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Abstract Toni Morrison's <i>Sula</i> offers a profound exploration of Black womanhood within a social structure shaped by intersecting systems of racial discrimination, gender inequality, and class marginalization. This study examines the novel through the lens of intersectional feminist criticism, focusing on the tension between individual autonomy and collective belonging as experienced by African American women. The central research question investigates whether a Black woman can construct an independent feminine identity under conditions of double oppression—racism and patriarchy—without experiencing social exclusion or psychological alienation. The analysis highlights the contrasting life trajectories of the two central characters, Sula Peace and Nel Wright, as symbolic representations of resistance and conformity. Sula embodies radical autonomy, rejecting traditional gender expectations related to marriage, motherhood, and social obedience, thereby challenging the normative structures of the Black community. However, her independence results in social demonization, isolation, and symbolic exclusion. Nel, in contrast, internalizes conventional feminine roles and seeks stability through family and social approval, yet experiences emotional repression, identity fragmentation, and existential alienation. The study further situates Morrison's narrative within broader socio-historical contexts, including racial segregation, patriarchal social organization, and the cultural legacy of African American collective survival strategies. Female friendship is interpreted as a critical space for identity formation, resistance, and emotional solidarity, while the community itself functions as both a protective structure and a mechanism of social control. The findings suggest that Morrison does not privilege resistance over conformity or vice versa; rather, she reveals the psychological, social, and cultural costs associated with both choices. Femininity in <i>Sula</i> emerges as a dynamic and contested process shaped by the negotiation between personal freedom and communal responsibility. Ultimately, the novel redefines Black femininity as an ongoing struggle to reconcile self-realization with the need for belonging within oppressive social structures.	
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1. Introduction

Some African writers have called for venturing into the world of novel writing to explore the complex issues plaguing African societies, raising a number of questions related to their cultural specificities. This has enabled them to carve out a prominent place for themselves in the world of narrative fiction, aiming to elevate African narrative from its local context to a universal one. From this perspective, Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* is considered one of the most widely read literary works of the 20th century. Morrison is among the creative minds who have carved out a unique world for themselves, not only because of her artistic brilliance and distinctive narrative style, but also because of her unique approach to African feminist issues, such as identity and race, her breaking of taboos in the society in which she lives, and her complete transcendence of the stereotypical life of women of African descent.

Toni Morrison is among the few African women to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature, which she received in 1993. This award propelled her into the world of literature with a series of novels that offered a profound and complex vision of the African American experience in general, and the experience of Black African women in particular, highlighting the racial and gender discrimination they face. This dual suffering was something Morrison was acutely aware of and understood in all its dimensions.

This iconic novelist, Toni Morrison, at peace with herself (half New Yorker, half New Jersey, half African-American, and a woman), stated, "I was born in Cleveland, my roots are in the South. My parents escaped slavery in the last century. The struggle between adapting to white society and preserving my Black identity has always been a constant concern."

Suffering ignites the spark of creativity, and it was this very suffering that fueled Morrison's creativity, leading to a narrative that embraces the suffering of African women in places where slavery was imposed upon them. The text becomes a mirror reflecting all the conflicting emotions that stir within the human soul, colored by every shade of darkness and cruelty.

In the novel *Sula*, Morrison reveals a multifaceted image of the African woman, through major and minor female characters, embodying the diversity of experiences and challenges faced by the black African woman in a society dominated by discrimination in all its forms: racial, ethnic, and gender. The novel *Sula* is therefore one of her most important novels, as it is not merely a narration of the life story of one person who fell into the trap of sin and lived her life with all the contradictions, but rather an exploration of a set of complex human relationships, and the internal and external conflicts that resulted from them, in an attempt to define her identity, and impose her fragmented self, which is riddled with deep wounds left by the hidden and declared conflicts, in a world that forces her and pushes her to assume certain roles and then executes her with unfair judgments simply because she refused to perform these roles.

2. Literature Review

Sociology of Feminist Society

Morrison's second novel, *Sula*, appeared three years after her first, *The Bluest Eye* (1973). Set in Ohio, it spans approximately 46 years, from 1919 to 1965. It is one of more than ten novels that reflect the suffering of Black people during a period that can only be described as harsh, whether on a familial, social, or even historical level. "Sula represents the third generation of Black people during the period chosen by the author, from the 1920s until 1941, with the novel's events continuing until 1965."

