

Victimhood and the Black Women: A Critical Analysis of Themes of Gender Identity, Racism, Slavery and Violence in Toni Morrison's '*Sula*'

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ABSTRACT

The most prominent African-American novelist who strives with liberation in every means to achieve women's emancipation is Toni Morrison. She is one of the main advocates of feminism in the 20th century and is best known for her emancipatory novels. This research demonstrated the validity of the behaviors and actions of women, with particular reference to Sula and Nel characters. It seeks, first of all, to address the sense of justice for women in their societies and, secondly, to prevent aberrations that could harm their status and reduce their chances of freedom. This focuses on Nel and its logical and moral contribution to social emancipation. The study is also examining Sula's irrationality which only produces disgraceful and passing emancipation because of its incompatibility with community values and principles. Within this study, gender identity, sexism, women hood, slavery, crime, etc. have been explored as well. This study will help to explain the issues that have arisen in America since last decade and will no doubt continue to influence them elsewhere. Analytical and descriptive methods are employed to drive the point of this paper home. The novel's structure is circular. Women strive hard to assert their identity as human beings. Whites or any man could not relinquish the racist opportunity or the gender rights. The conflict between the black and the white communities, the victimization of the blacks by the dominant whites, the violence and bloodshed within the black communities have been presented nowhere so effectively in the entire American fiction. Though all her works are suffused with violence, Morrison has dealt with violence in each novel in a unique way. The researcher concluded this study under research exemplifying the victimhood and the Black Women on the themes of gender identity, racism, slavery and violence as envisaged in *Sula*.

[**Keywords:** Emancipation, Gender, Identity, Violence, Womanhood, Racism, etc.]

FULL PAPER

Toni Morrison is Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1993 and she has been awarded the national, American and Pulitzer Prize. Morrison has written eleven books, and *God Help the Child* is the latest published book. Her most popular novels include the "Bluest Eye," "Sula," "Song of Solomon," and "Beloved." In the 1973 '*Sula*' of Toni Morrison, the two dominant aspects of African American women's emancipation process in relation to their communities are rationality and irrationality. That factor profoundly influenced women's lives by referring to Sula Peace and Nel Wright in particular. Morrison appears to be not only a novelist but a reformist, so he can resist being an impetuous emancipatory model for the African American women. Therefore, women's autonomy is Morrison's concerns in most of her novels as well as in '*Sula*'. In her self-exploration efforts, she also highlighted the vital need for black feminine sapience. The many shades of Sula's irrational behavior were represented by Toni Morrison's Sula. This is written in line with the rise and continuation of the women's liberation movement and social conventions. It's situated at the top of Ohio and above Medallion's white population, in a paradoxical position for blacks called Bottom. The novel looks at what a woman in her culture should be fair and what she shouldn't emancipate. Morrison tells the story of two families with different moral views towards their liberation, Sula and Nel. Within Toni Morrison, a fictional portrayal of African American women within her culture, the idea of liberation is the hallmark of the corpus of Morrison. Throughout Sula, the unfounded liberation problems are all interwoven with the rejection of group norms and

values. In the light of reason and research, however, the ideas of love and morality are examined and social borders in the search for emancipation are considered.

Motherhood, friendship and love stories are Morrison's *Sula*. It moves on from childhood to adulthood, with two children, Nel and Sula, and explains how their deep relationships are checked by societal expectations. The tale in Ohio, primarily a Black Town, examines women's relationships in the secluded Patriarchal South. The speaker delineates the city in which *Sula* was first declared to have been destroyed. The novel complains about the loss before it depicts everything that remained in the ground. Shadrack, a war veteran, who is physically wounded with battle wounds, has a drunk and an incandescent come back to Medallion. His insistence on death has led him to create the National Suicide Day, which must be observed every year on 3 January. Shadrack flashes the Carpenter Road with a cowbell this day, telling the people to kill each other. Encouraged to visit a dying relative by Helene and her daughter Nel to New Orleans. On their trips they witness the difficulties of the divided, racist South. Helene and Nel met the New Orleans mum of Helen who, since she was a prostitute, could not bring Helene up on her own. When Helene returns to the other two Helene is happy to be disconnected from her disgraceful past and Nel is resolute to one day be "fine."

