



UNIVERSITE D'ABOMEY- CALAVI (UAC)

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THEME :

THE THEME OF RACE AND IDENTITY
AS SEEN THROUGH NELLA LARSEN'S
QUICKSAND: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Présenté et soutenu par :

OKE Diane Denise

sous la direction de :

Prof. Ambroise MEDEGAN

Professeur Titulaire (CAMES)

d'études américaines

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DEDICATION

My research work is dedicated

- To the Lord my guide and protector who has provided me with the grace to complete this work.
- To my beloved mother and father. I hope their dreams have come true.

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ABSTRACT

The word discrimination is applied not only to deny human beings certain rights but also to prevent them from reaching higher stages. Discrimination occurs in every field but racial discrimination is the most known. Gender discrimination follows the racial one though things are changing nowadays.

Not knowing its place in a society full of prejudice is one thing; not belonging to one race is another thing but not having a family to call its own is worse and alarming. This situation is experienced by Helga Crane the protagonist of *Quicksand*; a novel by Nella Larsen.

My research work is a critical analysis of race and identity as seen through Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. The novel *Quicksand* explores the struggle of a woman in search of her identity as she has moved from one place to another and has eventually noticed that no place suited. In the novel, the protagonist has succeeded intellectually but fails socially because she is denied her identity at her birth and she spent all her life trying but in vain to cope that predicament. Her physical appearance marks her as an attractive sexual object for male satisfaction.

My work points out the racial and the lack of identity of Helga Crane in *Quicksand*; in each place she stays; with the people she stays with or encounters. It explains how Helga Crane feels during her life; being a mulatto. In addition, it comes to compare and to contrast Nella Larsen's life and *Quicksand* to find whether *Quicksand* is an autobiography or not. Finally my analysis is to give my own opinion on this lack of identity which is the source of problems and a den of iniquity for Helga Crane.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Literature is a means that helps to enlighten any social, political and economic problems of a country or of a community of people. Depending the period, literary publications are the mirror of the situations viewed by a country, except poems and love stories.

However, themes which are developed in literary writings are related somehow to humans at a social, political and economic level. In the field of literature, there are various kinds of writings. Among them, we have novels, short stories, poems dramas etc...

My research work is focused on a novel entitled *Quicksand* and written by Nella Larsen; an African American woman and writer. Well conceived and well written, *Quicksand* is one of the novels of the Harlem Renaissance period. This period of time was glorious and more favorable for New Negroes to express themselves; to denounce bad habits and to show the world their abilities and capacities of creativity. The nineteenth century was a time of expression to the former slaves but unfortunately, the society was divided between the Black and the Whites.

The novel deals with the historical realities of Harlem in the 1920's and shed a bright light on the social world of the black bourgeoisie. It's greatest appeal and achievement however is not sociological but psychological. As noted by Debora McDowell⁽¹⁾ comprehensive introduction on the novel, Larsen takes the theme of psychic dualism so popular in the Harlem Renaissance fiction to a higher and more complex level, displaying a sophisticated understanding and penetrating analysis of black female psychology.

From this comprehensive introduction, it is clear to recognize that Nella Larsen reveals in her novels the realities viewed by the mullatoes and all the blacks alike during the Harlem

(1) Deborah, M cDowel. *The Collected Fiction of Nella Larsen*, 1992

Renaissance. That is why most Black women's writings of that time have been shaped by a unique literary inheritance; by the challenges faced; and by day to day experience. The inheritance is so rich that it is not only rooted in written literary models but also in other creative arts such as music, theatre, sculpture, blues, aesthetics and their traditions of spirituals. And this explains the reason why in these black women's writings, we find many autobiographies. However, these women's writers reshape and redefine their inherited formulae by defying every attempt to enslave or diminish them or their self expression in any way. They liberate themselves from stereotyped views of black womanhood and define their own experience. Nella Larsen's work contains an overall view of a black world which once have existed but only in a female's perspectives.

My choice of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* is not a fortuitous one. The novel offers an example of a woman who is confronted with racial problems and who takes long to find her identity. In the novel, the protagonist suffers a lot her miscegenation and her lack of paternal roots since her childhood; what creates a veritable instability in her life. She is psychologically disturbed and never finds a place to stay comfortably and call her own. Her main problem is her lack of identity and her difficulty to integrate a proper race.

The main purpose of my research work is to define how the black women and especially the colored ones viewed the racial prejudice during the post war time. I also put a stress on how being "an other" among the races can be contrasting. Through this study, I would like to draw the importance and the duty of parents and relatives in the children's life. The study also contributes to stop the bad judgments of Whites on Blacks on the basis of skin color.

My work will be limited only to the struggle of the protagonist to find herself and to have a belonging. I take into account social sciences such as history and psychology. The work is divided into three parts. The first part is a literary review and some information about the writer Nella Larsen. The second part defines the question of race and identity in the novel. The third part is a critical analysis of identity and racial factors. Each part is composed of two chapters.

Part I: Literature Review and Background of Nella Larsen

The first part of my research work deals about what should be known about the novel *Quicksand*, her author Nella Larsen, the trend of the period of writing and the meaning of my topic race and identity as seen through Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. In addition, it helps to explain the concept race and identity in literature and race and identity after the abolition of slavery.

Chapter one: Literature Review

In the pursuit of my thesis, I judge useful to set about what is race and identity.

I-) Race and Identity

According to the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*⁽²⁾, *Race* is a noun which stands for a group, especially of people, with particular similar physical characteristic and considered belonging to the same type. It refers to the subdivision of human species and we distinguish three types of *race*: the whites, the yellows and the blacks.

Identity is a noun which says who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which make them different from other. It is the connection which exists between two or more people or things which have a perfect similarity.

II- Race and Identity's concept of authors

In Biology, *Race* is derived from an individual's physical features, genes pool and character qualities. Using these features as distinguishing characteristics, European grouped people hierarchically by physical ability and moral quality, with Caucasians as the pinnacle, followed by Asians and Native Americans, and Africans last on the racial ladder. However, looking beyond these characteristics, there are more similarities than differences between racial groups and more differences than similarities within these group.

Today, literary and theoretical manifestations of *racial identity* are discussed not in Biological terms (which may imply a racist perspective) but as a social construction, which refers to a sense of group or collective *identity* based on one's perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group. *Racial identity* seems most often, however, to be a frame in

⁽²⁾ *Cambridge International Dictionary of English. University of Cambridge, ed2003*

which individuals categorize others, often based on skin color. The use of skin color is one of many labeling tools that allow individuals and group to distance themselves from those they consider different from themselves. *Racial identity* is a surface-level manifestation based on what we look like yet has a deep implication in how we are treated. The scholar Cross's⁽³⁾ model is helpful in outlining *racial identity* as a dynamic progression, as influenced by those outside it, and in acknowledging ethnocentric and multicultural frames. Parham⁽⁴⁾ relates black *identity* directly to white people in a way that moves individual Black *identity* from the unconscious to the conscious. His model outlines a movement from an unconscious to a conscious *racial identity*. Cross, Parham and Helms⁽⁵⁾ *racial identity* models all discuss what we would describe as an intersection between *racial* perception of others (racism) and racial perception of self (racial development). Although our perceptions of others are important and act as triggers for development and consciousness, there is great value in the consideration of *racial* and ethnic *identity* for oneself and group of individuals.

III-) Race and Identity's effect on African American Literature

Racial discrimination occurs in African-American literature which is the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of African descent. It begins with the works of such late 18th-century writers as Phillis Wheatley. Before the high point of slave narratives, African-American literature was dominated by autobiographical spiritual narratives.

African-American literature reached early high points with slave narratives of the nineteenth century. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's was a time of flowering of literature and the arts. But this was not ready made. African Americans struggle a lot to impose their works.

(3) Cross, W. E., Jr. *Toward a Psychology of Black Liberation: The Negro to Black Convergence Experience*. Black World, 1971

(4) Parham, T. *Cycles of Psychological Nigrescence. The counseling Psychologist*, 1989

(5) Helms, J. E. *Introduction: Review of Racial Identity Terminology*. In J. E. Helms Ed, Praeger, 1993

Later, Writers of African-American literature have been recognized by the highest awards, including the Nobel Prize to Toni Morrison. Among the themes and issues explored in this literature are the role of African Americans within the larger American society, African-American culture, racism, slavery, and social equality. African-American writing has tended to incorporate oral forms, such as spirituals, sermons, gospel music, blues, or rap.

As African Americans' place in American society has changed over the centuries, so, has the focus of African-American literature. Before the American Civil War (1861-1865), the literature primarily consisted of memoirs by people who had escaped from slavery; the genre of slave narratives included accounts of life under slavery and the path of justice and redemption to freedom. There was an early distinction between the literature of freed slaves and the literature of free blacks who had been born in the North. Free blacks had to express their oppression in a different narrative form. Free blacks in the North often spoke out against slavery and racial injustices using the spiritual narrative. The spiritual addressed many of the same themes of slave narratives, but has been largely ignored in current scholarly conversation.

Unfortunately, while Black America was achieving a cultural peak in the Harlem Renaissance, other in America did not want to know of its development and achievement. Although the Harlem Renaissance was a high point in African American cultural history, it was not seen as such by the many non-African American who did not appreciate African American or their talents. Many in the general public did not know or believe that a Black Cultural Renaissance was going on or even possible and they insisted in treating African Americans according to long held negative stereotypes and prejudices.

