

Black Feminism in the Family Circle: A Reading of Toni Morrison's *Sula*

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ABSTRACT:- Black feminism plays an important role in the formation and stability of black families in the United States. This movement allows black women to free themselves from the authority of men in fighting effectively against domination, exploitation and sexism. In doing so, these women want to assert their equality with men, make their rights recognized and show that they are as competent and intelligent as men. Their determination allows to establish and direct families where prevail joy, harmony, understanding and brotherhood. Thus, they give education necessary for the social integration of their children.

Keywords: *black feminism, black families, racism, stability, socialization*

RESUME :- Le féminisme noir joue un rôle important dans la formation et la stabilité des familles noires aux Etats Unis. Ce mouvement permet aux femmes noires de s'affranchir de l'autorité des hommes en luttant efficacement contre la domination, l'exploitation et le sexisme. En agissant ainsi, ces femmes veulent affirmer leur égalité aux hommes, faire reconnaître leurs droits et montrer qu'elles sont aussi compétentes et intelligentes que les hommes. Leur détermination permet d'asseoir et de diriger des familles au sein desquelles règnent la joie, l'harmonie, l'entente et la fraternité. Ainsi, elles donnent une éducation nécessaire à l'insertion sociale de leurs enfants. Mots clés : féminisme noir, familles noires, racisme, stabilité, socialisation

I. INTRODUCTION

For long, the Black family in the United States was not considered as a legal institution, so it was not the subject of a serious scientific and sociological study. It was only in the 20th century that social scientists like Franklin Frazier (1957) and Wade Nobles (1987) became interested in the family structures of Blacks. They claimed that the way to solve the various problems Blacks met was to build a more stable family with the American patriarchal pattern. But with the dislocation of Black families since the period of slavery till the emergence of Civil Rights movements, many women became heads of households. Presented by the White dominant society as breeders, mammies, subservient, unskillful, and ugly and women with sexual deviant, they fought against patriarchy, sexism and racism to bring stability within their families. Many Black writers such as Toni Morrison challenge the negative representation of Black women in their works. In her novels, Morrison not only refuses those stereotypes, but also destroys them. She presents Black women as activists who try hard to cultivate a positive identity in a very hostile world. The destruction of those prevailing and controlling images gives birth to a new definition for her female characters whose fighting spirit embodies the emergence of Black feminism.

Our purpose in this paper is to show how Black feminism develops, not outside the family sphere as traditionally advocated by feminist militants, but inside this basic social structure.

We will use feminism in the sense of bell hooks as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression" (2000). Indeed, Black women complain that feminism takes exclusively into account the concerns and difficulties of White affluent women in developed nations while neglecting those of Black-working class women. They also argue that they experience a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of White women. Black feminism then comes into existence to claim a new set of Black women's definitions and equal rights. Patricia Hill defines it as a movement of "women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary Black women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community and society" (1990, p.221)

In our work, we will first deal with women's fight against racism, sexism and oppression which prevent them from having a peaceful family life. Secondly, we will present the Black family as a haven of peace where affluent women take part in decision making and give necessary education to their children for their socialization.

I- Black Women's Fight for Stable Families

In the United States, Black families experience constant instabilities due to the pressure that the American society exerts on them. Black women are more affected by these instabilities because their husbands have abandoned them, are dead, are in jail or are not able to meet their family's needs. In this case, the responsibility comes to women who have to reorganize their families to adapt them to the new requirements of their communities and to the whole American social environment. To reach this goal, they have to fight against racism which precludes them to have stable families.

