, p. 68). By writing in form of letters, Walker’s *The Color Purple* shows Celie and Nettie’s inner selves. Black folk English is the language used in Celie’s community and it is an indication of her uneducated and marginal background. Nevertheless, it is through the language of these letters that “she goes beyond the arbitrarily set limits of her culture, strengthening a self-barraged by the claims and traditions of patriarchy” (Fifer, 2015, p. 159). Without the letters, Celie’s voice would have been non-existent. As a result, *The Color Purple*’s form “places the self in a prominent position, it asserts the self, and so it is an effective strategy for the foregrounding of black female subjectivity” (Madsen, 2000, p. 223).

In Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, the author alternates a first-person narrator with an omniscient one, dividing the novel into four sections. Notwithstanding, the most outstanding narrative strategies in *The Bluest Eye* are Morrison’s use of a primer before certain chapters and the dual voice of Pecola at the end of the novel. According to Awkward, Morrison employs the

² Denigrate. (2017). In *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/denigrate>

primer in order to deconstruct the “myths of ideal family life,” i.e. the family standards generally delineated by the American society, which are “wholly inapplicable to Afro-American life” (1989, p. 61). This deconstruction also implies the undermining of such conventions with the purpose of demonstrating the “inappropriateness of the white voice’s attempt to authorise or authenticate the Afro-American text or to dictate the contours of Afro-American art” (Awkward, 1989, p. 63). Moreover, the double voicedness of Pecola when she hallucinates other self at the end of the novel is a remarkable narrative feature that Awkward links to W. E. B. Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of [whites]....One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro” (as cited in Awkward, 1989, p. 12). Du Bois emphasises the merging of these two selves into one; the existence of a possibility in which a single person could consider himself/herself both a Negro and an American. By contrast, what Morrison portrays in her novel is the events of a girl which have made her long for blue eyes and reject all her blackness, turning her into a delirious person who believes she has obtained the blue eyes that, unfortunately, she can never obtain. Lastly, the use of nature presents another remarkable feature since Morrison divides the novel into four seasons in which the development of events has a vast impact on Pecola’s character (Christian, 1997, p. 57).

Morrison and Walker’s forms of expression leading to the achievement of Afro-American authenticity were also originated as a consequence of their social position in contrast with that of white women. As aforementioned, the definition of woman in American society was linked to race, sex and social class. Hence, being a woman implied being white and upper-middle class. Moreover, “she was expected to be beautiful in an ornamental way, chaste, pious, married, and eventually, mother” (Christian, 1997, p. 72). This idealised concept of woman transmitted certain traits from which a community of black women was generally excluded: they belonged to a lower class, were deprived of education, had to work and, in addition, were deemed ugly. In a feminist struggle to gain social, political and economic presence in society, black women were put aside for not matching a description through which they had to leave behind a part of themselves in order to fit in: “if defined as black, her woman nature was often denied; if defined as woman, her blackness was often ignored; if defines as working class, her gender and race were muted” (Christian, 1997, p. 161). In her essay “In the Quiet, Undisputed Dignity of my Womanhood”, Hazel. V. Carby criticises the role of white women and their behaviour concerning this preconceived social definition. Instead of working together for the

same goal, she claims that white women contributed to the maintenance of such oppression, becoming in his way “not potential allies but formidable antagonists” (1987, p. 118). Afro-American women experienced the marginalization from white feminist movements that failed to include them in the fight for their cause; thus, the only way of being recognised was to begin their own struggle, creating and shaping their own concept of feminism in order to overcome specific problems concerning their womanhood.

2.2. The importance of community and female bonding in Toni Morrison and Alice Walker’s novels

The constant categorization and rejection of black women within society was ingeniously reflected on Afro-American fiction. Through her novels, black female writers portray how the concepts of beauty, class, gender and race affect black communities. In fact, the attitude of the members of such communities is paramount for the development of characters such as Pecola and Celie. Both Morrison and Walker approach these themes in different manners, which clearly determine the tragic or happy ending of the main characters. Toni Morrison presents a community which has accepted Western standards of beauty and racist stereotypes. Most women characters in her novel aspire to live up to those standards. Their attempt to achieve those ideals causes them to scorn Pecola, the victim of such social construction. The manner in which these women treat the girl as a consequence of her blackness, ugliness and poverty, is what leads Pecola to be cut off from her community and fall into madness. Only Claudia seems not to yield to the same attitudes and realise about the inappropriateness of such alienation. Conversely, Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* presents a more subversive stance. Celie undergoes a process of self-definition and self-empowerment thanks to the support of the women in her community. She gradually undermines those definitions which were product of western society and becomes a total liberated woman.

In her book *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (1945), the psychoanalyst Karen Horney studies the attitudes of individuals when confronting a conflict. She exemplifies her ideas by describing a child’s common movements when he/she needs to cope with the environment in cases of isolation or helplessness. According to her study, the child may react moving toward people, against them or away from them. Taking into consideration the first instinctive response, Horney describes the child’s move towards people in the following way:

[the child] accepts his own helplessness, and in spite of his estrangement and fears tries to win the affection of others and to lean on them....By complying with them, he gains a feeling of belonging and support which makes him feel less weak and less isolated. (p. 42)

Paul Born (2014) links this interpersonal strategy to the concept of deep community, through which people are connected and care for each other, thus strengthening and creating bonds between them: “We begin to open ourselves up to receive and give. Mutual acts of caring become the basis of an ever-stronger feeling of belonging” (Deep Community section). Following this line of thought, the foundation of a deep community lies on people sharing their stories with one another and finding mutual support. Hence, this communal sharing leads to a sense of belonging that enables people or members of a community to identify themselves with the rest of people and feel they are welcomed in a place or a group. Born also identifies family as “the most common source of belonging” and remarks that “identity forged during childhood is strongly influenced by family” (Options for Deep Community, seventh subsection). In this case, the main characters in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple* present dysfunctional families and consequently, the conflicts within each house inevitably affect Pecola and Celie’s lives.

Among other factors, the identity of Pecola and Celie and their sense of belonging are disrupted due to the violence and molestation of their fatherly figures. In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly rapes her own daughter when she was doing the dishes. Once he finished such monstrosity, a feeling of regret seems to overpower him: “Removing himself from her was so painful....Hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her” (Morrison, 2016, p. 161). Notwithstanding, this sentiment did not restrain him from committing the same sexual assault again. Given the circumstances, Pecola attempts to tell her mother the first time but her disbelief and usual neglect makes Pecola succumb to silence and hide it from her the second time. As a consequence, her father’s rape causes her “to enter her own personal world of silence and madness” (Miner, 1985, p. 180). Similarly, Celie suffers the same type of harassment. The first sentence we find as an introduction to the first Celie’s letter is, “You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy” (Walker, 2014, p.3). Since the beginning, we meet a raped and threatened Celie, trapped in a house where the owner of her body is her stepfather, whom she believes is her biological father. As Pecola, she gets pregnant but instead of suffering a miscarriage, she thinks the two children have been killed or sold. Likewise, the reader learns that Celie also

experiences maternal neglect when she says her mother died screaming and cussing at her. According to Uplabdhī Sangwan, the role of Celie at the beginning matches the controlling stereotype of a “mule” that existed during slavery; a term that served as justification for female slaves’ exploitation in terms of physical and sexual utilisation (2009, p. 177). Celie is objectified as if she were a market’s product when her father tries to give her in marriage: “I can let you have Celie....She ain’t fresh tho, but I specs you know that....She ugly....But she ain’t no stranger to hard work. And she clean” (Walker, 2014, p. 10).

