



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA
Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

TONI MORRISON'S SULA: A BLACK FEMINIST
REREADING

Alba Carretero Pascual

[Vº Bº del tutor y fecha]

Tutor: José Manuel Barrio Marco

2019/2020

ABSTRACT

Feminism within the African-American community is a topic that has to be thoroughly studied still. African-American women claim that they are the ones that suffer the most from this patriarchal racist community for being both black and female. Due to this, a study on black feminism in the US based on the ideas of the book *Ain't I a Woman* by bell hooks will be carried out, about the analysis of the main characters of the *Sula* by Toni Morrison. This way, the ideas that black women struggle the most because they are treated poorly by both the white community, since they are hated and laughed at for being black, and the black male community, which treat them like objects for them to use and abandon, will be reinforced.

Key words: Feminism, Black feminism, Racism, *Sula*, Toni Morrison, bell hooks.

RESUMEN

El feminismo dentro de la comunidad afroamericana es un tema que tiene que ser estudiado a fondo aún. Las mujeres afroamericanas claman que son las que más sufren y más expuestas están a la comunidad racista patriarcal por ser tanto negras como mujeres. Debido a esto un estudio sobre el afro feminismo en Estados Unidos basándose en las ideas del libro *Ain't I A Woman* de bell hooks será hecho, aplicándolas al análisis de los personajes principales de la novela *Sula* de Toni Morrison. De esta forma, las ideas de que la mujer afroamericana es la que más sufre debido a que es mal tratada y burlada por ser negra por la comunidad blanca, y usada y tratada como mero objeto que pueden usar y abandonar por los afroamericanos serán reforzadas.

Palabras clave: feminismo, afrofeminismo, racismo, *Sula*, Toni Morrison, bell hooks.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. History of Feminism.....	6
A. Definition of Feminism.....	6
B. Waves of Feminism	7
a) First Wave of Feminism: 18 th Century	7
b) Second Wave of Feminism: 19 th and 20 th Centuries	8
c) Third Wave of Feminism: 20 th and 21 st Centuries: Feminism as a social movement	9
C. Black Women within the White Feminist Movement	9
D. Important Figures	11
3. “ <i>Ain’t I a Woman</i> ” <i>Black Women and Feminism</i> by bell hooks: An Analysis.12	
A. Bell hooks	12
B. Summary.....	13
C. Key Points.....	14
4. A Feminist Analysis of the Characters in <i>Sula</i> by Toni Morrison	18
A. Toni Morrison.....	18
B. Summary.....	19
C. Characters	21
D. Similarities and Differences in <i>Ain’t I a Woman</i> and <i>Sula</i>	29
5. Conclusion	31
6. Works cited.....	32

1. Introduction

The black community of the United States has struggled a lot through the years. Since the beginning of the United States' history with the slavery of the African community they have been treated poorly and with violence by the white supremacist society they have lived in. Nevertheless, African-American women are the ones who have suffered the most, due to the fact that they have been mistreated as inferior for being black, but also for being women, therefore, being at the bottom of the racist-sexist hierarchy. Focusing on studying the struggles of the black women through the years, there have been both intellectuals like bell hooks, who have written books (e.g.: *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*) about the reasons why black women should be more aware about their position within the feminist movement and fight for their rights; and authors like, Toni Morrison, who have written novels like *Sula*, mainly focusing on the lives of African-American women within black communities.

This dissertation will try to analyze the role of the African-American woman in *Sula* by Toni Morrison with the help of a book about the feminist theory by bell hooks *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Therefore, the aim is to analyze whether it is true from these African-American authors' point of view that black women have suffered the most within the African-American community because they have been exposed to both sexism and racism.

Even though saying that black women are the ones who suffer the most within the White Patriarchal American community is stating the obvious I wanted to carry out this study in order to get to know if two contemporary black women who write completely opposite genres share the same ideas regarding the role of women in slavery days, within the feminist movement, in the family in the United States. There are a lot of books to choose from, but I chose Morrison's novel because it is one of her most acclaimed feminist novels and hooks' book because it is supposedly one of the main books of the contemporary black feminist studies.

To support my ideas and come to a conclusion I will make use of some of the articles and books that have been written regarding the topic of black feminism in these works. Both authors have been mentioned together constantly, however, hooks' ideas have never been

applied to Toni Morrison's work. Kevin Everod Quashie has talked about the topic of selfness in *Sula* in his article *The Other Dancer as Self: Girlfriend Selfhood in Toni Morrison's Sula and Alice Walker's "The Color Purple"*. Moreover, regarding the topic of black motherhood, Parvin Ghasemi has done an extensive research of it on the novel by Morrison in his article *Negotiating Black Motherhood in Toni Morrison's Novels*. Maggie Galehouse has also talked about the new role of black women within society in her work "*New World Woman*": *Toni Morrison's Sula*. Karen F. Stein made a great analysis of *Sula* and the role of the individuality of women in *Toni Morrison's Sula: A Black Woman's Epic*.

Regarding the analysis of bell hooks' work, I have found and made use of an article by Angharad N. Valdividia called *bell hooks: Ethics from the Margins* which studies all of her works, moreover Cliff Chen has carried out *A Review Essay on the Books of bell hooks* and Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Maria K. Mootry Ikerionwu have written *Black Women and Feminism: Two Reviews*.

In order to carry out this dissertation I will start by providing a brief background of the history of feminism and of black feminism within the context of the United States. This section will include both a definition of feminism and an explanation of its different periods, which were studied before and provided by the article *Feminismo: Historia y Corrientes*, written by Susana Gamba, and by the book *The Little Book of Feminism* by Harriet Dyer. This section will include as well a summary about the the position of black women within these different feminist periods and some of the main female African-American figures within the movement mentioned in *Ain't I a Woman* by bell hooks. Then, I will provide an analysis of *Ain't I a woman* by bell hooks, that will include a brief summary of the book, a small biography of the author, given by two articles, that will help to understand her ideas, and the key points and ideas of the book, including quotes. After that, I will provide the main analysis, the analysis of *Sula* by Toni Morrison. Within this section there will be several sections that will include a brief background of the author, a summary of the book, an analysis of the characters separately with the help of the main ideas of hooks' book, and then a commentary on the common points between the novel by Toni Morrison and the book by bell hooks. All of this with the help of articles that have been written on the topic of black

feminism regarding these books. Lastly, taking in consideration the analysis results, I will give some conclusions that will support or contradict my initial hypothesis.

Moreover, I will reach my conclusions after having also been supported by several texts that will be cited along the dissertation that studied both black feminism and the topic of feminism in Sula.

2. History of Feminism

As stated earlier in the introduction, feminism is a social movement that has been going on for almost three centuries, since the French revolution in the 18th Century until nowadays and which has had great impact on the lives of women all around the world.

A) Definition of Feminism

Feminism is defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as “the belief in social, economic and political equality of sexes”. However, that is a very basic and brief definition of a concept that encompasses the ideas of the lives of women in their social, political and work spheres and that has been developing for several centuries creating different meanings of itself and developing in different directions.