A- Defying Racism

Racism could be defined as political and social practices based on differences between races and on the belief that one's own race is the best. In the United States, Whites consider themselves superior to Blacks and inflict an inhuman treatment on them. This inhuman attitude leads in most cases to the destruction of Black families. So, Black people in general and particularly Black women declare their opposition to racist behaviors in order to have stable families. In *Sula*, Toni Morrison describes black women's fight to settle families within which they can have dignity. She portrays a Black family led by a Black woman, Eva Peace. After the desertion of her husband, Boy Boy, Eva becomes the leader of her family. She must care for her children, her granddaughter, Sula and three other children whom she gives a collective name, "Dewey". As such, she acts like her namesake, Eva, the biblical character in the Genesis as life provider. In the novel, Eva's big house, with a considerable number of people living in it, symbolizes not only the Eden Garden where according to the Old Testament, people have to live peacefully, but also the extended African family which gathers several generations living side by side in a perfect harmony. Eva shows that women can lead families as well as men. She transmits her household values necessary to face the atrocities of racism. One of these values is courage. She encourages people under her care not to be afraid of racists who exert violence against black communities. In that novel, Sula, the eponymous character embodies the courage and the power of her grandmother, Eva Peace. One day, on her way back home from school, she is frightened by a group of white boys. Quietly, she removes a knife from her school bag and tears part of her thumb. Seeing the blood running from her finger, the boys run away leaving her alone. They imagine what could happen to them since she is able to hurt herself. Sula's act can be analyzed at two different levels: The first level is that it is an act of self-assertion and dauntlessness. Through her courage, Eva demonstrates that women can also successfully fight against white oppressive system. She makes us understand that the quest for freedom and for the stability of Black families is not a struggle of black men only, but also of black women. These women are a strong link in the constitution and protection of their families since they have a double role to play: woman and mother. As women, they must take part in any fight to overcome male domination and to demand their rights in the American society at large. As mothers, they must feed, educate and protect their children, usually by substituting themselves for their deserted or dead husbands. The second level of Sula's act is that it symbolizes a sacrifice. The blood that flows from her thumb means that she is ready to sacrifice her life for the better of the black community of "Medallion". Her act makes her a heroine who fights for a brighter future of Blacks living in "Medallion". Generally, heroes and heroines combat a repressive system in order to defend and protect the rights and interests of their community. In their struggle, they are often killed. Through Sula, Toni Morrison reminds us that the struggle of Blacks against racism very often ends in death. Sula's death shows how difficult and painful it is for a black female to live and survive in a racist society. As Lisa William says: "her death is emblematic of the many unrecorded death of black women" (2001). This death is a victory of the whole Black community of "Medallion". This is why Helene Washington considers Eva Peace as a symbol of courage for Sula (1980). Thus, Sula challenges the stereotypical representation of black women in fiction. By destroying these stereotypes, Toni Morrison tries to rewrite the lost histories of African American women whose positive images have been eradicated by the white dominant culture. The courage transmitted to Sula by her grandmother, Eva Peace, is also illustrated by Sofia, a Black woman in *The Color Purple*, (1982) by Alice Walker. This novel deals with racism and prejudice as well, especially against women. It describes the life of black women who were forced to do things against their will. Indeed, in *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker depicts the brutality with which black women are treated. Miss Millie (a White woman), the mayor's wife wants Sofia (a black woman) to work for her as her maid. Sofia replies: "hell no", (90) and is slapped by Miss Millie for this refusal. She considers Sofia's answer as an offence. The mayor himself tries to intervene but Sofia knocks him down. She is arrested for hitting a White man and is severely beaten by policemen. She is sent to jail and she is later sentenced to work for twelve years as the mayor's maid. Sofia describes her working conditions at the mayor's as those of a slave since she is not authorized to go and see her children. After five years, she is allowed to go and see them once a year. Even during Christmas, she is accepted to spend only fifteen minutes with them. Seeing all this, her oldest son considers her mother as a captive.

The mayor's wife's behavior is due to the fact that black women emerged from slavery enshrined in the consciousness of white people as mammies. This image is created for the social and economic exploitation of house slaves. The mammy has no identity and she is defined in relation to black family. This image is used to justify black women's long standing restriction to domestic service. They represent the Whites' perceptions of the ideal black female who is obedient and internalizes her subordination.

Sofia's refusal to internalize this mammy image by comparing being the mayor's wife's maid to "hell" is significant. In some religions, hell is the place where the Devil lives, and where wicked people are sent to be punished when they die. Hell is usually imagined to be under the ground and full of flames. In making this comparison, Sofia knows the extent of suffering and pain she is going to encounter as a maid. The destruction of the mammy image becomes complete when Sofia hits the mayor himself. This act of beating like Sula's self hurting is a reaction against the American racist society which does not recognize any right belonging to Black women and destroys their family ties. In declaring their opposition to racism, black women's goal is to alleviate its negative effects in order to be free, have the same advantages as white women, build strong families and take care of their children. However, racism is not the only evil which constitutes a hindrance, we have also sexism.