The lack of parenthood in the lives of both characters results in a complete loss of self-esteem and therefore, a loss of self-identity. One of the first steps identified by Born in order to create a sense of belonging to a deep community is ruined by the destructive family environment that Pecola and Celie experience. Feeling despised and isolated, the only chance for these female characters to retrieve their self-love and confidence is to seek support and solidarity elsewhere within their communities. In this sense, the roles and attitudes of other female figures could prove a source of liberation from the internal demons that haunt them. However, as Patricia Hill Collins indicates, trusting other women is not easy and might not seem safe since only black women are acquainted with the implications of being a black woman in a racialized and gendered society. Nevertheless, the relationships that they sometimes establish with each other “are vital to their growth and well-being” (2000, p. 104). Professor Kevin Quashie explores the ways in which black women identify with one another, including with themselves, and observes that community is a “location of power and self-identity for black women” (2004, p. 16). Girlfriend, sisters and other mothers are common terms to refer to this type of black female connection. Quashie defines girlfriend as the “other someone who makes it possible for a Black female subject to bring more of herself into consideration” (2004, p. 18). According to him, the achievement of selfhood for a woman who feels helpless and selfless is determined by the woman’s identification with and as their girlfriends (2004, p. 16). This idea can be exemplified with *The Color Purple*’s female connection between Celie and Shug. When Shug invents a song and names it “Miss Celie’s Song,” she is identifying the lyrics with Celie and her troubled life. Moreover, during the time Shug is sick and Celie combs her hair, she identifies Shug with her daughter and her mother: “I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia—or like she mama” (Walker, 2014, p.51). At that moment, Celie sees Shug as if she were her daughter Olivia or her mother. This simple gesture thus creates a connection between all those women whom she has combed their hair before. In like manner, Shug remarks: “That feel just right...That feel like mama used to do. Or maybe not mama.

Maybe grandma” (Walker, 2014, p.51). This response to Celie combing her hair sparks in Shug memories of her mother and grandmother. At that moment, Shug feels as if Celie could have been replaced by her female relatives. The connection that emerges from this type of situations builds powerful interpersonal relationships between women and, most importantly, it enables them to reach a communal voice. As Awkward states:

From [their] friendship and “creative” interactions..., Celie begins to develop not only a higher self-regard, but also a sense of the benefits of community. [These women represent] audiences to whom [Celie] can speak about the burdens of her life and from whom...she receives immediate and beneficial response. (1989, p. 153)

The stories and moments they share, together with their sympathy and support instigate in Celie a process of self-transformation and personal development that leads her to a complete achievement of selfhood. With the help of Shug, Nettie and Sofia, she finds the strength and power to build herself anew, going from “subordination and victimization to heroic female selfhood” (Smith, 2009, p.5). According to Brenda Smith, this personal transformation that the protagonist undergoes contributes to the obtainment of a “successful Bildung” (2009, p. 8).³ She liberates herself from an oppressive life and subverts all gender stereotypes that have determined her adolescence within a patriarchal black community. Celie grants herself a new identity embracing her love and sexual attraction to Shug, her friendship with Sofia, the family support of Nettie and finally, the love and acceptance of her own self. Celie’s recovery of self-confidence and learning to love herself plainly matches Alice Walker’s concept of womanism: “A woman who loves another woman, sexually and/or non sexually, [who] appreciates and prefers women's culture, [who] is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people [and a woman who] loves herself” (1983, p. xi-xii).

In the case of Pecola, Toni Morrison introduces the reader into a completely different world. Although she comes from a similar background as Celie, she cannot find the strength to overcome the marginalisation and hatred that surrounds her. Unlike Celie, Pecola cannot achieve a communal unity because she is confined to a neighbourhood from which she only receives contempt. The root of this disdain lies in the rejection and abandonment of African American cultural traits and the internalization of white female physical beauty. In *The Bluest*

³ In the case of African American fiction, the common process of maturation and moral growth through which an adolescent finds his/her place in society or community is not portrayed in the same way as in Western literary novels. Female characters’ bildung also represents their “struggle with issues of not only race, skin color, and sex, but of procreation, Black feminine images inherited from mothers, and often despicable expectations for Black women preordained by society” (O’Neale, 1982, p. 26).

Eye, Morrison depicts characters that have adopted western standards of beauty. As Audre Lorde alleges in her essay “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger”, “[African American women] have not been allowed to experience each other freely as Black women in America; [they] come to each other coated in myths, stereotypes, and expectations from the outside, definitions not [their] own” (2007, p.170). Adult women in the novel dream with the achievement of light skin and blue eyes and attempt to conform to white femininity. The endeavour to meet standards which are impossible for a black woman proves what Paul C. Taylor denominates “the hierarchical valuation of human types along racial lines” (2000, p. 665). The fact of living in a racialized society turns blackness into a despicable condition that lead black people to wish they could dispose of their black identity.

Due to the implausibility to attain white facial features, characters in *The Bluest Eye* target their resentment and hopelessness at Pecola as a means of self-preservation. Despite the similarities they share with one another, people despise and alienates Pecola for having a darker skin tone and strong black facial features. Thus, Pecola becomes a scapegoat. According to Erich Neumann, “scapegoating results from the necessity for the self and/or the community to rid itself of the “guilt-feeling” inherent in any individual or group failure to attain the “acknowledged values” of that group” (as cited in Awkward, 1989, p. 74). Lorde states that black women judge one another because when they look in the mirror, they fear they might see the reflection of a face and eyes they never want to have; they measure the self they do not want to be (2007, p. 167). By abusing and marginalising Pecola, people in the community come to believe they are superior and worthy of social acceptance, whereas the ugliness and poverty of the Breedloves turn them into outcasts. In this way, physical appearance becomes a determining factor for communal acceptance. People in *The Bluest Eye* have come to define themselves according to their appearance and cleave to the Western society that, somehow, has always rejected them. Geraldine clearly expresses the colorism that invades the novel when she teaches her son the difference between coloured people and black people: “Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud” (Morrison, 2016, p. 85).

