

MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

∘.4#ξJH!∶⊙%#C∶V%||ξXX%!.Vξ∶⊙!.IX.⊙V.⊔ξX||C∶%V.XC#C∶Q|XξJξ∶Jξ∶X.ξ∶ΛΛ.ξX|+⊙%Nξ⊔ξIV
X∶X||.ξξI

UNIVERSITE MOULOUD MAMMERI TIZI-OUZOU

FACULTE DES LETTRES ET DES LANGUES

DEPARTEMENT D'ANGLAIS



Domaine: Lettres et Langues Etrangères.

Filière: Langue Anglaise.

Spécialité: Littérature Générale et Comparée.

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master in English**

Title:

**Feminist Revolt in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Toni
Morrison's *Sula* (1973)**

Presented by:

AKKOU Rachida

AMEUR Dalila

Supervised by:

Mrs. MAIDI Naima

Board of examiners:

Chair: Dr. SEDDIKI Sadia, MCB, Department of English, UMMTO

Examiner: Miss. MATMER Dalila, MAA, Department of English, UMMTO

Supervisor: Mrs. MAIDI Naima, MAA, Department of English, UMMTO

Academic year: 2019/2020

Dedicated

To

My dear Parents.

My sisters and brothers.

My best companion in life, my fiancé.

All my nephews and nieces.

All my friends and classmates.

Rachida AKKOU

I dedicate this work to:

My beloved parents.

*My precious sister, my two adorable brothers, and my lovely brother's
wife.*

My greatest friends.

Dalila AMEUR

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Allah for his blessing that enabled us to complete this dissertation.

We would like to express our gratitude to our supervisor Mss. MAIDI Naima for her guidance, help and patience to finish this dissertation, and Miss. MATMER Dalila for her pieces of advice.

We would also thank the honourable board of examiners for having accepted to assess our work.

We would express our special thanks to all those who contributed to the fulfilment of this humble work.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Abstract.....	vi
General Introduction	1
Review of the Literature	3
Issue and Working Hypothesis	5
Methodological Outline	7
Endnotes.....	8
Methods and Materials.....	9
1-Methods	9
A-Summary of the Theories.....	9
a-Pierre Bourdieu’s Theory <i>Masculine Domination</i>	9
b- bell hooks’ <i>Feminist Theory from margin to center</i>	11
2-Materials.....	13
A-Biography of the Authors.....	13
A -Kate Chopin.....	13
b- Toni Morrison.....	14
B-Summary of the Novels.....	16
a- Kate Chopin’s <i>The Awakening</i> (1899).....	16
b- Toni Morrison’s <i>Sula</i> (1973)	17
Endnotes.....	19
Results	20
Discussion	21
Chapter One: Masculine Domination and Gender Roles	21

1-Sexual Division and Gender Inequality	21
a-Sexual Division and Gender Inequality in <i>The Awakening</i>	21
b-Sexual Division and Gender Inequality in <i>Sula</i>	24
2-Symbolic Violence.....	27
a-Symbolic Violence in <i>The Awakening</i>	28
b-Symbolic Violence in <i>Sula</i>	31
End Notes.....	35
Chapter Two: The Institution of Marriage and Motherhood	37
a-Marriage and Motherhood in <i>The Awakening</i>	37
b-Marriage and Motherhood in <i>Sula</i>	43
End Notes.....	50
Chapter Three: Freedom and Death.....	52
a-Freedom and Death in <i>The Awakening</i>	53
b-Freedom and Death in <i>Sula</i>	57
End Notes.....	64
Conclusion.....	66
Bibliography	68

Abstract

This dissertation is a comparative study of two literary works, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). The purpose of this research has been to show how the two authors portray both American and Afro-American women's revolt in patriarchal societies. This comparative study has been achieved by applying Pierre Bourdieu's theory *Masculine Domination* (1998) and bell hooks' *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (1984). The basic premise of this research is that despite the fact that the events of two fictions occur in different periods of time in The United States, the writers converge in their depiction of American and Afro-American women's revolt against sexism, social norms, and male dominance in order to gain self-identity and live free. The two authors portray white and black women suffering from discrimination, injustice, and inequality by patriarchal system. They have described how these women rebel and resist patriarchy. These two theories have permitted us to study the two literary works in relation to revolt and freedom. The present research has been divided in to three chapters.

Key words: *The Awakening, Sula, male domination, patriarchal community, oppression, motherhood, freedom, death.*

General Introduction

The Feminist movement is a worldwide women's manifestation and is represented by various institutions acting on behalf of women and advocating social, economic, and political equality of the two sexes. This movement started in the 19th century; where it grew up and became popular through time. Until now, women still ask for their liberation. For instance, feminist literature defends equal rights for both genders, believing that gender inequality is related to power relationship between the two sexes. Women's struggle against oppression, discrimination, men's domination still continue at the present time. Although they gained many rights since 1800s especially in America, unfortunately, in many other continents among them Africa, women are still living under traditions, customs, and rules. Women in these countries are still subjugated to men's power and are considered as "properties" contrary to western women, who have succeeded to liberate themselves from patriarchal society by exhibiting and proving their abilities to manage their decisions as men.

Feminist writers and scholars gave birth to the feminist movement during the 19th and 20th centuries. It first emerged in America and Europe, where women suffered from inequality. However, they did not lose hope, and kept fighting to liberate themselves socially and sexually. In this context, Elizabeth Cady Stanton is among those who started the first wave feminism, occurring in the 19th and early 20th century. This movement opened up opportunities for women to vote. As for the second wave, it started with Betty Friedan in 1960s and 1970s. It focused on women's liberation; asking over for equal, legal, and social rights. It encouraged women to understand how their personal lives reflected sexist power structures. Then, third wave feminism began in 1990s. It refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to second wave feminism.

Our research paper, deals with the feminist revolt in America through two different literary works, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). Kate Chopin is among the first feminist writers, who participated in the emergence of new image of American woman to claim for female social and sexual liberation. Her second novel, *The Awakening* deals with women's sexual and spiritual liberation. The author transmits the message that women should express their needs and desires to be equal to men. Toni Morrison is one of the most prominent African American novelists, who not only defends women in general but also African American women (black women) in specific to accomplish their emancipation. In her popular second novel *Sula*, Morrison explores the story of motherhood, friendship, and love. It follows two female protagonists from childhood to adulthood and their rebellion against societal norms.

The main aim of this dissertation is to focus on the ways American and Afro-American women reclaim their rights against traditions and societal instructions by revolting to regain their social and sexual freedom through the two protagonists of both works; Edna, the white American Woman and Sula the Afro-American woman. In their attempt to achieve their goal, these two protagonists revolt against everything in society even life since they find that death is the only redemption for their freedom. Even though the two novels were written in different centuries in America, they share many similarities in the sense that women want to attain equality.

Review of Literature

Kate Chopin's work *The Awakening* has been studied by many critics from different perspectives. In the first instance, Megan P. Kaplon announces in her journal article entitled

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: Struggle against Society and Nature, written in (2012),

Nature and society were the two strongest forces attempting to mould Edna Pontellier into the woman that they wanted her to be, but through her suicide, Edna is finally able to escape their grasp...but it was her desire for individuality and self-definition that led her to her deathly rebirth.¹

Throughout the above quotation Megan P. Kaplon, shows "nature and society" are the two mightiest powers that try to form Edna's personality in the way they want; she is controlled by them. By committing suicide, she was able to get rid of that nature and society's frustration. In the same quotation, Megan says that Léonce as well as society control Edna's life, they wish to confine her in the private sphere. She adds that Edna's children are the ones who detain her, thus she is obliged to stay and accept the situation since she loves them. Yet her desire to live as an independent woman, who wants to pursue her own goals without the guidance of her society's instruction drives her to awaken, and be the woman she dreams for.

One more critique reported by Culley Margo in her edited book entitled *A Norton Critical Edition: Kate Chopin: The Awakening*, states that women have not the same rights as men. They are marginalized by the patriarchal system. In fact, Margo claims that women are not totally free from community's instructions and rules. For her, Edna betrays neither her husband nor her society. The writer explains Edna's faithfulness when she informs her husband about the end of their relation and her wish to become a free woman so that to lead the life of a non-command woman, no one has the right to blame her or ordain her.²

In his article entitled Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Dissenting Opinion Hugh J. Dawson asserts ,

The Awakening tells of Edna Pontellier's passing, in less than a year's time, from the accumulated frustrations she feels in her marriage to apparent suicide. The common understanding of her plight is that she is an intelligent woman stifled by the (PAGE6) of the Creole society she has married into. Denied the opportunity to be the person she deserves to be and wishes to become, she is seen to affirm her selfhood by-if not taking her life swimming away from society and being received into nature's innocence.³

It can be deduced from this quotation that Edna decides to make an end to her suffering through her self-murdering by giving herself to nature, to finish with the discrimination that she has faced in her entire life. Dawson considers that Edna's community rules and beliefs deny her to be the person she wants. She chooses to put an end to her life in her society's limited opportunities, into another world where she may express her freedom.