B- Subverting Sexism

Sexism is the belief that the members of one sex, usually women, are less intelligent or less capable than those of the other sex and need not be treated equally. So, the economic system of capitalism finds it expedient to reduce women to a state of enslavement. They are systematically exploited by this system. They are paid less for the same work that men do and jobs that are specifically assigned to women are low-paying and without the possibility of advancement. Statistics from the women's Bureau of the United States Department Labor show that the wage scale for white women was even below that of black men and the wage scale for black women was the lowest of all. Black feminists reject these traditional arguments and seek to show that their effects legitimize and protect male privilege to entrench female disadvantage in education and in employment. For them, sexism constitutes a barrier to women's social emergence, mainly black women.

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison depicts female characters who, rather than resigning themselves to enslavement, challenge social norms to show that they are as competitive as men and can protect their families. Toni Morrison creates a memorable character, Eva, who represents a strong challenge to sexism. She was left by her husband Boy Boy in a very helpless and miserable situation. Her self-respect does not allow her to beg. She does not become a mammy, but emerges as a strong black woman. She is a determined woman who courageously faces every kind of situation. She is a one-legged woman. Her missing leg gives birth to rumors. Some say that she stuck it under a train and made them pay off. For others, she sold it to the hospital for ten thousand dollars. Whatever is said about her leg, her act is heroic. She bears the pain just for the sake of her children. She sacrifices her youth and her beauty just to save them.

Through Eva, Toni Morrison challenges the passive and pathetic image of the Black mother. Eva stands for all single Black mothers who learn to resist and fight back. She learns to live for her children. She refuses to become a low paid domestic worker in a white family. In this way, she shatters the sexist stereotype of Black women. Like her grandmother, Sula also challenges sexist domination by demonstrating that black women are as efficient as men. Sula is an artist who rejects the dominant and hegemonic values of her community. She is a rebellious independent black woman, a nonconformist daring to violate the social norms to assert herself.

The determination with which Eva Peace acts to preserve the unity of her family is the same that drives Pilate Dead in *Song of Solomon* (1977). In that novel, Pilate Dead becomes the leader of the other part of Dead family after her separation from her brother, Macon Dead. Dauntless faced with the adversities of her living environment, she succeeds in building strong family ties by taking care of her daughter, Reba, and her granddaughter, Hagar. She meets their financial, material and emotional needs and a peaceful atmosphere reigns in her house. Milkman, Pilate's nephew is particularly attracted by this quiet atmosphere when his friend Guitar introduces him to Pilate. Even Macon Dead who qualifies her sister as ungrateful and compares her to a snake does not believe his eyes when he notices that harmony in Pilate's house, while his is prey to constant troubles and instabilities. Pilate does not only play a role of provider for her daughters, but also plays a role of protector. When a man attempts to beat and rape Reba, she reacts vigorously to rescue her. Like Eva, Pilate destroys sexist stereotypes of black women to show that they can successfully settle and lead families.

Dealing with sexism, there is a link between Toni Morrison's writing and that of Alice Walker. In her second book of poetry, *Revolutionary Petunias* (1973), Walker's main character, Samy Lou, is presented as a courageous Black woman. She insists on righteousness, justice even to the point of dangerous action. She kills the White man who killed her father, a rebellious act that inspires the folk to write songs about her to praise her courage. Black women's reaction against the White supremacy aims at establishing racial equality. They want to put an end to patriarchy and sexism. The way White domination and sexism are expressed in everyday life has created awareness in black women of the ways they are victimized, exploited, and in worse case scenarios,

oppressed. On a basic level, many hurt and exploited black females declare their opposition to White domination. It is where they uncover and openly reveal the depths of their intimate wounds. This spiritual aspect serves as a healing ritual: they gain strength to challenge the patriarchal forces of their society. Through black female characters who reject sexism, writers like Toni Morrison want to show that black women are as intelligent, efficient, skillful and competitive as men are. In their fight to have stable families which express pride, honor and dignity, black women are not only opposed to sexism, but they also fight for their socialization.