It must be remembered that before and during the Harlem Renaissance period racism and oppression was common and virulent all across America in both South and North. In the 1900's through the 1930's, lynching was consistently reported although they trailed off in frequency as

time went on. Furthermore, the ordinary White American at that time regarded blacks as a source of cheap, exploitable labor, an inferior nuisance, an economic threat or an ignorant quaint comical group who deserved second class citizenship and the scorn of other. Popular artifacts and expressions from that period reveal the total ignorance of what was going on in the New Negro consciousness of Harlem and other cities. It was only until decades later that the achievement and experiences of the Harlem Renaissance were widely known and appreciated. For the great majority of Americans then, the New Negro image had not yet replaced that of the old Negro.

At the turn of the 20th century, non-fiction works by authors such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington debated whether to confront or appease racist attitudes in the United States. During the American Civil Rights movement, authors such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about issues of racial segregation and black nationalism. Today, African-American literature has become accepted as an integral part of American literature, with books such as *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley, *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, which won the Pulitzer Prize; and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison achieving both best-selling and award-winning status.

Chapter two: Background: A Few words about Nella Larsen's life and work with special reference to *Quicksand*

This chapter is exclusively devoted to Nella Larsen's life; her work and the trend of the period of writing which favored the publication of *Quicksand*

I-) Nella Larsen's life story

Nella Larsen, the author of *Quicksand*, was born in Chicago, Illinois, on April 13, 1891 as Nellie walker. She was the daughter of Marie Hansen, a Danish immigrant and Peter walker, a West Indian man of color from Saint Cross who soon disappeared from her life leaving her mother alone with Nellie who was a baby at that time. Her mother, a domestic case worker in social services married again with Peter Larsen, a Scandinavian. After the remarriage, of her mother, Nellie took her step father's surname sometimes using Nellye Larson; Nellie Larsen and finally Nella Larsen.

In the years 1907-1908, Nella briefly attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, a historical Black University.

In 1915, she got a degree in nursery. She went to the south to work at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama as a head nurse in its hospital and training school. Three years after, in 1919, Nella Larsen married a prominent physicist Elmer Imes; the second African American to get a PH.D in Physics. A year after her marriage she published her first pieces. After working as a nurse through the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918, Larsen left nursing and became a librarian. She moved with her husband to Harlem where she was in charge of the children section of the Countee Cullen Branch of the New-York Public Library. She passed her certification exam in 1923. Later in October 1925, she took a sabbatical life form for health reasons and began to write her first novel *Quicksand*.

In 1926, she gave up her work of librarian and began to work as an active writer of the literary community. Her nightmares started when was accused of plagiarism after the publication of her third short story; *Sanctuary*. In 1933, she divorced her husband and lived in alimony until her ex- husband's death in 1942. She died on March 30, 1964 in her Brooklyn apartment at the age of 72 and no one knows the real cause of her death⁽⁶⁾

II-) Nella Larsen's works

To summarize what I have drawn from the biography of Nella Larsen, I can say that the literary career of Nella Larsen was mainly influenced by her presence in Harlem with her family during the 1920's. Her first novel *Quicksand* was published in 1928. The novel deals with the problem of race and identity.

In 1929, she published her second novel, *Passing*, which dealt with issues related to experiences of mixed race women.

Her literary career didn't stop. She wrote three short stories among others *Freedom*, in 1926, *The Wrong Man*, in 1926 and *Sanctuary*, in 1930; this latter for which she was accused of plagiarism because *Sanctuary* resembled Sheila Kaye-Smith's short story "*Mrs. Adis*", first published in the United Kingdom in 1919. Kaye-Smith wrote on rural themes and was very popular in the United States.

Indeed, no plagiarism charges were proved and Larsen received a Guggenheim Fellowship. She used it to travel to Europe for several years, spending time in Mallorca and Paris where she worked on a novel about "*A Love Triangle*" in which the protagonists are whites. But the book was never published. Nella Larsen was a great writer. Unfortunately, her literary career was too short for her to express all her talent.⁽⁷⁾

⁽⁶⁾ From the biography of Nella Larsen on line.

⁽⁷⁾ From the bibliography of Nella Larsen on line.

III-) The Trends of the Period of Writing and It's Influence on *Quicksand*

A field that the Harlem Renaissance is predominantly known for is the classic thought provoking literature it rolled out during this period. Radical ideas and vigorous social expression in the literary works had an impact on the Blacks and Whites alike. Noted poets include Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes. There were various themes that were experimented with and judiciously explored. Themes that Blacks could relate to were dealt with; for instance the concept of alienation, the feelings of being regarded as downtrodden and rising from the ashes of misery. Richard Wright with his work, entitled "*Native Son*" supported the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance.

In the year 1925, a magazine named "*Survey Graphic*" published write-ups by many authors such as Langston Hughes, Jessie Redmond Fausset, Jean Toomer and poet Claude McKay. Another important literary stance achieved by the African American writers is the magazine "Fire!!" It stayed for a short period but the editions were priceless, featuring works by noted novelists and poets.

Over the first two decades of the 20th century, continuing racial injustice and widespread reports of lynching and other violence inspired a literature of protest, including the short stories, novels and commentary of Pauline E. Hopkins, editor of the *Colored American's Magazine*. The 1920's, of course, saw a flowering of African American literature based in the New-York city neighborhood of Harlem. Among the most eloquent voices of the Harlem Renaissance was that of Nella Larsen, author of the novels *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). Zora Neale Hurston, who studied at Barnard and Columbia in New-York, published early short stories during the Harlem Renaissance but would become most famous for her novel "*Their Eyes Were Watching Gods*"(1937)

Nella Larsen contributed a lot to the Harlem Renaissance with her two famous novels; *Quicksand* and *Passing*. John Hope Franklin ⁽⁸⁾ has said in his book “De L’esclavage a la liberté. Histoire des Afro-Americans” (1984) that,

...Nella Larsen attempts in *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) to explore the countless difficulties of social order encountered by young women of color who struggled to achieve their promotions in Europe like in America...

In these perspectives, *Quicksand* denounces through the character of Helga Crane, the problems faced by many colored women in a society of the 1920’s full of prejudice and racism.

IV-) A Reference To *Quicksand*: Summary of the Story

Nella Larsen first novel *Quicksand* tells the story of Helga Crane, a fictional character loosely based on Larsen’s own life. Helga Crane is the lovely and refined daughter of a Danish mother and a West Indian black father. He abandoned Helga and her mother soon after the girl was born. Unable to feel comfortable with any of her European-American relatives, Helga Crane lives in various places in the United States and visits Denmark, searching for people among whom she feels at home.

Her travels bring her in contact with many of the communities which Nella Larsen knew. At the beginning of the novel, Helga Crane is a first year teacher in Naxos a southern Negro Boarding school based on Tuskegee University, where she finds herself dissatisfied with the philosophy of those around her. She criticizes a sermon by a white preacher, who advocates the segregation of Blacks into separate schools, and says their striving for social equality would lead Blacks to be avaricious. Helga Crane left her teaching and moves to Chicago. Her White uncle

⁽⁸⁾ Franklin, John Hope. *De L’esclavage à la liberté. Histoire des Afro-Américains*.chap, 20 p 430

now married to a bigoted woman, who Shuns her. She then goes to Harlem, New-York, where she finds a refined but often hypocritical Black middle class obsessed with the “*Race Problem*”. Taking her uncle legacy she visits her maternal aunt in Copenhagen, where she is treated as a high desirable racial exotic.

Missing Black people, she returns to New-York City. Experiencing a near mental breakdown, Helga Crane happens onto a store-front revival and a charismatic religious experience. After seducing and marrying the preacher who converts her, she moves with him to the poor Deep South. There she is disillusioned by the people’s adherence to religion. In each of her moves, Helga Crane fails to find fulfillment. She is looking for more than how to integrate her mixed ancestry; she expresses complex feelings about what she and her friends consider genetic differences between races.

The novel also tells the tale of Helga Crane’s search for a marriage partner; as it opens, she has become engaged to marry a prestigious Southern Negro man whom she does not really love, but with whom she can gain social benefits. In Denmark, she turns down the proposal of a famous White Danish artist for similar reasons. By the final chapters, Helga Crane had hoped to find sexual fulfillment in marriage and some success in helping the poor southerner blacks she lives among. She has an endless chain of pregnancies and sufferings. Disillusioned with religion, her husband and her life, Helga Crane fantasized about leaving her husband, but never does because of her lovely children. She thought that leaving her children alone is to condemn them to her own sufferings.⁽⁹⁾

⁽⁹⁾ Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928), London :Serpent’s Tail, 2001.

Part II: The Question of Race and Identity in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

The novel Quicksand follows the exploit of an educated mixed race woman who seeks self definition, social recognition and sexual expression. She tries with a determined effort to attain a space within which all part of her identity can coexist. Unfortunately, she discovers that such a place does not exist. The question of race and identity with Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* is a permanent quest of the protagonist searching for a black female identity which is denied to all Black women at this epoch. For this reason her searching of happiness, family connection and emancipated woman failed; that is why she flies through different communities. This part talks first with the race and identity in the novel and then with the protagonist in the novel.

Chapter three: The Theme of Racial Prejudice with Nella Larsen's

Quicksand

Quicksand appears in a time period when Blacks have just been freed from the bonds of the White men's slavery and therefore were fighting to express themselves and to live as such in the White men's country. Even after their freedom, Blacks do not gain social recognitions and the racist attitudes were also strong from the Whites to the Blacks and between the Blacks themselves.

I-) The Question of Racial Prejudice with Helga Crane

In the novel, the theme of racial prejudice is strongly developed through Helga Crane, the protagonist. Helga Crane's racial identity apparently is doomed to failure because at that time, it was unacceptable that a Black and a White should have a relation and more have marriage. But it happens with Helga's mother. At her birth, her father left her mother and by so doing, he cut her child from her paternal roots. His disappearance was symbolic to the fact that he was incapable of assuming his responsibilities and giving his child an identity.