According to the article *Feminismo: Historia y corrientes*, published on the Diccionario de Estudios de Género y Feminismos, another more widely explained concept of feminism:

“Refers to the social and political movements of liberation of the women, that have historically acquired several projections. Like other movements, the feminist movement has triggered thinking and action, theory and practice. The feminist movement advocates for a change in the social relations that leads to the liberation of the woman – as well as the man – throughout the abolition of the different hierarchies and inequalities between both genders” (Gamba, 2).

In this article, it is stated as well, that some authors believe that this feminist movement started at the end of the 13th Century when Guillermine of Bohemia proposed the creation of a Church for Women, whereas some other authors, believe that it started with the fight of women against witch hunting that took place in the US around the 17th Century. However, it isn't until the mid-nineteenth Century during some of the biggest historical movements and events, such as the Renaissance and the French Revolution, when an organized fight against sexism starts to take place and women start to take part in these affairs (Gamba, 2).

B) Waves of Feminism

The feminist movement is studied in a subject called Theory of Feminism or Feminist Studies, which evaluates the different periods whereby the feminist movement has been developed throughout the last centuries. Feminist Studies declares that the feminist movement has been through three main periods called “waves”:

- First wave of feminism: Eighteenth Century.

The first wave of the feminist movement, as Gamba states, starts to take place around the end of the eighteenth Century and the beginning of the nineteenth Century. This is a time of big political, social and ideological movements, especially in Europe, due to the Age of Enlightenment. The Age of Enlightenment or Reason was an intellectual and philosophical movement that stood by the idea that reason was the main source of wisdom that led to some other ideas such as progress and liberty.

The French Revolution, that took place in 1789 in France, was a movement bound to the egalitarian and rationalist movement of the Enlightenment. The French Revolution alongside the Industrial Revolution, led women to work due to the new demand for labor, in similar jobs to men. Although not having been granted the same rights, these were the two main movements that led to the beginning of the feminist fight for the same rights as men (Gamba, 2).

First wave feminism, as Harriet Dyer states in her book *The Little Book Of Feminism*: “is the umbrella term retrospectively applied to the women’s rights movement originating in the West in the mid-nineteenth century” (Dyer, 12). The term feminist was not even used at the time, and sometimes it was interchangeable with the term suffragette (or suffragist) in the United Kingdom, although nowadays we would not say that the terms first-wave feminist and suffragette are equivalent terms because suffragettes was a term used for the women that campaigned for the right to vote, whereas the first wave feminists were groups of women which worked independently “toward improving the rights of women. (...) the main focus was on improving laws and legislation to give women more equal footing with men” (Dyer, 13) as Harriet Dyer says. Therefore, they fought to enter the workplace, get the same education as men got and to own property among many other things.

First-wave feminists are often criticized nowadays “for having mainly acted in the interests of middle classes” (Dyer, 23) because their main focus was the acceptance of

middle-class women in the different social and professional spheres whereas the suffragist movement included every woman regardless of their social status. Moreover, as Dyer states in her book “History, too, has not been kind to the women of color and working-class women of first-wave feminism, often removing them from the story altogether” (Dyer, 24).

Some of the most important figures of the first wave feminism were Mary Wollstonecraft, an advocate for women’s rights and feminist philosopher, author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792, and Olympe de Gouges, a French Playwright advocate for women’s rights who wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*.

- Second Wave of Feminism: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

In *Feminismo: Historias y Corrientes*, Gamba asserts that actual equality did not start with the French Revolution, since it did not change the position of women in society even though the theory of the Age of Reason proclaimed the equality of genders. The real equality between men and women in some spheres of society started with the movement mentioned above, the movement of the Suffragettes. In the United States, most women that participated in this movement were mainly white women of the higher classes, as bell hooks claims in *Ain’t I a woman: Black women and feminism*:

“The fact that enslaved black women were forced to labor as “men” and to exist independently of male protection and provision did not lead to the development of a feminist consciousness. They did not advocate for social equality between sexes. Instead they bitterly resented that they were not considered ‘women’ by the dominant culture” (hooks, 49,50).

Nevertheless, as Susana Gamba proclaims in her article, not even after the civil war in 1865 when black men were given the right to vote women could vote, and neither white nor black women were given this right until 1920 when the 19th amendment of the American Constitution gave the right to vote without discrimination of gender (Gamba, 3).

The second-wave feminism started then around the twenties, and later, during the sixties when the sexual revolution took place in the United States, the women’s liberation movement, or second-wave American feminism, was fully developing. The liberal attitudes made women to start talking about sex and about their sexuality, as well about sexual harassment (Dyer, 34), while they also kept complaining about being paid less than men in the same job.

One of the biggest figures of the second-wave feminism was the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, writer of *The Second Sex*, “which discussed the fallacy of women’s inferiority to men and which had been previously been justified by their biological differences” (Dyer, 35).

During the second wave of the feminist movement, most of the minorities were excluded mainly because most of the texts were written by white, middle-class women, and as Dyer mentioned that bell hooks had said in *Ain’t I a woman* “the feminist movement had ignored the non-white, non-middle-class experience, reinforcing sexism, racism and classism” (Dyer, 44).

- Third Wave of Feminism: Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: Feminism as a Social Movement or New Feminism.

The third wave of feminism started around the nineties, when feminists started to realize that the first and second waves of the movement “had mainly seemed to serve white, middle-class women” (Dyer, 55). They insisted that feminism had to represent all types of women and therefore, they should let women of different kinds of religions, ethnicities and sexualities speak about their stories and their view of feminism. (Dyer, 55).

As Harriet Dyer states, third-wave feminists tried to continue raising awareness about the issues of domestic abuse, sexual harassment and rape as well as its links to politics and how the system would not protect the victims. (Dyer, 57). Feminism became more inclusive, and therefore, there were many more divisions within the movement, however, it all led to the idea that if women chose to do it, it was empowering (Dyer, 63).

One of the pioneers of the New Contemporary Feminism was Naomi Wolf, “an American journalist and author considered to be a spokesperson for third-wave feminism” (Dyer, 65). She wrote *The Beauty Myth* in 1991, which talks about the beauty standards that pressure women nowadays which lead to eating-disorder diseases and mental health issues.

C) Black women within the American Feminist Movement

The position of black women within the American feminist movement was not equal to the position of the white feminist activists. This was mainly because they did not only suffer from the sexist oppression but from the racial oppression as well, and when the issue of the sexist oppression was argued, black women remained silent because they defended as

bell hooks says in her book *Ain't I a woman: Black Women and Feminism*, that “Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant part of ourselves – and we did. Consequently [...] we argued that sexism was insignificant in light of the harsher, more brutal reality of racism” (hooks, 1).

However, as hooks says in her book, nineteenth century black women started to take part in the women’s rights movements as well as in the racial equality movements, because they thought that “any improvement in the social status of black women would benefit all black people” (hooks, 2).