The novel takes us back to the second decade of the 20th century, when the United States was under the yoke of the apartheid system. This system tightened its grip on African Americans, restricting their freedom and subjecting them to all kinds of oppression, particularly in the American South. This was achieved through unjust laws that enshrined racial discrimination, reminiscent of the era of slavery imposed on displaced Black people. By force of arms from Africa.

The American laws at the time insisted on making Black Americans second-class citizens, and sought to keep their social and economic status below a decent standard of living. This spread poverty and unemployment, created great resentment among the local population, and negatively impacted their public lives on all levels. "Dozens of people are killed every day in the name of differences that can only be attributed to race." Furthermore, colonial policy is often "governed by two considerations: - The first: racial, resulting from the settlers' feeling of discrimination against the indigenous population, and the second: economic, which is the settlers' feeling of being able to exploit the indigenous population as cheap labor." These combined circumstances were sufficient to give rise to the Civil Rights Movement, coinciding with the outbreak of the Civil War between North and South America, which hastened the abolition of slavery. This is what we witnessed in the novel, where these events were reflected in the society in which the characters lived, appearing as if they were suffering

from racism in all its forms. They also demonstrated an awareness of the necessity for change and a rejection of everything related to it. "The issue of class consciousness cannot be understood in a hybrid (colonial) society if we do not link it to a legal theory, as class consciousness contributes to the construction of two classes of personality: a superior personality and an inferior personality, completely contradictory, with a personality in between affected by the extent of this gap and fueled by violence; rejecting the conditions at their various levels (political, social, and economic) and rebelling against colonialism as the main reason for shaping society in its unjust image towards Black people." On the social level, the situation of women was no better than that of society as a whole. Their tragedy was twofold and compounded, as they were women as a human race suffering from the dominance and authority of men, and they were Africans who were ostracized as a race. The combination of these two stigmas further fragmented their identity in a society that perpetuates racial and gender discrimination.

This psychological fragmentation and disintegration is clearly evident in the novel *Sula* through its female characters, each searching for her own identity and being. This results in a mosaic of contradictory human experiences, yet united by a single social context that negatively impacts them, pushing them to exert double the effort in the face of endless challenges. Women in African-American society were forced to perform traditional gender roles, expected to be obedient wives and devoted, self-sacrificing mothers without the slightest complaint or resentment. This is reflected in *Sula*, where Nel embodies the traditional, obedient, and submissive mother and wife, while in contrast, we find the character of Sula, who rejects all forms of social or familial guardianship. She is the liberated, rebellious woman, a type nurtured by the liberation movements that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. These movements called for women's liberation from all constraints, opening wide the doors for them to exercise their political, social, and cultural presence, and to escape the control of society and the guardianship of men.

Perhaps what strengthened her cultural freedom was the rise of the Harlem Renaissance which coincided with the emergence of feminist movements. This movement brought together intellectuals, artists, and writers, striving to bolster African-American cultural identity while challenging negative stereotypes about Africans. Morrison, in her novel *Sula*, did not ignore this cultural renaissance; she sought to reinforce African identity, invoking collective African memory and having her characters reflect this in numerous scenes.

Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* presents a profound and multifaceted portrait of the African-American woman, depicting various responses to the need to delve into the depths of the African-American feminist experience within a society marked by racial and gender divisions. In this literature, Black womanhood becomes fertile ground for deconstructing the complex intersections of race, gender, class, and power. The novel stands out as a pivotal text that redraws the image of the Black woman, moving beyond stereotypes. It reveals Nel Wright as a traditional figure who has lived and coexisted with a societal system that systematically oppresses women, recognizing them as the weaker link. In contrast, Sula rebels against these norms, refusing to submit and be subservient. They emerge not merely as contrasting models, but their relationship forms a mirror reflecting the eternal tension within Black womanhood between two opposing desires: resisting domination and racism on the one hand, and falling into the trap of alienation and conformity to dominant values on the other.