Surprisingly, in the same way as people reject and insult the Breedloves, the family itself has also accepted its ugliness and social condition: “they took their ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it” (Morrison, 2016, p.37). The affirmation of their own ugliness is what ignites the family to strange from one another. There is no sign of familial love within the Breedloves. They alienate themselves just as people from

their community keep them away from their lives. This estrangement among family members has terrible repercussions on Pecola's well-being and determines the failure of creating any type of close bonds. The mother, Pauline, has great influence on Pecola's affective and social development. Had her attitude towards Pecola been different, perhaps her daughter would not have suffered such an identity crisis. In African American culture, the role of a mother and mothering generally contribute to the psychological development and empowerment of a black child. Andrea O'Reilly (2004) further elaborates:

In a racist culture that deems black children inferior, unworthy, and unlovable, maternal love of black children is an act of resistance; in loving her children the mother instils in them a loved sense of self and high self-esteem, enabling them to defy and subvert racist discourses that naturalize racial inferiority and commodify blacks as other and object. (p. 11)

Contrary to O'Reilly's statement, Pecola is emotionally separated from her mother. The mother's internalization of the dominant culture creates a huge gap between both characters. When Pecola has to call her mother, she does not say 'mama', she uses 'Mrs. Breedlove' instead. Pauline lives engrossed in a white-defined world and rejects Morrison's notion of the funk, which makes reference to traditional black values. Black women are considered to be cultural bearers. Mothers transmit their ethnic traditions to younger generations, thus endeavouring to maintain a sense of belonging within a particular black community and a feeling of connection to their ancestors. When mothers avoid the ancient properties of their culture and assimilate white definitions of feminism, they cannot achieve what Morrison denominates the completeness and fullness of the self (O'Reilly, 2004, p. 23). In the case of Pauline, she seems to be ashamed of her cultural traits since she renounces all connections to them. According to Melissa Harris-Perry, skin colour and hair texture provokes a sense of shame that can affect a black woman's self-esteem, contaminate familial relationships along with love life and economic success (2011, p. 107). Pauline seems affected by all these factors and hence, takes refuge in isolation. As Harris-Perry pinpoints:

Individuals...do not feel shame in isolation, only when [they] transgress a social boundary or break a community expectation. [Their] internal moral guide may lead [them] to feel guilt, but shame comes when [they] fear exposure and evaluation by others. This may be especially true for girls and women, who draw a larger sense of self-identity from their friendly, familial, and romantic relationships. (2011, p. 104)

Eventually, this self-rejection and feeling of shame are soon transferred from Pauline to Pecola. She perceives how everyone hates her and how her family breaks apart every time they argue and fight. No matter where she goes, she feels that nobody cherishes her. The only people that seem to support and care about her are the sisters Claudia and Frieda, and the three prostitutes. The former, as innocent children, can change neither the way in which the rest of the community treats Pecola nor the forthcoming events in her life. Similarly, China, Poland or Miss Marie do not have any power over Pecola's life since they are as socially rejected and repudiated as the poor girl.

Given the circumstances, Pecola begins to cultivate a feeling of despair and, at the same time, shame, anger and self-hatred. She embraces people's contempt and comes to believe she is worthless too. According to Harris-Perry, if someone is continuously treated as a problem, the person would end up believing he/she is indeed a problem, thus focusing only on the negative feedback (2011, p. 100). Pecola agrees with her social unacceptability. She deems herself as a communal burden; a problem which could only be solved by the obtainment of blue eyes. The yearning for the beautiful and blue eyes characteristic of a white girl makes Pecola delusional. The social rejection of the dominant culture and the lack of support from her own people, together with the horrid incestuous rape, provoke the origination of a trauma from which Pecola will never be able to get free. This physical distress truly affects her identity and selfhood. Maria Root's concept of insidious trauma correlates with Pecola's mental deterioration. This psychologist defines this type of trauma as the "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (as cited in López Ramírez, 2013, p. 76). Hence, Pecola is a mere victim of the ostracism rooted in a patriarchal dominant group that has influenced all her family and women around her. In this case, Judith Herman accurately underscores the correlation between the support of community and psychological distress:

Those who have survived [traumatic events] learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group recreates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity. (1997, p. 214)

Herman's clarification illustrates the main differences between Celie and Pecola. Whereas Celie finds the comfort of a group of women who stand by her side, Pecola hardly receives indications of solidarity. Celie establishes bonds of friendship that enables her to restore her identity. She becomes a survivor in a place characterised by man domination and racial intolerance. By contrast, Pecola is immersed in her solitude, devoid of love and without the support of any female figure. She becomes a victim of social exclusion in a community where racial features denote people's level of acceptance. In the end, the characters' success and personal well-being hinge to a large extent upon female bonding.

3. INFLUENCE OF FEMALE CHARACTERS ON PECOLA'S INNER SELF.

3.1. Claudia and Frieda

Claudia and Frieda represent major characters in *The Bluest Eye*. Contrary to the rest of females, they do not yield to the white domination of physical appearance and are not influenced by ostracism. In spite of their immaturity, the two sisters realise how racially contaminated and superficial is the society in which they live. Both Claudia and Frieda can be contemplated as two subversive girls who innocently expose how colorism permeates their community and alter what otherwise could have been a place characterised by social harmony. Through the eyes of Claudia, the reader witnesses the different treatment that certain characters receive depending on their skin tone and facial features. In the light of the circumstances, Claudia and Frieda rebel against these social preconceived notions and develop hostility towards those girls who exhibit their supremacy and arrogance along the street. At the beginning, this strong dislike is directed at dolls. For Claudia, dolls are mere representations of the beauty standards accepted in her neighbourhood and this conventional reproduction was something she detested: "I had only one desire: to dismember [the doll]. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me" (Morrison, 2016, p. 18). Claudia blames adults for not even considering or asking what their daughters wish for Christmas. They assumed that giving a blue-eyed doll with yellow hair and white skin was the perfect present because all little girls wanted to look like them. But girls like Claudia only wanted a simple act of love and to spend time with her father. People were so westernised that they could not see beyond appearances. As a consequence, Claudia commences to transfer her hatred from white dolls to real white girls. Such is the case with Rosemary Villanucci or Maureen Peal. Claudia observes how these girls are warmly received among the neighbourhood and how devoid of such gentleness she and her sister are:

We were lesser....Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. (Morrison, 2016, p. 72)

Despite their awareness, Claudia and Frieda are not affected by people's depreciation. They feel comfortable in their own skin and they do not let themselves be swayed by prejudices. This attitude towards the social construction of racial beauty is reflected on their relationship with Pecola. When Pecola comes to stay with the Macteers after his father set their house on fire, Claudia and Frieda accept her and do not disregard her at any moment. They count on her for playing, going to school and doing other activities. Claudia and Frieda are the only friends that Pecola has ever had and, consequently, the only girls in the neighbourhood that care about her. They witness how badly she is treated at her school by the rest of children and instead of turning a blind eye to the insults she receives, they defend and stand by her. This type of situations occurs when she is being bullied by some boys who call her "black e mo" or when she is disturbed by Maureen Peal accusing her of seeing her father naked. In the former situation, Frieda drops her books on a boy's head and tells them to stop; in the latter, Claudia answers back trying to ease the situation. Apart from their defensive stance, they also help her at embarrassing moments such as the day when Pecola menstruated for the first time.

