CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

African literature is not a monolithic attribute. The first thing this thesis analyzes is the complexity faced when one tries to define and interpret it. The first two chapters claim that African literature is embedded and clustered within a myriad of styles and histories that black peoples and their experiences represent. According to various experts and historiographers of Africa, the multi-layered complexity of African literature is mainly because of the presence of more than a thousand composite cultures. These cultural groups also mean that there are even more diversity in traditions and beliefs that are mainly tribal in character. Further, Gay Wilentz, a literary scholar, points upon the impracticality behind the collective concept like monolithic ‘African worldview’ because of European imperialism (Jennings 2010: 1). La Vinia Delois Jennings has very impressively highlighted upon this conflicting dilemma by quoting Toni Morrison from the latter’s “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation.” Morrison says:

I don’t regard Black literature as simply books written by Black people, or simply as literature written by about Black people, or simply as literature that uses a certain mode of language in which you sort of drop g’s. There is something very special and very identifiable about it and it is my struggle to find that elusive but identifiable style. (Evans 1984: 339)

As such, the introduction of the thesis examines the key terms ‘quest’ and ‘identity.’ They really play vital roles for black women who are exposed to
the dichotomy of being ‘black’ and ‘female’ in a white patriarchal society as part of their experiences of geographic displacement and diaspora. Toni Morrison is not part of the first generation of African diaspora in America. But her works definitely reveal the influence of West and Central African traditional culture. She speaks out clearly regarding the difference between black female writers and white/black male or white female writers. To quote her:

I write for African-American women. We are not addressing the men, as some White female writers do. We are not attacking each other, as both Black and White men do. African-American women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way. They are writing to repossess, re-name, re-own. (Arya 2010: 124)

This thesis, thus, looks forward to Morrison’s novels as stressing upon the necessity for the quest of self-discovery and self-identity leading towards self actualization. In other words, black women are equally concerned as much as about ethnic and racial discrimination as about sexism for being ‘black and female’ which is indeed ‘double jeopardy.’

The thesis on the other hand, brings to light Buchi Emecheta as representing the other side of diaspora based on personal choice and not rooted to slavery. Her story is more about struggles during geographic and cultural dislocations and displacements. According to Neerja Chand, Emecheta’s personal story is actually a success story of a black woman after being put down by an ethnocentric and racist alien culture in England. Nevertheless, Emecheta triumphs over misunderstandings that lurk within her traditional society and her conventional and egoistical husband too successfully. In fact, as Chand opines, “Emecheta’s unique contribution to the world literature lies in her commitment to the representation of women’s life stories in order to draw attention to the
problematic of inegalitarian gender and class relations that cut across racial and geographical boundaries” (Chand 2005 : 49). Nonetheless, Emecheta’s own words further elaborate Chand’s point as she declares openly, “I use the voices of women to talk about corruption and the inadequacies of so many things because women have been silenced for so long. I make most of them the protagonists in my books” (Umeh 1996: 451).

Again, in *Toni Morrison: The Feminist Icon* (2007), Bhaskar A. Shukla observes that in Morrison’s novels ‘feminism’ is grounded upon the cultural notions and beliefs that define women as ‘worthless and invisible victims’ of the white society’s capitalist and misogynist political agendas. Her black female characters struggle to strive against the dichotomy of racism and sexism which is followed by classism. In fact, they try to discover and (re)define their self-identity and freedom. However, Morrison has never agreed to call her works as ‘feminist’ novels. She says bluntly, “I would never write any ‘ist.’ I don’t write ‘ist’ novels” (Shukla 2007: 236). On an ironical note, she adds, “I don’t subscribe to patriarchy, and I don’t think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it’s a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things” (237). In addition, she admits without hesitation the special bond she shares with feminism since childhood. She says, “I think I merged those two words, black and feminist, growing up, because I was surrounded by black women who were very tough and very aggressive and who always assumed they had to work and rear children and manage home” (238).