C- Gender socialization

Gender socialization is the process by which people, especially women, fight in order to be accepted and integrated in their society. Because of patriarchy, women's involvement in active life goes without many troubles. In the United States, women, mainly black women are faced with serious obstacles when seeking for a job. Having a suitable job for them is the surest means to take care of their children and have a stable and harmonious family life. For writers like Toni Morrison, socialization is a major theme. She indicates that as a social group, Black people develop mechanisms by which they can maintain cooperation, harmony and unity between each other. These mechanisms guarantee their existence. Within black families, these directives are generally transmitted by women to their children. In *Sula*, Morrison introduces us a Black family led by a woman, Cecile Sabbath. That family is thriving and harmonious and its members stand together. Helene, Cecile's granddaughter is described as a worker with a good attendance record. She is not only proud of her family, but also for the whole Black community of "Medallion." She gets married with Wiley Wright, a sailor who also congratulates her for her know-how at work. She is skillful, efficient and better does what she has to do. She appears as a dynamic executive woman. Talking about her abilities, the narrator says: "Helene was an impressive woman, at least in Medallion she was. A Woman who won all social battles with presence and a conviction of the legitimacy of her authority". P. Through Helene, Toni Morrison shows that black women can excel in working in the same way men do and meet the needs of their children. Helene and Wiley Wright have a daughter, Nel Wright, who is a blossoming girl. Due to the fact that her mother is a hard worker and has a good standard of living, Nel does not envy white girls. In the process of socialization of black women, Toni Morrison particularly insists on the working environment. Some of them have the opportunity to meet different individuals who play a decisive role in their culture, their behavior and ascertain their personality. From these contacts, they acquire a necessary knowledge which enables them to better comprehend the problems they meet. In *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison shows through Pilate that the working environment favors black women's integration in the fabric of society. At twelve, Pilate is orphan and her only brother Macon breaks up with her. She is hired by bean collectors and spends three years with them. She meets a woman who helps her to forget that she has no family assistance. She explains the important role that this woman plays in her life: "I stayed with them for three years, I believe, and the main reason I stayed on was a woman I took to. She taught me a lot and kept me from missing my own family, Macon and papa" (142).

With the help of that woman, Pilate is now able to harvest beans. With these acquired skills, she finds another job as a washerwoman in a laundry. There she learns to wash clothes and put them away carefully. Later, she meets a group of farmers in Virginia who grow vegetables, make whisky and sell tobacco. With them, she learns to hoe, fish, plough and plant vegetables. After getting a daughter and a granddaughter, she decides to work for herself. She makes and sells whisky, exactly as the group of farmers in Virginia did. Under cover of the economic crisis in 1929, Pilate becomes wealthy, because that crisis favored a great number of consumers of traditional alcohol. Pilate made her fortune thanks to the professional activities she practiced. Through Pilate, Toni Morrison portrays the ideal Black woman who works harder to feed her family. Despite the hostile environment, Pilate succeeds in emerging socially and leads a peaceful family life. Once more, like Eva, Sula and Helene, Pilate also destroys the mammy image and sexist stereotypes. She shows that black women can free themselves from male domination and from patriarchal society to assert their economic independence.

The fight undertaken by black women against the white oppressive system is also developed in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), by Toni Morrison. That novel portrays the Breedlove's family which is composed of Cholly, his wife Pauline and their children Sammy and Pecola. Pauline is the only food provider since her husband is jobless and drunkard. She is hired by a white man, Mr Butler with whom she works. At her working place, she is known for her punctuality and her hardworking. She is even considered as an exemplary worker by her employer. What she earns permits her to take care of her family. Like the other women of Morrison's fictitious world, Pauline Breedlove also acts as the leader of her family, helping her husband and her children to survive. In their fight to settle stable families, Morrison's black women's characters first take on racism which excludes them from the American society. Next, they challenge sexism which conveys negative ideas about women as not intelligent as men and unable to efficiently and successfully perform a job. They demonstrate that these

conceptions are only prejudices that prevent them from having harmonious family life. For them, the family constitutes a haven of peace which gives them pride, honor and dignity.