Therefore, black women for the first time ever in American history started to talk about their struggles not only as part of the black community, but of the female community as well. When the women’s rights movement started to take place in the United States, a lot black women were left in limbo between both the black movement, because even though it was called the black movement, they were only fighting for male rights and therefore, black women had to subordinate to them; and the feminist movement, since it was mainly led by white, middle and upper-class women. As hooks says in *Ain't I a Woman*, the women’s movement talked about the dual oppression suffered by black women, and this oppression was often romanticized focusing on the strength of black women, instead of focusing on the negative impact this oppression had on the black female community and the ways of overcoming it (hooks, 9,7,4).

After all women were given the right to vote at the beginning of the 20th Century in the United States, more black women felt the need to talk about and study their experiences, introducing with the new wave of feminism the so-called Black studies by which as it is mentioned in the journal of black studies *“We Make Freedom”: An Exploration of Revolutionary Black Feminism*:

“Black women activists and scholars have carved out an intellectual space to uncover, (re)define, contextualize, and validate Black women's realities. These efforts have manifested themselves in various related developments, including the initiation of Black women's studies and the proliferation of explicitly Black feminist/womanist theories and analyses over the past two decades” (Neville, Hammer, 437).

From the 20th century onwards there has been a current explosion of interest in black feminist studies. However, many black women feel that the reason why black feminist studies have been getting attention these past few decades is because white male scholars or white feminists have decided to study the matter since they found it “exotic” when black people have been writing and talking about it for years without drawing any attention to their works. As Ann Duce states on her essay *The Occult of True Black Womanhood*:

“Yet, despite the recovery and reconnaissance missions of Bambara, Noble, Joyce Ladner, and other black women intellectuals who did groundbreaking work in the seventies, it is white feminist historian Gerda Lerner whom the academy recognises as the pioneer in reconstructing the history of African-American women” (Abel, Elizabeth, Christian, Barbara, and Moglen, Helene, 27).

D) Important figures within the black feminist movement

There have been several black women that have stood out throughout the history of the black feminist movement such as Anna Cooper or Sojourner Truth. Anna J. Cooper was an author and a black liberation activist, that, as mentioned in *Ain't I a Woman*, talked about the position of black women in the World Congress of Representative Women in 1893 saying that “The white woman could at least pleased for her own emancipation; the black women doubly enslaved, could but suffer and struggle and be silent” (hooks, 2). Sojourner Truth was a feminist activist and an African-American abolitionist who was one of the most outspoken women on demanding that not only black men, but all women should be given the right to vote.

Moreover, many black women intellectuals such as Toni Cade Bambara, Joyce Ladner, Barbara Christian, etc., have written texts and critical essays on black feminism that have been claimed, as Ann Duce states in her article *The Occult of True Black Womanhood* which is part of the book *Female subjects in black and white: race, psychoanalysis, feminism*, “as the founding texts of contemporary black feminist studies” (Abel, Elizabeth, Christian, Barbara, and Moglen, Helene, 24).

3. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* by bell hooks: an analysis

A) bell hooks

Born in 1952, bell hooks is an African-American poet, filmmaker, scholar and an intellectual and as the Encyclopedia Britannica states “whose work examined the varied perceptions of black women and black women writers and the development of feminist studies”. As it is mentioned in the article published by the University of Minnesota, “bell hooks [...] has been critically conscious since childhood” (Hua, Schrag, 1).

She soon realized that the feminist movement did not acknowledge her voice and the voices of the rest of the black women like her. After realizing that she “could not find a place for myself within the movement” (hooks, x), she then learnt, as she states on the preface of her book *Ain't I a Woman*, that she had to make people listen to her. Nevertheless, to make people listen to her she had to learn her place in society and her identity within it. To do so, she spent years attending an integrated school which was mostly full of white people and the Stanford University in which she took several courses in women’s studies (hooks, x).

Apart from pursuing an academic degree in which she worked on a thesis about Toni Morrison, the author of *Sula*, which is the novel that will be analyzed in the following section, she found time to encourage and teach people to realize the negative backlash of the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” by which our current society is organized which herself as an African-American woman has suffered from. As mentioned in the article, she wrote her first book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, which will be analyzed later in this section, in 1981 (Hua, Schrag, 1). This book, among many others of her late works, was written as a result of her love for the English language and her will to end the exploitation of black women in the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Née Gloria Watkins, also known as bell hooks, uses the pseudonym decapitalized to honor her mother and her grandmother (from whom she took the name) and as said in the article: “to be able to reclaim her voice and identity” (Hua, Schrag, 1), thus, to make the reader and the audience focus on her ideas against the exploitation of African-American women and for the critical mind, instead of on her name .

B) Summary

Ain't I a woman: Black Women and Feminism examines and analyzes the impact of both sexism as well as racism in the lives of African-American women from the beginning of the American history with slavery until current times. It is “a long overdue examination

of the complexity of black womanhood from the perspective of black women themselves” (Guy-Sheftall, Mootry Ikerionwu, 84). This book took hooks seven years to write. She studied the topic thoroughly and took several courses on feminism and on American literature in order to get to know that black feminist writings had been neglected throughout the years in all classrooms by scholars. It represents hooks’ attempt to move black women beyond silence and into the mainstream of feminist discourse which white women have tended to monopolise over the past decade” (Guy-Sheftall, Mootry Ikerionwu, 84).

Consisting of five main chapters, the first one discusses the negative impact of sexism and racism directed towards black women during the slavery days in which women, due to being both black and women, not only were forced to do the labor work like black men, but also to do the chores at the houses of their masters, and they were constantly raped and abused. Here, she states that slavery apart from oppressing black men defeminized black women. The following chapter talks about the devaluation of black womanhood historically and contemporaneously, which started with slavery and its constant sexual and labor exploitation of women. This devaluation led later on, to several myths regarding black women’s identity, amongst which stood out the myth of the sexually loose black woman, who, therefore, was the one to blame when men abused her, and the matriarch myth, by which they said that black women were the ones who led and provided the house, thus, being the one to blame for the demasculinization of the black men, and becoming the complete antithesis of the ideal white woman.

The third chapter consists of the hierarchy that is followed within the American patriarchal society by which white men were at the top, followed by black men and white women, and then, black women at the bottom, which were vulnerable and victims to the constant struggles for being both women and black. Therefore, when all the movements for the rights of the black community and feminism started to appear, they were mainly led by and for black males and by and for white middle-class women, thus, leaving black women in a kind of a limbo. Then, in the last chapters hooks discusses the persistent racism within the feminist movement, which as mentioned earlier is mainly led by white upper and middle-class women, and advises black women to try to fight against this racism within the feminist movement instead of giving up the movement because they may feel that they are not fully

represented and hooks believes that black women need feminism to find their identity and being able to find a voice. Hooks' concludes the book saying that white women never focused on looking for alternatives to different social structures, just wanting to "fill the shoes of the men who blocked their way" (Guy-Sheftall, Mootry Ikerionwu, 86), therefore, stating that white American women are socially classist and racist and suggests that: "the sisterhood that is necessary for the making of feminist revolution can be achieved only when all women disengage themselves from the hostility, jealousy and competition with one another that has kept us vulnerable, weak and unable to envision new realities" (hooks, 154).

