

“AIN’T THAT THE SAME?”: INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE SUPPLEMENTS IN TONI MORRISON’S *SULA*.

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ABSTRACT: This article aims at discussing what happens when the concept of the “supplement”, as discussed by Ki Namaste (1994), is interfered by intersectionality, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). More specifically, this article establishes a dialogue between the theory of intersectional feminism and deconstruction by analyzing an excerpt from Toni Morrison’s *Sula*. This work shows how an argument between the characters Nel and Sula relates to the theory of intersectionality by illustrating the ways in which both gender and race issues shape black women’s experience. Moreover, this investigation argues that Sula’s interpretation of her own experience of race and gender relates to the concept of the “supplement” because she exposes how traditional (white, male) notions of womanhood are flawed and allow the concept “men” to be supplemented. This analysis suggests that Sula exposes how the meanings imposed upon gender are blurred and socially constructed, contributing to their reinterpretation and questioning. From this perspective, this article argues that Sula (subconsciously) engages in deconstruction by breaking with structuralist binary thinking and showing how this line of thought is questionable. Furthermore, this analysis points out the belief that gendered conceptualizations and impositions about womanhood and manhood are “always already” racialized. Finally, this article argues that, for Sula, the intersection of multiple forms of oppression gives her the possibility of agency, which indicates that “intersectionality” and “agency” seems to be somewhat intertwined.

KEY WORDS: Intersectionality; Feminism; Deconstruction; The Supplement.

RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir o que acontece quando o conceito de “suplemento”, como discutido por Ki Namaste (1994), se relaciona com o conceito de “interseccionalidade”, termo cunhado por Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). Mais especificamente, este artigo estabelece um diálogo entre a teoria do feminismo interseccional e a teoria de desconstrução, através da análise de um trecho do romance *Sula*, de Toni Morrison. Este trabalho ilustra como uma discussão entre as personagens Nel e Sula se relaciona com a teoria da interseccionalidade, revelando os diversos modos pelas quais gênero e raça moldam a experiência das mulheres negras. Além disso, esta investigação argumenta que a interpretação de Sula de sua própria experiência como mulher negra se relaciona com o conceito de “suplemento”, porque ela expõe como noções tradicionais (masculinas e brancas) de feminilidade são falhas e permitem que o conceito “homem” seja suplementado. A presente análise sugere que Sula expõe como os significados impostos pelo gênero são socialmente construídos, contribuindo para sua reinterpretação e questionamento. A partir dessa perspectiva, este artigo argumenta que Sula (inconscientemente) usa um discurso desconstrucionista, quebrando com a lógica do pensamento binário estruturalista e mostrando como essa linha de pensamento é questionável. Além disso, este trabalho sugere que os significados impostos sobre o que significa ser mulher e o que significa ser homem são “sempre já” racializados. Finalmente, este artigo argumenta que, para Sula, a interseção de múltiplas formas de opressão representa a ela a possibilidade de agência, o que indica que os conceitos “interseccionalidade” e “agência” podem estar interligados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Interseccionalidade; Feminismo; Desconstrução; O Suplemento.

1. INTERSECTIONALITY MATTERS

When in 1851, Sojourner Truth brought the issue of intersection of race and gender to light by asking “Ain’t I a Woman?” and questioning (white) traditional notions of womanhood,

she exposed the limited view of a sexist and racist society. Truth's questioning was present in society before and was repeated years later by different women in different social and cultural contexts. Many authors have questioned patriarchal representations of women; and black feminist criticism has contributed to shed light on how traditional (white) feminist criticism initially failed to consider all the circumstances that intersect and create human experience. For many writers, one of the most important objectives of feminist criticism is to tell new stories, to create new narratives, and to raise awareness about the many ways women have been oppressed and underrepresented.

Among the contemporary writers who have engaged in the mission of reclaiming history and telling stories of new fictional possibilities is Toni Morrison. Morrison is an African American author who has contributed to the creation of a canon of African American Literature. More than to contest the silence and erasure of African American culture and history, Morrison's works voice the concerns of those people who have been silenced and oppressed for so long. Her works help to create new narratives about black women, and it is important for black women to see themselves well represented in literature because society is influenced by literature as much as society influences it. Therefore, it is necessary to create narratives that indicate the possibility of resistance to oppression because they contest stereotyped representation of black people and offer portrayals of their complexities instead. One of Toni Morrison's works that deals with black women's representation is *Sula* (1973), the focus of this article.