Toni Morrison's *Sula*, has been the subject of many critics. Professor Mohammed Sabbar Abdulbaqi from Lincoln's university analyses it in his article Rational and Irrational Emancipation of Women in Community: A Critical Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Sula*, says,

In Toni Morrison's *Sula*, it is known that Nel becomes a slave to racism and sexism while Sula strives and becomes an emancipated woman. But in this research, the meaning of emancipation is going to be interpreted in new detours that are ironically discussed in terms of rational and irrational emancipation. In *Sula*, the issues of emancipation along with the norms of the community are demonstrated in the light of reason. Sula becomes the embodiment of the African-American woman who emancipates at the expense of disciplines and values of her community and consequently dies socially and lonely.⁴

In this passage, Mohammed Sabbar sheds light on the way the two female characters behave towards society. Nel is "rational" and this is shown mainly through her following to society's commands, her rational emancipation is pleasantly received, she mainly becomes a slave sexually. Sula, according to him, acts "irrationally" as a social nonconformist and sexual dissident, who revolts against her community's values and principles. Mohammed Sabbar adds that Nel's behaviour helps her to gain the respect and the intention of her society. Contrary to Sula, who loses them and dies like an unknown person because of her disobedience.

Hameed Mankhi Azhar also criticizes Morrison's novel. In his article entitled Black Female Masculinity in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, the assistant professor of the English department claims that the main character, Sula tries to build her selfhood through rebellion on tradition, social norms. She fights against whatever is societal and restricted in a way that she tries to show herself as a free woman. In other words, she rejects the idea of being obedient or dominated by men even though many black women accept to live in such conditions. Hameed Mankhi insists that Sula does not care about how people see her. For Sula, a black woman could not live her life if she does not revolt against the oppression and the injustice she faces.⁵

Another important critique by the associate professor of English Marie Nigro in her article entitled In Search of Self Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, reports,

Although Toni Morrison (1973) may not intentionally have created a novel to celebrate the working class or to explore the consequences of work among African-Americans, she has in *Sula* celebrated the lives of ordinary people who daily must work and provide. *Sula* celebrates many lives: it is the story of friendship of two African-American women; it is the story of growing up black and female, but most of all, it is the story of a community.⁶

According to Nigro, Toni Morrison neither focuses on the African-American working class nor on the use of male domination to show up the Ohio's community. Instead, she concentrates on narrating the story of two different black female characters. Nigro contends that each aspect of the two girls affects the life of women in which Morrison sheds light on how an African-American woman could live; where *Sula* almost entirely told from the point of view of women living in that community.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

It appears from the review of literature that Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has received much more criticism comparing to Toni Morrison's *Sula*. In fact, this is due to their periods. *The Awakening* was published in the late nineteenth century and *Sula* in the middle of

the twentieth century. Most critics shed light on the feminist revolt in the case of both white and black women in the patriarchal society as an important aspect in the two novels. The American writer Kate Chopin and the Afro-American Toni Morrison call for women's liberation. Yet, despite the similarities in the two works no research, to our best knowledge, had been conducted comparing the two novels.

Our purpose in this dissertation is to offer some insight about how an American and Afro-American woman live in a patriarchal society; where man represents full power. How do these women react and fight against men's oppression in order to free themselves from this discrimination and how they revolt to gain their independence both socially and sexually. In addition to this, we are going to focus on the similarities between the two works concerning the female characters' struggle to establish themselves within communities. This comparative study is based on the hypothesis that though the two novels were written in different periods in America, they bear many analogies at the level of characters and themes. At first sight, women in Kate Chopin's novel are obliged to face their sexuality. In Toni Morrison's novel, women accumulate two handicaps which are being first a woman and then a black.

Throughout our analysis, we will rely on two theoretical assumptions that are *Masculine Domination* (1998) by Pierre Bourdieu, who analyses it as an example form of "symbolic violence", it also treats gender sexuality and power as well. As for bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (1984), it refers to the description of black women, whose voices have been marginalized.

The choice of the selected theories emanates from our belief that their premises are the most relevant to our issue in *The Awakening* and *Sula*, and that their components fit the aim of our comparison.

Methodological Outline

At the methodological level, this research paper intends to depict Feminist Revolt in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). In order to study the highlighted issue, our dissertation will be divided into four sections. The first section will be divided into a general introduction in which we have made an overview about the feminist movement in America including white and black women. The second will be devoted to methods and materials. In the method section, we will introduce and explain the theories; Pierre Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination* (1998) and bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (1984). As for the materials section, we will deal with the biographies of the two authors, then we come to provide brief summaries of the novels cited above, in addition to their historical background. The third section will be the results; where we will present our findings. The discussion section is constituted of three chapters; the first chapter deals with "male domination" and gender roles in both novels, by analysing the major female characters in relation to men's oppression and society's traditions and roles in America presented by both white and black women. The second chapter discusses the theme of the institution of marriage and motherhood by making reference to the novel's female characters. In the last chapter, we will shed light on the theme of freedom and death in relation to the female protagonists, who reach freedom through their tragic end. Finally, we will conclude our paper with a summary of the important points that relate and differentiate the two works.

Endnotes

¹Megan P Kaplon, “Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*: Struggle against Society and Nature,” *Inquiries Journal/ Student Pulse* 04, no. 07 (2012): 02.

²Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, ed. Culley Margo, Third Norton Critical Edition: Kate Chopin: *The Awakening* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1994).

³Hugh J. Dawson, “Kate Chopin *The Awakening*: A Dissenting Option,” *American Literary Realism* 26, no. 2 (1994): 1-18.

⁴Abdulbaqi Mohammed Sabbar, “Rational and Irrational Emancipation of Women in Community: A Critical Analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Sula*,” *Midad Al-Adab Magazine*, 2017: 645.

⁵Hameed Mankhi Azhar, “Black Female Masculinity in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*,” *University of Wasit, Iraq*. Vol 25(2020): 41-48.

⁶Marie Nigro, “In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*,” *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no.6 (1998): 724-737.

Methods and Materials

1-Methods

To reach our purpose in comparing Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), in the context of feminist revolt and rebellion in American Literatures in two different periods presented by the American and Afro-American writer, we will borrow from Pierre Bourdieu's theory *Masculine Domination* (1998) and bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (1984).

A-Summary of the Theories

a-Pierre Bourdieu's Theory *Masculine Domination*

Pierre Bourdieu is one of the most important French sociologists of the second half of the twentieth century, his book *La Domination Masculine* (1998), was translated to English by Richard Nice as *Masculine Domination* (2001). In *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu develops a sociological analysis of social relations between the sexes, which explain the causes of the domination of men over women in all human societies. He deals in general with questions of culture, class, gender inequality, sexuality, and the structures that move our social, political, and personal lives.

The book is based on particular on an anthropological study of the relations between the sexes on Berber society in Kabylia; treated as a "Magnified Image". This society organized by what he calls "Androcentric Society"; which means male centred. Thus he explains how Kabylisians moved from a casual and "arbitrary division" between male and female "naturalized" social structure, and how they "eternalized" the arbitrary. After that, he moves to describe female body and analyse "masculine domination" as a main example of "symbolic violence". Then he shifts to cite the possibilities for social transformation, study of

gender and class. Bourdieu recognizes that important change has taken place in the wake of second-wave feminism especially in modernized societies; where masculine domination has reduced though still exist. As Bourdieu states, “The submissive demeanour which is imposed on Kabyle women is the limiting case of what is still imposed on women, even today, as much in the United States as in Europe.”¹

To better explain this theory, we will focus more on two main concepts that Bourdieu deals with. The first concept is "sexual division"; that is the difference exercised on women and men in a discriminated way, it is considered as something natural that women live under the decisions of men. In which Bourdieu argues, “The division between the sexes appears to be ‘in the order of things’, as people sometimes say to refer to what is normal, natural.”² Therefore the relationship between male and female is not balanced, women looked as "things"; they are condemned to see themselves only through the dominant due to the differences on bodies, “The biological difference between the sexes...can thus appear as the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the genders,”³

Bourdieu, in his theory, adds that social structures influence the organization of space and time as well as the sexual division of labor results, so women are in under representation in the important domain of economic and political world.