Female Alienation:

Morrison's novel *Sula* seeks to reveal the inseparable links between gender, race, and class. It offers sharp and sensitive perspectives on issues related to social construction, particularly the relationship between woman and man, Black and White, slave and free, and traditional and liberated. In choosing the character of Nel Wright, she embodies a type of alienated figure. Through her novels, Morrison presents the most complex and damaging aspects of patriarchal societies and how such societies destroy relationships not only between men and women but also among women themselves. Nel's character in the novel represents the most common archetype in African societies, and the most prominent in the novel, for example, as she is assigned gender roles within the community. This is evidenced by her early marriage and her responsibility for a husband, home, and children, dedicating her life to their care and service without complaint or negligence. Morrison deliberately portrays Nel as a character possessing remarkable resilience, as the novel demonstrates, and a great capacity to endure hardship and face challenges.

It is clear from the novel that sex is the central theme, given that its events are represented by female characters and constitute most of their conflicts. This suggests a flaw in the environment in which the characters grew up and lived. Nel's family is restricted by social norms that define the traditional meaning of family, and is characterized by tranquility and the suppression of deviant desires and abnormal behaviors that do not conform to collective customs and values. This is reflected in the arrangement and order of the house, which is always orderly and tidy. This is what made Jude think of her as a wife to replace his mother. He became even more determined to take on the role of a man in any way possible, without

needing to satisfy his desires or feel his masculinity. He wanted someone to care about his pain, to care deeply, deeply enough to embrace him, deeply enough to comfort him. He wanted to test the girl who had always been kind.

Jude didn't choose Nel because he loved her and envisioned a future with her as a respectable and vital partner in his life. Rather, he saw her as a means to satisfy his growing desires as a young man trying to embody the role of a man. Nel's indifference to his hints about marriage vanished when she discovered his pain. Jude could see himself reflected in her eyes. She was indeed comforting him. Was Ajax right, as he had said in the Times and Half Ball Hall? "What they want, man, is their pain. Ask them to die for you and you'll have them for life." Nel embodies societal gender roles, as evidenced by Jude's infidelity with her best friend, Sula. The only thing she reproached her for was saying, "Why did you think of me? Don't I mean anything? I never hurt you. Why did you take him from me if you didn't love him, and why didn't you think of me?" Then she continued, "I was kind to you, Sula, why didn't that mean anything?"

Thus, her behavior reflects a double alienation, preventing her from even directing the harshest rebuke or any fierce confrontation from a wife towards a woman who was supposed to be a friend, a friend who betrayed her friendship before betraying her husband. She even offered her help while Sula was on her deathbed, without the slightest consideration from Sula, stubbornly clinging to her guilt. "What do you mean by 'took him'? I didn't kill him, I only slept with him. If we were such close friends, how could you not move on?"

She persisted in ignoring what she had done to herself and her friend, posing a philosophical question that reveals her adoption of a particular philosophy of life: "How did you know? Who is kind? How did you know it was you? I mean, maybe it wasn't you." "Perhaps it's me." Here, Morrison doesn't truly define good and evil, because good sometimes resembles evil. This is what Sula's feelings, stemming from her sense of self or her attempt to reach her true self, translate into. She seeks to justify her actions, which are rejected by society and hurt her closest friend. She believes that Jude doesn't deserve Nel, that he was never meant for her, and that her actions exposed his true intentions and revealed his falsehood. Because she was accustomed to sharing everything with Nel, she sees this as normal.

3. Discussion

The environment in which Nel grew up shaped her alienated personality. She preferred Sula's chaotic house, where a pot was constantly boiling on the stove, and where her mother, Hannah, never scolded or gave her instructions. And where all sorts of people come, and where newspapers are piled up in the hallway, and dirty dishes are left for hours in the sink." Before that, she muttered, declaring to herself: "It's me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nele. I'm me."