After her mother married again to a man of her own; Helga was systematically rejected by her stepfather and her stepsisters and brothers who disapprove the color of her skin and consequently her race. The parental relation that remained her finally after her mother's death is her aunt Katrina and her uncle Peter. One question that is raised when I, was conducting this research work is as follows: why do women and especially colored women have difficulty to integrate the society of the 1920's? Regarding the case of Helga Crane in *Quicksand*, who can't socialize with white people or with the Black community? These factors contribute to the image of the "tragic mulatto" she is in the novel. She ends very tragically. In the novel, she figured as an unstable person who desired self fulfillment, happiness, peace and love and wanted to be considered superior to Blacks and equally to Whites because of her mixed blood.

Her happiness must normally start at her birth, but her mother disliked her through the disappearance of her father. Karen Nilssen hated her own child and all the Blacks by pointing out the racial differences between her daughter and her, she fails to grant her daughter the recognition that would help her gain access to herself as an active subject. Through her action, her new husband and new children did the same. Helga lacks mother love and family acceptance and support. That is why she thought she was alone on earth.

Helga's fulfillment must come by the time she is growing. But as she lacked self confidence and self assurance since her childhood, she fails in her adulthood and created her own disillusion.

Peace and love will come to her if she succeeded in transcending the racial barrier and if she tries to live with the stereotype defining by men.

II-) Helga Crane and her identity problems

The mulatto woman's inability to belong to either world is well reflected by Helga Crane, the heroine of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928). Her continuous quest for happiness and her need of something, something vaguely familiar, but which she could not put a name to and hold for definite examination incites her restlessness and fragmentation. Helga Crane's dissatisfaction and asphyxiation haunts her and inhibits her feelings of being at home and with her own people. Her double consciousness and identity prevents her from belonging to either society for both were equally complicated and rigid in their ramifications. She felt that "if one couldn't prove his ancestry and connections, one was tolerated but one didn't belong"

Being "whitish" and regarded thus as more beautiful than full-blooded Black women, many mulattoes were also during the 1920's. And they constantly fight for the need of racial purity and social separation that could feed their racial pride. Their failure resulted in their damage and

damaging psyche. Helga experience this with her nearly breakdown when she was for the second time in Harlem

Apart from the quest of belonging, many mulattoes and eventually the Black women were treated as sexual object, only born to satisfy men's desires. Some conformed themselves to this stereotype while others reject. Likewise in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, Helga represses her sexuality, and her sexlessness is a mean to dispute White stereotypes about Black women's sexuality. Furthermore, the sacrifice of her emotions and sexual desires makes her leave racist America for Denmark where she channels her unacknowledged sexuality into the pleasures of consumeristic purchasing and self-displays as the wealthy Dahl's dress her in gorgeous clothes and shows off her exotic beauty to their friends". Again, in Denmark, Helga's refusal of Axel Olsen's marriage proposal displays her resistance to the distorted image projected onto Black females as primitive, savage, hot blooded and exotic; the very forces that entail Helga's denial and self-sacrifice of her own desires. In addition, Helga's rejection of the proposal echoes her disapproval of the portrait Axel has painted of her. His portraiture of Helga as a female of "the warm impulsive nature of women in Africa", but "with a soul of prostitute" selling herself to "*the highest buyer*"⁽¹⁰⁾ is for Helga not the true picture of her but of a "some disgusting sensual creature with her features"

(10) Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928) London:Serpent's Tail ,p149

Chapter four: The Question of Race and Identity in Nella Larsen's

Quicksand

In the novel, it states that in each step, Helga Crane fails in her quest for control over her own identity and body. She struggles to feel herself like a woman with a personality. And therefore, she explores the struggle of African American women to forge an identity for themselves that is free from the bonds placed on them by society.

The theme of racial identity faced by the protagonist of *Quicksand* can be analyzed through the different places she visited in the novel. Five places have been recapitulated: NAXOS- CHICAGO- NEW-YORK (Harlem) - DENMARK (Copenhagen)- ALABAMA (in the deep south)

The first place is in **Naxos** where Helga disapproves of the treatment distressed to Blacks and hates the hypocrisy of her colleagues who disapproves of her and her loving of certain colors prohibited for Blacks. She is a teacher in the school. And one day, after attending a meeting organized by a White Preacher who claimed that the Black should know its place in the White men's world, she has become revolted. After many analysis of the social environment, she realizes that life has gone out of Naxos. For her, this great community, she thought, was no longer a school. It had grown into a machine. It is now a showplace in the Black Belt, exemplification of the white man's magnanimity, refutation of the black man's inefficiency. Life had died out of it. It was now only a big knife with cruelly sharp edges ruthlessly cutting all to a pattern, the white man's pattern. She has spent only two years in this social environment and then, she feels like a person who had been for months fighting the devil and then unexpectedly had turn round and agreed to do his bidding.

She was a failure in Naxos; she repeatedly tells herself. And therefore she had no need to stay. Her fiancé James Vayle whom she does not really love and whose parents also disapprove of their relation will not be informed of her departure. Helga's lack of family disconcerted them. More they don't like Helga. So she can leave without hurting anybody

All she needs is happiness. It is a fact that she cannot define, isolate or contemplate as she could. But she needs it strongly. Another problem she faced in Naxos had been clothes. Helga loves clothes and the elaborate ones. She also loves colors like dark purple; royal blues; rich greens; deep red and so on that made her colleagues very discontent. Her clothing seems them positively indecent what she does not care. Further problem Helga hated was the hypocrisy of her colleagues, the cruelty to students, the backbiting and the jealousy. She thought Naxos had been infected by wrong habits and she had to go and experience her life elsewhere.⁽¹¹⁾

The second place is in **Chicago**. In Chicago, Helga discovers that her uncle Peter has been married. And her uncle's new wife visibly does not like her. She does not want a colored as niece.

Helga took the way to Chicago, at her uncle Peter's. At the doors she was received by Mrs. Nilssen, her uncle's new wife. After introductions, the woman told Helga that in fact her uncle is not really her uncle because her parents were not married. A passage of it is the following;

...oh, yes! I remember about you now. I'd forgotten you for a moment. Well, he is not exactly your uncle, is he? Your mother was not married, was she? I mean to your father?

.. *I- I don't know...* stammered the girl, feeling pushed down to the utter most depths of ignominy. And as if this is not sufficient Mrs. Nilssen Continued:

Of course she was not. Her clear voice held a positive note.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Quicksand*, p28

Mr. Nilssen has been very kind to you, supporting you, and sent you to school. But you must not expect anything else. And you must not come anymore. It-well, frankly it isn't convenient. I'm sure an intelligent girl like you can understand that. ---and please remember that my husband is not your uncle. No indeed! Why, that, that would made me your aunt! He is not- .

This news were very shocking and Helga became so disillusioned that she ran out of her uncle's house troubled, recalling all the words and phrases pronounced by her uncle's new wife. It was as if all the bogies and goblins that had beset her unloved, unloving and unhappy childhood had come to life with tenfold power to hurt and frighten. Helga does not know where to put his head. She was troubled because she now have lost a relative; her preferred uncle. ⁽¹²⁾

The third place is in **New-York**. Helga come and stays in New-York by the help of Mrs. Hayes-Rore. Mrs. Hayes-Rore introduces Helga to her niece Anne Grey. Anne Grey proposes to help Helga, putting her up in her big and luxurious apartment. By the help of Mrs. Hayes-Rore, Helga finds a job and a place to live. She meets people with taste and ideas similar to her own. In Harlem, Helga thought of marriage. She has projecting to marry a wealthy black man and to have a home, a car, servants, clothes and leisure. Life was sweet in Harlem for Helga. Her secretary job filled her day but her night was full of parties, theater and gathering.

As if there is something wrong to Helga's psychology, she started at a moment hating all around her; her friend, Anne, her home, the gatherings were the race problem always occurs. Helga was seriously disturbed; not only did the crowds of nameless folk on the street annoy her; she began also to actually to dislike his friends. Even the kind Anne Grey, even the gentle Anne distressed her. Perhaps because Anne was obsessed by the race problem and fed her

(12) *Quicksand*, p62

obsession. While Anne hated white people, she copies their manners, their clothes and their gracious ways of living.

Anne hated white people with a deep hatred, with a kind of hatred which, finding itself held in sufficiently numerous group was capable some day, on some great provocation, of bursting into dangerously malignant flames .

Harlem suddenly irked Helga with a great irksomeness. She wanted to be free from this content prattling of the incongruities, the injustices, the stupidities, the viciousness of White people. She is tired of the gatherings where at any time they talked about the race problem. She wonders why the race problem always creeps in;

Why, Helga wondered, with unreasoning exasperation did not they find somewhere else to talk? Why the race problem always creeps in...?

And Helga decides not to assist at any gathering; any other meeting;

life became for her only a hateful place where one live in intimacy with people one would not have chosen had one been given choice. It was, too, an excruciating agony. She was continuously out of temper. Anne; thanks the Gods! Was away, but her nearing return filled Helga with dismay.