The sexual division is inscribed, on the one hand, in the division of productive activities with which we associate the idea of work, and more generally in the division of the labour of maintaining social capital and symbolic capital which gives men the monopoly of all official, public activities, of representation,⁴

Without denying the "physical violence" linked to this domination, Bourdieu draws attention to the importance of the effects of the concept of "symbolic violence" or "invisible violence" of male domination, “Symbolic force is a form of power that is exerted on bodies, directly and as if by magic, without any physical constraint.”⁵

The sociologist goes on to say that the "symbolic power" exercised on women will continue as long as there is no change on the social conditions of the dominant's behaviour. As it is stated, "the relation of complicity that the victims of symbolic domination grant to the dominant can only be broken through a radical transformation of the social conditions,"⁶

Our selection of Pierre Bourdieu's theory is justified by the fact that he seeks to highlight male domination over women within society. Whereas in his theory the division of the sexes is particularly visible in Kabylia, it has not disappeared in other societies like America; it is simply less visible and internalized. Thus, how the feminist characters in *The Awakening* and in *Sula* react toward this form of domination to revolt and reclaim their liberation.

b-bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*

Feminist Theory: from margin to center is a book by the African-American author, professor, feminist and social activist bell hooks, published in 1984. In her theory, hooks critiques feminist thought and practice as it existed before and theorizes new ways to achieve a society without oppression. hooks argues that the early feminist movement was dominated by middle-class white women who separated racial and class struggles from feminism. This issue pushed women of colour to the margins of the feminist movement, "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body."⁷ ; Therefore, the "margin" in her title refers to the marginalization of black women in the American society. Thus, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center's* central topic is that the final goal of feminism is not only to fight for equality between sexes, but to end sexist oppression and the male domination that supports it.

Motherhood has been seen in different ways mostly; some viewed that women are meant to have children, and their main job is raising them and taking care of them. While

others want to have more freedom, they want to have career, this can be seen in hooks' words where she says,

Many black women were saying we want to have more time to share with family, we want to leave the world of alienated work. Many white women's liberationists were saying we are tired of the isolation of the home, tired of relating only to children and husbands, tired of being emotionally and economically dependent; we want to be liberated to enter the world of work.⁸

Thus, hooks sees that motherhood is something that is to be valued and appreciated by the society, since it is considered as a unique gift for women, and that it was not given much importance in feminist movement. Indeed, the nature of motherhood must be revised in order to make it neither an obligatory experience, nor an oppression's or exploitation's experience.

Additionally, feminism creates an opportunity for all women to be sexual, enjoying sex and have the right to control it. Therefore, feminism supports an end to sexual oppression, and many believe that those who are heterosexual are blocking feminism's way to achieve this goal. However, sexual orientation is a private choice, and by choosing it, women practice their sexual freedom. Also, "feminist activists need to remember that the political choices we make are not determined by who we choose to have genital sexual contact with."⁹ hooks adds that the struggle for ending sexual oppression is an unavoidable part that needs to be accomplished, in order to transform society and create a new social order. According to hooks, feminism has many sub-goals that are necessary to achieve the final goal: to end women's oppression. However, it has not taught women enough but, "it has been a successful rebellion."¹⁰ Although it is not yet at the stage of changing social orders.

2-Materials

A-Biography of the Authors

a-Kate Chopin

Kate Chopin was born Catherin O'Flaherty, in St. Louis, Missouri (1850), she is a novelist and short story writer. She was sent to Sacred Heart Academy, but she comes back home after her father's death. Therefore she lived with her mother, grandmother and great grandmother, where she developed a marked interest in fairy tales, poetry, and in classics and contemporary novels. In 1865, Chopin came back to Sacred Heart Academy, from where she graduated, and has developed a talent as a narrator.

Chopin suffered from depression, in which her doctor advised her to start writing, and from here she regained her interest in literature. Indeed, she was a writer who has intensive observational skills. Her stories do not give just the traditions of the society, but also an idea about the author's beliefs about individuality. As it is stated in Kate Chopin: Biography, works and style (2013),

Chopin found that her own experience as a self-reliant woman in the south made the best fodder for her works. These stories colourful in description and bold in ideas not only give the reader an insight into the regions customs and social structures but also offer a clear idea of the author's beliefs about individuality.¹¹

Thus, in 1890, Chopin established a successful writing carrier, contributing short stories and articles to local publications and literary magazines. Fred Lewis Pattee in his book entitled *A History of American Literature Since 1870*, states, "Kate Chopin has been credited by some as a pioneer of the early feminist movement even though she did not achieve any literary rewards for her works."¹² She died in 1904. Among her major works; the two story collections: "Bayou Folk" (1894) and "A Night in Acadie" (1897). In addition to this; her important short stories "The Story of An Hour" (1894) and "The Storm" (1898). She also

wrote two novels; *At Fault* (1890) and *The Awakening* (1899). The latter explores the life of a woman living under the rules of a patriarchal society. Her sense of admiration in life pushes her to explore her inner feeling and reclaim her sexual and social liberation.

b- Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison is an Afro-American novelist, essayist, children's writer, book editor, and college professor. Her original name is Chloe Anthony Wofford, she was born in 1931 and raised in Lorain, Ohio, to Ramah and George Wofford in the United States of America. Then she passed away in 2019, Broux, New York. She was noted for her works about black female experience within the black community. Toni Morrison was the second of four children from working class, black family. She became catholic at the age of twelve. In 1958 she married Harold Morrison and had two children before divorcing in 1964.

Toni Morrison read frequently when she was a child, among her favourite authors are Jane Austen and Leo Tolstoy. Her parents instilled in her a sense of heritage and language through telling traditional African-American folktales, ghost stories, and singing songs, then she became obsessed by writing essays, articles, plays, and nonfiction books in classic literature by analysing black female characters living in an unjust society and how they fight to find themselves and their cultural identity. As she declares in one of her conferences in 1975 at Portland State University,

The very serious function of racism ...is distraction. It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and so you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head is not shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says that you have no art so you dredge that up. Somebody says that you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary.¹³

Toni Morrison joined Lorain High School, from where she graduated with honour in 1949 even though she was working in homes for two dollars a week while she was studying.

Morrison was encouraged by her parents to go to college, and earn her Bachelor's degree in English from Harvard University in Washington, D.C, in 1953. She earned a master arts in American Literature in 1955 from Cornell University, her master thesis was titled, « *Virginia Wolf's and William Faulkner's » Treatment of the Alienated*. She taught English first at Texas Southern University in Houston from 1955 to 1957 and then at Howard University for the next seven years. In the late 1960s, she became the first black female editor in fiction at Random House in New York. Then in 1970s to 1980s she developed her own reputation as an author. She was admired by many for the elegant density of her novel's language. As Oprah says about her in The Oprah Magazine 2018, "It's impossible to actually imagine the American literary landscape without Toni Morrison. She is our conscience, she is our seer, she is our truth-teller."¹⁴

Toni Morrison's critically acclaimed *Song of Salomon* (1977) brought her national attention and won the National Book Critics Circle Award, and won the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* (1987). She was honoured with the National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. In 2012, President Barack Obama presented her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Among her best-known and notable novels we have *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which deals with the story of a young African-American girl who grows up during the years following the Great Depression. *Sula* (1973), where she explores the African-American experience through the friendship of two women. We have also *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008).

B-Summary of the Novels

a- Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899)

The Awakening is a novel by Kate Chopin, first published in 1899. His original title was *A Solitary Soul*. The novel did not gain its popularity at the time of its publication. Actually, the story opens in Grand Isle, and the second half of it is set in New Orleans. *The Awakening* deals with the story of a woman who tries to find her true self within a patriarchal society due to her experiences with friends she met during her summer vacation.

The story took place in 1890s Louisiana. Edna Pontellier and her family went to the Grand Isle, where she met Madame Ratignolle. The latter helped her to learn a lot about freedom of expression. Therefore, this relation between the two serves to the "awakening" of Edna. Thus, she learned how to express her emotions. Throughout her vacationing, Edna encounters another friend called Mademoiselle Reisz; who helped her to express herself through art. In addition to this, Robert Lebrun is also among those who helped Edna to express herself. At first, the relation between the two was innocent. However, later on they become closer to each other. By knowing him, Edna feels more alive than ever before. He brings her awareness of her independence. After her returning to New Orleans, Edna starts neglecting all her social duties, hence, she continues the process of her self-discovery. Therefore, Edna leaves her home and moves to the "pigeon house" where she starts her own business, which makes her independent financially. After that Edna declares herself independent, Robert confesses his love and wants to possess her, but she refuses to be tied to someone else again. Unfortunately Edna finds herself alone; her independence throws her out of society. Therefore, she decides to make her final step in order to reach freedom. Indeed, her only way is suicide. She puts an end to her suffering, and gets rid from her society's restrictions.

b-Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973)

Sula was a postmodern novel written by Toni Morrison in 1973; an African American writer. It was written in accordance with the emergence of women liberation movement in 19th c. Toni Morrison's *Sula* was the story of friendship, motherhood, love, sex, family, and betrayal. The events took place in the neighbourhood of Bottom, which was a black community in Ohio situated in the hills above the mostly White. The story followed two black female characters from childhood to adulthood and how their relation resisted societal norms. The author used the central female characters to show the relationship between "race", "class", and "gender", how these characters reclaimed their social and sexual freedom. It was based on the rationality of woman's attitudes and decisions by referencing to two female characters Sula and Nel.