Her journey with her mother enabled her to discover the self she had lost due to a lack of life and social experiences, and her confinement within her family environment. Her mother, Helen Wright, and her father, Willie, lived a life restricted by strict rules, leaving no room for deviating from social traditions, and no escape from their authority. The girl grew up naively good-natured, submitting to every dictate and barely expressing an opinion. Her father's constant absence as a sailor deprived her of a sense of psychological balance, instilling in her a lack of confidence and a constant feeling of insecurity. "Nele grew up in an atmosphere of oppressive order." It is a strict and organized family that knows the rules of society in depth. Nel's mother constantly tries to destroy Nel's free spirit and her rich imagination. Under Helen's hand, the girl became obedient and polite. This obedience and politeness were nothing but a defeated surrender. However, she discovers the secret and falseness of these traditions that her mother restricts her with during her journey that led her to meet her deceased grandmother and a former prostitute who is close to her. This led to the discovery of the gap of hypocrisy in which her family lives, and an attempt to focus on her inner self. The upbringing that the girl receives, whether at home or in society, causes many problems and psychological complexes.

Perhaps her friendship with Sula, whom she met in high school, was destined to reveal another side of social life. Sula became her other half, a refuge, despite her mother's disapproval, which stemmed from Sula's mother's bad reputation and erratic behavior. In her escape from her family's control, she collided with a harsher and more miserable reality, especially after being betrayed by her close friend. "The conflict between her own needs and the demands of others is what gives rise to the most dangerous struggle Nel faces in her life. In defying the norms of the underclass, Nel ultimately realizes, through her inner journey, that one cannot rely completely on anyone." Yet, no hatred or resentment formed in Nel's heart towards Sula. Instead, nostalgia drew her back to the sweet memories of their teenage years together, and "a bright void opened in her mind, and memories seeped in. Sula standing on the riverbank in a white and red dress..." The excitement, the expansion of experiences, and the discovery of her lost self within a rigid, oppressive, and rigid traditional society that Nel encountered with Sula ... Devoid of emotion, and torn between a husband who abandoned her at the first false opportunity for love and betrayal, she overcame the pain of his infidelity. Her silent journey into her own depths transformed into a quest to establish her true existence in a patriarchal society that sees women only as supporters and

sacrifices for their husbands and families, their will subjugated. This husband, who was merely a casual acquaintance, represented nothing in her life except that he left a deep wound that shattered her psychological balance and alienated her closest friends.

The character of Eva Pace stands as the most prominent embodiment of this double subjugation. Eva deliberately cut off her leg. "Some people said she put her foot under a train and forced them to pay her compensation. Others said she sold it to a hospital for ten thousand dollars." Her irrational behavior—which betrays no sound reasoning—is not merely a maternal sacrifice, but a deliberate mutilation of the female body to ensure its continued productive function within a patriarchal structure that sees women only as instruments of survival. Abdel-Mutaal Muhammad Al-Jabri observes that "this image, which texts have allowed us to see in various religions, sects, and social systems across different eras and regions, portrays woman as a hunted, terrifying animal, not merely deprived of rights, but entitled to inflict harm." In oppressed societies, women are forced to inflict self-inflicted violence upon their bodies to guarantee the group's survival, a violence that ultimately reinforces the authority of the patriarchal system itself.

The character of Helen Wright (Nel's mother) represents voluntary alienation in its clearest and most complete form. She succumbed to social alienation after her husband, Wingam, abandoned her, becoming a servant in the home of a white family. She exhibited a kind of obsessive, almost pathological, obsession with cleanliness and order in an attempt to immerse herself and ignore reality. This puritanism is not merely a psychological symptom, but a desperate attempt to reclaim lost dignity in a society that associates blackness with impurity. The black woman who madly cleans white people's houses is trying to cleanse herself of the stigma of both race and gender. Helen embodies the washed woman, a woman who transforms her oppression into a ritualistic behavior that ultimately perpetuates the very system that oppresses her.

Rejection and Resistance

Sula Pace is the revolutionary core of the novel, the only character in whom Black womanhood is realized as genuine freedom, not as a social or biological function. Sula is not merely a bad woman or a fleeting rebel; rather, she represents a complete existential project that rejects all frameworks that transform women into subordinates or beings defined by their absence (a wife without a husband, a mother without children, a daughter without obedience). This is embodied in three patterns or states: Sula's return to the lowlands, the place where she was born and raised, after ten years of absence (1927-1937), was not like any other time. She returned in a different form and with a different body: "She dressed in a style reminiscent of a movie star, as anyone might have noticed. A black crepe dress with pink and yellow polka dots, a foxtail, a black hat..." This different appearance is the first sign of a declaration of war against the local Black community, which prefers a pure woman to prove its civility to white people. The difference was not limited to appearance and clothing, but its origin was primarily intellectual.