Before discussing some key concepts related to *Sula*, it is important to understand the context in which they were produced. In order to understand better this context though, it is relevant to discuss the intersection of race and gender in shaping (black) women's experience. Hooks states that "race and sex are both immutable facets of human identity" (HOOKS, 1981, p.13). When hook says "immutable", she means that race and sex are everlasting parts of

someone's identity. That is, both the experience of being black and the experience of being a woman *constantly* constitute the fluid identity of a black woman and are inseparable. Kimberlé Crenshaw corroborates hooks' view and affirms that the "experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism". Crenshaw coins the term "intersectionality" and emphasizes that to ignore the influence of both experiences in shaping black women's experience is to contribute to the double oppression of black women (CRENSHAW, 1993, p.1243). Therefore, it becomes important to investigate whether *Sula* reflects this intersection. What Truth, hooks, and Crenshaw have in common is that they recognize the importance of considering someone's experience as the encounter of many different issues, such as gender, class, and race. To ignore this complexity is to contribute to the spreading of misconceptions and stereotypes, thus reinforcing and reproducing oppressive ideologies.

My main objective in this article is to offer a discussion on a specific passage from *Sula* from a feminist perspective, establishing a dialogue with deconstructive criticism. In order to do so, this article addresses matters related to the intersection of issues such as gender, race, and class, while also discussing concepts such as "the supplement", grounded mainly on Ki Namaste's *The Politics of Inside Out* (1994). More specifically, this work aims at analyzing the theory of intersectionality and deconstruction at play in the specific excerpt from the novel, raising questions about whether the concept of "agency" and the concept of "intersectionality" are intertwined. In addition, I attempt to discuss whether the concepts of intersectionality and agency can be related to Anzaldúa's concept of "new (mestiza) consciousness" present in the seventh chapter¹ of *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, "*La conciencia de la mestiza*" (concept to be further discussed in the following section).

¹ Chapter 7: La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p. 77-91)

In order to conduct this theoretical discussion, I investigated whether the passage from the novel reveals the ways in which intersectionality relates to black women's experiences. The question that emerged from this discussion was, what happens in the encounter of the theory of intersectionality and the concept of the "supplement"? Is it possible to find signs of agency in the passage? If so, how do the concepts of "intersectionality" and "agency" relate or conflict?

2. *SULA*, INTERSECTIONALITY AND DECONSTRUCTION

In *Sula* (1973), Toni Morrison questions several misconceptions resulting from binary thinking through the narrative about two girls, Nel and Sula. Nel and Sula are initially presented as very different girls, coming from different backgrounds. The two girls become best friends and find solace from racial and sexual oppression in each other, as well as stability for the social structures they inhabit. After some time, the two follow different paths in life. Nel marries and has kids and follows what could be considered as a traditional gender role for women, whereas Sula goes off to college. When many years later Sula returns to the Bottom (the black community they were both raised), she is considered a rebel, a "whore", and a "witch". After spending years apart the two friends initially restore their friendship until Sula sleeps with Nel's husband – which sets them apart for good.

Sula is isolated from the community because the community cannot accept an independent woman like her. Sula refuses to perform her "role" as a mother and as a caretaker, she also does not let men rule her life, and she pleases herself with as many men as she wants, with completely disregard to the institution of marriage. Years after their separation, Sula gets sick and, in her deathbed, is visited by her old friend Nel. They end up arguing and Nel tells Sula that Sula "can't have it all" in life. She has to abdicate something, to which Sula questions: "Why? I can do it all, why can't I have it all?" (MORRISON, 1973, p. 142). The discussion follows:

“You can’t do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man. You can’t be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don’t.”

“You repeating yourself”.

“How repeating myself?”

“You say I’m a woman and colored. Ain’t that the same as being a man?”.

(MORRISON, 1973, p. 142).

This discussion is the focus of this article, which is concerned with some implications present in their argument.