One sultry day at her work, she receives a letter from her Uncle Peter. In the letter, she realizes thoroughly that her Uncle's wife must be considered and therefore she is to be less. Her Uncle also informs her that her Aunt Katrina wanted her and gives her five thousand dollars; what he intend to give her at his death. Helga decides then to visit her Aunt in Copenhagen where she spent her joyful childhood. She now is living New-York;

She didn't in spite of her racial markings belong to these dark segregated people. She was different. She felt it. It wasn't merely a matter of color. It was something broader, deeper that made folk kin. For Helga, New-York is full of Negroes who fought always for the pride of their race. Even in New-York (Harlem) where Helga can meet many people of her color, she thought that she is different and that the milieu is not for her. She was pleased at the beginning but now, it irked her. Every day at every time and at every gathering of the black community, they talk about race; the racial discrimination toward the one's coming from slavery. Helga is tired to hear the same topic: "race". She resumed to live New-York and to go to Copenhagen; a milieu where there were no Negroes, no problems and no prejudice. ⁽¹³⁾

In **Copenhagen**, Helga was received with a warm and gracious welcome by her Aunt Katrina and her husband; the Dahl's. The welcome was so special that Helga seems to begin a new life in her old Copenhagen. She likes it, this new life and also the way her Aunt and her Uncle take care of her. About the caring,

Helga felt herself like nothing so much as some new and strange species of pet dog being proudly exhibited. Everyone was very polite and very friendly, but she felt the massed curiosity and interest, so discreetly hidden under the polite greetings. To the visitors the Dahl's friend who came to see Helga, This girl, this Helga Crane, this mysterious niece of the Dahl's, was not to be reckoned seriously in their scheme of things. True she was attractive, unusual, in an exotic almost savage way, but she wasn't one of them. She didn't at all count. Near the end of the evening, Fru Dahl, the uncle of Helga invited Herr Axel Olsen, a painter to meet her beautiful niece. As he sees Helga he covers her with unfinished praises in Danish. His words don't mean anything to Helga who has trouble following him. When she resumed knowing more about the man who filled her

⁽¹³⁾ *Quicksand*, p 91-100.

with praises, she heard that Axel Olsen was going to paint her. Surprised as she sharing their laughs, she suddenly recounts that,

Here she is a curiosity, a stunt, at which people came and gazed. And was she to be treated like a secluded young miss, a Danish frokken, not to be consulted personally? Helga was not happy with the news. She wishes her Aunt and Uncle consulted her before accepted the painter's offer.

In Copenhagen, Helga is admired. For the Danish, she is so beautiful this brown girl, this niece of the Dahl's. The next day, she went with her Aunt and Axel Olsen for a shopping. For the occasion,

She was worn as a decoration, a curio, a peacock. Her way through the shops was an event, an event for Copenhagen as well as for Helga Crane. Her dark alien, appearance was to most people astonishment.

For her Aunt and Uncle, her presence was an occasion for them to profit of their "den sorte" creature; beautiful niece. Her Aunt chooses her clothes with delicacy. She chooses the best colors which she thought suites most to her skin. Helga first was pleased and she liked the way her Aunt and Uncle dresses her. One day she thought of marriage and sees herself stupid,

How stupid she had ever been to have thought that she could marry and perhaps have children in a land where every dark child was handicapped at the start by the shroud of color! She saw, suddenly, the giving birth to little helpless, unprotecting Negro children as a sin, an unforgivable outrage, and more Black folks to suffer indignities. She thought of more dark bodies for mobs to lynch, no, Helga Crane doesn't think of America. It is too humiliating, too disturbing; and she want to be left to the peace which has come to her. Nevertheless she is startled when on a

pleasant afternoon, while drinking coffee in the hotel Vivili, Aunt Katrina mentions, almost casually her desire of Helga making a good marriage. At this word, Helga exclaimed:

Marriage, Aunt, dear!

Her Aunt convinced marriage, you are, and she pointed out, twenty-five. But Helga continued, oh, Aunt, I couldn't! I mean there is nobody here for me to marry!

In spite of her desire not to be, Helga was shocked. Her Aunt pointed out all the young man, rich and handsome who visited the house, their position and all their goodness. It is as if Helga was pressurized. She started feeling tired of Copenhagen. It is long before she admitted that she is less happy than the first year of her arrival. A few days later, she went to a circus with Axel Olsen and other folk of Denmark in search of amusement. During this show Helga was not happy. She felt a great deception and was shocked;

Helga was not amused. Instead she was filled with a fierce hatred for the cavorting Negroes on the stage. She was shamed and betrayed as if the people on the stage have come to show off something of her that she had hidden and wanted to forge.

Later on, she is alone and then, it became quite clear for her that all along they have divined her presence and they have shown that in her was something, some characteristics different from any that they themselves possessed

And it was in this confusion that Axel Olsen came and asked her marriage and gave her a picture, the true Helga Crane. At the sight of the picture, Helga thought;

She had been, she told herself insulted. And definitely she ceased to consider Axel other than someone amusing, desirable and convenient to have about if one was careful. Therefore where she would have pleased and proud at Axel's proposal, she is now truly surprised; she was

astonished, was it possible? Was it really this man that she had thought, even wished she could marry?

She is now too amazed to discover how intensely she dislikes him; she dislikes his person, every part of her body and even the look of his irreproachable clothes. And naturally, she rejects his marriage offer and said that it was; quite unexpected.

Helga rejects Axel Olsen. She thanks him for his honor. And more gently, less indifferently, she said: You see I couldn't marry a white man, I simply couldn't. It isn't just you, not just personal you understand? It is deeper, broader than that. It is racial. Some day may be you'll be glad. We can't tell, you know; if we were married, you might come to be ashamed of me, to hate me, to hate all dark people. My mother did that.

Axel found it is a nonsense to talk about race and shame in such occasion; and, Helga being incapable of explanation, and haven't get other words to add said;

I might, have considered it once- when I first came. But, you, hopping for a more informal arrangement, waited too long, you missed the moment. I had time to think. Now I couldn't. Nothing is worth the risk. We might come to hate each other. I have been through it, or something like it. I know. I couldn't do it. And I'm glad. At the end of these words, she said formally to Axel: Good afternoon, it has been a great honor.

A tragedy, Axel corrected and tempted to calm her but Helga seems not to regret her decision. After all, Axel said and quite solemnly; that though I don't entirely understand you, yet in a way I do too. I think that my picture of you is after all the true Helga Crane, Therefore a tragedy, for someone, for me, perhaps.

Helga remembered the picture and thought she is glad to have refused Axel. Looking at it, she said; a tragedy, my picture is, after all, the true Helga Crane. Vehemently she shakes her head

and said aloud: It isn't, it isn't at all. Helga shows the picture to everyone in the house and remark that nobody likes the picture and she concludes that anyone with half an eye could see that it wasn't her. She thought she was different; but she lies to herself. Why doesn't she accept to marry the painter and be happy in Denmark?'⁽¹⁴⁾

The last place which characterizes Helga crane's journey in *Quicksand* is the South again. Not in Naxos, but **in the Deep South in Alabama** State; an agglomeration called the "woods". Helga comes in this town as Mrs. Green; the wife of Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green, the preacher who converts her in an apostolic church, the day she gets out of her hotel's room and wanted to put on end to her life in a foolish way. Helga marries the Preacher the day after and the couple establish themselves in the woods where Mr. Pleasant Green is a pastor to a scattered and primitive flock. With the Reverend, Helga willingly, even eagerly, left the sins and temptations of New-York behind her. She thinks that it is the right time for her to get married and that, this time will last. With the churchgoers, Helga shares, her sense of beauty; what she considered the more appropriate clothing and her sense of improving their homes. She was appreciated and she was even pleased because everything contributed to her gladness in living and so for a time she loved everything and everyone. Among the women of the church, she doesn't gain the respect of Miss Clementine who adored the pastor and who would like to marry him.

After the first exciting months Helga became pregnant and gave life to two boys twins. Short after, another girl; three children in the short space of twenty months. She became very tired because the children used her up. She was always sick and she could care for her house and her husband. Waiting for the fourth baby's Helga becomes desperate and hate her husband who asked her to be more faithful and that children are act of God, this husband who is only present during

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Quicksand*, p 102-152.

her pregnancy. Short after, the fifth child is coming and has almost killed her. Her marital life now is composed of a chain of pregnancy. The imposed identity men's put on women's that she refused from Naxos to New-York has finally caged her up when she married the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green.⁽¹⁵⁾

Analysis of this last place

Helga's religious conversion, thinly veiled as sexual consummation, mirrors the symbolic descent she will experience after the conversion; a miraculous calm came upon her. Life seemed to expand, and to become very easy. Gradually the room grew quiet and almost solemn, and to her time seemed to sink back into the mysterious grandeur and holiness of far-off simpler centuries. The last chapters reveal the cruel irony of Helga's hope for an easy, simpler life. Helga's religious experience prompts her to seduce and then to marry the Reverend of the church out of the confusion of seductive repentance. By revealing the rashness and foolishness of Helga's marriage, the novel critiques Helga's need to legitimize her sexual encounter with Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green. Helga Crane was married to the Reverend, that rattish yellow man who had kindly, so unctuously, proffered his escort to her hotel on the memorable night of her conversion. With the Pastor, Helga willingly, even eagerly, left the sins and temptations of New-York behind her. Helga marries the Reverend not out of love but out of guilt for her sexual experience. Thus, Helga finally succumbs to marriage, which void of love, deprives her of agency. She tries to find meaning in her life outside her status as the preacher's wife but in the end yields to the societal pressures to bear children and sacrifice her autonomy. Helga's repression as a wife is punctuated only by the intense pain of repeated and dangerous childbirth.

⁽¹⁵⁾ *Quicksand*, p 160-240.

That last setting of the novel depicts Helga's denial of sexual agency and exploitation as a child bearer. At the end of the novel, it is made clear the victimization of Helga who becomes a victim of a system in which procreation takes precedence over a woman's pleasure.

Part III: A Critical Analysis of Identity and Racial Factors

In the third part I make a deep analysis of the fate of Helga Crane in *Quicksand*. The analysis explains how and why she fails continuously in her quest of self-fulfillment and belonging. In addition, I try to find the relation between Nella Larsen and *Quicksand*.