While she doesn't consider her questionable relationship with Jude to be infidelity in the traditional sense, she sees it as a redefinition of sex itself, reflecting her principles and ideas. Sula tells Nel bluntly, "What do you mean by 'I took him'? I didn't kill him, I just slept with him. If we were such close friends, how come you didn't get over it?" Here, Sula declares that a man is not private property to be borrowed briefly, and the female body is not land to be visited once and then forbidden.

This stance represents the most dangerous moment in the history of Black feminism, a moment when the Black woman declares that she owns her body absolutely, and that her desire is not a betrayal of race or gender. Here, we discover how "Sula's concept of sexuality is shaped through bodily writing," Sula practices what the critic Fatima Mernissi (in a different but perfectly applicable context) calls "rebellion against male authority" the authority of the marginalized body that refuses to be controlled from the outside. Mernissi states in the same context that "while all the aforementioned experts agree on the dominance of men over women, there is no consensus on the extent of this authority, especially when it relates to disobedience, rebellion within the realm of sex." Researcher Saraswati Bhatta adds that "in a patriarchal society, men control the conceptual field and define social values...it is the man who explains, analyzes, describes, and directs the woman, because he has the authority to define everything."

In a terrifying scene, Eva retreated onto the bed, leaving the crutches under her arms. She rolled a piece of newspaper into a taut stick six inches long, lit it, and threw it at... The bed where the kerosene-soaked sack lay contentedly, and quickly, as the flames engulfed it, she closed the door and made her slow, agonizing journey back upstairs. This violence is not an anomaly; it is a declaration that motherhood is not a biological destiny, and that a child is not the symbolic capital of a Black woman, as patriarchy dictates.

Sula embodies the absolute rejection of motherhood, and before that, of commitment and marriage. She does not see her existence and self in them, as she stated in her dialogue with her mother, Eva, who is no better off than she is, "When will

you get married? You need a few children... they will help you settle down. I don't want to create anyone else... I want to create myself. Selfish. A woman shouldn't be a vagrant and a wanderer without a man." The writer Nawal El Saadawi believes that "the idea that has been mistakenly prevalent since ancient times that man is the master of woman, and that she is nothing but a tool for his pleasure and a vessel for his children..." It has allowed society to remove whatever it wants from a woman's body and neglect whatever it wants, so that a woman becomes merely a womb that gives birth to children." This is what Sula understands, is aware of its dimensions, and categorically rejects. She resists the desire of a society that "decided, for economic reasons, that a woman's only role in life is to give birth and serve her husband and children." Researcher Arya Kavita confirms that Sula, in her response, "rejects traditional standards of respect for women such as family, marriage, children, caring for grandparents, sexual norms, and the concept of a fixed job. She hates to see a woman only as a wife, mother, and daughter." She simply rejects the stereotypical gender roles that Black women have embodied in her society, and she rebels against and fiercely resists norms and traditions to create her own rebellious, resistant, and different self. Her ultimate desire is "to be a woman who can guide other oppressed Black women and help them resist and challenge the social hegemony of oppressive patriarchal rule."

Here, Sula sends a powerful message through a tattoo on her body, a dark spot resembling a snake or a rose. The neighborhood interprets it as a demonic sign, for this tattoo proclaims ontological difference. As Morrison says through the narrator, "The tattoo is considered an implicit symbolic model that refers to a cultural and social reference point, transcending the boundaries of artistic aesthetics and the circles of behavioral stereotyping that respond to specific needs, to a message that contributes to conveying the colonial uses of the body, in order to create a dialogue with the other." On the other hand, we find that the phenomenon of tattooing among women is linked to "a social function related to marking or stigmatizing, as the presence of a tattoo for a woman differs from its absence. Its absence for some women brings a kind of social shame," and its presence for others may provoke a kind of rejection and disapproval, because it is a cultural product associated with the body. Writing on the body is traditionally used to protect women, but Sula transforms it into a form of rebellious writing that declares separation from the community. The tattoo "embodies, in a sense, a woman's feminist identity and her repressions," as is the case with Sula. The tattoo on her face is the scar that freedom leaves on a woman's body. It has a socio-cultural and identity-based dimension, a semiotic and symbolic dimension, expressing her distinction from other women of the underclass, her feminist identity, and her repressed desires, considering that "the woman who bears the tattoo carries with her an inescapable past, her present, and her dreams."