In her novel, Toni Morrison narrated the suffering of black people; she focused on women's revolt against society's discrimination. She described Nel Wright and her mother, Helene. The latter experienced the difficulties of south discrimination while travelling to New Orleans, where Nel met her grandmother Rochelle; a prostitute, who gave her a strong sense of self.

Nel and Sula were raised in different families. Nel's family believed deeply in social conventions. Though she respected traditions, Nel only tried to be an obedient girl contrary to Sula who chose to be against the rules. Despite their differences, Nel and Sula attached to each other. After high school, the two girls opted for different ways. Nel chose to marry and live the conventional role of wife while Sula followed a divergent path and lived a life of total independence. When Nel married Jude, Sula disappeared from the country during ten years because she did not support the idea of losing her best friend. While she was out of the

Bottom she had many affairs with black and white men. Finding freedom nowhere, she decided to return to the Bottom, where she was seen as an "evil" due to her acts.

Sula betrayed her best friend by having a relationship with her husband, Jude. When Nel discovered the affair, she realized that her marriage was destroyed and broke up her friendship with Sula. The latter was seen by her community as "roach" and "bitch".

At the age of twenty, Sula fell in love with Ajax who was an old man. Unfortunately, he left her. Shortly afterwards she fell ill. While on her deathbed no one among her society had visited her except Nel. Sula died alone in a house as an outsider. After she passed away harmony returns.

End Notes

¹Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*. Translated by Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 28.

²Ibid., 08.

³Ibid., 11.

⁴Ibid., 47.

⁵Ibid., 38.

⁶Ibid., 41-42.

⁷bell hooks, “Preface,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984).

⁸bell hooks, “Revolutionary Parenting,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 133.

⁹Ibid., “Ending Female Sexual Oppression,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 152.

¹⁰Ibid., “Feminist Revolution: Development Through Struggle,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 159.

¹¹Katherine Godin, “Kate Chopin: Biography, Works, and Style,” (Study. Com. March 29, 2013).

¹²Lewis Patte Fred, “A History of American Literature Since 1870,” (Harvard University Press, 1915), 364.

¹³Unknown, “12 of Toni Morrison’s Most Memorable Quotes,” (The New York Times Magazine, 2019).

¹⁴Mc Kenzie, Jean-Philippe, “12 Groundbreaking Toni Morrison Books to Read Right Now,” (The Oprah Magazine, August 6, 2019).

Results

In this part of dissertation, we shed light on the findings in our comparative study of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). Fusing the theoretical auspices we have borrowed from bell hooks' *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (1984) and *Masculine Domination* of Pierre Bourdieu (1998).

In the first chapter, we have dealt with masculine domination and symbolic violence in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). In fact, we have revealed the feminist vision of the two authors on men's domination. Therefore, we have noticed that both authors reject the sexual division and the symbolic violence that women face in the patriarchal society. Indeed, they attempt to make their female characters fight against the conventions of the society to show that women could no longer be considered as being properties, and could also reach the public sphere as men.

In the second chapter, we have come to deduce that like Chopin, Morrison uses the female characters to show that there are two categories of women; those who adhere to the conventional beliefs that men's authority is natural. They devote their lives to their families. Contrarily, other women perceive marriage and children to be hindrance to their aspirations and freedom. They want to free themselves from these restrictions. Hence, they choose to live far from the familial responsibilities.

Our analysis of the third chapter has revealed that Chopin's protagonist Edna, and Morrison's main female character Sula, find themselves alone when they decide to go against their society in order to secure a place for themselves. Indeed, Edna ends up by being misunderstood. Therefore, her ultimate solution to end this conflict between her and society is committing suicide. Similarly, Sula follows her own desire throughout the entire novel. She ends up dying alone in a room just like an alien, an outcast.

Discussion

Chapter One: Masculine Domination and Gender Roles

Our intention in this chapter is to examine the female characters; Edna Pontellier as she is portrayed in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Sula Peace, Nel Wright, and Eva Peace in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). In fact, we will try to demonstrate how the authors deal with the female protagonists's reactions over male domination within the same society in the United States. In Chopin's novel, white men and society in general oppress white women. In *Sula*, women face two constraints, being a woman first then a black; both white and black men despise them. Therefore, we will substantiate the extent to which they revolt to gain their place within the patriarchal society. To better explain this authority toward women we will rely on Bourdieu's theory *Masculine Domination*.

1 – Sexual Division and Gender Inequality

Women almost all over the world have been placed under the authority of men for centuries, they have always been dependent on the decisions that men take on their behalf due to rules dictated by society. Sexual division and gender inequality are among the important themes that Kate Chopin and Toni Morrison treat in their novels. Women suffer from injustice, inequality, and oppression that community made on them by classifying them as inferior to men. This is best exemplified in *Masculine Domination* where Bourdieu says that while this division of the sexes is particularly visible in Kabylia, it has not disappeared in other countries. Consequently, male value systems are always superior and implicit.

a – Sexual Division and Gender Inequality in *The Awakening*

In the Creole society, the role assigned to women is the domestic sphere. They are asked to raise their children, take care of their husbands, and do all other kinds of household

chores. However, any kind of work outside the home is considered as unsuitable. Whereas for men, they are seen as the rulers, they are fit to do all kinds of work outside the domestic scale.

As Pierre Bourdieu asserts,

The sexual division is inscribed, on the one hand, in the division of productive activities with which we associate the idea of work, and more generally in the division of the labor of maintaining social capital and symbolic capital which gives men the monopoly of all official, public activities, of representation.¹

Indeed, men are asked to make their families comfortable financially, contrary to women, who are made to be only wives and mothers. As it is seen in the following passage by Kate Chopin, where she says,

If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them.²

Therefore, in the beginning of the novel, Chopin discusses this idea of division, in which she makes Léonce Pontellier; Edna's husband, believes in and adheres to the Creole's rules. As it is stated in Erika Ariparno's thesis,

Her husband holds up his society's system that a wife is demanded to be at home to take care household matters, while a husband is demanded to be in a public sphere. Mr. Pontellier exploits Edna that a wife is supposed to be in a private sphere. He is a dominating husband, he always forces Edna to do and be what he wants.³

Indeed, Léonce sees that women are meant to be confined at home to take care of their husbands and children. Therefore, he tries to put his wife Edna in the "domestic sphere", whereas he is responsible of managing business and making money for his family. In this sense, Bourdieu says,

It is the sexual division of labour, a very strict distribution of the activities assigned to each sex, of their place, time and instruments; it is the structure of space, with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, served for men, and the house, reserved for women.⁴

Throughout the novel, Edna is discriminated in her society. Hence, she does not obtain the same opportunity in job distribution. This is because of the Creole's traditions and rules

that push women to become good housewives like Madame Ratignolle. However, Edna does not accept to be like her, she rather wants to be an artist.

Throughout her vacation on Grand Isle, Edna meets a friend called Mademoiselle Reisz. By knowing her, Edna asks whether she has the ability to become an artist or not. Mademoiselle Reisz encourages Edna to follow her desire, helping her to take the first step to become an artist, where she states, “to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul.”⁵ Therefore, the struggle that Edna makes to achieve an identity of her own is then inspired and encouraged by her friend Mademoiselle Reisz.

Hence, once Mademoiselle Reisz asks Edna what she is doing in her life, Edna then answers, “painting!...I am becoming an artist. Think of it.”⁶ From the quotation, one can see that Edna is trying to break the Creole’s norms; she does not want to spend all her time with her family doing the household chores. She, rather, chooses to do what she really likes. Instead of obeying her husband, Edna decides to work,

Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her.⁷

From the quotation, the reader realizes that Edna finds true satisfaction and fulfilment in art and not elsewhere. At first, she exercises this activity just for fun, not for any other purpose. She even declares, “I feel like painting’. Perhaps I shan’t always feel like it. ”⁸ Edna then feels like art becomes essential to her.

Edna spent an hour or two looking over some of her old sketches. She could see their shortcomings and defects, which were glaring in her eyes. She tries to work a little, but found she was not in the humor. Finally she gathered together a few of the sketches those which she considered the least discreditable; and she carried them with her when, a little later, she dressed and left the house.⁹

From the above quotation, one can notice that painting becomes an important job for Edna. She starts identifying her flaws and tries to improve them, and by developing them, she

succeeds to improve herself within the Creole society as well. Therefore, painting becomes Edna's job rather than a hobby.