These little actions were hints of the support that Pecola could have received, were she aware of the friendship ties that lay close to her. Claudia and Frieda could have been the heroines that Pecola needed to overcome her inner problems and thus, save her from her downfall. Even if they were children, they could have formed a sister bond that would have allowed Pecola to feel some affection from others and not only experience loneliness and rejection. In some chapters, it is evident that Claudia has grown fond of her: "She was smiling, and since it was a rare thing to see on her, I was surprised at the pleasure it gave me" (Morrison, 2016, p. 104). Unfortunately, Pecola does not realise the little treasure that was lingering beside her. She is such a fragile character that when she is abused by the school boys or Maureen, she does not pay attention to her friends' behaviour; her anxiety only allows her to adopt a bodily position in case it permitted her to disappear: "Pecola tucked her head in....A kind of hunching of the shoulders, pulling in of the neck, as though she wanted to cover her ears" (Morrison, 2016, p. 70).

When Frieda and Claudia learn about Pecola's rape and subsequent pregnancy, they were hearing the gossip and abhorrent comments about the baby not deserving to live. At that

moment, thinking about all the hatred that poor Pecola has always endured, they comprehend how destructive people could be to another person. Their only wish was to change the course of events and come up with an idea that could make the future infant live. Hence, they decide to plant some seeds, in the hope that they come up and a miracle happens; but the damage was done and there was no turning back. Pecola's baby does not survive and she falls into madness, believing she has the most blue and beautiful eyes in the world and a friend with whom to talk. After this event, Frieda and Claudia were filled with guilt. They thought they had failed Pecola, that what they did was not enough. Claudia believed it was her fault for planting the seeds too far down. Long after, they realised the blame was not on them, but on those people and Cholly Breedlove who sentenced her daughter to delusion.

3.2. Miss Marie, China and Poland

These three women live in the apartment above the Breedloves family. The fact that their house is in the same place as Pecola's family already illustrates their social position. As women who work providing sex in exchange for money, they are socially repudiated. Unlike good Christian women, they are defined as ruined people with a very bad reputation; they are sinners who smoke, drink and spoil families by sleeping with husbands. Nevertheless, they do not seem affected by their marginalization. They led a dissolute lifestyle being indifferent to public opinion and moral restrictions. This nonchalant attitude was not even concealed from Pecola. For them, child's innocence did not exist. When Pecola visits them, they do not deprive themselves from saying swear words or telling rough stories in front of a child. Yet, these women are touched by Pecola's life. They worry about her and pay attention to her lack of parental care. Pecola notices their kind gestures and truly appreciates them: "Miss Marie is nice. They all nice....I got more shoes than I ever wear....They take me to the movies, and once we went to the carnival" (Morrison, 2016, p. 105). Although they might not be the most adequate women for taking care of a child, at least they give her the little they can and provide a poor black child with the kindness she mostly needs. This fondness is perceived through the pet names that Miss Marie uses to call Pecola such as "dumplin'", "puddin'" or "honey". Notwithstanding, and as it occurs with Frieda and Pecola, they hold no power over the situation and can do nothing to change the course of events that soon is going to affect Pecola's state of mind.

3.3. Mrs. MacTeer

Mrs. MacTeer is Frieda and Claudia's mother. She takes Pecola in her house to take care of her while her house is being restored after the fire Cholly had caused. This act of kindness

demonstrates that this woman has not been influenced by the divisive and destructive ideas of the community. Mrs. MacTeer could be acknowledged the othermother of Pecola for a short period of time.⁴ She treats Pecola in the same way as her daughters. She feeds her, reprimand her and beat her if she considers she is being naughty, be “child of [hers] or not” (Morrison, 2016, p. 29). An illustrative example of her good nature is the day when Pecola begins to menstruate. Although at the beginning she is swayed by the false accusations of Rosemary, as soon as she realises that the reason for such a fuss was Pecola’s menstruation, she feels sorry for whipping her daughters and quickly turns to aid Pecola. She washes her clothes and helps her with the situation. This assistance and maternal gesture proves Mrs. Macteer’s othermothering. On the other hand, Pecola cannot distinguish love from rebuke. Because of her mother’s neglect, she is not acquainted with maternal care. Hence, she does not know to differentiate between people’s offensive comments and Mrs. Macteer’s usual moaning. From her perspective, she is a hindrance to everybody.

3.4. Pauline

Pauline’s attitude is one of the major causes for Pecola’s development of low self-esteem and a feeling of unworthiness. Due to her neglect and lack of interest in her daughter, Pecola grows up devoid of maternal love. However, Pauline did not use to behave in such a careless way before Pecola was born. Everything began to change after she moved with Cholly. She felt alone in a new neighbourhood where everyone was mostly coloured or white. Her life starts to collapse when her marriage enters into a crisis characterised by economic problems and Cholly’s addiction to alcohol. In an attempt to combat her lonesomeness, she commences going to the cinema. It is within the world of films that she gradually changes her worldview. Pauline is introduced to new socially defined ideals of beauty and is acquainted with romantic ideas of love. She compares her physical appearance with that of the actresses, her stormy relationship with those of the films and her poor condition with the lovely houses of the characters. During her months of pregnancy, she said she would love Pecola no matter what she looked like. But once she was born, she knew she was going to be ugly; she describes her as “a black ball of hair” (Morrison, 2016, p. 122).

From the moment she finds a permanent job in a white rich family, she focuses on being a good maid and distances herself from all her family and domestic responsibilities: “More and

⁴ The concept of othermother in African American communities makes reference to the care that some women provide to a child who is not biologically their own. The term encompasses from female family members to neighbours and friends (Collins, 2000, p. 178)

more she neglected her house, her children, her man—they were like...the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely” (Morrison, 2016, p. 125). Pauline isolates herself from a poor lifestyle and takes shelter in the world of the Fishers. Evidently, the consequences of such alienation take its toll on Pecola’s upbringing: she is ignored, she is not provided with the necessary clothes or food, her mother neither talks nor looks at her, etc. The incident at the Fishers with the berry cobbler evinces Pauline’s thoughtlessness. When Pecola burns herself with the pan’s hot juice that splashes on her legs, Pauline rants at her instead of coming to her aid and check if she has a serious scald: “Crazy fool...my floor, mess...look what you...” (Morrison, 2016, p. 107). In addition to this, she turns to comfort the Fishers’ little girl who is crying: “Hush, baby, hush” (Morrison, 2016, p. 107). The harsh treatment of Pecola clearly contrasts with the gentleness aimed at the blond girl. While she is holding onto something she can never obtain, her daughter is abused by an entire community and deprived of her mother’s support and kind gestures. This estrangement markedly proves her shallowness. Nonetheless, her indifference slightly changes almost at the end of the novel but, unfortunately, for the worse. When Pauline learns from Cholly’s rape of Pecola, she does not believe her. However, once she learns about her pregnancy, she does not show any sympathy either. On the contrary, for the first time Pauline makes contact with Pecola by beating her, as if she were guilty of such atrocity. Since Pecola was born, Pauline has been unconsciously contributing to Pecola’s deterioration of her selfhood until she finally loses her total identity.