C) Key points

-

"We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture"[...] "when black people are talked about the focus tends to be on the black men, and when women are talked about, the focus tends to be on white women" (hooks,7).

This indicates the major problem for African American women. All of their community has always left them out because they felt on a 'limbo' since there was no social group to whom they belonged to and felt completely represented by and identified as (i.e.: black men focused on the struggle of black men and asked for black men rights, and women only focused on the problem of the sexism affecting white upper and middle-class women, without taking into account black women's struggles and sufferings). She states that black women had to find a voice by themselves within those movements, due to the fact that they needed to find their identity, and nobody cared about their struggles but them.

- "My life experience had shown me that the two issues were inseparable, that at the moment of my birth, two factors determined my destiny, my having been born black and my having been born female" (hooks, 12). This is the main focus of this paper and hooks states it right at the beginning, how black women had to struggle with the double burden of being women and of being black, therefore, being seen as the last piece of the big hierarchy which had the white colonist man on top.
- "It is obvious that the two forces, sexism and racism, intensified and magnified the sufferings and oppressions of enslaved black women" (hooks, 22) Here, hooks is

once again establishing how even though black men's sufferings were not dismissed, she also confirms that women had to deal with worse struggles because:

“The black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields, the black female was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault” (hooks, 22).

Therefore, black women were not only forced to work at the fields and at homes of their white masters, but they were forced to keep quiet, and be victims of rape, sexual abuse and harassment constantly, being blamed for it instead of pitied. They did not feel protected by anyone, not by the government, nor by black men and white women.

- When the slavery days were finally gone, in order to maintain the social differences between black and white communities, myths about black males and females were created, although the men's myths were soon forgotten. However, the image of black women kept being devaluated through to main myths.

In the first myth, black woman was depicted as the ideal black nanny:

“She was first and foremost asexual and consequently she had to be fat [...] she was also to give the impression of not being clean [...]. Her greatest virtue was of course her love for white folk whom she willingly and passively served.” (hooks, 84).

Because of this, many black women were completely alienated from the feminist movement, because they genuinely thought that they had to be like this, to be identified as the ideal black nanny for the society to accept her, and for her to finally be seen as a woman, which was one of their biggest concerns, since black women were constantly defeminized.

This way, black women totally despised black women who were the complete opposite of this: free, sexual and not devoted to either a family or white people, they completely despised the Sapphire image that white people made black women to have: “the image of an evil, treacherous, bitchy stubborn and hateful woman, [...] the image of the female as inherently evil” (hooks, 85). These women were depicted as the embodiment of lust, they were depicted as mean and loose, sometimes even as masculinized because they hold a power over their bodies and the lives they were not supposed to have.

- “Black women were told that they had overstepped the bounds of femininity because they worked outside their home” (hooks, 75). This way, women were more focused on being seen as a woman rather than focusing on the main problem which was sexism. They were to blame for the demasculinization of black men, because following the myth of the matriarch, black women were told that they were the heads of their households, which was not true whatsoever; and therefore, they were overstepping the boundaries of what should be the role of the man as well.
- “The most important aspect of a woman’s life is the relationship with a man” (hooks, 82). Many black women thought, and some still think, that the most important thing for a black woman has to be the relationship that they have with a man. Settling down and having children should be among their priorities. Moreover, many women that worked and entered the labor force “resented the fact that they were not being supported economically by men” (hooks, 85), the white sexist ideas of the perfect women made them believe that they had to stay at home, whereas the man had to provide for the family, and since most women had to work they felt that they were not feminine enough and that they would never be accepted by society.
- “Sexist discrimination against all women in the labor force and in higher educational spheres through 19th Century America, [...] those of black people who aspired to leadership roles either during slavery or manumission, black men were the more likely candidates” (hooks, 89). Therefore, black women were dismissed from having leadership roles and taught to be quiet. This, along the negative image the media and everyone portrayed about black women, made them keep quiet and accept the patriarchy instead of fighting for their rights because they thought this way they would be accepted by the society.
- This way black males could aspire then to bigger jobs within society, and also become a great part of the patriarchy, finally accepting that they had a role and a power as a man that was superior and bigger to any power females held, and therefore, they could do whatever they wanted with them: “In the 60s, black men disassociated themselves from the chivalrous codes of manhood [...] and idolized

those who exploited and brutalized women” (hooks, 106), because women were merely seen as a sexual object for men to use, especially black women.

-

“Resolution of the conflict between white and black women begin until all women acknowledge that a feminist movement, which is both racist and classist is a mere sham, a cover-up for women’s continued bondage to materialistic patriarchal principles, and passive acceptance of the status quo” (hooks, 157).

Here hooks states that without acknowledging the different movements within the feminist movement and acknowledging the different struggles of both black and labor worker women, the movement was merely still part of the patriarchal capitalist system: only white women from the upper classes were right to fight for their rights. This way, she states that white women were racist, classist, and in a way sexist, because they only care about the rights of the white upper-class women, not taking into account and thinking about women from different ethnicities and social ranks.

- She concludes almost at the end of the book that feminism should not be about taking the role and the power of men in society but about thinking of a way of reorganizing society so everyone is equal not only on their rights but on every sphere of life, so that people can develop without having struggles because of race, gender or social status:

“To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights to men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels – sex, race, and class, to name a few – and a commitment to reorganising U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires.” (hooks, 194).

- “Today masses of black women in the U.S. refuse to acknowledge that they have much to gain by feminist struggle. [...] They are afraid to openly confront white feminists with their racism or black males with their sexism.” (hooks, 195). Whereas black women are in a much better position within American society nowadays, they still have a lot to fight for (i.e.: they myth of the sexually loose woman is maintained which makes the media to always portray them as the fallen women, the prostitutes), but because they have been abused and at the bottom of the hierarchy for so long,

they are afraid to fight for more in case this changes and goes back to the way it was before.

4. A Feminist Analysis of *Sula* by Toni Morrison

A) Toni Morrison

Although named differently at her birth, everyone knew and knows the African-American author, activist and playwright by the name of Toni Morrison, who got Toni from the nickname her family gave her, and Morrison from her husband's surname. Born in 1931 in a middle-class family in an African-American town of immigrants it is mentioned in the article From the University of Minnesota named after her that "she grew up in a lively household and was surrounded by [...] the language of the African American heritage" (Thao, Dipasquale, Meyer, Rouzina, 2).

"Toni Morrison's family had a profound influence on her development as a writer" (Gillespie, 3). She was taught about classic literature, and encouraged by her parents since she was young to gain confidence as a woman and to develop her abilities in which she was passionate about, literature, which led her to pursue a bachelor's degree in English, to shortly after graduate and start her teaching career, and subsequently begin working on her own writings. As mentioned in the article *Toni Morrison*, she ended up moving to New York to work as an editor in 1967, and in 1970 she published her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, which was rejected many times by several publishers. She then kept working as a writer, editor, professor as well as a mentor of several African-American women writers. From then, she started writing and publishing several novels among which stand out *Sula*, *Home*, and *Beloved*. (Thao, Dipasquale, Meyer, Rouzina, 2,3).