Furthermore, instead of receiving Léonce's business partners in their home as she used to do every Tuesday, she prefers to take long lonely walks to get inspiration for her paintings, this is illustrated when Chopin says,

She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household en bonne ménagère, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice.¹⁰

Edna then understands that it takes a lot of hard work to become a good artist. Therefore, in the last chapters of the novel, Edna decides to leave the Pontellier's house, moving to her own small home "pigeon house", where she starts selling her painting there and making her own money. Indeed, she sees that making her own money provides her status and independence. As a result, Edna succeeds to get a job just like a Creole man, and she reaches her goal that is financial independence.

In her literary work *The Awakening* (1899), Chopin depicts the image of how Edna revolts against the Creole society to get access and opportunity to job distribution, and breaks the rules that require women to stay at home and take care of their children and husbands. In fact, Edna succeeds to free herself from her society's orders and gain a place in men's world.

b – Sexual Division and Gender Inequality in *Sula*

Toni Morrison's fiction portrays African-American women in their communities during the 20th century, showing their struggle for identity and self-discovery. The black women in *Sula* are victims of racism, gender discrimination, and gender inequality due to submission to society's orders. The story explores first how women live in a patriarchal community, then how they are oppressed by black society in general and white men in

particular. Some of these characters suffer by their husbands who neglect and leave them, such as Sula's grandmother, Eva and Sula's best friend Nel. Others suffer from society's traditions and customs as it is depicted with Sula.

For Pierre Bourdieu, the roles given to women in society are just culturally made ones. It becomes natural after centuries, in the name of traditions, to explain this inequality between the two sexes. Bourdieu says, "When we try to understand masculine domination, we are therefore likely to resort to modes of thought that are the product of domination."¹¹

For him, the division and the differentiation between man and woman has been created by society, this gives men power and superiority. Bourdieu adds: "The division between the sexes appears to be 'in the order of things ', as people sometimes say to refer to what is normal, natural."¹²

The two main characters, Nel and Sula endure more from the issues of race and gender. They suffer from restrictive gender roles that dictate their daily lives. Society teaches them to be disciplined and take care of their brothers, fathers, and husbands. Women according to them must be confined at home, while men are designated to be in the public sphere. In the same context, Pierre Bourdieu asserts,

As if femininity were measured by the art of 'shrinking' (in Berber the feminine is marked by the diminutive form) women are held in a kind of invisible enclosure (of which the veil is only the visible manifestation) circumscribing the space allowed for the movements and postures of their bodies (whereas men occupy more space, especially in public places).¹³

In *Sula*, Nel confirms black women weakness in such a patriarchal society, where no consideration is given to them. She believes that men have the right to do whatever they want, whereas women have their limits, in a way that they can not do whatever they want. Women, according to her, could not get through with life without the help of men. In fact, her mother

Helene teaches her to be obedient and submissive, accept whatever society says. In this passage she speaks to Sula,

You _can't_ do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't." "You repeating yourself." "How repeating myself?" "You say I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?" "I don't think so and you wouldn't either if you had children."¹⁴

Morrison adds, "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be."¹⁵ This quote illustrates clearly sexual division and inequality between the two sexes in The United States where women are placed under the tutorship of men. Her grandmother, Cecile Sabat in a strictly religious home, raised Helene Wright. She is an authoritative mother; she raises Nel to be a conventional woman.

According to Bourdieu, gender differentiation is everywhere in the world, not only in Africa and America, women are regarded as weak, situated in the bottom in opposition to men, who have superiority, placed by their society in the top of the social ladder.

The submissive demeanour which is imposed on Kabyle women is the limiting case of what is still imposed on women, even today, as much in the United States as in Europe, and which, as a number of observers have shown, is summed up in a few imperatives: smile, look down, accept interruptions.¹⁶

In *Sula*, the black women are oppressed not only by the whites but also by black men, who allow themselves to have relationships with white women but deny the sexual union between Sula and any white man,

The fact that their own skin color was proof that it had happened in their own families was no deterrent to their bile. Nor was the willingness of black men to lie in the beds of white women a consideration that might lead them toward tolerance. They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable.¹⁷

We can notice prejudices between women themselves within black community. Sula and Jude are both sexual anarchists; Sula is judged and is seen as a bitch. Contrary to

Jude whom all women love, they find him nice; no one from the community insults him or judges him. Indeed, when Sula is dying, she admits about the discrimination that women face in their daily lives because of male dominance and the social norms to which women must kneel down. When speaking to Nel, Sula maintains that every black woman is living a dead life. Sula says, “I know what every colored woman in this country is doing.” “What's that?” “Dying”. Just like me.”¹⁸

Contrary to many women living in the Bottom (Medallion), who choose to be obedient to the communities' beliefs, Sula wants to live an independent life without obstacles; she frees herself from distinction and behaves as if she has equal rights with men. Unfortunately, she could not go far. Even Eva tells her, “It ain't right for you to want to stay off of yourself.”¹⁹

However, Sula does not agree with her community imposing traditional notions under the pretext of being a woman. She refuses to marry because of man dominance. She declares, “I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself.”²⁰ She sees other women living in under oppression. For that reason, she prefers freedom and loneliness. Finally Toni Morrison concludes that social conventions are the foundation for living one's life, otherwise not at the expense of ruining women's lives.

2 – Symbolic violence

Bourdieu introduces another type of domination, which is the concept of "symbolic violence". According to him, the causes of invisible violence are linked to the application of social order, to which women are victims. This is depicted in the two novels. The female characters in both Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*, whether white or black, are abused by their husbands in particular and their society's rules in general.

a – Symbolic violence in *The Awakening*

The Awakening indicates the societal patriarchal stereotypes that orders women to give themselves to their husbands and rely on their material support, while being honest with them. Therefore, Creole women have to follow their husband's rules and must obey them as well. Doing so does not really provide them with the opportunity to be independent. The Creole sees that after marriage, women must devote their lives to their husbands and children in order to become good wives and mothers. Thus, perhaps they get a comfortable life because their husbands give them what they need, however, they lose their freedom.

Therefore, by losing freedom, they are considered as being weak, "Women, weak in themselves and sources of weakness,"²¹ as Bourdieu says. Hence, because women are considered weak in the Creole society, they should follow their husband's rules. Since the position of men is elevated in that society; they are the ones who provide money, and women are only there to serve them, just as Bourdieu proclaims, "women are almost always confined to minor roles."²²

In the early chapters of the novel, it becomes clear to Edna that society considers her a possession of her husband, and slave to her children. Thus, throughout the novel, Edna sees her marriage as a handicap depriving her of power. She must obey her husband Léonce. The latter loves her in his way; he does not give much attention to her, and treats her as a property.

As Erika Ariparno declares,

Léonce does not know and care of what makes Edna happy. He does not think of his wife as a lover that needs his attention and time, in addition he does not want to participate in Edna's world because they have a different world.²³

Léonce does not see Edna as a human being who needs much his attention. Therefore, he does not really know or understand the troubles that happen in Edna's inner life. As a result, he cannot understand her personal transformation, or the unfamiliar lifestyle that results from it in the last chapters of the novel.

In the beginning of the novel, Chopin depicts the scene in which Mr. Pontellier reproves his wife for taking a sunbathing in such an extreme heat saying, “you are burnt beyond recognition’, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage.”²⁴ This implies that Léonce regards his wife as a piece of his property rather than an individual.

From the same quotation, one can notice that Léonce looks at his wife in a way someone does not look at a human being, but rather something that belongs to them. Though, the use of the phrase “personal property” suggests that Edna is considered as being an object by her husband, not as an individual or even a woman. Indeed, Bourdieu declares, “the will to dominate, exploit or oppress has relied on the ‘manly’ fear of being excluded from the world of ‘men’ without weakness.”²⁵ Therefore, Mr. Pontellier could do that thing, because as a Creole man, he feels superior towards Edna. He believes that his wife cannot live without him. So, he could act in the way he wants towards her.

Because Mr. Pontellier considers Edna as a property, he becomes angry when his wife disobeys his order. As Chopin states,

Mrs. Pontellier was quite sure Raoul had no fever. He had gone to bed perfectly well, she said, and nothing had ailed him all day. Mr. Pontellier was too well acquainted with fever symptoms to be mistaken. He assured her the child was consuming at that moment in the next room.²⁶

As a Creole man and a husband, Léonce feels superior to Edna. He is upset with the action that Edna takes, when she defies his order to take care of his child who, according to him, gets a fever. Therefore, he does not appreciate his wife for not following his order.