3.5. Maureen Peal

Described as “a high-yellow dream child with long brown hair” (Morrison, 2016, p. 60), Maureen is the lucky girl whom everybody respects and adores. Because of the manner in which she initially treats Pecola, this character creates the feeling she is giving a good impression. Although sometimes she speaks in a condescending way, she does not seem to despise Pecola as the rest of coloured or white girls. Her attitude indicates friendliness and putting her arm through Pecola’s denotes closeness instead of loathing. She is even kind enough to buy Pecola an ice-cream.

Nevertheless, her kindness does not last long. When she asks Pecola if she has even seen a naked man, Pecola gets particularly nervous and takes a defensive stance against Maureen. This situation causes the beginning of an argument in which Frieda and Claudia had to intervene due to Maureen’s persistence on the subject. As it was expected from the beginning, Maureen reveals the impact of the communal internalization of physical beauty on her

character: “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos!” (Morrison, 2016, p. 71). It is evident that no matter how much a child tries to ignore people’s reaction to others, adults’ transmission of social prejudices to their children results in affecting their friendly relations. In the end, the one suffering the consequences is Pecola, who “fold[s] into herself, like a pleated wing” (Morrison, 2016, p. 71). The repetition of this type of incidents on a daily basis is the cause of Pecola’s self-loathing and loss of self-regard.

3.6. Geraldine

Geraldine’s hatred and repulsion towards black people is clearly manifested through the way of expressing herself and the education she gives his son. The incident with the cat demonstrates that she is blinded with prejudices. Her judgement regarding an occurrence which she has not witnessed confirms that she prefers to believe an unjustified and wicked accusation involving a black girl rather than reasonably inform herself first.

Geraldine is a woman who provides his son with all he physically needs even though she does not usually talk to him or show any affection. She treats her cat more tenderly than his son; all her love and attention are directed to her pet. The only lesson she makes sure her son learns is the difference between people like them and people with a darker skin tone. She instils in his son the racial hatred so characteristic of the community. As a consequence, Junior’s character is delineated by jealousy and contempt. When he sees the chance of both abusing the cat and Pecola, he does not hesitate to seize the opportunity. Once again, Pecola becomes the victim of a mother’s neglect and racial discrimination. In a state of panic and pain after Junior throws the cat at her face and later against the window, Pecola suffers the consequences of Junior’s fake accusation and Geraldine’s harsh comment against her: “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (Morrison, 2016, p. 90). Geraldine immediately believes her son’s statement, even though he frequently mistreats the cat and she is always the one soothing the animal. With regard to Pecola, this incident perfectly epitomises the psychological abuse to which she is constantly subjected. When Pecola leaves the house, she seems considerably affected: “She held her head down against the cold. But she could not hold it low enough to avoid the snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement” (Morrison, 2016, p. 91). Morrison’s image of snow falling and melting away allegorises Pecola’s victimisation. She tries to be invisible and avoid mortifying situations, but verbal abuses and people’s rejection chase her everywhere she goes. The worst part of these humiliations is that she cannot escape from them.

4. INFLUENCE OF FEMALE CHARACTERS ON CELIE'S INNER SELF.

4.1. Albert's sisters

Carrie and Kate are the first female characters that appear after Celie marries Albert. They perfectly embody the traditional idea of women as good housewives and compliment Celie on the accomplishment of such role; she is described as a good housekeeper and is praised for the maternal care of Albert's children. Nonetheless, they also pay attention to the manner in which Celie is treated by her husband. Albert's sister Kate is the first female character who unsuccessfully comes to Celie's defence by reproaching her brother his behaviour. She also attempts to encourage Celie to face him and his son Harpo: "You got to fight them, Celie...I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself" (Walker, 2014, p. 22). But Celie's main focus is on surviving. Her fear and hopelessness restrain her from making any daring move: "What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (Walker, 2014, p. 22). Luckily, these thoughts will be gradually changing into a more positive view of life with the appearance of new characters.

4.2. Shug Avery

Shug becomes the most significant and influential character on Celie's life. She is a liberal woman who does not content herself with being a housekeeper. Working as a blues singer, she is always on tour and devotes her time to leading a carefree life liberated from responsibilities and full of enjoyments. Moreover, her presence does not remain indifferent among the community. When Celie sees her for the first time in a picture, she is in awe with her beauty: "Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier then me" (Walker, 2014, p. 8). However, her way of living does not please many people since she is commonly criticised for her bad habits. When she falls sick, nobody wants to lodge her and look after her. In the same way as Miss Marie, China and Poland in *The Bluest Eye*, Shug is rejected for her smoking and drinking habits, her provocative clothing and her reputation as a loose woman. She is the opposite of what is femininely correct and socially accepted. Nonetheless, she proves that appearances are deceptive and that people are usually driven by prejudices. With her kindness and solidarity, she saves Celie from despair.

Once Shug moves to Albert's house, the first contact she makes with Celie occurs when Celie looks after her, baths her and ensures that she recovers from her illness. From that moment onwards, they begin to build a friendship which will bring much happiness and positivity to

Celie's life, together with the discovery of her sexuality and love for her friend. Celie has never felt attracted to anybody since she has always been subjected to her stepfather's will and could not even choose her husband. To her, "men look like frogs" (Walker, 2014, p. 230). She does not feel anything towards them. Throughout the novel, the reader witnesses how Celie falls in love with Shug but she does not recognise or identifies the feeling since she has never experienced it. This physical and emotional attraction towards Shug is manifested through jealousy, insecurity and self-underestimation: "I hate the way I look, I hate the way I'm dress. Nothing but churchgoing clothes in my chifferobe" (Walker, 2014, p. 69). As Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Celie suffers from a terrible self-esteem caused by the continuous offensive remarks she receives from Alphonso and Albert. She believes in her ugliness and unworthiness. For that reason, when Shug dedicates a song to her, she is moved by her kind gesture, since it was the first time someone "made something and name[d] it after [her]" (Walker, 2014, p. 70). Apart from awakening Celie's sexual desire and help her explore her sexuality, Shug also gives Celie the most important feeling she has always lacked: love and a real relationship. After her mother died and Nettie disappeared, Celie is surrounded by loneliness and is treated like a servant. Shug's arrival means the end of her isolation in a patriarchal environment. For the first time in her life, she knows what is to love and be loved in return.