Chapter five: An analysis of imposed identity: Helga Crane, a failure of rejecting an imposed identity.

This chapter makes a deep analysis on Helga's long search of identity. It depicts Helga's psychological status in *Quicksand* and reveals how being "an other" among one's people can be contrasting and difficult to manage if one doesn't know where to belong. A man should be aware of its origins whatever the situations. It helps to have self confidence and to gain respectability. Helga's search illustrates three complications associated with establishing one's identity:

- First; that navigating the racial line between and among Black and white is liminal and suspended;
- Second, that an unstable childhood can create a lack of clear identity and belonging
- Third, despite racial identities, motherhood is the most difficult, if not impossible, identity to escape. I learn from Helga's experience that her identity as "an other" is imposed and unacceptable to her.

Helga tries on many identities with fleeting satisfaction; among them are teacher; niece; black woman (among both Black and white communities) and wife (mother).

As a teacher, she experiences life among Blacks in the south who seems content to live white imposed traditions and structures. **As a niece**, she is both rejected and accepted by her white relatives, neither of which satisfies her yearning to belong. **As Black woman**, she must straddle the racial line between being a mulatto among Blacks and being "an other" among whites. Yet, once she tries on **wife and mother**, it is identity she cannot escape; much like her skin color. *Quicksand* explores the many complications of racial identity, and female identities. This chapter explores the treatment of identity, both African American and Female, through the character of Helga Crane.

As a mother and wife,

For Helga, Motherhood is partly impossible to escape because of its ties to religion. As wife and mother, Helga's motherhood is a result of her religious conversions and the two identities demand the same adherence to give up one's identity in order to find it. The song Helga hears in the church as she first experiences religion says; "*Less of self and more of thee*" which is similar to the scripture in *Mathew chapter 10 and 16*, which contains the admonition to lose one's life for the sake of Christ in order to find it.

After Helga's long search for her place in the world, this idea is comforting and she succumbs to its message. Previously, she has sought after self and has not found a satisfactory image; therefore; her conversion to Christianity seems to be the answer. Religion promises to free her from the restraints of a male imposed identity. The church goes call her a "*scarlet woman*" and say, "*come to Jesus, you pore los Jezebel*". For Helga to be prostitute, she must first be the object of a man's desire and therefore assume the identity expected by men for women. Religion promises to rectify this, with the reverend saying, "*Let him that is without sin cast the first stone*" She finds herself an equal ground, a place where everybody has undesirable identities and where these can be rectified. Yet, religion ultimately strips her of freedom, imposing marriage and patriarchy. This is best controlled and reinforced by motherhood, imposed by Reverend Pleasant Green. Yet, Helga's conversion takes time. At first she is disturbed by the "*Bacchic vehemence*" and the "*Frenzied women*" It seems to her an "*unknown world*" that she feels she must escape. Instead, she watched and listened, and gradually a curious influence penetrated her; she felt an echo of the a weird orgy resound in her own heart; she felt herself possessed by the same madness; she too felt a brutal desire to shout and to seeing herself about .This description is not unlike sex, a connection she has been seeking with all previous mal acquaintances throughout her search of identity. The women are "*frenzied*" and slinging themselves about. Helga feels the atmosphere

penetrate her, much like intercourse. The use of the word “*orgy*” is also symbolic. The loss of control and the search for pleasure during the sexual act is what Helga seems to be feeling during her religious conversion. This is no mistake, as Helga finds herself trapped because of sex. Helga marries Reverend Pleasant Green because of foolish seduction shortly after this religious orgy occurs. She is angry with Dr. Robert Anderson, who has rejected her, so she finds out what Reverend Green has to offer as “*a chance at stability, at permanent happiness*”. However, once she marries, she gives up her body to assure the identity of wife and mother. The identity of wife is least desirable to Helga because it is the most oppressive. After the excitement of her decision has worn off, she feels “*unconquerable aversion*” and “*that she hated this man*” She feels at his every approach she had forcibly to subdue a furious inclination to scream out in protest She wants to escape him and his imposed identity, to run away as she has previously, but she cannot because of her children. After four babies, she has lost herself, yet found nothing. It is her husband who controls her biology. He is the patriarch and she has become a non identity, someone only to service his desires and clean his home. She cares for his babies, for which, he has no responsibility despite his participation in creating them. His identity not changed in marriage or fatherhood, but hers has inalterably changed. Instead, Helga is most unhappy in the role of mother, yet she cannot escape it because of the children.

Helga wants to leave, but “*the recollection of her own childhood, lonely, unloved, rose too poignantly before her for her to consider calmly such a solution*” In addition to the past and her own difficulties with being abandoned, this inability to leave her children is in town caused by the coming of more children. The novel ends with despair; explaining that as soon as she has recovered from the difficult labor and losing her fourth baby, “*she began to have her fifth child*” . Thus it is her role as mother that prevents her from changing her circumstance, and the news of this new baby is symbolic of her inability to search for identity any longer. Emotionally, she cannot leave her children, as “*no matter how after or how long she looked at these two small sons*

of hers, never did she lose a certain delicious feeling in which were mingled pride, tenderness, and escalation She is a mother emotionally, despite this ‘ ‘ horrifying vision of procreation’ ’

More significantly, the children hold her physically captive because they continue to come. Before experiencing motherhood, Helga did not want to pass the fraught legacy of being “an other “onto her children. Before she marries, she says, “*Marriage that means children, to me. And why add more suffering to the world?*” She sees her future children as trapped by race and patriarchy before ever being born. She has experienced the life of a woman with a Danish mother and Black father. She does not want this racial confusion or lack of stability for her own children. Although she cannot escape mother hood, she can reject Christianity. She complains of being “*always so tired and half sick*” from having children, which neighbors tell her is natural and “*an act of God*”. These neighbors are in line with religious thought concerning male- female roles, and culturally women belonged in the home during Larsen’s time. During the Harlem Renaissance the majority of women, contributors to the Messenger emphasized that a woman’s place was in the home.

However, Larsen explores Helga’s inability to reconcile the unfairness of her burden as a mother with the “*compensations of immortality that seemed very shadowy and very far away*”. Her religion promises that rewards will come, yet she is “*less than content*” Losing herself physically and emotionally due to her new found religion’s precepts weighs on her sense of identity. Her religion was to her a kind of protective coloring, shielding her from the cruel light of an unbearable reality. This reality eventually captures Helga’s attention, as she becomes ill during childbirth and retreats into “*kind darkness*” .The reality of an imposed identity welcomes her back from her sickness, causing her to “*set her reluctant feet to the hard path of life again*”. She longs to reject this. She reflects on all the people she has come to know during her search for identity and realizes her dissatisfaction with her current identity as wife and mother. She sees life, “*for Negroes at least, as only a great disappointment. Something to be got through, with as best one could*”. She feels

“disillusion” and “*chaotic turmoil*” when contemplating the “*white man’s God*”. She feels she has believed “idiotic nonsense” about this God, who does not belong to her race. Her rejection of this religion is very nearly a return to her rejection of identity as a teacher in Naxos at the novel’s opening.

As a teacher in Naxos,

In Naxos, Helga is a teacher at a school for black students; the conditions are unbearable to her because they are imposed by white values and traditions.

Many scholars note that “Saxon” is the reverse of Naxos but more importantly is the symbolism in the way the school is run. The school’s students and teachers are “*herded into the sun baked chapel to listen to the banal, the patronizing, and even the insulting remarks of one the renowned white preachers of the state*” In this environment, “*Naxos Negroes knew what was expected of them*” The preacher also “*sincerely hoped ... that they wouldn’t become avaricious and grasping*” and spoke to them of “*contentment*”. His purpose is to keep the blacks in their place in white, southern society. The school adheres to this “*white men pattern*” Helga rejects this pattern and this imposed identity. After leaving the school, she goes in search of a place where she can reside as both Black and white.

Helga’s identity as a teacher can also be juxtaposed with her identity as a mother. Of the South, she calls it “hardly a place at all. It’s more like some loathsome, venomous disease”. She also dislikes her colleagues and the environment of hypocrisy and backbiting. She describes any work place environment, where employees compete for promotions. A scholar interested in radical American literature. Anthony Dawahare ⁽¹⁶⁾ describes Naxos as a “*Machine*” associated with a “*capitalist industrial enterprise*”. He suggests that Helga seeks reprieve from the

(16) Dewahare, Anthony. *The Gold Standard of racial identity in Nella Larsen’s Quicksand and Passing*. 20th century literature. Web 29 June 2011

environment because it is “*repressive and exploitative work relations legitimized by notions of discipline and service*”. It is a corporate mentality that Helga dislikes, symbolic of her dislike of being a working woman. This can be compared with her role as mother, which also requires discipline and service. In present day, women tend to choose between these two identities or struggle to combine them. Of this struggle, Matthew Henry ⁽¹⁷⁾ in his feminist analysis of popular adult cartoon the Simpsons says: *women are in a conflicted state, torn between very traditional and stereotypical ideas about who and what they ought to be and rather progressive and liberating concepts of who and what they can be.*

Helga is experiencing this ambivalence herself, as she takes on both roles, disapproving of her working milieu, yet arriving at mother hood and not appreciating that either. It is after Naxos that Helga’s search for identity begins, and it is not necessarily unique to her circumstance of being a woman or being African American. Identity is always changing. Although many people would like to consider themselves to be constant, they are not. Human experience demands that we reconstruct our identities according to environment, experience, social situations, and perspectives. Helga encapsulates this constantly emerging identity, described by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson ⁽¹⁸⁾, editors of journal Interfaces which explores women autobiography image and performance as follows: *What may be a meaningful identity, on one day or in one context, may not be culturally and personally meaningful at another context.*

Because identities change, it follows that they are also constructed. Human want to believe that he knows who he is and that he is in control. However, identity is subject to change and therefore construction. Russian theorist M.M. Bakhtin argues that consciousness, or identity is dialogical. This means that it is developed through our interactions with others; Helga’s self regard

(17) Henry, Mathew . Don’t ask me, I’m just a Girl: Feminism, Female Identity and the Simpsons.