Crenshaw offers a definition of “intersectionality”, a concept important to this work because it contributes to the analysis of the intersection of gender, race, and class issues in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*. According to Crenshaw, intersectionality “denote(s) the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment and experiences” (CRENSHAW, 1991, p. 1244). In other words, for Crenshaw, black women’s experience is shaped by the interactions of race and gender. Her statement suggests that women experience oppression differently according to their different social and cultural background. Furthermore, Crenshaw’s statement indicates that race and gender intersect and assign, or at least influence, the spaces allowed to black women in society. Thus, it relates with the socioeconomic position of people in society as well. The relevance of the concept of “intersectionality” to feminism lies on the fact that it sheds light on the complexities of gender, and it questions homogenizing definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Re-visiting the concept of “intersectionality”, Crenshaw has stressed that although the concept initially focused on the experience of black women, caught in the intersection of race, class, and gender, the concept has helped to give visibility to many so-called minority groups whose needs have been erased by the privilege extended to one single dimension of experience over others (CRENSHAW, 2015). In line with this idea, Maria Lugones states that “intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are separate from each other” (LUGONES, 2007, p. 192). From Lugones’s statement, one can understand

that intersectionality implies looking at what it is not seen when one considers only one aspect of someone's experience. For Crenshaw, "intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion" (CRENSHAW, 2015). From a feminist perspective, then, intersectionality opens space for more inclusive ways of looking at experience and thinking about power relations. As Brah and Phoenix point out, it "allows a more complex and dynamic understanding" of experience, an understanding based on the idea that experience is built in "the intersections of different axis of differentiation" (BRAH AND PHOENIX, 2004, p. 75). In addition, by revealing the intersection of multiple systems of oppression, intersectionality also exposes the frailty of binary thinking because it blurs the lines often used to divide and to categorize people.

Another writer who provides a discussion on intersectionality and queer is Gloria Anzaldúa. In "Towards a New Consciousness", Anzaldúa discusses what she calls "consciousness of the Borderlands", a new *mestiza* consciousness: a result of the many experiences that form a *mestiza* experience. According to Anzaldúa: "this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with rich gene pool" (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p. 77). Anzaldúa argues that because the *mestiza* has to struggle, to tolerate, to live in a world of contractions and ambiguities caused by this encounter of different cultures, the *mestiza* develops a tolerance for ambiguity. The result is a consciousness that is not limited by binary thinking, a consciousness that is more flexible and inclusive. For Anzaldúa, the very existence of the *mestiza* questions master narratives, opens possibilities for transgression, and creates new meanings. In other words, for Anzaldúa, this "new (*mestiza*) consciousness" provides a new way of perceiving the world, which could result in a change in the way we relate to the world, and to the people living in it.

Taking into consideration the previous discussion, deconstruction needs to be addressed in order to establish a dialogue between feminist and deconstructive criticism. In *The Politics*

of *Inside Out*, Namaste defines deconstruction as a form of analysis that illustrates “the implicit underpinnings of a particular binary opposition” (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 223). According to Namaste: “(d)estruction seeks to make sense of how these relations are at once the condition and the effect of all interpretation. The play between presence and absence is the *condition* of interpretation, insofar as each term depends on the other for its meaning” (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 223). In other words, in a binary opposition, although the elements are seen as opposites, they depend on each other for their existence. In fact, opposed elements are constituted by the other. Deconstruction exposes the meanings present in power structures and how they are contradictory.

Still concerning deconstruction, Namaste discusses Jacques Derrida’s notion of “supplementarity”, a concept related to the ways in which meanings are created and reproduced in society. According to Namaste, the “(s)upplement’ suggests that meanings are organized through difference, in a dynamic play of presence and absence” (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 222). In other words, meanings can only be created by asserting their difference towards “the other”; and the supplement is created by an absence present in the side of the binary considered as superior. This “original lack” allows the structure to be supplemented, to be added and transformed. Namaste discusses that for Derrida this focus on this play of presence and absence is necessary because “it reveals that what appears to be outside a given system is always already fully inside it, that which seems to be natural is historical” (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 222). This discussion on supplementarity is particularly relevant to my analysis of the previously presented passage from *Sula* because this article aims at discussing what happens when the concept of the “supplement” is interfered by intersectionality.