In the context of Buchi Emecheta, Chand claims that the cultural and historical realities of African women and their difference from their western counterparts cannot be obliterated or wished away when the question of Emecheta’s feminism arises. Like Morrison, she is also constantly preoccupied
with the term ‘feminism.’ However, she expresses a recurrent sense of discomfort of being called a feminist. She clarifies her position, “I did not start as a feminist. I do not think I am one now. Most of my readers would take this to be the statement of a coward. But it is not” (Chand 2005: 50). In fact, she clearly states her stand in her essay “Feminism with a small ‘f’” (1988):

> Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes … chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small ‘f.’ (50)

Further, the awareness of black women as a subjugated being when compared to white male, white female and black male makes them discontent enough to query their existing life situation. As a result, in the hope of an alternative and more fulfilling life, the necessity for a quest to make possible a more meaningful realization of black woman’s self and (re)discovery of her identity becomes undeniable. In this quest for black female identity, the first point this thesis strikes is black woman’s identities as an individual and as a part of a community side-by-side. It is also borne out well that her identities in the social scenario make her more complete and meaningful. However, the trouble erupts when the beauty and value of her very existence and contribution is monopolized under sexism and racism. As a consequence her ‘self-identity’ is also marginalized and subjugated by the deliberate politics of white patriarchal society.

The thesis, with this point of view, confirms that in Morrison’s *Jazz* and Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra*, the individual identity has to face three important phases. First, black women are exposed to the triple consciousness of
discriminations based on race, gender and class. In *Jazz*, the overall downfall of the main three characters Joe, Violet and Dorcas happens due to the venom inflicted by racism which further deteriorates in the forms of class and gender discriminations. Sexual exploitation of women in the form of crimes like Dorcas’s murder by Joe generates fear in Alice. As a consequence, it destroys individual identity and instead creates artificial concepts of identity and beauty. This is part of the larger confinement created by misogynistic double standard and hypocrisy. However, the confinement is strictly targeted towards women. Consequently, Violet’s craving for motherhood and Dorcas’s craving for love have very deep psychological overtones. However, Felice refuses to end up like them. She rather dares to make her choice to have a career.

In Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra*, the war is a result of many factors – classism, sexism, racism, tribalism and corruption. The colonial impact reduces the Nigerian people into white-washed blacks where women are mere extensions of patriarchal order. In the case of Julia, she is an independent single mother before getting married to Abosi. But post-marriage she becomes a submissive and silent spectator. And Debbie is opposed to Julia’s helpless condition. In addition, there is the presence of double standard and hypocrisy present in both white and black male figures towards black women who are commodified for possession. Unfortunately, there are brutal rapes and murders of innocent women in the war which was created and outraged by men.

Again, in Morrison’s *Paradise* and Emecheta’s *Rape of Shavi*, two significant sides of black female identity are visible. Black female identity as a part of community and the black female community as a whole are equally intertwined. In *Paradise*, motherhood is not static in both cases of biological and surrogate mothers. However, in *Rape of Shavi* motherhood is always
nurturing irrespective of blood ties or any other superficial difference. In both the novels, the bonding present among black women heals and nurtures the spirit of survival as well as preserves peace and harmony unlike the destructive nature of black men’s pride and violence. In other words, black women’s wisdom inflict unity by overcoming differences and challenges while black men’s pride blow more tension and violence among the entire community. Nonetheless, racism and the sense of ‘ours’ have different connotations in both *Paradise* and *Rape of Shavi*.

As the thesis reveals, according to Buchi Emecheta, the long process of female subjectivity starts from the social conditioning since childhood as a girl child. It is soon followed by her roles as a wife and a mother within marriage. And finally, from the traditional patriarchal point of view, her whole existence becomes full-circle as a complete woman which is wrapped around the much idolized ‘ideal motherhood.’ In the context of black woman’s subjugation, Emecheta has elaborated her opinion on the social and psychological conditioning of a young girl child in an article entitled “Feminism with a small ‘f’.” She says:

In most African societies the birth of a son enhances a woman’s authority in the family. Male children are very, very important…. From childhood, she[the girl child] is conditioned into thinking that being the girl she must do all housework, she must help her mother to cook, clean, fetch water and look after her younger brothers and sisters. If she moans or shows signs of not wanting to do any of this, she will be sharply reminded by her mother; ‘But you are a girl! Going to be a woman!’ (Biswas 1998: 76)
The family is considered the most important unit of society. Its worth is proved in a most unusual manner in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and Emecheta’s *The Family*. In both the novels, the focus of both writers is the worst case scenario of a helpless and most vulnerable black girl under a damaged parenthood caused by racism. The family is distorted when the mother is dumbstruck by false concepts of white beauty. In fact, she denies her own daughter and indirectly forced the latter to negate her own existence as a consequence. Similarly, the damaged father finally rapes his own daughter in his mental and emotional void.