(18) Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. Reading Autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2001 print.

and perceptions change as she places herself in new environments. She is, like us, essentially an actor in a play that is never complete. Because we never know what will happen next, we must shift who we are to continue to play a role in the larger world. This struggle for identity is well illustrated through Helga, who seems to be a representation of Larsen herself. Larsen's own mother was a Danish woman and "her father was from the virgin Islands, formerly the Danish West Indies". Their marriage, if there was one, did not last, and Nella became a step-daughter. Cheryl A. Wall ⁽¹⁹⁾, a specialist in black woman's writing, notes: *Along with the alienation she experienced at home she was ostracized at school.*

Thadious M. Davis ⁽²⁰⁾, Larsen's biographer, point out that Larsen had *experienced as a stigmatized female child... who had keenly felt isolation and disconnection throughout much of her youth..* From these beginnings, Larsen made sense of herself; Helga, seemingly autobiographical, also investigates her identity. Of this exploration, Cynthia Merrill ⁽²¹⁾ compares autobiography to the Lacanian mirror stage, in which a child recognizes itself as other and starts to develop an independent identity. *Quicksand* is likely an attempt by Larsen to make sense of her own experiences as a daughter of a white woman and of a black man. Merrill suggests: *Seeking to connect the past to the present, simultaneously subject and object in her own discourse, the autobiographer inevitably confronts her doubleness as well as her identity.*

. Helga experiences this in her separation from family and her search for identity. Finding identity proves difficult for Helga because of her family. "*If you couldn't prove your ancestry and connections, you were tolerated, but you didn't belong*". One of the key features of Helga's identity is that she has no family. She is a young woman, capable of working as a teacher and

(19) Wall, Cheryl A. *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*. India Up, 1995 print.

(20) Davis, Thadious M. *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance*. 1994 print

(21) Merrill, Cynthia. *Mirrored image*; 1985 print

supporting herself, but without a family, “*it was presumptuous of her to be anything but inconspicuous and conformable*”.

Among Blacks (As a Black woman),

This truth is revealed when Helga tells her new employer Mrs. Hayes-Rore, “*I haven’t any people*”. Mrs. Hayes-Rore has a hard time believing this and responds that, “*Everybody has people, Miss Crane. Everybody.*”. To this, Helga spills out her story, explaining passionately, tearfully, incoherently her family situation, which includes “*race intermingling and possibly adultery*” These confessions embarrass Mrs. Hayes-Rore for “*these things are not mentioned and therefore they do not exist*”. The social propriety of the time puts Helga in a difficult position. She does not have people to whom she can look for support or good breeding, yet if she explains her situation, others do not want to hear it. Not only did people pretend that such shocking things did not exist, but Mrs. Hayes-Rore ignores Helga’s tearful outburst and changes the subject. It is as if Helga does not exist, for she cannot acknowledge her own beginnings. Her lack of people creates a lack of identity and separates her from proper society. This complicated sense of identity also becomes clear in Helga’s confrontation with Dr. Anderson when she leaves Naxos. His speech at first mollifies her desire to leave the school; yet he appeals to her “*dignity and breeding*”. For Helga, these words do not evoke pride, but anger. Anderson, in an attempt to qualify what he said as an appeal to Helga, who has told him that she has no family, states that “*Financial, economic circumstances can’t destroy tendencies inherited from good stock. You yourself prove that!*”. This further distresses Helga who replies “*the joke is on you, Dr. Anderson. My father was a gambler who deserted my mother, a white immigrant. It is even uncertain that they were married*”. To her, these words confirm her inability to remain at Naxos because she is different. She feels as if she does not belong because her background doesn’t lend itself to conformity to the “*white*” standards imposed on the Blacks of the school.

As child,

Helga's beginning is rejected as proper. Not only does society reject Helga's beginnings as proper, but her childhood creates a lack of identity for emotional reasons as well. Her childhood is not only marked by a white mother and a Black father, but a step-father and step-siblings who displayed her "*savage unkindness*" because of Helga's skin color. As a result, "*the tragic cruelties of the year had left her a little pathetic, a little hard, and a little unapproachable*". I contend that such years also left her uncertain of who she was or where she belonged. She didn't fit into her family, and once her mother died she was left to the care of her white uncle Peter, who sent her to "a school for Negroes". She has never known happiness or security as a child; therefore, discontent for which there was no remedy crept upon her. This discontent is evident throughout Helga's search for identity; she never finds a place in which she can relax or appreciate herself and her place in the larger bands of society. According to Craig H. Hart, professor in the school of Family Life at Brigham Young University, children from psychologically abusive or unstable families, don't *learn how to regulate their emotions and their behavior from the inside rather than from external pressure, and that makes for a difficult adjustment to childhood.*

Helga is experiencing this difficult transition, and she does not fit in, not since her birth. As she thinks about her background, she repeats: "*Angry half truths –Angry half –*". Helga is acknowledging that what she knows and feels about her childhood are half- truth, yet it also represents her own identity, which is half black and half white. It is this line that she cannot navigate or cross without turmoil about who she is or where she belongs.

As a niece of Peter Nilssen,

As a niece, Helga attempts to create an identity connected to her white family in Chicago. Instead of a warm welcome, she discovers that her uncle has married a woman who does not approve of Helga's skin color. She rejects Helga, telling her, "*And please remembers that my*

husband is not your uncle. No indeed! Why, that, that would make me your aunt! He's not -. Mrs. Nilssen is ashamed of Helga's existence. She rejects the notion that Helga is even a relative, stripping her of her identity as a niece, and ultimately as a member of a family. Helga's uncle had always been kind, but because of racism Helga's relationship with him is interrupted. It seems she would have happily continued to play her role as niece, but it is denied her. She is not allowed to be part of her own family because Mrs. Nilssen imposes a lack of white identity on Helga.

As a colored in New York,

When testing her place in the black world, Helga learns to hide her white identity. Mrs Hayes-Rore says, *"I wouldn't mention that my people are white, if I were you. Colored people won't understand it, and after all it's your own business"*. Helga is supposed to keep half of her identity to herself because she is not like the people who surround her despite their similar appearances. She accepts this, thinking of whites as *"sinister folk"* who had stolen her birthright. Their past contribution to her life, which had been but shame and grief, she had hidden away from brown folk in a locked closet. She decided to be complicit in suppressing her identity in the hopes that she will find ease and comfort in her Harlem life. Charles R. Larson ⁽²²⁾ who has written extensively on African fiction notices that, Helga has been conditioned to regard herself as a cultural half caste, trapped between the races.

Because Helga is part of both worlds, she doesn't belong in either one; she walks like a funambulist between the two, unsure of her rightful place. She adopts this hidden identity, only to find *"restlessness"* and *"discontent"*. She finds her new friend Anne Gray, adds to this "estrangement and isolation «because Anne hated white people with a deep hatred and burning. Although Helga has adopted this black sensibility in Harlem, she cannot remove the whiteness

(22) Charles, R. Larson. *Invisible Darkness* : Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen.1993. print

from her blood. Anne's attitude disturbs Helga because it is essentially an attack against her. Among blacks, Helga is "an others" despite having brown skin. Helga feels this in Harlem, the sensation of being "othered" despite the gradation within this oppressed race of hers. This feeling of not belonging comes to denouement in a Harlem night club that gives Helga a shameful certainty that only had she been in the jungle, but that she had enjoyed it. She does not like this imposed identity of primitiveness and savagery, yet she sees those around her as fantastic motley of ugliness and beauty, semi-barbaric, sophisticated, and exotic». It is in this scene that she sees Dr. Anderson again, but he is with Audrey Denney, with skin like alabaster. Helga connects with Audrey because they are alike. They are both pale and beautiful. But Anne despises Audrey because she goes about with white people. Anne again rejects this part of Helga's identity. Anne says of Audrey's socializing with white people: *it's worse than disgusting, it's positively obscene*. However Anne's last name Gray, in Larsen's novel becomes another sign of racial ambiguity. This makes Anne's vehement hatred of Audrey and "othering" of Helga is ironic. Helga's discomfort with her race is justified; Helga too, is obscene in their eyes. Helga's existence verifies the sexual connection between the races, the mixing of black and white. In opposition to Anne, Helga feels it would be useless to tell them that what she felt for the beautiful, calm, cool girl who had the assurance, the courage, so placidly to ignore racial barriers and give her attention to people, was not contempt, but envious admiration. Helga appreciates and envies Audrey's navigation of the racial line and wishes to do the same. But the "jungle" atmosphere brings out "*anothermore primitive emotion*" when Helga sees Audrey with Dr. Anderson. She is jealous of Audrey's sexual power over the man she truly loves. Ultimately, Helga cannot create an identity to rival Audrey or to reveal her feelings to Dr Anderson. Instead, she rejects the people of Harlem and decides to leave in search of her roots.