Finally, before moving to the next section, a brief discussion on agency is necessary. According to Judith Butler, agency relates to the possibility of change within the constraints of society. For Butler, “if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an

agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive meditation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness” (BUTLER, 1990, p. 182). Butler draws on the concept of “agency” as “a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power” (BUTLER, 1990, p.15). As one can see, Butler’s discussion on “agency” seems to be related with Namaste’s discussion on the “impossibility of locating oneself ‘outside’ the dominant discourse” (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 224). Nevertheless, although social structures are a limitation, according to Butler, there is still possibility for agency within these limitations. From this perspective, one can understand that discourse can be used to reinforce oppressive discourses or to deconstruct them. Notwithstanding, change can only happen inside the power structures that already exist and the dominant discourses one is trying to undermine.

3. “A WOMAN AND A COLORED WOMAN AT THAT”

From a Cultural Studies perspective, identity is continuously in transformation according to the context we are inserted in and the power structures we are subjected to. For Stuart Hall,

identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices they represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (HALL, 1996, p. 222)

This notion of identity is relevant to my analysis of *Sula* because the history of slavery and racist oppression has made it a lot harder for black people to develop a sense of identity. In fact, slavery deconstructed blacks’ sense of identity. Black women’s sense of identity was even more damaged because they were also discriminated against and oppressed for being women. By looking at their experience from an intersectional feminist perspective, one can better understand the multiple forms of oppression that intersect and constitute the experience of black

women, such as racialized male prejudice and gendered racism. In addition, women's sense of identity was socially constructed from a male perspective, which naturalized stereotypical views of women as men's inferior "Other". Therefore, women's sense of identity was highly influenced by patriarchal thinking. Nevertheless, identities are not natural, not fixed, which implies that they can be transformed.

As discussed previously, such transformation would only be possible within the limitations of the power structures at work. For Nel, because Sula is a black woman she is limited twice and the space she is allowed in society is even smaller. When Nel tells Sula that Sula is "a woman and a colored woman at that" (MORRISON, 1993, p.142) she is affirming that a black woman's experience is influenced both by issues of gender and race. Thus, a black woman's experience would be created *in* this intersection of race and gender, shaped not only by both racist and sexist oppression, but also *by their intersection*. Nel's statement also suggests the importance of considering black women's experience in all its complexities. Nel seems to have internalized these dominant oppressive discourses as natural, and has conformed to the space and norms assigned to her as a black woman.

In "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences", Jacques Derrida's narrative seems to invite the reader to engage in deconstruction and to de-center structures that limit the elements inside them. Men and whites have always occupied the position of the center in society. Nevertheless, as Derrida discusses, "(t)he function of this center was (...) above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *freeplay* of the structure" (DERRIDA, 1970, p. 1). From this perspective, the positioning of men as the center has helped to privilege them over women and to keep women undermined. In a similar way, the positioning of white people as the center of Western society has also contributed to the oppression of black people, given that the creation (invention) of these centers limits the spaces those considered as margins can occupy. And although, as Derrida discusses,

the center is a myth, it has effects and it works. The dominant structures of power dictate that Sula “can’t have it all”; and Nel has learned that as a black woman she cannot change her situation, and she “can’t do it all” as well.

When Sula questions Nel and says, “You say I’m a woman and colored. Ain’t that the same as being a man?” (MORRISON, 1973, p. 142), Sula is questioning traditional binary thinking and exposing the ways in which they are limited and reductionist. In Sula’s sentence, one can notice two binaries: men and women, and whites and blacks. Sula’s statement asks for a brief discussion on traditional female gender roles. As hooks discusses, many characteristics used to describe traditional notions of womanhood (such as chastity, purity, frailty, and weakness, for instance) were in fact white concepts of womanhood—although they also apply to and affect black women. Hooks argues that those characteristics and roles assigned to “women” are representations created by (white) men to define white women (HOOKS, 1981). From this perspective, one could argue that because black women could not perform those roles (or would not be allowed to do so during slavery) and did not have those characteristics, they could not be considered as women at all, and this is exactly what Sula questions. Sula exposes this “original lack” present on traditional (white) notions of womanhood. This lack allows Sula to define herself as a non-woman; and because the meanings imposed on what it means to be a “woman” are built in contrast to “man”, Sula questions whether, because she is a black woman, she is not (by contrast) a man. One can say that, consciously or not Sula engages in deconstruction by exposing how the binary man/woman is flawed since it cannot be used to refer to all women. Sula plays with (white) sexist and racist notions of womanhood, and creates her own interpretation of what it means to be a black woman and of the spaces allowed to her in society.