When Edna explains that the children are perfectly good and happy, Léonce erupts with anger, blaming her for being inattentive and a bad mother, saying, “If it was not a mother’s place to look after children, whose on earth was it?”²⁷

Hereafter, Edna decides to keep silent and not answer him; as Creole women should do. This is shown when Chopin states, “she said nothing, and refused to answer her husband when he

questioned her.”²⁸, and since Edna is still weak “she began to cry a little and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her peignoir.”²⁹ In fact, Léonce does not care about Edna’s opinions and feelings. He wants to dominate and control his wife because the Creole norms entail him to do so. Léonce is really disappointed by Edna because he believes that his wife must obey his entire requests without any protest.

Moreover, during her vacationing on Grand Isle, Edna starts to revolt against the Creole’s instructions in general, and her husband’s oppression and domination in particular. She meets friends that help her in different ways to awaken. Indeed, she learns the way of expression of Creole women. Therefore, these women express their feeling freely and share their emotions openly. At first she is shocked while hearing them, as Chopin states, “their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her.”³⁰ She adds: “never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the harrowing story of one of her accouchements, withholding no intimate detail.”³¹ In fact, Madame Ratignolle teaches her that it is okay to speak and think about one’s feeling. Edna then starts acknowledging her emotions. “Mrs. Pontellier gave over being astonished, and concluded that wonders would never cease.”³²

In addition to this, Edna meets a friend called Robert Lebrun, with whom she falls in love. She expresses her feeling freely with him. Thus, she feels more alive with him. However, Edna’s feeling to Robert breaks the norms of the Creole society. The Creole perceives that women must be faithful to their husbands. So, falling in love with another man is forbidden. Indeed, Robert devotes himself to Edna the whole summer as her guide and swimming teacher. When Edna learns how to swim, she feels more confident about herself. She considers that Robert brings out the best in her. Edna starts believing in her then; one can see it in the following quote “How easy it is! She thought. It is nothing, she said aloud; why

did I not discover before that it was nothing. Think of the time I have lost splashing about like a baby.”³³

Thus, from here, she begins to believe in her own ability to have an independent life. During her vacation, Edna starts feeling her own self as a human, she even denies her husband's orders; this is shown when he starts asking and yelling at her to enter home rather than stay out all the night. Edna answers him. She says, “Léonce, go to bed, I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you.”³⁴ Here, the reader can understand that Edna is no longer that weak person who cannot argue against her husband.

Additionally, Edna is rather a strong person who gets the power to control herself and to choose her path. Accordingly, Chopin states, “In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her.”³⁵ Eventually, as she becomes more self-aware, Edna attempts to liberate herself from the male-domination and oppression that she has faced. She declares, “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not.”³⁶

In her novel, Kate Chopin depicts the image of the oppressed female character Edna, and how she frees herself from the domination she faces from her husband and society as well, to gain her own self. Therefore, Edna becomes aware of her actions, she is no more her husband's possession. In other words, Edna now belongs to herself, not to someone else.

b – Symbolic violence in *Sula*

Racially exploited, sexually violated and emotionally humiliated is the case of the female characters in Toni Morrison's novels. Most of the women in her fiction are rejected, neglected, and ill-treated for being a woman and a colored one. Through reading *Sula*, we notice that the author does not shed light on men while she focuses on describing how many

black women try to confront the symbolic violence exerted by white, black men and their societies. According to Bourdieu this type of violence is "invisible" not "physical", as it is not perceived, 'Symbolic force is a form of power that is exerted on bodies, directly and as if by magic, without any physical constraint; but this magic works only on the basis of the dispositions deposited.'³⁷

The two main women live in a racially, conventional small town in Ohio in The United States. Sula Peace and Nel Wright faced violence when they were young and they continue to face it until their death. Throughout the passage below, we note that black children suffer also from discrimination. Morrison declares,

Four white boys in their early teens, sons of some newly arrived Irish people, occasionally entertained themselves in the afternoon by harassing black schoolchildren... These particular boys caught Nel once, and pushed her from hand to hand until they grew tired of the frightened helpless face. Because of that incident, Nel's route home from school became elaborate.³⁸

When Sula and Nel grew up, they faced another type of violence that is an indirect one from men and society. Women are not only abused for their black skin, they are punished simply for being women. Pierre Bourdieu explains,

The regularities of the physical order and the social order impose and inculcate dispositions by excluding women from the noblest tasks (leading the plough, for example) by designating inferior places for them (the edge of the road or embankment, for example), by teaching them how to hold their bodies (for example, bent, with arms folded on the chest, before respectable men),³⁹

From this quotation, Bourdieu explains how violence is exercised on women from their people's community, who teaches them to act, behave, and be under men's instructions.

In Toni Morrison's novel, violence does not only occur in the white versus black conflict at that period. The passage below illustrates also prejudices among the blacks themselves, Nel is offended by her own race, who insults her instead of defending her. Morrison declares,

Nel was the color of wet sandpaper--just dark enough to escape the blows of the pitch-black true bloods and the contempt of old women who worried about such things as bad blood mixtures and knew that the origins of a mule and a mulatto were one and the same.⁴⁰

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison shows how the relationships between women hold families and entire communities together. Yet, many women friendships are ruined because society teaches them that their purpose in life is to marry and build a family. Being a homemaker is considered as an indirect violence toward a woman.

Nel's mother, Helene teaches her to respect the norms and the traditions. Contrary to Sula, who seeks for freedom everywhere, Nel becomes a slave of racism and "sexism", her moral commitment maintains her social emancipation. Although Nel does not believe enough in her mother's thoughts, she only goes with tradition. In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu confirms, "Symbolic power cannot be exercised without the contribution of those who undergo it and who only undergo it because they construct it as such."⁴¹

For Bourdieu, women could make an end to this violence. Unfortunately, many of them accept that. Just like Helene, Nel lives in a time when women are only asked to follow and not to lead. Nel and her mother are symbolically dominated by the opposite sex. Their blind adherence to traditions and the idea of male leadership is fixed up in their minds.

Another important example of symbolic violence appears very clearly in the novel, which Toni Morrison bases on it, is the one exercised on wives by their husbands. Nel and Eva are among these women. Nel's husband, Jude betrays her with her best friend Sula. He causes her pain and abandons her with three children. The same thing happens with Sula's grandmother; Eva. After an unhappy marriage with BoyBoy, the latter leaves her rearing alone three children without conscious. He also moves Eva away from her home in Virginia to Medallion then, he goes to renew his life with another woman. Toni Morrison affirms,

After five years of a sad and disgruntled marriage BoyBoy took off. During the time they were together he was very much preoccupied with other women and not home much. He did whatever he could that he liked, and he liked womanizing best, drinking second, and abusing Eva third.⁴²

In conclusion, we can say that women in Toni Morrison's *Sula* are portrayed as victims of a patriarchal society under sexism and oppression of men. Except the main character Sula, who wants to free herself because she looks upon conventions as barriers to self-discovery. Even though at that time in the twentieth century women's liberation movements started to regain freedom and ask for liberation of their rights in different domains, regrettably masculine domination and society's instructions were still exercised on women.

End Notes

¹Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*. Translated by Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 47.

²Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (New York, NY: Bantam Classic, 1899), 12-13.

³Erika Ariparno, “Edna Pontellier’s Liberation Against the Oppression Seen in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*: A Marxist- Feminist Study,” (An Undergraduate Thesis, Faculty of Letters Sanata Dharma University Dean, 2016), 38.

⁴Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 10-11.

⁵Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 165.

⁶*Ibid.*, 164.

⁷*Ibid.*, 28.

⁸*Ibid.*, 147.

⁹*Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 05.

¹²*Ibid.*, 08.

¹³Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 92.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 28.

¹⁶Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 137.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁸Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 28.

¹⁹Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 110.

²⁰Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 137.

²¹Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 51.

²²*Ibid.*, “Anamnesis of the hidden constants,” in *Masculine Domination*, 59.

²³Erika Ariparno, “Edna Pontellier’s Liberation Against the Oppression Seen in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*: A Marxist- Feminist Study,” 29.

²⁴Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 04.

²⁵Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 52.

²⁶Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 12.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 23.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*, 24.

³³*Ibid.*, 71.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 80.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 33.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 282.

³⁷Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 38.

³⁸Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 59-60.

³⁹Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 24.

⁴⁰Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 58.

⁴¹Pierre Bourdieu, “A Magnified Image,” in *Masculine Domination*, 40.

⁴²Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 39.