From the matriarch Eva Peace comes to *Sula* and the Peace family. Eva's wife BoyBoy and her husband, three children: Hannah, Pearl, and Ralph (Plum), will accompany her when she arrives in Medallion. Once BoyBoy is given a job for a white carpenter, they move to Medallion. But BoyBoy ends up abandoning the family and Eva is compelled to bring her children up. Fatigued and depleted, she has for eighteen months left children with a neighbor and gains with enigmatic new good fortune and a lost leg. Eva utilizes her funds to erect the big house on the Carpenter's Road and takes boarders and kids. Despite their young age, *Sula* and Nel became fabulously intimate friends. They work all together and finish the sentences of each other. The girls share a black mystery when they accidentally kill Chicken Little, a young boy. Nel and *Sula* hold a secret their connection in the death of Chicken, and their relationship continues as before after his funeral.

A couple of other deaths of leading characters follow the death of Chicken. Plum, with a drug addiction, comes back from the war. He's like a kid and he's back and acting. Eva, if his son can't live like one, wants her to die a man, puts Plum on fire. Hannah is later to die and burns alive when she accidentally ignites while she is laundering. We live together as *Sula* and Nel grow up. When she married Jude Greene *Sula* even plans the majority of Nel's wedding. However, the girls don't mark each other after their wedding night for another ten years, when *Sula* comes back for Medallion after accompanying college and inspect other American places. She likes to meet her childhood friend and remember the past. *Sula*, however, is unable to talk to Nel because she has an affair with Nel's husbands and she stays in Medallion, which is despised and punished by Medallion. Ajax, an older man she met from in girlhood, is having a short Love Affair. However, if *Sula* displays signs of committing, Ajax leaves. The departure of *Sula* gets saddened and she falls ill shortly afterwards.

The two women are reunited with *Sula*'s disease, but after Jude left Nel, they had not talked. They contend, and the attitude of *Sula* to conformity and tradition frustrates him again. After *Sula* left, on 7 Carpenter's lane, *Sula* dies alone at home. The Medallion people are happy after *Sula*'s death, but they do so differently. They give up their just indignation in their absence and likely to dilapidated in their roles as mothers and sisters. Death of *Sula* also changes Shadrack, which does not plan to observe National Suicide Day any more. However, for another year he will decide to wear his rope and bell. On January 3, several acquaintances with them Shadrack, until they entered the work site forbidden for Black employees to seek employment for a considerable time. Frustrated, a few people are beginning to wreck the tunnel, and when it collapses they are killed. The story comes to an end in 1965. Nel is 55 and her children have grown up all of them. She is visiting Eva in the hospital and is obliged to think about her role in the death of Chicken. Nel knows she was conspiracy in his demise, and she liked to watch him fall. At last of the book, Nel discovers that her friend *Sula* is experiencing great sorrow and distress. Through a gesture of sorrow and anger, she cries *Sula*'s name into the rain. During the late 1960s, when Morrison conceived the novel, she had a feminist debate that led women to join instead of to competing. She wanted to provide an example of the culturally appropriate sisterhood which she remembered when she grew up in a black neighborhood, while demonstrating how external factors can threaten the sisterhood.

Suffering and community identity in 'Sula'

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison investigates how people at the bottom of Sula, most of them poor, ill or prematurely lost loved ones, can sense their own tragedy and family history. One of the most important ways in which the people of Bottom face the tragedy is to develop their own identity and their own community. The history of city people as a culture is based on tragic events. There is a lot to go around: in 1917 thousands of black men are sent to fight in World War I — a perilous duty that causes these men to die protecting their nation but which does not result in new freedoms or recognition for the African American who manage to survive. The Bassoon itself is built upon the dishonest swindling of African-Americans by whites. Gradually, each of the persons in the novel has a feeling of deep vulnerability. A feeling that regardless of how difficult they effort, they are always mocked, treated as internal. They are drive to live in destitution and distress. The people come to see their lives as painful, ill-fashioned things — no other way they could imagine living. Paradoxically, the awareness of this reality generates a sense of security and harmony, even though things are difficult to change, at least things can be acknowledged. It is then possible, with music, dance, priestly or humor, to shed light on one's tragic case. That is exactly what Shadrack (a First World War veteran) starts in his annual ritual. In embracing National Suicide Day, Shadrack and eventually other city residents accept their own anxiety, depression and resentment towards themselves — they will attempt to handle it, and making it understandable in splitting it into one day of the year.