With the Dahls,

Similar to all the colored in a white country, Helga is the only brown person in, Denmark, her mother's homeland. She arrives and smiles a little at the thought that her aunt, or any one waiting there in the crowd below, would have no difficulty in slinging her out. Yet at first, she feels comfortable among the Danish people. She liked it, this new life. For a time it blotted from her mind all else. This fleeting contentment changes once Aunt Katrina dressing Helga for social events and gatherings. In Denmark, Helga becomes savage and exotic. Aunt Katrina tells her "*you're a foreigner, and different*". You must have bright things to set off the color of your lovely brown skin. "*Striking things, exotic thing*". This attitude is opposite of what she face in Naxos with its southern, white imposed restrictions on manners. There the dean of women had said "*bright color are vulgar... dark completed people shouldn't wear yellow or green or red*". In Denmark, Helga was allowed to dress in flashy frocks and encouraged to love "*color with a passion that perhaps only Negroes and Gypsies know*". Despite Helga's pleasure in things, she is already being treated as an outsider. Helga's adornment leads to the self alienating power of consumerism. She is already different, and accentuates that through exotic dress. Aunt Katrina imposes new accessories, such as jewelry and buckles, on Helga that best illustrates this exotism. Once wearing these accessories; she felt like a veritable savage. This feeling was intensified by many pedestrians who stopped to stare at the queer dark creature .When Helga blushes because of the attention, her aunt approves, saying, "*A high color becomes you*". Instead of realizing Helga's, feeling like a strange species of pet dog being proudly exhibited, her aunt encourages such differences. Helga becomes an accessory herself, one meant to help her Aunt Katrina and Uncle Poul climb the social ladder. As to Helga's clothes, Aunt Katrina has them reduced and restructured. She dressed Helga in the prized green velvet that Helga describes as practically nothing but a skirt. Because of this exposure of her skin, similar to that of what uncivilized savages would wear in the jungle, Helga was thankful for the barbaric bracelets, for the dangling earrings, for the beads about her neck. She was

even thankful for the rouge on her burning cheeks. The accessories become reassuring because they cover parts of Helga despite her great exposure. Helga's new look is repeatedly associated with the words "*exotic*" and "*savage*". Helga is not meant to blend into her white, European upper class surrounding. Instead, she is reduced to being the civilized African, a curiosity meant to draw attention to the kindness of her aunt and uncle. Helga is unsure of her aunt's characterization of her as a "*foreigner*" and "*different*". Helga is not sure that she liked that. Hitherto; all her efforts had been toward similarity to those about her. Yet the color of her skin makes this striving impossible in Denmark. Reducing Helga to the stereotyped image of an African imposes an identity and draws the attention of Axel Olsen, a famous painter. Helga's reduced status as "*A decoration. A curio, A peacock*" catches the painter's eye, which is what her aunt and uncle were hoping He agrees to paint her portrait, which looks like "*some disgusting sensual creature with her features*". The maid hesitantly tells Helga that the picture looks bad wicked. Through Olsen's gaze, Helga is a temptress and an exotic sexual object. He does not respect who she really is, but is instead attracted by "*delight in her exotic appearance*". When she rejects his marriage proposal, his identity and instead declares that his picture of her is "*after all, the true Helga crane*". Instead of allowing her to forge an identity independent of his gaze, he imposes the alluring and savage identity upon her without regret or remorse.

This "othering" in white Denmark becomes pronounced to Helga once she sees "*two black men*" at the circus dancing and cavorting. It is as if she can see herself and the ridiculous act she has put on by letting Aunt Katrina dresses her. The men danced, pounding their thighs, slapping their hands to get her, twisting their legs, waving their abnormally long arms, throwing their bodies about with a loose case. The men act like savages, their bodies performing a primitive or uncivilized dance. Their arms are described as too long, similar to the arms of apes. These men allow themselves to be viewed as "others" rather than as part of society because of their skin color. They are conforming to white European stereotypes about what Africans should be.

Helga realizes that she has done the same, allowing herself to be viewed the way her aunt and uncle prefer, rather than forging her own identity based on who she really is. Helga crane was not amused. Instead she was filled with a fierce hatred for the cavorting Negroes on the stage. She felt shamed, betrayed, as if these pale pink and white people among whom she lived had suddenly been invited to look upon something in her which she had hidden away and wanted to forget Helga's shame and anger is not echoed by her companions. Axel Olsen drank it in as he has with Helga's first meeting with Axel Olsen; he looks her over, as if she is a statue, and decides that she will do as a model for his paintings. Helga has no control or choice in the matter. She becomes his muse and plays this role to please her aunt and uncle. She even thinks she may love Olsen, and at one time hopes for a proposal. She does not see herself as an easily conquered woman, and because Axel Olsen does she rejects him and ultimately that identity. His gaze forces this identity on her, and only does he expects this in her behavior, but he represents her as an exotic to everyone else through the portrait. When his proposal comes, Helga realizes that he does not love her, but himself. She is expected to be some sort of prize or trophy. When he offers her marriage, He moved forward putting out his arms. His hands touched air. For Helga had moved back.

After this rejection, he confirms his opinion of her by saying, "*You have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but, my lovely, you have, I fear, the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest buyer*". She feels his distance in these words and realizes that she wants to escape his imposed identity. She responds, "*I'm not for sale ... I don't at all care to be owned*". She asserts her own strength in this moment, realizing that his identity would trap her. She does not want to be exotic. When Helga rejects Olsen's marriage proposal, it isn't only a rejection of him, an amusing, if conceited, man but a rejection of "othering" and imposed identity. She rejects the label of savage. Along these lines, she also rejects slavery. She says, "*I'm not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man*". She is responding to his insinuation that she is a prostitute, but also responding to the label she has worn since arriving in Denmark. She refuses any longer to be

identified as a savage or “an other”. She rejects the stripped, naked feeling under Olsen’s direct glance. He has exerted his white, male gaze long enough, and she holds her ground decent girl. Similar to Olsen, her aunt and uncle cannot accept her rejection of their imposed identity. They are disappointed with her rejection of Olsen because of their own social loss. When Helga explains her situation to Uncle Poul, he thinks that this strange exotic niece of his wife was indeed charming. However, his approval of charm disintegrates when Helga weeps because of the distress she feels at having lost the confidence of her family. Uncle Poul sees her weeping and immediately thinks she is Charming, yes. But;insufficiently civilized. Impulsive; Imprudent, Selfish. He attributes savage traits to her because of the label he and his wife have applied to her. He does not allow a more human identity to emerge, but instead others her without actually seeing her. The excitement Denmark ebbs and Helga decides to return home to America because of sense of a sense of incompleteness. Interestingly, she makes this decision while listening to Dvorak’s new world Symphony which has wailing undertones of Swing Low, Sweet Chariot. It is as if Helga’s African American and spiritual roots are calling her home to the United States. In this longing for home, she comes to forgive her father. She understood and could sympathize with his facile surrender to the irresistible ties of race, now that they dragged at her own heart. It is this forgiveness and knowledge that allows Helga to move forward in her quest for identity as an almost sacred importance.

Helga in New- York again;

She regrets not having “two lives” or “one place” but continues to try to navigate her identity between black and white. In her second attempt at living in New York, Helga realizes, *“these were her people She is “bound... forever to these mysterious, these fascinating, these lovable, dark hordes”* Helga accepts other African Americans as part of her heritage, and ultimately she is accepting that of herself. This comes after forgiving her father because of his

facile surrender to the irresistible ties of race Helga's acceptance of her father's choices and identity should allow her to accept her own identity. This epiphany is spiritual in nature, as she describes her ties to the people of Harlem as "*of the spirit*" She also feels "*as if she had passed from the heavy solemnity of a church service to a gorgeous care free revel* However, she cannot accept her identity nor construct one because Helga's plight does not arise solely out of her racial heritage but more importantly out of her gender"

Helga's identity search continues because of her gender and consequently her feelings for Dr. Anderson. He married her Anne, and upon Helga's return, Helga knew that Anne disapproved of her. This stems from distrust between them, as Anne realizes the feelings that exist between Helga and Anderson, although nothing has happened. Anne's distrust of Helga is also the reason Anne dislikes Audrey Denney and whiteness that exotic identity attracts men, as we have seen with Axel Olsen. Anne's feelings are validated when Helga finds herself in the arms of Robert Anderson. They kiss, but anger seizes her. Helga knows why he is attracted to her; he likes her for her sensuality, just as Axel Olsen did. Although Helga wishes to accept Dr. Anderson's imposed identity, he rejects her. The next time she sees him they are looking at some examples of African carving, symbolizing their primitive attraction to one another when they are alone, Helga looks down at her hands and inspect her bracelets, for she had felt that to him would be, under the circumstances, too exposing. She is vulnerable to him as an object of desire. She does not want to be objectified, but instead want to be something special to him. This does not happen. Dr Anderson has already chosen Anne, the sensible wife with the concern for race. When Dr. Anderson rejects her, she becomes savage. "*A sort of madness had swept over*". She feels belittled and ridiculed and responds by slapping him savagely with all her might She realizes that her actions reveal too much of her feelings for him. Her anger reveals her identity, but this rejection reveals his selfishness, like Olsen. He was not the sort of man who would for any reason give up one particle of his own good opinion of himself. Helga knows that she is only an exotic object to him, just as Audrey Denney

was earlier. It is this realization and her mortification that leads her into the arms of reverend pleasant Green. Helga's relationship with men is complicated because of the identities each one imposes on her. The first man in her life imposed an identity on her from birth-for even her skin color is bestowed by an absent father. For men to impose identities on women leads to confusion and entrapment, as illustrated by Helga's journey in *Quicksand* poet and scholar Ann E. Hostetler recognizes that Helga's destiny, is shaped as much by her sex as by the problematic of race.