As Stephanie Li states in her book *Toni Morrison: A Biography*: "For Morrison, who began writing novels in her thirties writing has become essential to her very existence" (Li, xi). She's written eleven novels along some other fictional works such as plays (e.g.: *Dreaming Emmet*), children's literature (e.g.: *The Big Box*) as well as non-fictional works and articles.

Toni was one of the greatest figures within the African-American contemporary feminist literary movement, activist for the civil rights, and against the racial discrimination. She mainly deals with the topics of women within African-American communities in her

works and her novels “in the tradition of most contemporary novels authored by women, are woman-centered and revolve around women’s lives, problems and search for identity” (Gashemi, 235). She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for *Beloved*, and the Literature Nobel prize in 1993, becoming the first black woman to receive it.

B) *Sula*: Plot

As Maggie Galehouse states in her article “*New Woman*”: *Toni Morrison’s Sula*: “*Sula* chronicles a community in which black women dominate public and private life” (Galehouse, 339). In the novel, Nel and Sula are pictured as two best friends who grew up in two completely opposite households in a black community of Ohio called The Bottom. On one hand, Sula lives with her mother, her grandmother and her siblings, with little boundaries and a big sense of freedom, in a household without a father figure because he died, and with two role models: her mother who teaches her the freedom of owning her body, and her grandmother, who sets the example on how to be an independent woman. On the other hand, Nel comes from a very traditional and oppressive household, in which her mum, Helene, even though coming from a really poor background in which her mother was a prostitute, lives as the “ideal woman”: religious, a lovely housewife and devoted to her daughter.

After finishing high school, Sula leaves the Bottom to go to college and does not meet Nel until she comes back ten years later. During that time, Sula has had several affairs with men and has shaped herself into an independent woman, whereas Nel has married Jude. When Sula comes back, she has an affair with Jude, Nel’s husband which causes a big argument between both friends and the hatred towards Sula to grow even more within the community of The Bottom. This causes the end of the marriage and the friendship. They don’t meet up again until three years later when Sula is sick and about to die and they end up having a long conversation about the duality of good and bad, which is one of the main focuses of the whole novel. When Sula dies the whole town is kind of joyous, since they thought she was the cause of their despair and bad luck, however, bad things start happening when she dies and the town starts to wonder if she really was the cause of their bad luck. Moreover, after Sula’s death, Nel realizes she misses her and that even though she hurt her,

she was her only real friend, the only person who ever was real and completely honest with her.

This novel brings up the question of good and bad, and the opposition of dualities since the beginning when Toni calls the town the Bottom although being a town situated in the top of a mountain. There are always two opposite characters or situations present in the novel. Nevertheless, *Sula* also shows that both good and bad can be within the same person, especially within Nel and Sula, who are also used as a way of analyzing the contemporary black women as stated in *Toni Morrison's Sula: A Black Woman's Epic*:

“The Central figures of the novel, Nel Wright and Sula Peace, are diametric opposites whose lives are linked by bonds too powerful for either to resist. Ultimate hero and villain change roles, as their relationship grows into a larger selfhood. Using heroic conventions as a structural basis for her novel, Morrison creates layers of irony and multiple perceptions that add depth to her analysis of contemporary black women” (Stein, 146).

Thus, the way black women have been portrayed by American society since slavery days is represented ironically through Sula and Nel, since they are complete opposites, but none of them are completely good or completely “evil”. Moreover, Sula and Nel’s relationship is not only one of antithesis, but sometimes the completely opposite. Sometimes they become one, and also represent the idea of “girlfriendness”, the companionship between women that black feminism defends. Sula and Nel become each other’s someone, a constant and needed presence in the life of each other: “this presence, this someone, is the girlfriend, the other who is so much the self that the boundaries between the two become fluid and sometimes collapse” (Everod Quashie, 192). This kind of friendship is as Kevin Everod Quashie said “a self-centered process, for it facilitates each girl’s process of self” (Everod Quashie, 193), meaning that it helps them grow individually, but on the other hand “The need for self-distinction is muted by the deliberateness of their union, the political character of two young black women who choose to be together against the impossible of the world around them” (Everod Quashie, 193), so they grow and develop individually but somehow become one.

C) *Sula*: A Black Feminist Analysis of the main characters

Sula has got several main characters, most of them women, who will be analyzed below from the feminist point of view of bell hooks' ideas from her book *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*.

- Helene Wright:

Helene is Nel's mother. Coming from a really poor background, she is the daughter of a creole New Orleans prostitute, raised by her grandmother, who taught her to be a "respectful" woman and tries to distance from her past as soon as possible, moving to Medallion after marrying Wiley Wright, "a seaman [...] in port only three days out of every sixteen." (Morrison, 17) who, therefore, was always away. There, she somehow forgets about her past and lives in a respectable house within the black community because her husband "put her in a lovely house with a brick porch and real lace curtains at the window" (Morrison, 17), therefore providing her with all her needs, as every husband was told they should do. Because of that, she was alone most of the time with their daughter Nel, who made her "rose grandly to the occasion of motherhood" (Morrison, 18). In Medallion she also "joined the most conservative black church" (Morrison, 18) and was really participative of the activities that took place there.

Thus, Helene was pictured as what society of the mid 20th Century would say the perfect black women should be "The images of black women that are seen as positive usually are those that depict the black woman and long-suffering, religious, maternal figure, whose most endearing characteristic is her self-sacrificing self-denial for those she loves" (hooks, 66).

Helene, although pictured positively by the white standards, was still a black woman, nevertheless, and she struggles and is reminded that even though she lives in a somehow good position within the black community, she will never be an equal, and that is pictured when she takes the train with Nel to go to her grandmother's house because she had passed away and she mistakenly enters one of the zones that only white people can enter:

"Helene and her daughter entered a coach peopled by some twenty white men and women [...] Helene decided to spare herself some embarrassment and walk on through to the colored car. [...] they saw a white conductor coming toward them 'What you think you doin', gal?' [...] Back to her grandmother's house in the city [...] and already she had been called 'gal'" (Morrison, 20).

In this paragraph it is stated how not only she had to sit in a different place because she was black, but she was discriminated as well, and treated poorly for being a woman, being called a 'gal' which brought her to her past a slang word used by lower classes to refer to girls. This word was something that someone of her current social position should never have been called, but she was still black and a woman nevertheless, and as they did with every black woman: "They reminded her, that in the eyes of the white public, she would never be seen as worthy of consideration or respect" (hooks, 55).

Helen is pictured by Toni as the way black women were considered to be under the slavery system: "as nurturing forces that protected and provided for their children at any cost without any concern for their own individuality and selves" (Ghasemi, 238). She, along her daughter, is pictured the complete antithesis of the rest of the mother figures in the novel.