Motherhood and Gender Role in 'Sula'

Sula's story is almost exclusively conveyed in terms of women living in the Bottom while it switches between several different characters' viewpoints. The men in the book often can't be pinned down long enough: their job prevents them from living (Wiley Wright), or because of their wish for independence (Jude Greene, BoyBoy, etc.), they abandon their relatives. Therefore, Morrison provides many perceptions into the lives and role of women in their brotherhood. This does not surprise. Motherhood is one of the qualities that characterize many women in Sula (Helene, Eva, Hannah, Nel, etc.). The men in the novel are often less closely associated than their wives with their families — sometimes abandoning their families.

Another important type of female bond in Sula is friendship — a prime example being intimate friendship between Sula Peace and Nel Wright. It is probably even more important than motherhood. Yet in the friendships between women and other women there is always an implied question. All too often, the women — certainly the women from the bottom — are taught that they must find a husband or be "incomplete." Sula and Nel, only 12, can see this dynamism at work to find "wonderful boys." Kavita Arya emphasises that Sula "rejects the traditional norms of feminine respectability like family, marriage, children, grand parental care, sexual mores and the concept of steady job. She hates to see a woman only as a wife, mother and daughter". That is what makes them look at their lives, eventually spoiling their friendship. This is a lifetime episode. Years later she sleeps with the husband of Nel, the wedding of Jude Green, and persuaded that her love and understanding will come to an end through sex. When women are convinced that finding a man is their ultimate goal in life, they will see their friendships with other women as secondary — and therefore women's friendships risk being ripped apart by their competition for 'beautiful children.' The uncommon friendship between women in literature is worth thinking about, and more often than not the common objective of women's relations: the husband. Through Sula, Morrison reveals how women's relationships bind families and whole societies. Yet many friendships between women are ruined because society teaches women that their life intention is to compete for a married man and to build a new family.

Racism in 'Sula'

Sula studies the manner in which the Black people are living in America, a nation with a popular past in which people are persecuting and oppressing them, like the most of Toni Morrison's novels. In this book, the black protagonists face the weight of a past in which white Americans have repeatedly swindled Blacks out of their wealth and freedoms by handling legislation, social criterion and even language. The city of Medallion, where the novel is written, traditionally confines African-Americans in the lower part ironically to the highest altitude area of the city and the least desirable area. White promised black land on the "bottom," which is apparently land near

the Ohio River, and then rejected their promises by sending land on the hills, supposedly the "bottom" of the sky. As the novel progresses, the African-American culture is more of this white exploitation but more and more sluggish. It'll be clear at the end of the book that whites consistently denied black people the care and heating they had in the bottom and always said that they would use extra resources to pay a so-called New River Road —. Although there are hardly any white characters in the book, the novel shows how a white institution — often mentioned to as "they"— has employed the artifice to keep blacks as poor and as far from white communities as possible, supported by the sarcastic sense that blacks have no juridical representations and can't debate for their position. They also try to be naive and optimistic in the Black people: they always pursue goals they will never reach, like the New River Road.

Many of the Black people who live in the Bottom, in response to racism, respect white culture with hate. But because of the structure of society by white culture, in the book, black people have little more unique than whiteness. Thus (and given Ohio's obvious desire by the white organization, many of the black characters in the bottom are hungry to reach the white community). Characters straighten their hair and painfully twist their necks to "look whites." Some Blacks in the community will eventually get sufficient money and power to move to Medallion's white neighbourhoods. Yet these white communities move away and keep Medallion city segregated when this happens. The wish of Blacks to enter White communities appears to be another naive and unattainable target, just like the New River Path. The role of race and racism in *Sula* is important to understand. The characters in the novel, who are almost all black, were trained to see oneself as second-class people and to hate one another for being black, in some instances. By writing *Sula*, a 20th-century African-American novel, Morrison explores how a community strives to change a culture designed to prevent this improvement — a theme that's important for the readers of all races.

Slavery and Violence in '*Sula*'