II- The Family as Heaven

In the United States, from the period of slavery to the end of the Civil Rights movements, Black people have been victims of any kind of atrocities such as imprisonment, lynching, lashing, privations of civil rights and murder. But whatever the nature of the suffering, the family stands as a shelter, a refuge for commiseration. In most cases, when the family is dislocated, children remain with their mother who takes care of them. Thus, we have the emergence of single-parent families led by black women who are generally happy with a high standard of living.

A- Happy and Affluent Black Families

In her novels, Toni Morrison usually depicts single-parent families in which fathers (husbands) are very often nonexistent. In her depiction, she shows that the typical black family is matriarchal. She lays a particular stress on the harmony within Black families by pointing that most of them stretch over several generations. This aspect is illustrated in *Sula* where she describes extended families within which many generations live side by side. First, she presents the Sabbath family which consists of Nel's great-grandmother, Cecile Sabbath, her grandmother, Rochelle, her mother, Helene and herself. Cecile Sabbath is regarded as a combative and dynamic woman in so far as she has been able to build a family in which there are understanding, joy, solidarity and brotherhood. All the members of this family stand by each other and each of them takes part in its well-being. None of them begs to survive. Thus, this family appears as a wealthy one and commands respect of both the White and the Black communities of "Medallion."

In the novel, Toni Morrison also portrays Peace family, another Black family led by a woman. That family has the same pattern as Sabbath's. It has several generations living side by side and it is composed of Sula's grandmother, Eva Peace, her mother, Hannah and herself. Despite the desertion of her husband, Eva and her children do not sink into extreme poverty. With her courage and her fighting spirit, she succeeds in hoisting her family in the middle-class society, making her granddaughter Sula, a blooming girl. Eva has a big house where she puts up, dresses, and feeds three adopted children. This bears witness her financial health and cheerfulness in her residence. This peaceful atmosphere enables Sula to discover her abilities, know what she needs and go about getting it. Along with these activities, come pride and independence.

The economic success of black families in *Sula* also finds illustration in *Song of Solomon* (1977). Here, Morrison portrays a black girl, Pilate who, despite her youth learns a trade to fit into the fabric of society. After several unsuccessful attempts, she finally succeeds in practicing a job as a trader. She amasses a lot of money so that she can take care of her daughter and her granddaughter. The affluence of Pilate makes her a generous woman who assists people, mainly her nephew, Milkman. When she hears that her only brother, Macon Dead lives in Louisiana, she goes there with her daughters. The narrator describes their travel in these words: "They made the trip in style (one train and two buses), for Pilate has a lot of money" (152). Like the other Black female characters of Toni Morrison, Pilate also does not beg for her self respect. She succeeds in overcoming patriarchal and sexist barriers for her self-determination.

Just like Sabbath, Eva and Pilate, Toni Morrison indicates that the majority of Black people have a peaceful and harmonious family life. Within those families, there are a recognized social code, a disciplined life and a respected social code. Cecile Sabbath, Eva Peace, Sula and Pilate are all women who fight against white oppressive system and male domination to assert their independence. They appear as heroines through whom Toni Morrison draws the attention of people on the value of a genuine life. These women assert their presence in an environment which rejects them. Toni Morrison's goal in dealing with such characters is to show that Black women can acquire a more authentic life and become satisfied and blooming individuals rather than being submitted to conventional standards. Presenting her characters living in extended families, she gives them the meaning of their existence, for family life is the only thing they can really claim, and which has the power to gather them as oppressed people. Through extended families, Blacks have the feeling that they belong to the same lineage. With a wealth of their acquired experience in social life, Black women understand the real meaning of motherhood and know the kind of education they must give to their children in order to successfully face future problems.