In addition to their love relationship, Shug demonstrates to be more than a romantic partner. Her preoccupation and involvement in Celie's issues create strong ties between the two characters. She consoles Celie when she is having a difficult time, giving vent to painful memories about her stepfather's abuses. Celie's suffering gains Shug's sympathy and makes her intercede on her behalf. For instance, Albert stops beating and raping Celie because Shug, taking advantage of Albert's feelings towards her, cuts off their friendship: "you been mistreating somebody I love. So far as you concern, I'm gone" (Walker, 2014, 245). Moreover, she is the one who discovers Nettie's letters hidden in Albert's room; an unexpected occurrence that completely changes Celie's perspective of life, for Nettie becomes the new addressee of her letters and God stays in the background. Knowing about Nettie has a great impact on Celie's attitude towards Albert. His concealment provokes resentment in Celie to the extent that she considers killing him. Thenceforward, she rebels against her husband and assumes a bolder attitude, liberating herself from the chains that have always kept her captive and venturing into a more independent life. In this case, Shug also contributes to her professional and personal growth. Firstly, she suggests the idea of making a new pair of

trousers for Celie and secondly, she invites Celie to move to her house in Memphis in order that she could begin afresh, free from any male domination. The former represents a major step forwards. Celie challenges sex-differentiated clothes and is developing a free spirit far from social conventions. She demonstrates that a woman on her own can earn a living without the necessity of being dependent on a man to maintain herself. In the end, Shug's proposal and encouragement triggers a complete transformation in her friend's way of living:

Let's put a few advertisements in the paper...And let's us raise your prices a hefty notch. And let's us just go ahead and give you this diningroom for your factory and git you some more women in here to cut and sew, while you sit back and design. You making your living, Celie...Girl, you on your way. (Walker, 2014, p. 193).

With a little push from Shug, Celie manages to start her own business and successfully achieve her emancipation. At the end, Celie becomes a self-sufficient woman whose independence overcomes those patriarchal attitudes that may attempt to exercise any power over her.

4.3. Sofia

Sofia represents the very opposite of femininity. Walker depicts a character that totally goes beyond the traditional role of submissive woman. Sofia is described as a "strong and ruddy looking" woman (Walker, 2014, p.38). She lacks all type of ladylike traits. She has a temperament and does not tolerate that anyone maltreats or humiliates her. This self-defensive attitude is noticeable within her marriage. The roles of husband and wife seem to have been inverted. Whereas Harpo is portrayed as the weaker sex, Sofia adopts a patriarchal demeanour. She carries out what has always been considered manly duties such as fixing the roof of their house, while Harpo is in charge of certain domestic chores. Notwithstanding, Harpo is not pleased with her attitude and he attempts to impose his own rules through domestic violence; he wants Sofia to obey him. In such situations, Sofia proves to be the strongest and most defiant woman within the novel. When she is beaten, she does not remain motionless. Conversely, her reaction consists of hitting back and defending herself.

Surprisingly enough, Celie is partly connected to these family conflicts which affect Harpo and Sofia relationship. She observes how Sofia stands up for herself. She admires her determination and self-confidence, along with her courage to confront her controlling husband. Celie compares her situation with that of Sofia and realises that her reaction to her husband's abuse considerably differs from Sofia's. She envies Sofia's physical and

psychological strength to deal with the subject since she cannot even consider talking back to Albert. Moreover, she notices how Sofia pities her for her inability to defend herself, which makes her feel angry. For that reason, when Harpo asks for advice on the best way to make Sofia obey, Celie tells him to beat her. Evidently this advice unleashes a series of fights between the married couple, which soon causes Celie's regret. However, although her inconsideration hinders the creation of a friendship between the two women at the beginning, the formation of a strong bonding seems unavoidable.

Celie feels an incredible remorse for her evil act and is ashamed of her behaviour: "A little voice say, something you done wrong. Somebody spirit you sin against" (Walker, 2014, p. 38). She has a guilty conscience and truly repents her words. When Sofia visits her to reproach her behaviour, she confesses the reasons why she gave such advice: "I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't....Fight" (Walker, 2014, p. 39). Her honesty leads Sofia to equally expose the reasons for her self-protective attitude: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy...my brothers...my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker, 2014, p. 39). Her statement reflects the subjugation of women in her family as a result of a patriarchal environment. Hence, her sympathy for Celie is justifiable. By means of conversing, they get to know each other and share their life's experiences. Sofia identifies Celie's oppression with her childhood and associates her role of submissive wife with her mother because she also was under her father's dominance without attempting to escape from his control. Instead of developing hostility, this conversation instigates the creation of a powerful bond between them through understanding. They both have gone through similar adversities and therefore, they can relate to each other and mitigate the pain by comforting each other. A prime example of this mutual support and comprehension is Sofia's imprisonment for attacking the mayor. On the one hand, Sofia cannot avoid identifying herself with Celie: "Every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you. I jump right up and do just what they say" (Walker, 2014, p. 83). On the other hand, Celie makes sure Sofia recovers from the beatings in prison and treats all her wounds as she did with Shug when she was sick.

This sisterly bond is reinforced through the sewing of quilts. Quilting is a paramount element in Alice Walker's novels. In *The Color Purple* it symbolises the unity between women. Celie and Sofia begin a new patchwork quilt using curtain pieces. Those moments they spend sewing are characterised by laughter and mutual understanding, which contribute to the consolidation of their friendship. When Sofia abandons her husband and moves to her sister's

place, Celie decides to give her the quilt as a reminder of their friendship and as a symbol of her support. No matter the distance between them, the quilt is the sign which indicates that some bonds will never be broken.

4.4. Squeak

Squeak's relation to Celie is not that notable compared to Shug or Sofia's friendship. Notwithstanding, her presence in the novel is equally relevant in order to illustrate a sense of community and female bonding. Similarly to Sofia and Celie, her friendship building and trust does not begin well. As Harpo's new companion after Sofia's break-up, she has a heated argument with Sofia as a result of jealousy. However, the unexpected events that occur within Sofia's life trigger their reconciliation through a process of compassion. When Sofia is sent to prison, everyone is devastated by the news. Squeak seems to be especially affected considering their bad start, "scrunch down in her chair, trembling" (Walker, 2014, p. 81). From that moment, she takes responsibility for Sofia's children and raises them as if they were her own— a favour that is equally returned when she decides to pursue a singing career. Moreover, she takes the risk of visiting an acquaintance in prison, where she is raped, in an attempt to save Sofia from a life characterised by constant blows and miserable conditions. Instead of ignoring her husband ex-wife, she manifests her concern and helps her in the best possible manner.

With regard to her own life, Celie has a great influence on her character. While Squeak is living with Harpo, Celie projects everything she is learning from her friendship with Sofia and Shug and encourages Squeak to make herself respected by Harpo. The use of Squeak as a dismissive name instead of her real one, Mary Agnes, constitutes a clear example: "Make Harpo call you by your real name...Then maybe he see you even when he trouble" (Walker, 2014, p. 80). Celie stands by her because she does not want her to become a submissive woman as she has been with Albert. In truth, the lives of these two characters are very alike since both become independent and start a life on their own. When Squeak begins to sing and invent new songs, she accepts Shug's proposal of moving to Memphis with the purpose of earning a living. As it occurs with Celie, she defies her husband and embarks on a journey of self-determination and self-sufficiency.

4.5. Nettie

At the beginning of *The Color Purple*, Nettie was the only source of happiness for Celie. She was the only supportive person Celie had at home and her presence alleviated her loneliness.