But Sula's death in 1940 (at around the age of thirty) is not natural. She contracts a mysterious illness and dies contemplating resisting and breaking free from alienation. "Out of defiance and a refusal to submit, even on her deathbed," she dies just like me. "But the difference is that they die like rags. I, on the other hand, am rooted in the earth like a mighty tree. I have certainly lived my life. Really? And what is your proof? Proof? For whom, girl? I have a mind. And what goes on is in it. I can say, I own myself..." This is self-affirmation and a declaration of existence in the face of the rejection of the other's (white and male) dominance. Sula's death is the moment when society discovers that it has been living off the energy of her resistance, not her obedience. Sula dies, but she is not defeated; she is killed because society cannot tolerate a free woman, but her death exposes the nakedness of the entire patriarchal system.

Sula Bess is not a character; Rather, it is an event and an existential one in its philosophical dimensions. She is the black woman who refuses to be a victim and thus becomes guilty, who refuses to be a mother and thus becomes a monster, and who refuses to be possessed and thus becomes a demon, and in the end pays the price of her freedom with death. But this death does not negate the act of resistance, but rather immortalizes it. Sula is the open wound in the body of black and white patriarchy together, and she is the living (then dead) proof that femininity can be an invincible revolution, even if its owner is killed.

The Boundaries of Intersection and Difference

If Eva and Helen represent alienation, then Sula Pace embodies radical rejection. Sula rejects marriage, motherhood, commitment, and even belonging to the neighborhood. When she sleeps with Jude (her friend Nel's husband), she doesn't do so out of jealousy or possessiveness, but because she sees men as men see themselves: as mere fleeting pleasures. She says, "Is this what I'm supposed to do? Spend my life keeping a man? They deserve to be kept, Sula. They don't deserve more than I do. Besides, I've never loved a man because he deserved it. Deserving it is useless." (Sula, p. 118). This stance dismantles the concept of male ownership over a woman's body and restores femininity to its status as a free act, not a possession. Yet resistance comes at a high price when Sula is redefined within the community as a necessary evil: "Mothers often use her to frighten their children, and husbands justify their domestic violence by placing broomsticks on their doors at night and sprinkling salt on the steps of their balconies. But aside from one or two attempts to sweep away the dust from her footprints, no one harmed her. As usual, Black people looked at the injustice with stony eyes and let it happen." Black

people don't see evil in witchcraft; it's simply an attempt to change the status quo in different ways—in their view. A society in crisis cannot tolerate a free woman, so it demonizes her to justify its false moral constraints. Sula's death, in the end, is not a natural death, but a symbolic execution carried out by the community to reorganize its threatened patriarchal system.

If Sula represents solitary resistance, and Nel represents social alienation, then the relationship between them is the only place in the novel where a third form of femininity can be born: a shared, horizontal femininity, outside of patriarchy and outside of politicized race. But this possibility is aborted, and the friendship becomes the deepest wound in the lives of the two heroines. It is the tragedy of female love in a world that allows only love that passes through men. This is something she exposes and rejects in a blatant, unmasked resistance: "Oh, they must love me. It will take time, but they will love me... after the old women have slept with teenagers; when all the young girls have slept with their drunken old uncles; after all the black men have sodomized all the white men; when all the white women have kissed all the black women..." She exposes a society that applies double standards and issues arbitrary, unjust judgments that kill the soul before the body. Nel and Sula together formed a single, more beautiful, stronger, and more mature being through their meeting and friendship, which was unlike any other friendship. The narrator describes this formation with rare eloquence: "Because each of them had discovered years ago that she was neither white nor male, and that both freedom and victory were forbidden to them, they began to create something else of themselves. Their meeting was fortunate because it allowed them to use each other to mature." Barbara Smith sees their friendship as "the necessary bond that has always existed between Black women in order to stay together; the two girls could find the courage to build themselves up." This third being is the first utopian feminist space in the novel: no marriage, no man, no motherhood, no authority. They play together, steal ice cream, confront unruly white teenagers together. "...Holding the knife in her right hand, she pulled the plate toward her and pressed her left forefinger sharply against its edge. Her aim was deliberate but imprecise. She only scraped the top of her forefinger..." The incident becomes their sacred secret, also their first blood pact, foreshadowing the power of friendship and the possibility of sacrifice.