B- Motherhood and Children Education

A mother is woman who gives birth to children and brings them up, looks after them and treats them with great care and affection. She transmits them teaching and knowledge carrying moral and social values useful for their integration in society. In the United States, despite racism and discrimination society exerts on black families, black women succeed in settling families and teaching their children how to behave. This process of education is illustrated in Toni Morrison's novels. In *Sula*, for example, she presents the life of two protagonists, Sula and Nel from childhood to adulthood. They are described as members of a new generation of Black women who want to lead their own lives and create their own histories. Yet, their growing and their friendship revolve around powerful maternal influence that teaches them motherhood. The dominant maternal presence in the novel is indicated by Eva who rules a big house in which Sula and Nel spent a great part of their childhood. Eva transmits to Sula useful courage to face difficult living conditions. Under Eva's influence, Sula acquires social values which strengthen her personality. She learns from Eva that she is not only African but also American. As African, she must take into account cultural values, among which there is motherhood in order to settle a family. For Eva, a woman is well seen and appreciated when she has children. This is why she is disappointed because Sula refuses to conform to the ideology of black womanhood. As American, Sula learns that she lives in a society that excludes her from participating in American's political, economic and social life. She has to fight to be integrated in that society. This is the reason why she refuses to conform to conventional standards of "The Bottom" by displaying her aversion not to have anyone depend on her. She only wants to care for herself: "I don't want to make somebody else, I want to make myself" (92). She attempts to structure her own social order, considering "The Bottom" as a political system which limits her class and her racial identity. Like Eva, Helene Wright also transmits a good education to her daughter, Nel, which enables her to have a good behavior and to give advice to her friend Sula when she diverts social norms. Nel tells Sula that a woman has a social consideration when she becomes a mother. Nel appears as a respectful and polite girl as indicated by the narrator: "Under Helene's hand, the girl become obedient and polite" (18).

In *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison, lays a particular stress on the importance of mothers' education of their children. Pilate Dead provides her daughter Reba with any knowledge useful for her socialization. This makes the girl appear as gentle, quiet, respectful and kind. Having internalized specific social values, she significantly intervenes in the education of her daughter, Hagar. When Hagar falls in love with Milkman, Pilate's nephew, Reba refuses telling her that they are cousins. She informs her daughter that no sexual intercourse is possible between close relatives, insisting that for Africans as well as for African-Americans, incestuous acts are forbidden. The decisive role played by black mothers in the education of their children is also shown through the relation between Mrs. Ruth Foster Dead and her son Milkman. She feels such affection for him that she breast-feeds him till six years old. This prolonged breast-feeding is due to the fact that Milkman represents a passion for her. This tenderness is revealed by the narrator: "Her son had never been a person to her, a real separate person. He had always been a passion" (131). Through mothers/children bonds, Toni Morrison indicates that Black women must attend to the education of their children to be fully integrated as members of the American society in order to understand American ideology and the processes of assimilation and interpretation. Toni Morrison lays stress on the importance of the psychological network, the nature of education and mother-child tie, as demonstrated by Hess D. (1968). According to him, Black women prefer two different styles of teaching which have a real impact on their children's performance. The first style is known as "personal subjective" which takes into account children's needs, preferences, interests and moods. Black women who adopt this style provide their children with what they need to face difficult situations. The second style is "normative status" through which Black women teach their children a particular task, or insist on a given behavior because they comply with a social norm. This style does not take into account the preferences of children. Hess concludes by arguing that generally, the ways by which mothers act in the life of their children considerably influence their intellectual growth and their linguistic fluency. In using the methods described by Hess in her novels, Toni Morrison raises the question of the meaning of the family. If Black mothers are not able to possess their children, then they experience separation and loss. This is why they are resolved to protect them by giving them life and assistance. In their fight to have stable families, black women significantly intervene in the education of their children to provide them with reliable moral and social values. They act so because the role of the fathers (husbands) in the socialization of children is almost nonexistent. This situation leads women to have a great power in making decision in the family.

C- Decision Making Within the Family

Many women are exploited and oppressed within the family. Feminists therefore believe that patriarchy exists in the society as a whole. The term is especially used by feminists who argue that it is entrenched in male-female relationships. In her literary work, Toni Morrison explains that if women opt for a traditional housewife-