Fortunately, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison has introduced the MacTeers couple who are strict and yet supportive parents for their two daughters, Frieda and Claudia. They are smart and caring enough to teach their daughters the survival tactics against challenges of race, class and gender. On the contrary, the Breedloves are failure as parents. Pauline and Cholly are destructive and not nurturing as a mother and a father for Pecola and Sammy equally. But there are two sides of fatherhood and motherhood. Cholly’s free love in the form of lust destroys Pecola completely while Mr. MacTeer’s protective side gives security to Frieda after her molestation incident. Likewise, Pauline’s selfish and falsely glorified sacrifice which damages the vulnerable Pecola is opposed to Mrs. MacTeer’s strong and yet nurturing side of motherhood. In *The Family*, Wilson’s lust shatters Gwendolen; but luckily Sonia’s ignorance and jealousy does not last long and the mother-daughter reconcile after the truth reveals itself in the form of Gwen’s baby, Iyamide. However, there is one basic difference found in the two novels. Morrison has not shown any particular preference given towards male child unlike Emecheta’s characters who represent traditional African society accustomed to giving boys special preference and treatment.
The thesis, here, by way of analysis explores that the next role of a black girl child is being a wife within matrimony. In Morrison’s *Sula* and Emecheta’s *Double Yoke*, a black woman’s choice and helplessness regarding marriage are the double-edged sides of social obligation and not necessarily a free individual choice. In *Sula*, Nel eventually assumes the traditional role of an ideal wife and later embraces motherhood after marrying Jude. Ironically, Sula insists on making herself by rejecting the social norms of marriage and motherhood. As a consequence, she is branded and rejected by the Bottoms. Similarly, individual choices of women are not appreciated in *Double Yoke*.

However, in both the novels, the ‘New Woman’ who is educated and independent is treated as a social threat by the traditional patriarchal society because of her individuality. Under such narrow-outlook, it is obvious that the pressures of being ideal woman, mother and beauty are universal truth. As a result, the self-identity of woman is put under jeopardy and chaos. The worst part is that there sprout distrust, jealousy and bad-mouthing among women against one another while men are mere spectators. Another significant feature is the treatment of ‘women’s sexuality.’ In *Sula*, the concept of ‘race’ is the yardstick to determine the hold of patriarchy unlike ‘virginity’ which controls the choice of both marriage and motherhood in *Double Yoke*.

Nevertheless, the vital fact in the treatment of marriage for all women is that there is no choice even if any woman dares to make an independent personal choice. Nel in her traditional choice and Sula in her radical choice are sufferers. On a paradoxical note, Nko is an exceptional case to choose both motherhood and career. And luckily, she still manages to get rescued by Ete Kamba in *Double Yoke*. 
The thesis, in continuity, discusses that the most glorified and anticipated role of a woman is attaining motherhood. Without children a woman is never considered complete. Unfortunately, in both Morrison’s *Beloved* and Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, ‘motherhood’ and ‘barrenness’ have different interpretations dependent upon situation and marital status. In fact, motherhood is questioned but not fatherhood which is a double standard encouraged by patriarchy. Baby Suggs because of her eight children from different fathers is not favored and moreover doubted. But Sethe has no such issue because she has four children with Halle in *Beloved*. On the contrary, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego is so desperate for motherhood that she becomes suicidal when she loses her first child unexpectedly. The baby boy was indeed a living proof of her fertility. Yet, it’s a pity that all fathers are absent figures while their love for the children are conditional as opposed to mothers who are completely dedicated physically, emotionally and financially to their children.