- Nel Wright:

Nel is Helene's daughter and Sula's best friend. She represents one of the two central figures of the book. Brought up in a really oppressive household, she always preferred staying at Sula's house because of the freedom they had there, and because there Sula could be their own person, something Nel yearned for even since before meeting Sula: "I'm me, I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me" (Morrison, 28). However, since Nel was greatly influenced by her mother and had the same values as her she always made sure that virtue and following the rules were her priorities, and she feels incredibly betrayed when she finds out that Sula had had a sexual affair with her husband Jude.

Marriage was one of the most important things to her because as she was taught, her relationship with a man was the most important aspect of her life, that she even tries to remarry a while after having been abandoned by Jude. This personal trait or idea that a woman should be married to a man to be completely content, is what hooks talks about when saying that most black women think that in order to be the perfect woman and to aspire to feel complete they must be married to a man (hooks, 82). However, later she realizes she should have focused on Sula instead of that, because she was her only real friend, representing here the relationship of "girlfriendness" mentioned above, of having another black woman to support you.

As Ghasemi states in his article, Nel along her mother and the crowd of mother figures surrounding Jadine and Baby Suggs, represent the church-going, socially accepted, good mothers (Ghasemi, 247).

- Eva Peace:

Eva is Sula's grandmother. She belongs to the groups "of sexually free mothers [...]" who refuse to be restricted or pressed to be defined in terms of maternity only" (Ghasemi, 247). Eva, along Helene's mother, Sula, and Hannah are what Morrison is using to represent her revision of the concept of black womanhood, someone able to live freely, with a sense of individuality and have a life on their own, mothers who are not really maternal, but deals with the same struggles than the ideal mothers.

Having to take care of her children alone since her husband Boyboy abandoned them, she had to leave them with a neighbor for eighteen months to go to work and came back without a leg, being disabled the rest of her life. This circumstance is seen by Ghasemi in his article *Negotiating Black Motherhood in Toni Morrison's Novels* as "Eva's initiation into her awareness of a free and distinct selfhood" (Ghasemi, 242), and it is true that she changes her attitude towards motherhood after her husband leaves. However, it should also be taken into account that she was forced to that "freedom" but it taught her that somehow, she could live without a man, an opposition of what was stated before by hooks that most black women think they need a man to have full happiness (hooks, 82).

Eva managed to bring her children up with being as what can be described as the role of the "matriarch" of her family. Many black women have thought for years that the black society was a matriarchal one because white supremacists created that myth, reasoning that women were powerful providers and workers in black households, and the ones to blame for the demasculinization of black men (hooks, 75). Nevertheless, that is what they wanted to make them believe, since black women still held no power in the household whatsoever: "black women represented one of the largest socially and economically deprived groups in America whose status in no way resembled that of a matriarch" (hooks, 72).

However, in the case of Eva, an arrogant provider and head of the household, she could be seen as a great example of a matriarch of her household, not outside of it though, because "the term matriarch implies the existence of a social order in which women exercise social

and political power” (hooks, 72) and that has nothing to do with the real condition of black women in American society.

Nevertheless, even though she could be pictured as the greatest example of the independent woman in the novel, it could be seen just as a façade as well, because she was forced to live independently without her husband, and she was still concerned about her relationship with her husband, as most black women were about their relationship with men, because they all thought they needed to have a man by their side to live happily. One of the instances of how positive Eva thinks marriage is for women is when she was talking to Sula after she came back from the city after 10 years: “when you gone to get married? You need to have some babies, I’ll settle you. [...] Selfish, Ain’t no woman got no business flouting around without no man.” (Morrison, 92)

- Hannah Peace:

Hannah is Sula’s mother. She got married but her husband died, and she moved to Eva’s house and lived her life freely. She was known and hated in the village for living happily without any property and any husband, and also for seducing every man because she was really beautiful and lovely. They criticized her because she lived her sexuality freely and was hated among both the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women as stated in the book:

“Hannah exasperated the women in the town, the “good women, who said ‘One thing I can’t stand is a nasty woman’, the whores, who were hard put to find trade among black men anyway and who resented Hannah’s generosity; the middling women, who had both husbands and affairs, because Hannah seemed too unlike them, having no passion attached to her relationships and being wholly incapable of jealousy” (Morrison, 44).

They all despised her, because as mentioned before, she was someone who enjoyed her sexuality freely and was not particularly concerned or worried about being a good mother to Sula. As Ghasemi mentions on his article, Hannah’s “‘motherly’ relationship with Sula was anything but typical” (Ghasemi, 247) and sometimes it seems she does not even like her own daughter, and therefore, did not follow the stereotypes of the ideal black woman. They all pictured Hannah as what the patriarchal society had tried to make people believe that black women were like: the Sapphire images:

“As Sapphires, black women were depicted as evil, treacherous, bitchy, stubborn, and hateful, [...] The Sapphire image had as its base one of the oldest negative stereotypes of woman: the image of

the females as inherently evil [...] racist-sexist mythology simply designated black women the epitome of female evil and sinfulness” (hooks, 85).

Thus, Hannah was hated mostly by women, only because she enjoyed her sexuality freely and the racist patriarchal society had taught black women that they should always be by their husbands’ and their children sides instead. She was not the typical self-sacrificing mother that Helene was.

Hannah also influenced Sula greatly, and some of her qualities appear on Sula when she grows up. The topic in which Sula was influenced the most was the topic about sex and sexual relationships: “Seeing her step so easily into the pantry and emerge looking precisely as she did when she entered, only happier, taught Sula that sex was pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable” (Morrison, 44). Thus, what Sula concluded from this was that sex was something she could enjoy freely, but not something remarkable and sinful as society tried to show them.

- Sula Peace:

She’s Hannah’s daughter and the other central figure of the book along Nel, both of them representing the duality of the way black women was depicted: Nel being the ideal religious with lighter skin, loving mother as her mum, as well as respectable and Sula represents the Sapphire image as her mother did. Sula is seen by the black community as strange, but when she came back from college, they could not even stand her because she was completely different, and even regarded her as bewitched. Sula was perceived as what the society “perceived the black women like, as the “fallen woman”, the whore,” (hooks, 52) the sexually loose woman.

It seems that these two characters are opposed as good and evil throughout the whole book, however, when they accidentally make Chicken Little drown and they keep it a secret, Nel confesses after Sula’s death that she somehow felt delighted at the child’s death whereas Sula was completely horrified, so in reality who seemed to be the ideal good woman, was the evil.

Sula can be described as a dark character that was so overly influenced by her mother’s way of life and lack of emotion that she inherits the same traits, and this way, she is depicted

watching her mother burn, as well as having an affair with Jude because she felt abandoned by Nel since she had gotten married, without feeling any emotion or remorse.