mother role, this is not because they are mindless victims of patriarchal socialization processes. Instead, they may be exercising this role for the well-being and the stability of their families, since men in most cases fail to assume their responsibility as fathers or husbands. Morrison gives the power to her black female characters to make decisions within the family. Power may be read as the ability to get one's own way or to have control over people and activities. In depicting black women's real involvement in leading their families, Toni Morrison uses the three dimensions of power as described by Steven Lukes (2005, P.18). According to him, the first dimension of power relates to the outcome of actual decisions. The second one is the possibility that an individual may have to shape an agenda so that issues which threaten his/her interests are excluded from the agenda. The third dimension arises from the possibility that an individual may lack power because he/she may not realize what his/her real interests are. In *Sula*, Toni Morrison uses the first dimension of power to describe the role played by Eva Peace and Helene Wright in their different families. Both women are leaders of their respective families and they decide what they think is useful and good for them. Thus Eva Peace decides to make Sula a courageous and autonomous girl able to fight against any hostile situation. Sula grows and acts following the standards specified by her grandmother. In her quest for autonomy, she embodies the potential of the black woman in her community. For her, conforming to social norms in "Medallion" would prevent her from getting what she wants. She does not want to be oppressed by the white administrative system of "Medallion" for she wants to assert her independence. As for Helene Wright, she convinces her daughter, to settle a family. As a consequence, she marries Wiley Wright. Nel complies with her mother's instructions by forsaking her own dream of leaving "Medallion" for the sake of her husband and children, diminishing her identity to that of a wife and a mother.

Song of Solomon is a novel which also illustrates the first dimension of power. Here, Pilate Dead maintains the cohesion within her family. Despite the strained relations between her and her brother, Macon Dead, she actively involves herself in the socialization of Macon's son: Milkman. Against her brother's will, Pilate makes Milkman a courageous boy and teaches him the importance and meaning of family ties. Her influence on him is greater than his father's. Thanks to Pilate, he undertakes his quest for identity by defying any obstacle to discover the real history of his family. The second dimension of power found in Morrison's black women characters is seen through the Child family in *Tar Baby*. That novel introduces us with Sydney, Ondine and their niece, Jadine Child who rejects black cultural values and behaves as a White girl. In the fortification of her personality, Ondine insists on aspects like motherhood, the meaning of being a black girl in America and family settling. Jadine's mother is dead and her aunt Ondine does her utmost so that Jadine can have a good socialization. She tells her:

Jadine, a girl has to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be a woman, she can never learn how to be a woman. I mean a real woman : a woman good enough for a child, good enough for a man, good enough for the respect for other women. (281)

By urging Jadine to be "a real woman," Ondine means a woman who embodies Black cultural values. To avoid any cultural conflict with her niece, she does not tell her immediately to get rid of the white standards of beauty that she has adopted. Instead, she explains her how useful it is for a woman to be responsible and raise children. Jadine understands the value of her aunt's teaching and complies with it. The third dimension of power is depicted in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) through the Breedlove family. Pauline Breedlove works for Mr. Butler, a white man. One day, her daughter Pecola pays her a visit at her working place. On her way, she frightens Mr. Butler's daughter. For that, Pecola is beaten by her mother till premature birth, (she was pregnant) and she consoles the white girl. In disgusting her own daughter and being fond of the white girl, Pauline conveys the third dimension of power. She lacks the power to welcome her daughter at her working place fearing that she would be dismissed by her employer. She rejects her daughter who needs a particular affection from her and she shows a real interest for the white girl who is not hers. Portraying Black women who make decisions in their families, Toni Morrison wants to show that they can satisfactorily stand in for their deserted, dead or nonexistent husbands in order to maintain stability in their families.

II. CONCLUSION

By dint of conclusion, we can say that feminism does not consist for women to rebel against men so as to deny their rights and their existence. Women's goal is simply to demonstrate that they are equal to men and have the same abilities, skills, intelligence and know-how. In her novels, Toni Morrison assigns these qualities to Black women to show that they can effectively act not only for the well-being of their communities, but also and especially for the stability of their families. Through her female characters, she reveals the dynamism of Black people searching for their identity in an environment which denies their rights. By assuming their own responsibilities, these heroines show the authentic values of life within the family. They indicate that because of racism, discrimination and social upheavals, the black family surely experiences a severe crisis, but is not

disappearing. On the contrary, it looks good as a strong social institution reflecting the most fundamental values, hopes and aspirations of its members, values that enable them to fit into American social fabric and take part in the development of the country.

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