Scholar Saraswati Bhatta observes that "the friendship between Sula and Nel is a microcosm of the broader struggles faced by African American women, reflecting their relationship, which is characterized by both profound connection and profound betrayal." It is a stark contradiction. As the two girls reach puberty, their relationship begins to drift apart. This natural order is evident in the relationship between Nel and Sula. Nel, with her feminine intuition, recognizes that she possesses a beauty comparable to that of fair-skinned women (fair complexion, soft hair), making her the object of male desire. Sula, on the other hand, lacks the feminine beauty that attracts male admirers, becoming the other, the darker, outcast one. She tells him, "Stop lying. Everyone preferred you." This feeling of loss and emotional deprivation leads her to deliver a devastating blow to her relationship with Nel by having a sexual relationship with his husband, Jude.

The scene was terrifying in its simplicity for Nel. She was shocked and stunned by the shameful act she witnessed between her husband, Jude, and Sula. But the shock wasn't primarily sexual; it was existential: "She looked around for a place to be, a small place. The closet? No. Too dark. The bathroom. It was small and bright at the same time, small enough to contain her grief, bright enough to release the dark things piling up inside her..." At that moment, Nel felt that the third being had died, that she was alone forever. Sula suddenly became the rejected object that had to be removed so that Nel could maintain her social identity. Nel wasn't angry at Jude, but rather at Sula's freedom, which she could no longer tolerate after she herself had chosen alienation.

After the Sula and Jude scandal, Nel completely cuts off her relationship with Sula, transforming into the ideal respectable woman: as a wife, a mother, and a member of the church. But deep down, she knows that this respectability is fake and superficial, and she tries to erase all the nightmares and painful memories that cling to her. "She even wishes that their terrifying dreams would transform into her and give her wonderful relief from her nightmare so that she could stop wandering around afraid of turning her head this way or that, lest she see her." It seems that Nel doesn't hate Sula, but rather herself for choosing safety over freedom. Nel had visited Sula during her illness and tried to help her, but Sula, as usual, was stubborn and refused. And now Sula dies in 1941, and suddenly Nel realizes the truth she had always denied: that she had never forgotten her and had never hated her. "Suddenly, Nel stopped... her eyes twitched and burned slightly. 'Sula?' she whispered, staring at the treetops. 'Sula?... We were girls together,' she said, as if explaining something, 'Oh God, Sula.' 'Girl, oh girl, girl, girl, girl,' she cried. It was a final cry—loud and long—but without resolution. It had no end, only circles and circles of sorrow."

This cry is the deepest confession of a subjugated woman that she lost a part of herself when she abandoned her dearest, freest friend. Nel is not Sula's victim; Rather, she is her own voluntary executioner. Her choice of silence for thirty years is the longest symbolic execution of female friendship. Yet, she realizes too late that she didn't hold a grudge against her, and that she forgave her, but only after it was too late.

The relationship between Nel and Sula is not romantic love in the repressed homosexual sense but rather an ontological relationship built on each woman's reflection in the other. This is what Nel stated in an interview with Hanna: "Of course you love her. You love her. Just as I love Sula . I'm just not attached to her. That's the difference." In another scene, we see them "pushing themselves into the four-cornered shade to taste the sweat of their lips and contemplate the unbridled passion that had taken them by surprise. They lay stretched out on the grass, their foreheads almost touching, their bodies parting from one another..." It is a scene of identification and merging, but in the end, Nel realizes that Sula was the only beautiful pain in her life, while Sula always saw Nel as superior to her, shining in every situation. And the one time she cut her finger trying to protect Nel, she received not gratitude, but disgust.