The black community regards her as bewitched because they think that she was the one that brought the bad luck to the town when she came back and think everything will be better when she dies. However, contrary to what people believed, after her death bad luck follows the town

One of her biggest qualities is the way she is determined to live without commitment and independent to others even though she ends up falling in love. She has really strong opinions on everything and she knows that the black women of her community hate her, but she does not care. She also thinks that because black females are both black and females they are in the last position of the social hierarchy as bell hooks stated: “As far as back as slavery, white people established a asocial hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men, who are ranked third, and black women last”. (hooks, 53).

Sula also expressed her opinions very strongly and when she talked about how Jude had had a bad day at work when he said “that a Negro had a hard row to hoe in this world” (hooks, 103) she immediately answered that they do not have it as bad as black women because white men only cared that they could have affairs with white women due to the sexual myth of surrounding black men, however black women spent their entire lives loving them for later to be abandoned by them : “White men love you. They spend so much time worrying about your penis they forget their own. And if that ain’t love and respect I don’t know what is. And white women? They chase you all to every corner of the earth, feel for you under every bed. [...] Colored women worry themselves into bad health just trying to hang onto your cuffs.” (hooks, 103).

Sula, as Maggie Galehouse says, is “conceived outside of the constraints ordinarily felt by women in her community, her status as a woman is only a small part of how she perceives herself and ultimately, how she is perceived by readers. The same goes for race” (Galehouse, 339). So, due to the fact that Sula represents the embodiment of freedom and carelessness, sometimes it is difficult to perceive her as a black woman who could be a representative

against sexism and racism, but she suffers the consequences of being black and a woman nevertheless.

- Plum Peace:

He is Eva's youngest son, therefore, Hannah's brother. He is pictured as the spoiled youngest son, mainly because he was the youngest but also because he was a man. He comes back from being a soldier in the Second World War addicted to heroin and with no purpose in life, therefore, being an embarrassment for Eva, because she believed he could not live as a real man, and "exercise their right as 'men' in a patriarchal society" (hooks, 69) and could not marry anyone, nor find a job to provide for the house. Therefore, even though he was the one Eva had planned to bequest everything, she sets him on fire while he is asleep and after not having left his room for days.

- Boyboy:

Mentioned only a few times throughout the novel, he was Eva's husband and the father of her three children. He leaves the family, and Eva has to take care of the children, and provide for them by working in tough jobs. He comes back with a woman to visit them, but he shortly leaves again.

- Jude Greene:

He is Nel's husband, whom later becomes Sula's lover. Nel sees Sula and him making love, and he leaves her with their two children right after the betrayal. His biblical name could be seen as a sign of betrayal to his wife, as Jude betrayed Jesus.

At the beginning, and almost throughout all his appearances in the book, Jude is pictured as a frustrated black man. Firstly, because he did not get the job he wanted and he had to settle for a job he was shamed about, a waiter, which was a woman's job, and, secondly, because he still had not married Nel, and therefore, could not take any man's role, neither on the household, nor on his job. Some of his thoughts about this are stated in the book: "So it was rage, rage and a determination to take on a man's role anyhow that made him press Nel about settling down." (Morrison, 82), and he also said that "Without that someone, he was a waiter hanging around a kitchen like a woman. With her he was the head of a household pinned to an unsatisfactory job" (Morrison, 83). Two connections with the ideas of bell hooks can be done here. First of all, the need of Jude to play a man's role, to

feel like he was not demasculinized because of having supposedly a woman's job, since the white society usually attacked black men for being demasculinized due to the fact that black women used to work outside on such jobs in order to provide for their families and "the worst that can happen to a man is that he be made to assume the social status of a woman" (hooks, 20). Moreover, the embarrassment and shame Jude felt because of having to take on a woman's role at a job, because black men of lower classes could feel shame and even reject some jobs if they felt like they were losing their masculinity or their dignity whereas women could not do that because they had to provide for the house and they would be seen as uppity:

"lower class black men in our neighborhood commenting on the fact that some jobs were not worth doing because of the loss of one's personal dignity [...]. The black female who thought herself "too good" to do domestic work or other service jobs was often ridiculed for being uppity. Yet everyone sympathized when unemployed black men talked about their inability to accept "the man" bossing them." (hooks, 77).

In Jude's eyes, as Karen F. Stein states in her article *Toni Morrison's Sula: A Black Woman Epic*: "Nel is to become a part of him, [...] signifies the death of Nel's already fragile sense of self"(Stein, 147), therefore, Nel just does what she's told by her husband becoming one with him and completely losing herself to her husband and children.

At the end, Jude is pictured in *Sula* as almost every other man that appears on it: betraying his significant other and leaving them behind to take care of the house and the children and to provide for the family alone. Therefore, he represents a pattern followed on most of Morrison's male characters, the fathers that as a result of social and economical oppression leave the household and that are not considered responsible for their children anymore (Ghasemi, 240).

- Ajax:

Whose real name was Albert Jacks, could be described as the only true love in Sula's life. He's nine years older than Sula, and they start meeting up when she comes back from being away those ten years. He seems charming at the beginning, and Sula likes him because "her real pleasure was the fact that he talked to her. They had genuine conversations. He did not speak down to her or at her" (Morrison,127), which can mean that he didn't treat her as a mere sexual object, but as an equal human being with whom he had genuine conversations

with. This made Sula happy, since men usually treated her as a mere sexual object mainly due to the fact that the white supremacist patriarchal society had taught everyone since the beginning of the slavery times that “All black women, irrespective of their circumstances, were lumped into the category of available sex objects” (hooks, 58). He fancied her because she was a spontaneous and untraditional woman unlike all the other women he had dated before “this was perhaps the only woman he knew whose life was her own, who could deal with life efficiently, and who was not interested in nailing him” (Morrison, 127). Within this quote, one can draw two different conclusions, he liked independent women, and all the black women pictured by him that were “interested in nailing him” (Morrison, 127), thought, as hooks explains in her book, “that the most important aspect of a woman’s life is the relationship with a man” (hooks, 82), therefore, they had to settle down with one. Thus, when Ajax realizes she’s falling for him and changing into a more traditional woman and not as ‘independent’ as he wanted her to be, Ajax leaves her as well.

D) Similarities and differences in the topics of *Ain’t I a Woman* and *Sula*

Ain’t I a woman: Black Women and Feminism and *Sula* have little to do, since the former is basically a black feminist theory or an analysis of black feminism in the American society, and the other is a novel. They do not share a lot of topics, for instance the topic of motherhood is barely mentioned in *Ain’t I a Woman* whereas it is one of the biggest topics in the novel, and also, in *Sula* the importance of slavery and how negatively it affected the image of black women that has been portrayed until nowadays is not mentioned at all. Morrison also does not explicitly talk about feminism in the book, however, she prefers to focus mainly on the female characters making them the protagonists, and their struggles within a sexist and racist world. She challenges the readers to create a multicultural, feminist world in which both women and men can live equally.