This article has addressed the concepts of the “supplement” and “intersectionality” before. Nel and Sula’s argument is connected to the theory of intersectionality because it

suggests the ways in which both gender and race issues shape black women's experience. One can add the intersection of issues such as class, age, and sexuality to that discussion as well, since all of those factors influence their narratives. Moreover, Sula's reinterpretation of the intersection of race and gender in her experience as a black woman is related to the concept of the "supplement" because she exposes how traditional (white, male) notions of womanhood are flawed and allow "men" to be supplemented. Sula exposes how the meanings imposed upon gender are blurred and socially constructed. Therefore, they can be reinterpreted and questioned. Sula engages in deconstruction by breaking with structuralist binary thinking and showing how this line of thought is questionable. What is left here is to analyze what Sula's question ("You say I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?") teaches about the encounter of these two perspectives (intersectionality and deconstruction).

What does Sula's question reveal about the ways in which intersectionality interferes in the concept of the "supplement"? As discussed previously, "the supplement" refers to the organization of meanings through difference. By playing with traditional notions of womanhood, Sula exposes the flaws in the construction of gender roles. However, it is important to emphasize that Sula was referring to *black* women as men. Therefore, not only does Sula question the binaries between men/women and white/black, but her question also seems to blur the lines between gender and race, which shows the works of intersectionality. If because she is a black woman she thinks of herself as a man, one could say that, for Sula, gender is always racialized, always influenced by race. Sula recognizes that black women's oppression has been marked by their experience with both racism and sexism. The consequence of this simultaneous oppression is that the gendered expectations and social impositions on women and men are "always already" racialized. Therefore, if intersectionality focuses on what happens at these intersections, these intersecting axes such as race, gender, and class are not separate, but mutually constitutive.

Namaste discusses how the subject is constructed in relation to the sociopolitical context in which they are inserted: “(...) subjects are embedded in a complex network of social relations. These relations in turn determine which subjects can appear where, and in what capacity” (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 221). As a black woman, Sula’s experience is constructed and limited by a sexist, racist, and oppressive society. Nevertheless, she rejects traditional thinking and asserts her own space in her community. Still, in order to create her own interpretation of the meanings imposed upon her, Sula needs first to embrace (white, male) traditional notions of womanhood before she can reject them. Namaste discusses that for Derrida “(...) we are always within a binary logic, and whenever we try to break out of its stranglehold, we reinscribe its very basis” (qtd. In NAMASTE, 1994, p. 223). Sula’s question reflects this impossibility of moving outside discourse. Notwithstanding, it is in these dominant discourses that Sula finds “this original lack” that permits this reflection that allowed her independence and freedom, and led her to think of her as someone as free as a man.

Sula’s discourse, however, is also somewhat problematic, in the sense that it does not escape binary oppositions. She needs to think of herself as a man to negotiate her own independence as a black woman. However, the way she lives shows her detachment from social conventions. As mentioned previously, she refuses to assume roles traditionally associated with women, and she enrages the community by having sexual intercourse with multiple male partners, including white men². Therefore, when Sula asks Nel if being a black woman does not make her a man, Nel says that Sula would not think that if she were a mother. As a response, Sula openly questions male roles as fathers and says that if she were a mother she would really

² Sula receives the final label of evilness when men spread the rumor that Sula “was guilty of the unforgivable thing – the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion”: they say she slept with white men. “They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; and for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable” (MORRISON, 1973, p. 112). The community condemns Sula even more because of these rumors, which once again expresses their racialized sexism. The idea that a woman might be doing it voluntarily was a sacrilege to the black community. Nevertheless, black men could sleep with white women, and although it was not common, it could even be seen as empowering for them. Sula, then, breaks the expectations and shows the reader one more facet of her experience as a black woman.