The friendship between Nel and Sula is the highest form of female love, but at the same time its most dangerous form, because it forces each woman to confront the rejected part of herself. Morrison does not present us with an ideal friendship, but rather with a harsh truth: even the most beautiful female relationship can become a prison if it is not protected from patriarchy and alienation. In short, the friendship between Nel and Sula is both the novel's greatest achievement and its greatest failure. It is an achievement because it proves that Black womanhood can give birth to a new form of shared existence, and a failure because this form could not withstand the pressure of a patriarchal and racist world. Sula dies alone, and Nel lives on alone, while the third being they formed remains merely a childhood dream that found no place in the adult world. This is the true tragedy of Black womanhood in Sula's case: that individual freedom is possible (Sula), and collective alienation is possible (Nel), but shared freedom between women remains impossible... until now. Herein lies the ultimate contradiction.

The novel presents the friendship between Nel and Sula as a kind of spiritual same-sex marriage in childhood. Together, they witness the sinking of Chicken Little and bury the event in a shared silence that becomes their sacred secret. But this utopian feminist space disintegrates with adulthood. When Sula betrays Nel with Jude, Nel feels not so much the sexual betrayal as the collapse of the third being they formed. On the other hand, Nawal El Saadawi believes that "moralists and legal scholars come to establish values and laws that impose on women behavior that conforms to society's view of them and the role assigned to them, while psychologists play their active role in implementing societal values and destroying what remains of a woman's personality in the name of social adaptation." The end of the novel – Sula's death and Nel's belated regret is a tragedy of female friendship that finds no place in a world that is hostile to all forms of female freedom.

4. Conclusion

Sula demonstrates that Black womanhood is not a fixed essence, but rather a continuous struggle between alienation and resistance. This is evident in the novel's characters: Eva mutilates her body as a sacrifice because she is a mother; Helen cleans white homes to maintain cleanliness; and Nel marries and has children to gain societal respect. Sula, however, rejects all of this and is symbolically, then literally, killed. In the end, neither resistance nor alienation achieves victory; the wound remains open: the wound of a Black woman in a world that still insists her freedom is a sin.

Ultimately, Sula leaves us with a question that doesn't lend itself to easy answers: Can Black womanhood survive alienation without paying the price of freedom with death in all its forms? Eva paid the price by having a part of her body removed, fulfilling society's alienation of the mother, whom it sees only as a sacrifice. Helen paid with her soul, her spirit immersed in the chlorine of her work as a maid in white households until she became devoid of self and soul. Nel paid with forty years of poisoned silence, striving with all her might to be the perfect wife and mother, which forced her to kill a part of her soul called Sula. Sula believed she had taken the opposite path when she refused to pay, but she found herself obligated to pay an inflated price. She departed alone and in pain, but free until her last breath. In this novel, neither resistance nor alienation triumphs. Rather, the wound triumphs, an open wound bleeding on every page, in every female body, in every silence, in every stifled cry. A wound that declares that Black femininity is still defined from the outside: either as a victim deserving of pity, or as a rebel deserving of punishment. There is no room in between for a woman to be a complete being with her own desires, her own pain and joy, and her right to be human, not a symbol. - In the weakness of every woman lies a source of strength. Sula has not died; rather, she will continue to rise like the phoenix, haunting Nel and the people of the neighborhood in their waking and sleeping hours. She has transformed into an unkillable ghost, a voice that will not fade, a black icon that will not disappear. No matter how much they try to fold away her memory and erase it, she returns stronger, as if to say: I am not evil. Sula's true victory lies in the fact that she made the very act of alienation painful and forced Nel to realize, too late, that everything she built, it was a grave she built with her own hands to bury a part of herself, and she affirmed to the entire neighborhood that its morality was nothing but fear of a woman who dared to choose freedom. She exposed the truth about society and stripped away its facade. Sula will remain an icon of resistance, and every Black woman will continue to ask herself in silence: Were you Nel, or were you Sula? Or were you just a passive, powerless bystander?

Ethical Considerations

This research is based solely on literary analysis and the interpretation of published texts. No human participants, personal data, or experimental procedures were involved. The study adheres to the principles of academic integrity, intellectual honesty, and responsible scholarship. All theoretical perspectives and textual references are properly acknowledged, and the analysis is conducted in accordance with international standards of research ethics, avoiding plagiarism, misrepresentation, or data fabrication.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this research. The study was conducted independently, and no financial, institutional, or personal relationships influenced the research process, interpretation, or publication of the findings.

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