Celie has always endeavoured to protect her sister from the hands of their oppressive stepfather and husband. When she runs away from Alphonso and seeks refuge in Pastor Samuel's house, Celie stops hearing from her and associates her disappearance with her death. The discovery of her letters hidden among Albert's belongings brings a glimmer of hope to her life. Her usual sadness begins to dissipate and gives place to an array of feelings and emotions such as agitation, nostalgia, optimism and excitement. By reading her letters, Celie learns that Nettie is living with the pastor, his wife and their children, who happen to be Celie's children: "their children, sent by 'God' are your children, Celie. And they are being brought up in love, Christian charity and awareness of God. And now 'God' has sent me to watch over them, to protect and cherish them" (Walker, 2014, p. 119). Knowing the truth about her sister and reading that her two children are sound and safe could not make Celie feel more blessed. The only matter that seems to destabilise her is the revelation about her biological father. Celie finds out that the man who used to rape her is her stepfather, that her real father was killed and that her mother was insane. This news brings both a feeling of relief and confusion until she assimilates the whole story. She feels uneasy because all her childhood has been based on lies. For this reason, she stops addressing her letters to God:

he gave me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won't ever see again...the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown. (Walker, 2014, p. 173)

Nettie becomes her new hope. Since her appearance, Celie's vision of the future encompasses a more positive stance. She does not wait for more God's signs; she adheres to actual facts and concentrates on embracing the good things life is offering her at present. Now her letters are addressed to her beloved sister and she confides all her feelings and concerns to her.

In the letters, Nettie tells her experiences as a missionary in Africa. Her aim is to improve the living conditions of the Olinka people by providing an education to their children. Nonetheless, her words reveal that this task presents some difficulties. The Olinka tribe is ruled according to a patriarchal system that does not allow girls to be educated: "A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something" (Walker, 2014, p. 140). Since Nettie is unmarried and has no children, she becomes an "object of pity and contempt" (Walker, 2014, p. 146). She feels lonely and unaccepted among the villagers. In this sense, Nettie uses her letters as a means for giving vent to her feelings, hoping that one day they reach her sister's hands. In reality, her life in Africa does not differ much from Celie's in the

sense that they somehow become victims of patriarchy. It is through the creation of bonds that she is able to cope within the community. Both sisters feel isolated but, as soon as they forge a friendship with other women and share each other's burdens, they become at ease with themselves. Nettie does not achieve contentedness until she befriends Catherine and her daughter Tashi and helps Olinka people overcome the destruction of their village due to the new infrastructures created by white people. Through her altruism, she gains people's trust and kindness and feels part of a family and community:

I have nothing on my own. No man, no children, no close friend, except for Samuel. But I do have children, Adam and Olivia. And I do have friends, Tashi and Catherine. I even have a family – this village which has fallen on such hard times. (Walker, 2014, p. 171)

The reception of these letters enables Celie to identify herself with her sister and serve them as a powerful source of motivation. She shows her excitement about the establishment of a trousers company and tells her about the acquisition of the new house they have inherited from their father. For every step she takes forwards, she can feel her sister's support from the distance and writes back in the hope that her letters get through to her so that she can find the same comfort. The only thing missing is a complete family reunion.

5. FINAL CONSEQUENCES ON THE LIVES OF BOTH CHARACTERS

The analysis of each female character in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple* anticipates the major consequences that their rejection and/or support inflict upon the main characters of these novels. As victims of racial and gender oppression, Pecola and Celie are wrapped in a cloud of despair and misery. Their lives evolve around abuse and isolation as a consequence of their parents' estrangement and the social environment in which they grow up. Their bad experiences lead them to underestimate themselves, losing all confidence and individuality. Under these circumstances, the presence of female figures implies a major factor in the development of the protagonists' personality and therefore, in the denouement of each novel.

As seen in the previous sections, the experiences of Pecola and Celie with other girls or women greatly differ from each other. Pecola's attempt to trust and make friends always ends badly. Such is the case with girls like Maureen. Every time she approaches someone, people treat her unfairly, either insulting or mocking at her because of her blackness. These superficial judgements lead her to embrace her own ugliness and despise herself. Instead of showing solidarity and tolerance, women characters such as Geraldine or her own mother

contribute to the creation of an inferiority complex in Pecola's mind. Hence, Pecola only craves for beauty and acceptance: "if those eyes of hers were...beautiful, she herself would be different....If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say...we mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (Morrison, 2016, p. 44). The internalization of particular beauty standards provokes a community fracture from which characters will never recover. Contrary to Born's concept of deep community, people's selfishness in *The Bluest Eye* makes them care only about themselves and they target at Pecola in order to protect themselves from becoming the new neighbourhood's scapegoats. Celie, on the contrary, successfully achieves a sense of belonging and feels welcomed in a female environment. All the women she meets treat her with tenderness. Thus, these friendships result in strong female bondings based on mutual support and understanding. While Pecola is marginalised, Celie does not feel lonely or helpless any longer.

One of the reasons for the development of these friendship ties is the fact that they can identify themselves with one another. Somehow, all women in *The Color Purple* have suffered from gender oppression. By sharing their stories, they sympathise and comprehend every situation due to their own experiences. Moreover, the strength and courage they own in order to confront chauvinist scenes and challenge gender stereotypes encourage Celie to abandon her own fears and face her reality. In the case of Pecola, this mutual understanding cannot occur even if she counts on the support of Claudia and Frieda because she is the only one suffering the consequences of a racialized community. The only creature with which she identifies herself is Geraldine's cat; a cat with black fur and blue eyes that is usually battered by Geraldine's son. For a moment, Pecola could see herself reflected on the cat's face, being equally mistreated but, at the same time, wishing to obtain those blue eyes. Her family's neglect and the repudiation of people around her completely destabilise her. Pecola realises she is unwanted and dreams of being accepted at school and the neighbourhood. She even asks Claudia and Frieda, "How do you get somebody to love you?" (Morrison, 2016, p. 30). This lack of love leads Pecola to blame herself and feel ashamed of her black skin and facial features. The complete loss of self-esteem and her obsession with the attainment of blue eyes determine Pecola's undoing. Desperate to find a solution to her black eyes and to receive some affection, she seeks the help of a priest nicknamed Soaphead. When Pecola asks him for the blue eyes, the perverse priest tricks her into believing she has miraculously acquired blue

eyes right after following his request of poisoning a dog innocently. As a result, Pecola's mental health begins to deteriorate.

In regard to Celie, the arrival of Shug and Sofia to her life together with the reappearance of Nettie brings the recovery of her self-confidence and self-regard. Thanks to these women characters, Celie experiences the sentiment of love in its different forms: romantic love, familial love and love of close friends. Celie is lucky enough to be able to lean on these women, whose support helps Celie regain her confidence. She undergoes a process of self-transformation that turns her into a powerful woman who finally accepts herself and is capable of confronting her husband. When she finally reproaches Albert for hiding Nettie's letters and tells him she is moving to Tennessee with Shug, she utters, "You a lowdown dog...It's time to leave you...And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (Walker, 2014, p. 180). Her self-love is manifested when Albert attempts to depress her by insulting her and emphasising her unworthiness. But Celie is no longer affected by derogatory remarks because she feels happy in her own skin and values herself: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook...But I'm here" (Walker, 2014, p. 187). This new attitude even causes Albert's mistrust and fear in subsequent visits.