act as a man (and leave her children) (MORRISON, 1973, p. 143). Namaste discusses the impossibility of locating oneself outside discourse. He exemplifies this impossibility by stating that "in efforts to define sexual identity *outside* the norm, one needs first to place oneself *inside* dominant definitions of sexuality" (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 224). Sula's statement points to this "impossibility of moving outside current conceptions of sexuality" (NAMASTE, 1994, p. 224) when, in order to assert her own identity as an independent woman she needs to define herself in opposition to what she is not: a fragile, dependent-on-men (white) woman, which for her, makes her "a man". In fact, what she points out is the need for looking at the intersection of her experience as a black woman. Without looking at her experience from an intersectional feminist perspective, one might fail to apprehend her condition in its complexities.

This idea of transgression and change signed in Sula's final question reminded me of Anzaldúa's "Towards A New Consciousness", in which she discusses how the structures created by race and gender collapse and are deconstructed by the existence of people inhabiting more than one side of the binary, people "living in the Borderlands". Although Anzaldúa's text is mostly used to talk about the *chicanas*, a dialogue can be established with the discussion developed here on intersectionality. As discussed previously, intersectionality focuses on what happens in the intersection of several modes of differentiation. Therefore, the experience of someone "living in the borderlands" cannot be understood without taking into consideration all elements that are part of this experience, which also includes geography and nationality. Because the existence of people in the borderlands questions traditional notions of womanhood, manhood, and of race as well, these people represent something new. In "Towards a New Consciousness", Anzaldúa argues that "the work of the *mestiza* is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through images in her work how duality is transcended" (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p. 80). Anzaldúa's statement indicates that the new *mestiza* should break with traditional conceptualizations and contribute to a new

perception of the world. As Anzaldúa claims, the *mestiza* not only sustains contradictions, but also “turns the ambivalence into something else” (ANZALDÚA, 1987, p. 79). Similarly, in the passage discussed here, Sula embraces the contradictions of being a black woman and asserts her own freedom in this ambivalence.

People living in the Borderlands have to learn how to deal with all the complexities that constitute who they are, and they have to learn how to deal with this cultural collision and to adapt these differences into their own world according to their experiences. Therefore, one can say that even in circumstances of racial, sexist, and other forms of oppression found by “people living in the Borderlands”, there is the possibility of change and transgression. For Anzaldúa, the very existence of *la mestiza* breaks with binary oppositions. This possibility for transgression seems to have been found by Sula as well. Historically speaking, black women were not allowed to have the same privileges white women had; and the possibility of acquiring those characteristics valued by men and assigned to (white) women were also denied to them. They were oppressed by whites and by men, their needs disregarded by both of them. Nevertheless, whereas for Nel the double prejudice is seen only as a limitation, for Sula, the intersection of multiple forms of oppression gives her the possibility of agency, of moving within these limitations and still living something new, which seems to indicate that “intersectionality” and “agency” are somewhat intertwined.

4. FINAL REMARKS

I have tried in this article to demonstrate how different authors talk to each other from their similar yet somewhat different perspectives. Some of the authors mentioned in this elaboration, such as hooks, Crenshaw, Namaste, and Anzaldúa, challenge dominant discourses. Intersectionality exposes what happens in the intersection of human experiences. The very existence of black women questions traditional binary thinking such as (white) patriarchal

notions of womanhood or of what it means to be either a man or a woman. Finally, the passage from the novel also reveals that there is room for agency. Unlike Nel, Sula believes that she can be independent and do whatever she wants. From Nel's statement to Sula's, there is a movement from victimization and acceptance to resistance and empowerment. It seems that, for Sula, because black women's experience of racism sets them apart from white women, she has the opportunity to act differently, the opportunity to change. In *Sula*, Morrison illustrates the ways in which literature can be used as a way of theorizing. Her narrative, more specifically the excerpt discussed in this work, has allowed me to establish a conversation with the theory of the intersectionality and with deconstruction as well. Deconstruction helps to understand the ways in which binary thinking contributes to the marginalization of black women, while intersectionality reveals the ways in which their experience of gender is intertwined with other factors that cannot be separated from each other. In *Sula*, however, Sula asserts herself as an independent black woman regardless of the intersection of multiple systems of oppression, and she questions the validity of fixed categories such as man, woman, black, and white.

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