Helga never discovers a comfortable identity, racially or as a woman, but is trapped and can no longer go in search of self at the novel's end. In fact, she is further from discovering a place in which she is not objectified. One of the imposed identities fit, and motherhood, to which is now tied, nearly kills her. Helga's search for identity ultimately fails because of her tumultuous and possibly abusive childhood, the difficulty of finding her place between black and white racial boundaries, and the imposed identity of motherhood, from which she cannot escape. Her identity is fraught with complications that cannot be resolved. However, I can learn from Helga's experience that the tragedies of her life are unacceptable. Larsen warns us that racial and gender boundaries are difficult to navigate, but to impose restricted ideas of identity on others is immoral, unacceptable, and inappropriate.

Chapter six: Assessment of the race issue in *Quicksand*

This chapter is a kind of summary in which I enclose the struggle of Helga Crane in *Quicksand* and thus, that of Nella Larsen in her own life. I try to point out the relationship between Nella and Helga in *Quicksand*.

I-) Nella Larsen's Relation with the Publication of *Quicksand*.

Nella Larsen's first novel *Quicksand* is written during the Literary Renaissance period in which many Blacks were pregnant of ideas and creativities. Their freedom was an event and a celebration. Unfortunately, during this period; Black women especially the mullatoes were marginalized. They were seen "as branches without roots and that makes things come around them in queer ways" ⁽²³⁾.

The life story of Nella Larsen is an example of how it was difficult for mullatoes to cross the color line during the early nineteen's. I will not recall here the biography of Nella Larsen because I have already done it in the first part of my research work. What I want to do here is to show how Nella Larsen's life is related to *Quicksand*.

While reading *Quicksand* and the biography of Nella Larsen, I'm aware that their stories seem similar. Nella Larsen has born from a Danish mother a black Indian father exactly like Helga crane.

After her birth, she was abandoned by her father and lives with her mother who remarried. Helga Crane said it too in *Quicksand*.

(23) Zora Neale Hurston, *Their eyes were watching Gods*, chap 2 p 31

She was supported by an uncle, a brother of her mother name's Uncle Peter. Helga also was supported by an uncle.

From these three points, I make my first conclusion which is that Nella Larsen is counting her own life story. Taking Helga Crane as her shadow and making her reacts, talks and thinks exactly the way she had lived her life.

The story started exactly the way Nella Larsen herself wanted. She tries successfully to describe everything, every moment of her life in great detail. Nella had been in Naxos, a school she attended by the help of Uncle Peter.

She had been to Chicago, to New-York and also to Denmark .Each of these places was visited by Helga Crane in *Quicksand*. Unlike Helga, it seems that Nella had accepted this imposed identity and tried to live with it that is why she had made herself known in literature and she even is married to a prominent black doctor. In a total opposition to what can be read in *Quicksand*, Larsen ended up her life in a total isolation but not like Helga's who ruined hers in motherhood.

Maybe, throughout her life Larsen is always in search of her identity and belonging but she doesn't show it off everywhere, I mean she is not physically affected by this imposed identity (while Helga did).I suppose that Nella herself finishes this way and no one knows finally this end of her.

But it doesn't confirm that *Quicksand* is largely an autobiography of Nella Larsen.

By the way, I can accept that it is half autobiography of Nella Larsen if the term exists because the story starts exactly like Larsen's own life but ends up in a totally different way.

I can say that in the novel *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen relates some of her own personal experiences, ideas thoughts and beliefs.

Undoubtedly, the novel depicts bits and pieces of Larsen's early life. It is a story which involves an early autobiographical account of a woman whose racial and sexual confusion contribute to the unfulfilled quest of an identity,

this woman, this Helga Crane, the fictional protagonist of Nella Larsen lives for her time. Nella Larsen was a modern woman that is why addresses different women's related issues such as women's sexuality and power. Nella Larsen wrote about how male expect women's sexuality to be confined to their desires, In addition to addressing the issues of race. Larsen expressed all these thoughts and all this society's imposed restrictions in her novel *Quicksand* through Helga who is trapped by the occurrences of her own reproductively. A reproductively that she finds herself not being able to escape; she is trapped within the confines of motherhood. At the same time, Larsen addressees the issue of race also through Helga Crane, who is an illegitimate half white and half African American female who is at the same time experiencing the post civil war area. Helga's problems were not only race and class; her life is desperately revolved around the lack of socialism and extreme fantasy which is an issue that most women had in the early 1920's.

I conclude that in writing *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen is attempting to convey her reader that in American and European society in the 1920's, Black women were marginalized to such an extent that there was no place where they could truly be free. Helga's quest for selfhood is similar to many African American's search for equality in America.

In the book, I felt like Larsen crawled deeply into the skin of her character and in fact the introduction suggests that Helga is really a thinly veiled version of Larsen, and I could feel the struggle and the restlessness within Helga so deeply. So much of her conflict is bound up in her feelings about race. What I really appreciate about the story is the exploration of race and how Black people felt during this period. But even connecting strongly with her race didn't give Helga peace; nor did Nella Larsen.

The coincidence between Nella Larsen's life and Helga Crane's story in *Quicksand* is clear enough. *Quicksand* is a half autobiographical novel of Nellie Larsen. Through Helga Crane, Nella Larsen is revealing her own life experiences and the mullatoes' failure during the Harlem Renaissance. This is justifying by her total isolation after her ex- husband's death.

II-) The Assessment of Race issue in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

Helga Crane in *Quicksand* behaves as if she were the only brown complexion in the world. When she encounters Audrey Denney in New-York, she realizes that this woman is like her and she even appreciates her power over men. What Helga doesn't want to accept is the sexual object men imposed on colored women .But what was astonishing; at last, she was surrounded by it after marriage. Helga in *Quicksand* should have found her way in this community. She should have accepted herself black and live her life similar to the blacks of her generation .But she didn't , she wanted to be seen as different that is why she behaved this way in the novel , jumping from place to place, and finally found that no one suited her. Like Helga, Nella Larsen is also biracial. Mother White and father Black. Despite this fact nature has imposed on her, she lives with it and she succeeded. She went to school and even to university, where she got a degree in nursery .She married a prominent Black and Interests in reading Books, she started writing short stories and after novels. Maybe Nella Larsen too live this way her miscegenation .And she too flees from one milieu to another in search of her identity .What I appreciate with Nella , is that she had coped with it .She succeeded intellectually and socially . Perhaps, not psychologically. That is why she retired herself after her husband's death and stay in a total darkness. Apart from the nursery job she did till the end of her days, no one can tell without mistaken if she had remarried after her husband's death. Helga should have taken the example of Nella and ceased to be troubled psychologically. It is clear that it is her lack of selfhood that disturbs her through her life. If she was able to dominate this lack in her, she would have succeeded.

This stereotype used by Nella which identifies Helga Crane's generation is to denounce how female mullatoes were treated after slavery and how most of them had psychic trouble because of lack of identity. Nella Larsen has for sure a high psychology that is why she had made herself known at a higher level and denounces the bad judgment society put on mullatoes.

III-) Perspectives

The problem viewed by Helga Crane in Quicksand is also the problem of all the mullatoes during the 1920's. It is an example which shows that society must turn away certain radical restrictions to promote individual recognition, safety and happiness.

Colors must understand that their lives are in their hand and they need to redefine their roles. Race and Identity is a tool Nella Larsen used to denounce the society's eyes on mullatoes. But I hope. Things are changing. If the President Barack Obama has succeeded in gaining the "White House" in America, it is a great success for all the Colored and the Blacks alike. Racism, I hope will totally disappear one day.

CONCLUSION

In most part of the world, women are discriminated in various ways and many are still considered as homemakers and due to the fact that it was assumed that they had nothing to do with the outer world, female scholars have been in all activity sectors to change women status. To resolve their situations, and to achieve democracy, women think they must have the same right and opportunities as men to influence development at all level.

This novel by Nella Larsen explores the Race and Identity issues and Black women search of Selfhood and acceptance in a society full of prejudice on women. With her search for Identity, Nella Larsen put out the problems faced by many African-Americans during the post war time. Her novels had taken time to be published because she is a woman and a Black. In her struggle for Identity, Nella was supported by many of her fellows' famous writers and even share their point of view on race. Some are Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois.

The Novel depicts the rejection view by the colored women victims of slavery and their sexuality, looking for a place of fulfillment and a family which they call their own. These women hated being seen as a sexual object an imposed identity on them by men and more to be regarded as "savage and exotic" due to the color of their skin.

In the novel, the emphasis on color advances a thematic of race. Helga, a colored perceives herself as the consequence of a passion, an unwanted product of a temporary union between her mother and her father; the father she has never known. Through her behaving in the novel, embodied the tension between Black and White constructed as opposite in American culture. For Helga, it is an extreme case because she is separated from ethnicity and from community. Her only family connection is white. She has never known a single black person whom she could call family. And that results in her hatred for "the race problem".

If Helga in *Quicksand* attempts in spite of self fulfillment to create a spectrum through her love of color rather than an opposition, it will be a palette that she will use to unify her life rather than leave it divided.

In the novel, the theme race merges with concerns of gender, for Helga's destiny is shaped as much by her sex as by the problematic of race. The fascination with clothing and color that marks her character is an attempt to construct a female identity, to use her attractiveness as power, the object of desires. This justifies why Hazel Carby⁽²⁴⁾ calls Helga Crane the *truly sexual black female protagonist in Afro- American fiction* and noted that the representation of black female sexuality meant risking its definition as primitive and exotic within a racist society.

It is then compulsory to take care of women's situation especially colored women who didn't choose to be like that so as to help them face the problems pointed out by Nella Larsen in her books. Colored women should also think about their personal development in order not to be considered only as sexual object and attractive female by men but as a human being with full right in a society which claim the same right to all without discrimination of sex, race and religion.

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