Celie's self-empowerment and the strengthening of sisterhood ties are partly due to the completion of cooperative activities such as quilting: "Me and Sofia work on the quilt....Shug Avery donate her old yellow dress for scrap, and I work in a piece every chance I get. It a nice pattern call Sister's Choice" (Walker, 2014, p. 56). Creating a quilt enables *The Color Purple*'s women to establish a friendly connection which, in the end, not only contributes to their alliance but also to the continuity of black cultural values. As far as *The Bluest Eye* is concerned, women have abandoned their "funkiness" in order to pursue white feminine ideals. By adopting white feminism and western cultural practices, they wipe away all their black traits, including Pecola, who becomes a reminder of what they want to avoid. Despite this communal alienation, there were people like Claudia and Frieda, Mrs Macteer and Miss Marie who did not judge the poor girl and accepted her. They are chief characters in the novel because they hold in their hands the support Pecola so desperately needs but that she fails to see. Had she realised that not everybody rejects her, perhaps she would have found a reason to accept herself and be happy. The good intentions of these characters are more noticeable in Claudia and Frieda, who naively attempt to save the life of Pecola's child's by planting marigold seeds. At the beginning, they felt guilty because their idea did not succeed but, eventually, they realised it was not their fault or the seeds they planted, but the "land of the

entire country [which] was hostile to marigolds that year” (Morrison, 2016, p. 204). The will of two girls was powerless compared to an entire community contaminated by prejudices and hostility, spitting poison in form of sentences such as: “She be lucky if it don’t live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking” (Morrison, 2016, p. 187). Given the circumstances, Pecola and her baby’s fate were doomed from the beginning. She ends up living under a great delusion. On the one hand, she believes she has acquired the most beautiful blue eyes in the world. For that reason, everybody feels jealous and ignore her. On the other hand, she creates an imaginary friend identified as a hallucination of her other self. This girl to whom she talks is but another version of herself and, at the same time, her only friend. At the end, “the horror at the heart of [Pecola’s] yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment” (Morrison, 2016, p. 202).

Conversely, in *The Color Purple*, Celie and Albert bring about a reconciliation in which now they respect each other and live in harmony. Although they are not together, they become friends and Albert does not treat her as an inferior and worthless person. In addition, she begins to run a trousers factory and becomes the owner of her former house, which is now renovated. These final steps of Celie’s evolution substantiate her transformation from being a submissive wife to achieving individuality and being a self-reliant woman. The only period of time in which her new accomplishments are at risk occurs when Shug begins to date another person and she receives news about the sinking of a ship in which her sister and children were coming from Africa. At that moment, “being a life begin[s] to seem like a[n] awful strain” (Walker, 2014, p. 231). In this particular case, the relevance of feminine support and the lack of it are noteworthy in the novel since Celie relapses into sadness and low self-esteem. Notwithstanding, Celie’s fate implies that she reaches happiness. Therefore, Walker provides a happy ending in which Shug comes back and she is finally reunited with all her family. The novel concludes with a reunion of all characters having a barbecue and most importantly, with Celie feeling better than ever, surrounded by the people she loves:

I feel a little peculiar round the children....I see they think me and Nettie and Shug and Albert and Samuel and Harpo and Sofia and Jack and Odessa real old...But I don’t think us feel old at all. And as so happy. Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt. (Walker, 2014, p. 261)

6. CONCLUSION

By way of the characters Celie and Pecola, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have portrayed real life situations from which many black women have suffered in the course of history. While Celie experiences the repercussions of a chauvinist society, Pecola is trapped in a world where people are racially categorised, i.e. a world delineated by colorism. In a positive and negative manner, these authors have used their fictional characters to parallel social reality. Thus, their literary contributions have helped to define and shape the underpinnings of African American literature, evolving from being considered a “minority” literature to gaining authority and recognition.

The goal of this paper was to determine the main reasons why Pecola’s relation with other female characters does not help her overcome her oppressive status and recover the love on herself, as opposed to Celie. By means of an exhaustive analysis of each female character in both novels, it has been possible to thoroughly contrast the different types of friendships and connections with other women and examine what fails and succeeds. In *The Color Purple*, it is evident that the formation of female bonds is the key to Celie’s recovery of self-confidence, her confrontation against her controlling husband and her final achievement of emancipation. Thanks to Sofia, Shug and her sister Nettie, she becomes a strong character capable of facing life’s adversities. By contrast, Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* does not suffer the same fate. She also lives oppressed since her community does not accept her blackness and constantly despises her. However, her friendships with Claudia and Frieda or Miss Marie, China and Poland do not save her from having hallucinations at the end of the novel. The root of the problem lies on the strengthening of female ties that the characters in *The Bluest Eye* fail to achieve. The lack of female bonding within these relationships is the reason why her mental delusion cannot be prevented.

Delving into Celie’s kinship with the rest of *The Color Purple*’s female characters has substantiated that one of the chief foundations for a prosperous female bonding is the existence of a mutual understanding. This common understanding is usually originated in the sharing of similar experiences so that women can identify with one another and achieve selfhood. In the case of *The Bluest Eye*, this lack of commonality illustrates why Pecola cannot reach such degree of understanding with the two sisters, their mother and the three prostitutes. Whereas Claudia and Frieda support, defend and attempt to save Pecola, Mrs. Macteer and Miss Marie provide her with care and treat her with kindness. Nonetheless,

Pecola cannot identify with them because she is the only one suffering the consequences of the internalisation of western beauty standards. Thus, this sympathy only occurs on one side. Since Pecola cannot feel such type of compassion, she does not realise about the support and kindness surrounding her. Coinciding with Harris-Perry, a negative environment leads to a negative thinking and Pecola only focuses on her social rejection. Thus, another characteristic of female bonding is the emergence of a sense of belonging—a crucial factor for the triumph of a deep community that Pecola finds neither at home nor out in the neighbourhood. In this sense, a strong mother-daughter relationship would have been fundamental in order to attain this sense of belonging, since both Pecola and Pauline are in the same situation of social marginalization. While Celie receives Nettie's familial consolation through distance, Pecola and her mother are physically closed to each other but, at the same time, emotionally disconnected. Caused by a feeling of shame and fear, this alienation becomes increasingly more conspicuous in an attempt to not be judged in the same way as Pecola is. This behaviour is visible not only in her mother's attitude but in the rest of females such as Maureen.

In conclusion, this paper has enabled to take another approach to Pecola's loss of identity and inner deterioration since it has not only focused on the main causes of the character's tragic ending as previous studies, but it has also underscored the elements of female bonding that impede the reawakening of Pecola's inner self and the overcoming of racial obstacles. The comparison of the main character with Celie in *The Color Purple* has facilitated the identification of main differences between Celie's female relationships and Pecola's. Thus, such comparison has helped to determine the main foundations for the success of a strong female bonding and to distinguish a regular friendship from a triumphant women's unity that enhances female empowerment.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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