Chapter Two: The Institution of Marriage and Motherhood

Our purpose in this chapter is to illustrate the way female characters face marriage and motherhood in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). In fact, the chapter will analyse the following women characters Edna Pontellier and Madame Ratignolle in *The Awakening*. As for *Sula*, we will consider the characters Eva, Hannah, Helene, Nel, and Sula. The two authors reveal the state of marriage and motherhood in The United States in different centuries. They portray the suffering of the American and the Afro-American daughters, wives and mothers in patriarchal dominated communities. Actually, we will rely on bell hooks' *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (1984) in order to better explain this issue.

a-The Institution of Marriage and Motherhood in *The Awakening*

Creole women are supposed to conform to the normative example of Victorian society as ideal wives and mothers. They always place their husbands and children before themselves; they are asked to take care of them. So, Creole women need to make house comfortable for them, because "the word 'maternal' is associated with the behaviour of women,"¹

According to bell hooks in her *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, mothers believe that "motherhood is a sphere of power they would lose if men participated equally in parenting."² Therefore, in her theory, she argues that motherhood is an important role that women play in society. It is obvious from the quotation below that the task of women is to take care of their children, they have to place the needs and lives of their children before their own. It has been considered as strength of the nation. hooks adds,

As long as women or society as a whole see the mother/ child relationship as unique and special because the female carries the child in her body and gives birth, or makes this biological experience synonymous with women having a closer, more significant

bond to children than the male parent, responsibility for child care and childrearing will continue to be primarily women's work.³

In *The Awakening*, the holiday destination, Grand Isle is described as a place where “mother- woman seemed to prevail.”⁴ They were “women who idolized their children, worship their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.”⁵ Many were “delicious in the role,”⁶ but one of them was above them all. That woman is “the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm.”⁷ This was Madame Adele Ratignolle. The latter seems satisfied with her role. Thus, she follows the instruction of her society and accepts it. Madame Ratignolle is generally busy with household affairs, even though there are servants at home; she prefers to take care of every little detail in the house, and to take care of her children as well. As hooks declares in her book, “we want to have more time to share with family.”⁸ Therefore, Madame Ratignolle then is considered as a perfect woman in Creole society.

Throughout the novel, Madame Ratignolle is viewed as a “mother-woman”, who idolizes her husband and children. Chopin writes, “If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture.”⁹ Thus, from the quotation, one can notice that Madame Ratignolle is the kind that Creole society esteems. She is described as a perfect woman so her husband should be ashamed if he does not like her. In addition to this, Adele Ratignolle is happy with her position as being a wife and mother. This is shown through her behaviour towards her husband and children. She is very excited and happy about being pregnant again. Simone de Beauvoir says in her book entitled *The Second Sex* (1989), “The woman who feels affection for her husband will often tailor her feelings to his: she will welcome pregnancy and motherhood with joy,”¹⁰ thus, Madame Ratignolle gives full attention to her three children. She carries her youngest child although “as everybody well knew, the doctor had forbidden her to lift so much as a pin.”¹¹ Madame Ratignolle spends her

free time sewing winter clothes for her children. She gives attention to her husband too, and this is shown during their “soirees musicales” in which Chopin states that Mr. Ratignolle,

...spoke with an animation and earnestness that gave an exaggerated importance to every syllable he uttered. His wife was keenly interested in everything he said, laying down her fork the better to listen, chiming in, taking the words out of his mouth.¹²

From the quotation, the reader can see that Madame Ratignolle devotes her life for her family. She is aware of her husband and children’s needs. Indeed, Madame Ratignolle fulfils her female duties that the society sets up. Contrary to Edna, who feels good about having met her own needs. Actually, she is not interested in making winter outfits to her children since they are still in summer. The novelist asserts,

She had brought the pattern of the drawers for Mrs. Pontellier to cut a marvel of construction fashioned to enclose a baby’s body so effectually that only two small eyes might look out from the garment, like an Eskimo’s. They were designed for winter wear, when treacherous drafts came down chimneys and insidious current of deadly cold found their way through key-holes. Mrs. Pontellier’s mind was quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children, and she could not see the use of anticipating and making winter night garments the subject of her summer meditations.¹³

The Creole considers that women are made to stay at home and look after their families, they expect from Edna to be like that. Therefore, the Creole wants her to worship her husband and idolize her children. In her theory, hooks states “Masses of women continue to believe that they should be primarily responsible for child care—this point cannot be over emphasized.”¹⁴

However, Edna is accused by her husband that she neglects her duty towards her two little children. He says, “If it was not a mother’s place to look after children, whose on earth was it?”¹⁵ As a Creole man, Léonce Pontellier believes that women must dedicate their lives to their husband’s house to become good wives and mothers.

As the story progresses, the reader becomes aware that according to her husband, Mrs. Pontellier, “was not a mother-woman.”¹⁶ Because Edna’s marriage was just to meet the society

demands, she was not happy in her relationship or in her position as a mother. Chopin states, "It would have been a difficult matter for Mr. Pontellier to define his own satisfaction or anyone else's wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children."¹⁷ In the given passage, the reader can make out that Mr. Pontellier is anxious about how Edna neglects her duties as a mother, and lets the nurses take care of her children and assume all her maternal responsibilities. Subsequently, one can see that Edna does not feel that motherhood is relevant for her. bell hooks argues, "Some white middle class, college-educated women argued that motherhood was a serious obstacle to women's liberation."¹⁸

Moreover, Edna cannot become the idol of her children. In contrast to Madame Ratignolle, Edna does not really dedicate her life for taking care of her children and husband. Therefore, she may be attached to her children, but not in the same manner that Adele Ratignolle is. She is instead "fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes forget them."¹⁹ In this quote, Edna is seen as if she is not sure if she really cares for her children. She even forgets about them. It is as if they were not important enough for her to remember them. In other words, it is not as if Edna does not love her children, but she is not dedicated to them. Thus, she buys "candies" for them when she is happy, and ignores them when she is not in her mood.

However, the Creole wants Edna to be like Madame Ratignolle who spends her life serving her husband and children, because, as they assume, this is a woman's destiny. Unfortunately, Edna has never been satisfied with the societal assumption of the Creole concerning motherhood. She starts to awaken and sees that these rules threaten her freedom. She worries that she will lose herself in her devotion to family, and sacrifice her individuality in caring about the children. Therefore, Edna chooses simply to neglect her duties towards her family. This can be seen in Chopin's words, "Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for the children or for anyone."²⁰ From these words, the reader

understands that Edna realizes that motherhood and the responsibilities of being a wife can destroy her individuality and sense of selfhood. Hence, Edna does not allow herself to belong to her family, but rather to herself only. As hooks indicates in her book, “We are tired of the isolation of the home, tired of relating only to children and husband, tired of being emotionally and economically dependent.”²¹

Indeed, after realizing that her marriage does not give her the happiness that she wishes for, she decides to abandon her duty as a mother. Edna then attempts to find self-definition by starting to act like a man. She sees that men have the right to live a life of sexual fulfilment, and they are not expected to take care of the children. This could be seen in hooks’ words, “Instead women involved with feminist reforms were inclined to think less about transforming society and more about fighting for equality and equal rights with men”²²

consequently, Edna first finds a sense of freedom when her husband Léonce goes to New York, and her two children Raoul and Etienne were sent to their grandmother, as it is shown in the quotation below, “A radiant peace settled upon her when she at last found herself alone even the children were gone.”²³ Edna awakens in a romantic and sexual way that frees her as a woman. It is through Alcée Arobin that Edna becomes aware of her sexual independence, her desire for sex without shame. With Alcée, Edna discovers a physical need within herself; she really wants a sexual intercourse with him. The first kiss that Edna had from Alcée Arobin was like the first kiss in her life that she could really reply to it. Thus, it seems like Alcée Arobin feeds her need. This idea is well shown in the quotation, “It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire.”²⁴ Furthermore, Edna acts like any other independent men in the society. Hence, what Alcée Arobin could do Edna could do it as well.

After that, Edna decides to move to her own house, she does not really care about what others can think of her. This is shown when Madame Ratignolle tells her, “you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life.”²⁵ but Edna does not care because she finally recognizes that,

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.²⁶

In fact, the above quotation demonstrates the extent to which Edna has succeeded to feel more powerful and independent than the other Creole women do. Seeing that she swims far from where the other women swum she feels she is freer than the other women of her society.

Moreover, the transformation that Edna achieves makes her escape her role as a mother and wife. She forgets about her husband to whom she used to write a letter every day. It is only, “In the middle of the night she remembered that she had forgotten to write her regular letter to her husband.”²⁷ The Creoles and even the readers may judge that Edna is neglecting her duties towards her family. She, instead, thinks that it is a successful revolt that led her to spend her time doing things for her own pleasure not for anyone else.