It is well known in Toni Morrison's *Sula* that, while Sula is a struggling woman, Nel becomes a slave to racism and sexism. However, this research will interpret the meaning of emancipation in new detours, which it is ironically discussed in terms of rational and irrational emancipation. In *Sula*, emancipation problems are illustrated in the light of reason along with the Community's norms. Sula is an embodiment of the African American woman who emancipates her Culture at the detriment of its traditions and values. Accommodating irrationality is "an unacceptable way of behaving in that it differs from the rules that describe rationality," according to Sebastian Gardner. Gardener talked that rational mind factors are combined with Sula's clear ideas, wishes and memories in the emancipation search. Gardner also emphasized the importance and attitudes of people in shaping rational minds. However, Sula disregards all that affects her people's mental characteristics and dispatches in her liberation efforts. "Sula is marked both literally and figuratively with her singularity of mind and action" (23), Bhasker A. Shukla, attributes Sula 's irrational emancipation to its monopoly on decision and the lack of foundation and structure, that subsequently affect her thought and action. She chose, without thinking, to abandon her hometown Medallion for a decade in which she gained her independence irrationally. It is from Sula's release of Medallion that Nel could emancipate socially with her community, and the degree of her irrationality became apparent. Whatever the contempt white hold against the Blacks, Sula prefers to find herself in a white Community. "While Sula is always a very different and independent self in society but in the view of the colorful dominant society she is no more than an understated and semi-human being" (Bala, 66). Therefore, Sula 's autonomy was uncertain and returns home as an insane emancipated individual. Sula 's logical and unreasonable liberation of women in societies is not accepted by the community: a critical analytic of Toni Morrison 's emancipation from Sula, for unreasonable views have been thwarted in the face of the social rules being followed. Morrison implies that emancipation can't be authenticated alone, but only in relationship with the community, those dissidents opposed to their communal principles. In the words of Karen Stein as reflected in K. Sumana's *The Novels of Toni Morrison*, "Sula struggles to carve out a niche for herself as a woman, unmindful of the fact the free development of each is conditioned by the free development of all. In other words, individuality is rewarding only if it is achieved within the context of the community well-being"

While numerous themes can be found woven deep into each of Morrison's novels, some of the most prevalent are racism, sexism, and desire. She effectively ties her themes into the plots of her

stories so that the reader can actually obtain an overall message that teaches a lesson or makes a comment about society. Undoubtedly, the themes in Morrison's works can connect and relate to more people lives than she probably ever intended, and that is what makes her literature strong. The effects of emancipation are sometimes positive and sometimes negative in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), in line with the values of the community following the emancipations. The more insightful study of *Sula* reveals that the novel is more irrational than logical. In order to discuss the conventional social roles of African American women and thus pave the way for a better identity results, Morrison focused more on portraying irrational experiences. *Sula* uses the group to express their irrational experiences while Nel describes itself in accordance with their Group tenets. Toni Morrison's *Sula* is written deliberately as a social novel and can also be seen as a reformatory book on the rectitude of the black woman. But a thinking, irrational woman, emancipated, is often cruel for herself and community. *Sula*'s physical and psychological issues not only contribute to her death, but are strongly linked to her unfounded liberation. *Sula* struggles. She lives and shapes her unchecked identity unthinkingly. Toni Morrison says the misbehavioural and untraditional search for oneself should be subject to a tax. *Sula* becomes isolated and becomes an alarming woman because of her irrationality, and eventually dies as a pariah, abandoned by her kin. Morrison used *Sula* metaphorically as an instrument of reformation and as an embodiment for irrational emancipation. The work has a social impact, therefore, and this group does not examine dissidents. In *Sula*, Toni Morrison suggests what can happen if a woman violates her community's traditional and moral limits. As a result, Morrison shows how superior rational over irrationality is when Nel proven its permanent social identity, though on account of her individual freedom, and when she finally loses her fragile emancipation, *Sula* is alone. Thus, Toni Morrison criticizes the irrational self-rational and irrational emancipation of the woman within a community: A critical analysis of Toni Morrison's *Sula*'s achievements in the African American Woman. It can be seen that neither mothers nor daughters, but only partially, social and personal, could express complete emancipation. The irrational features are *Sula* and her mother, Hannah, while the rationality of Nel is limited to conventional and Eva, *Sula*'s grandmother, to a little. Toni Morrison seems definitely to alert those women who aspire not to follow the example of *Sula* but to obey social norms as logical Nel to achieve their collective emancipation. *Sula* is ultimately viewed as the local manifestation of evil and as a source of unity internally. Although the Medallion people disdain *Sula*, who in turn opposes their values, can't live without communities or emancipate themselves from them. Therefore, *Sula* is a novel which is portrayal of many voices that is the theme of Afro-American many voices. While, exploring the ways in which people try to make meaning of lives filled with conflicts over race, gender, and simple idiosyncratic points of views, *Sula* resists easy answers, demonstrating the ambiguity, beauty, and terror of life, in both its triumphs and horrors. The researcher drives the point home exploring the notion that people do not always know why they feel how they do (or why they do what they do). There is a deep, inner drive that animates the body and the mind, it would seem, and there is not always a way to consciously articulate or explain how this mechanism works keeping in view of the nuances of gender identity, racism, slavery and violence that can be perceived from *Sula*.

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