In addition, there are also contradictory states of reality. One important fact visible in *Beloved* is the (re)interpretation of rape and radicalism. Here, Sethe’s motherhood, Halle’s manhood and Paul D’s self-identity - all are raped by the whites. And in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Adaku who creates ‘New Women’ in her two daughters who are educated and independent is unconventional by chance and not by choice. Her bold choices to become a prostitute and also to educate her daughters did not come naturally. Actually, her perspectives totally changed only after repeatedly getting humiliated and suffering after her only son’s death.
Thus, after the detailed analysis of the major ten novels from each author and a vigorous comparative study of the portrayal of black female identity in the novels, the conclusive findings are:

1. The double standards practiced in patriarchy which are pointed towards black women are universal. But the bonding of black women during their sufferings is also universal.
2. The concept of ‘ours’ is different for men and women. For men it is pride but women’s wisdom is all about survival and peace.
3. There is a very special bond between mother-daughter that forms the foundation for the development of the daughter’s self-identity and self-realization.
4. Black women suffer in both choices of tradition and individuality. Race and gender are the tools of patriarchy to subjugate and control them.
5. The much glorified ‘motherhood’ is actually false. Women pay too much in the role of ‘mother’ while fatherhood is never questioned for denial or negligence of duties.

Indeed, this thesis explores that the novels by Toni Morrison and Buchi Emecheta, in their respective manners have dealt women’s issues as part of the ‘double consciousness’ experienced by black women. Morrison’s outbreak on gender issues comes along side racism where their combined effect forms the basis to (re)interpret African-American long history of denial, suffering and silence. Emecheta’s concern upon gender is heavier than racial discrimination. However, it is no surprise that Morrison is more aggressive during her description and discussions of women’s sexuality which are filled with vivid and passionate encounters. Emecheta is more conservative and traditional in
this case; and so she is silent towards radical forms of women’s sexuality like ‘lesbian’ relations. However, she also manages to strike a very controversial point against useless traditions in her treatment of ‘virginity’ and its double standard.

In addition, an important difference between these writers is the treatment of marriage. Emecheta is not opposed to ‘polygamy’ as for her it is a necessity or a burden depending on the tradition and need of the hour. But Morrison’s novels have free-love but not polygamy. In the context of the treatment of community’s role, Morrison portrays both aspects of community – nagging and shallow alongside nurturing and healing. But for Emecheta, community is the most essential part of women’s existence and survival. And finally, she supports the significance of education in women’s emancipation whereas Morrison embraces the insight of women’s mutual understanding and cooperation for the survival of women in particular and black community in general.

What is more, the similarities and differences found in the novels of Morrison and Emecheta reveal a striking point. Both writers experienced different types of diaspora. Morrison inherits the history of ‘first’ African diaspora which is based on the slave trade across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. But Emecheta is more a part of Robin Cohen’s term ‘deteriorialized’ diaspora which is linked to postcolonial independent states and their ‘travelling culture.’ In other words, this most recent form is associated with global economy as “[it] permits greater connectivity, the expansion of enterprises and the growth of new professional and managerial cadres, thereby changing but creating new opportunities for more diasporas” (Cohen 2008: 141). Further,
Emecheta has very clearly talked about the link of African and African-American women writers in her interview with Ogundele:

The link [between African and African-American female writers] is that theirs is the next stage. We deal with the Pan African situation that we experienced while theirs are the interpretations over generations. They get their secondary ideas from Africans who have lived in the States for a long time or through books written by Africans. (Umeh 1996: 451)

Finally, this comparative study of black female identity in the novels of Morrison and Emecheta brings out black woman’s discovery and realization of the challenges in her quest for ‘self-identity’ and ‘self-realization.’ Her identity does not end simply as a daughter, wife and mother. As a black girl she needs to strongly respect herself and her identity through proper nurturing provided by education and parental support and protection. In the case of marriage, it should be her choice and this personal choice should be acknowledged and respected by her community. Moreover, motherhood should not be falsely glorified as ‘thick love’ can destroy or kill her physically as well as emotionally.

In fact, both the writers are important both as individuals and as a part of the nurturing women’s community. In their works, the quest for black female identity is vividly showcased towards a leitmotif. The black women are meticulously exposed to oppressions of race and gender followed by classism which result into destruction of their dreams and aspirations. Yet, there is room for realization of unpleasant truths that challenge their identities. Nevertheless, they are capable of bringing reconciliation of their adversities to ignite the fire to light their paths in their quest for true self-identities. Indeed, both Morrison and Emecheta have successfully portrayed that in their quest they have rejected
not only ‘white’, but also ‘male’ created norms of living. As such, the black ‘New Woman’ is the phoenix of black woman’s (re)discovery of her true self as an individual as well as a part of a strong black community. To say the least, in their quest for black female identity the two writers overall (re)define themselves by way of exploring the heart and the matter.