The antithesis of the portrayal of black women can be seen in both books, in hook’s work through the theory, and in *Sula* through the characters. Helene and Nel represent, as mentioned earlier, the ideal black woman (i.e.: a religious, asexual woman, devoted to their family), whereas Hannah and Sula represent the opposite, someone who lives their life freely without strings and commitment, someone seen as “sexually loose” and without a sense of motherhood. By always picturing this duality between good and bad, the book also shows

the way women are devaluated within the black society because of all of the myths they have created about them, which were previously mentioned on this paper (i.e.: the myth of the sexually loose woman, the myth of the matriarchal black society).

Moreover, men are depicted as the ones free to do anything, and even though they still may suffer from racism they “don’t have it as bad” as black women do. Most of them are pictured as almost invisible figures within their household, that either abandon their families or betray their wives and abandon the household. Black men are pictured in both books as accepting figures of the patriarchal society, only fighting for their rights, only caring about being man enough and not demasculinized. The greatest example of this is Jude, Nel’s husband, who feels shamed for having to work as a waiter, which was supposedly a woman’s job, and needs to settle down and marry Nel in order to feel like he is the head of his household, and therefore, he could take on his role as a man that has to work on a shameful feminine job because he has to provide for his house.

The other big topic shared in both books is the topic of sexism within the black community. Because black women were shown that they had to be like their white counterparts (i.e.: ideal, religious, loving wives) they are brainwashed and judge every woman that decides to live her life freely, without settling down with a man. Mainly Sula and Hannah were the focus of these alienated females that felt attacked but somehow jealous of the beauty and the free-spirited way of life of Sula and Hannah.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, and as it is already mentioned in the introduction, African-American women struggle the most within the black American community for both being black and women. Depictions of these struggles can be seen in both books, which have nothing to do with each other since *Ain’t I a Woman* is a non-fictional work and *Sula* is a novel, they represent ideas and works made by black women for black women.

Whereas on one hand, hook’s work concern is black feminism and how it has affected the daily lives of African-American women from the slavery days, Toni Morrison’s novel may seem, on the other hand a not so metaphorically or politically charged novel. However,

once read, the reader realizes that these works have a lot in common because they deal with similar topics yet being completely different genres.

Both works deal with the topics of the portrayal of women in American society, showing how black women can only supposedly be seen as the perfect woman or the complete opposite. These images have been a result of racism. They have been created for centuries since the slavery days for white people to control and undermine black women's will to fight for their rights. The idea that black women should be religious, clean, motherly women (i.e.: Helene and Nel) it is nowadays fully integrated within the black community and, therefore, a lot of black women are both racist and sexist, because that's what the white patriarchal society has told them that is right. Thus, plenty of examples of this have been shown in Morrison's work, when women from *The Bottom* criticize and judge Sula and Hannah just because they do not abide the rules of what should be the correct perfect woman.

They also deal with the idea of the demasculinization of men and how black men, (e.g.: Jude) just want to be portrayed as masculine and following the patriarchal role for them to feel fulfilled with their role in society.

Moreover, the role of motherhood and of the matriarch is a constant topic. Women in the writings struggle to feel fully independent because they always have to follow the mother role even if they do not want to. Also, women that have more freedom or do not have that motherhood feeling sometimes are pictured as less feminine and more masculinized (e.g.: Eva, Sula's grandmother).

Regarding the topic of race, it can be concluded that it does not matter the social status they have, black women are always going to be treated differently, are always going to feel as "the other" (e.g.: Nel and Helen being treated poorly when getting into the place of the train meant for white people), and this otherness is going to follow them around in their everyday lives.

To sum up, even though nowadays American society has developed a lot in terms of feminism and racism there is still a lot work to do in order for black women to feel as equal as everyone else. However, I think these works written by black women are helping a lot of people see the reality these women face every day and have been facing for centuries. Now it is the time to open people's minds in order to get rid of the white supremacist patriarchal

values from the society we live in so that these women talk and speak their mind in order for them to find their identity within the feminist movement.

Both hooks and Morrison have done an extraordinarily job to make people see through both non-fictional works and novels how black women and themselves have felt in American society and by comparing these works I could understand the topic of the identity of black women more fully. However, there were some topics that I had expected to study further such as slavery, that were not really mentioned in the novel. Therefore, a wider study and analysis of for instance *Beloved* or *The Bluest Eye* can be done in order to get to know a bit more of a bigger variety of topics within black feminism.

6. Works cited

- Abel, Elizabeth, Christian, Barbara, and Moglen, Helene. *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Berkeley (CA) [etc: University of California Press, 1997. Print.
- Brunell, Laura, and Elinor Burkett. "Feminism" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 8 Feb. 2019.
- Cheng, Cliff. "A Review Essay on the Books of Bell Hooks: Organizational Diversity Lessons from a Thoughtful Race and Gender Heretic." *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1997, p. 553.
- Dyer, Harriet. *The Little Book of Feminism*. Summersdale, 2016. Print
- Galehouse, Maggie. "New World Woman: Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, vol.35, no.4, 1999, pp. 339-362,
- Gamba, Susana. "Feminismo: historia y corrientes." *Gamba, S. Diccionario de estudios de Género y Feminismos*. Editorial Biblos (2008): 1-8.
- Ghasemi, Parvin. "Negotiationg Black Motherhood in Toni Morrison's Novels" *CLA Journal*, vol. 53, Mar. 2010, pp. 235–253.
- Gillespie, Carmen. *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison a Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts On File, 2008.

- Guy-Sheftall, Beverly, et al. "Black Women and Feminism: Two Reviews." *Phylon* (1960-), vol. 44, no. 1, 1983, p. 84.
- Hooks, Bell. *Aint I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. First ed., Routledge, 2015. Print
- Hua, Julia, and Adam Tobias Schrag. "Voices from the Gaps - Bell Hooks." *University of Minnesota – Driven to Discover*, 2009, conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/166225/hooks_bell.pdf;sequence=1.
- Li, Stephanie. *Toni Morrison: A Biography*. Greenwood, 2010. Print
- Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. Vintage, 2016. Print
- Neville, Helen A., and Jennifer Hamer. "We Make Freedom': An Exploration of Revolutionary Black Feminism An Exploration of Revolutionary Black Feminism." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4, Mar. 2001, pp. 437–461.
- Quashie, Kevin Everod. "The Other Dancer as Self: Girlfriend Selfhood in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple.'" *Meridians*, vol. 2, 2001, pp. 187–217.
- Stein, Karen F. "Toni Morrisons *Sula*: A Black Womans Epic." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1984, pp. 146–150., doi:10.2307/2904289.
- Stein, Karen F. "Toni Morrisons *Sula*: A Black Womans Epic." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1984, p. 146., doi:10.2307/2904289.
- Thao, Gaushia, et al. "Voices from the Gaps - Toni Morrison." *University of Minnesota – Driven to Discover*, May 2007, conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/166281/Morrison_Toni.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Bell Hooks." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1 Nov. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/bell-hooks>.
- Valdivia, Angharad N. "*Bell Hooks: Ethics From the Margins*." *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, Aug. 2002, pp. 429–447.