From our analysis of the two female characters, we can conclude that Kate Chopin seeks to demonstrate how the two characters are opposed to each other. In fact, Chopin depicts the image of Madame Ratignolle as being the “mother-woman” that the Creole respect and consider as a perfect wife and mother. Thus, she reproduces the image of motherhood that hooks sees a “sphere of power”. In *Edna Pontellier*, the writer however, portrays a woman who opposes the Creole norms, and fights against the patriarchal system. In fact, Edna refuses to devote her life to her family; she prefers to regain her own self. Edna then chooses to follow her own desire to uncover her individuality within the Creoles.

b -The Institution of Marriage and Motherhood in *Sula*

Marriage and Motherhood are among the important subjects in Toni Morrison's *Sula*. This is the quality embodied by many of female characters such as Eva Peace, Hannah Peace, Helene Wright, and Nel Wright. Marriage plays an important role in the novel, while some characters accept to marry, others do not agree and reject the idea because of fear to lose their self-identity as they are living under a segregating society. When they are young Women of the Bottom are taught that they must find a husband, otherwise they will be "incomplete". This belief is not only in The United States, however, in many other countries, women must marry or they will be seen as a burden. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche asserts in her essay *We Should All Be Feminists*, "A woman at a certain age who is unmarried, our society teaches her to see it as a deep personal failure. And a man, after a certain age isn't married, we just think he hasn't come around to making his pick."²⁸

In her *Feminist Theory from margin to center* bell hooks reports Betty Friedan's important phrase, "the problem that has no name,"²⁹ which means that women's rights in The United States are neglected whether they are white or black, single or married. In a way that, housewives are also tired at home being always with children. In the same context, Friedan adds, "we can no longer ignore that voice within women that says, 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my house.'"³⁰

In Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Eva Peace is the courageous and the independent woman, who fulfils all the tasks and responsibilities; being a wife, a mother then a grandmother. She has experienced marriage without success, so she decides to live alone for the rest of her life. Eva refuses to surrender, recognizing that life continues without the existence of men. Due to the unhappy marriage with BoyBoy, she decides to devote her life to raise her children after he left her. In the same sense bell hooks states, "In black communities, it is not unusual for a

single female parent to rely on male relatives and friends to help with childrearing.”³¹ Eva does not ask for help from anybody. She becomes a responsible woman. Her sense of obligation and Motherhood towards her children let the Ohio’s people say that she has sacrificed her leg in order that her children would not die of starvation. She has made this sacrifice, to gain insurance. To hooks, “Black women would not have said motherhood prevented us from entering the world of paid work because we have always worked.”³²

From the above quotation, bell hooks means that motherhood is a work itself, and in black societies, women perform all the roles in the house. For her, women who choose to work outside do not find time for their husbands and children, who are more important than work.

Although Eva does not give love or show affection to her three children, she does all what she could for them. After the return of her son; Plum from war, he sinks into addiction. Eva tries to help him but she could not. She burns him during his sleep because she does not support seeing him suffer. Eva explains, “I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he couldn’t and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man.”³³

Another important sacrifice the mother does is that she throws herself from the window to help her daughter, Hannah, who is burning. Eva does not hesitate to kill herself in order to save her daughter’s life. She does everything that a mother could do for her children to secure their survival. Morrison reports,

The flames from the yard fire were licking the blue cotton dress... Eva knew there was time for nothing in this world other than the time it took to get there and cover her daughter's body with her own. She lifted her heavy frame up on her good leg, and with fists and arms smashed the windowpane. Using her stump as a support on the window sill, her good leg as a lever, she threw herself out of the window.³⁴

In the same context, bell hooks insists that the mother is the only parent, who could raise and take care of her children in a good and appropriate way. Consequently, no one could assume the role of parenting except mothers.

To hooks, mothers play an important part in their kid's life and affect their identity development. It is the case of Eva, who raises Hannah without love. Hannah inherits that way of education and she applies it on Sula. Hannah is a neglecting mother. After the death of her husband, she has sexual intercourse with many men, both married and single. She does not care about what her community will think about her. Toni Morrison claims, "Hannah simply refused to live without the attentions of a man, and after Rekus' death had a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbors."³⁵ Hannah gives Sula neither affection nor a good education. Instead, she teaches her to regard sex as "pleasant" and "frequent". Morrison illustrates, "Seeing her step so easily into the pantry and emerge looking precisely as she did when she entered, only happier, taught Sula that sex was pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable."³⁶

Hannah's suffering from the lack of motherly affection and love influences her thoughts about parenting. This explains her failure about raising Sula in an appropriate way. bell hooks confirms, "In spite of the difficulties of single parenting (especially economic) in this society, the focus is on "joys of motherhood," the special intimacy, closeness, and bonding purported to characterize the mother/child relationship."³⁷

In the above passage, bell hooks illustrates the kind of relationship that should be between mothers and their daughters. They must be close to each other, mothers must show love, care and affection to their daughters. Nevertheless, Hannah and her mother Eva have both experienced unsuccessful marriages, an experience they do not wish to live through again. They find themselves, after their husbands left, alone with many responsibilities.

Another important female character presented by Toni Morrison as a conservative and a good mother who respects the value of marriage is Nel's mother, Helene Sabat. The latter acts as a traditionalist and conventional woman. She takes care of her husband and their daughter, and leads a moral and respectable life because she is motivated by her own fear of rejection by society. Toni Morrison describes her, "she loved her house and enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband."³⁸

Consequently, she raises her daughter in a conservative and traditional way. She always advises Nel to be obedient and to respect the community's orders. Helene does everything to satisfy and to please her town's people. Morrison declares that Helene is, "a woman who won all social battles with presence and a conviction of the legitimacy of her authority...she lost one battle, the pronunciation of her name."³⁹

Helene obliges her daughter, Nel to follow her instructions and to live up to the expectations imposed by their environment. She wants to control her family because her identity is built by society's oppression. Black women in The United States are taught to consider motherhood as a sacred work in family. bell hooks suggests, "Historically, black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labour, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care,"⁴⁰

Nel decides as her mother does to follow the social conventions, to be a traditionalist, marry and have children. Writing about powerless women in The United States, bell hooks considers, "A mark of their victimization is that they accept their lot in life without visible question, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage."⁴¹

The author, in this quotation, means that black women accept and receive domination without complaint. Consequently, Nel is viewed as a good woman. Yet, her obedience leads her to become a slave of sexism; she loses her personal identity, to get a social identity by marrying

Jude. In this context, hooks suggests, “To be oppressed means to be deprived of your ability to choose.”⁴²; In a way, Nel is oppressed by her town and mother’s thoughts. She cannot decide for herself. Morrison confirms, “under Helene’s hand, the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasm that little Nel showed was calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter’s imagination underground.”⁴³

Even though Nel does not care about marriage, yet the laws in Medallion’s community oblige her to apply what is evident. After ten years of marriage with Jude, Nel discovers her husband having a sexual intercourse with Sula. After their separation, Nel takes the responsibility of rearing three children alone, going to work, and spending time with them.

Finally, we can say that Nel recognizes marriage is not all in life. She seems to settle into the role of wife, she never had marriage as her main goal but the town’s customs oblige her to obey. This becomes very clear when she loses both her best friend and her husband because of their betrayal. At that time, Nel misses and values her relationship with Sula more than that with her husband. Nel goes to Sula’s grave and speaks to her,

"All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude."..."We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." It was a fine cry--loud and long--but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.⁴⁴

According to bell hooks, white women claim their independence and liberation because they are tired of taking all the family’s responsibilities at home, being only homemakers. Otherwise they want to work and to be independent. For the author, white feminist movement does not value the importance of motherhood and accuses black women to be voiceless. hooks agrees that motherhood has many positive aspects for women, yet they deserve respect.

In contrast to many black women who have married, Sula denies completely the idea to build a family. bell hooks argues that the system made by the society’s people is corrupt. Hence, women achieving equality in such environment is neither possible nor acceptable.

Nevertheless, Sula works to create her selfhood and identity by rejecting the conventional gender roles and the stereotypical roles destined to black females. Morrison describes Sula, “she wanted to be the bridesmaid. No other.”⁴⁵ Sula becomes an emancipated woman, revolts against whatever is societal and disciplined.

The main protagonist, Sula Peace thinks negatively about marriage. She rejects the notion of woman’s need for a man or marriage. Nel’s marriage to Jude, according to Sula, distorts Nel’s selfhood. Sula refuses to see women only as wives and mothers. She is determined that marriage gives freedom to men and strips women of their identity. As a result, she does not want to tie herself under the pretext of marriage.

Morrison agrees that Sula has never been taught in a moral and conventional way; she lacks maternal love and has known no motherly affection. Hannah’s "self-indulgence" has a great impact on her. Sula sees her having "fun" with men. Morrison says, “sex was pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable.”⁴⁶ For Hannah. As far as Sula keeps the idea that, it is normal to be with different men without marrying. Toni Morrison mentions,

Sula was distinctly different. Eva’s arrogance and Hannah’s self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her.⁴⁷

In the above quotation, Morrison illustrates that Sula’s mother and grandmother failed marriages let her reject the idea of matrimony. Both of them influence her negatively and raise in her a kind of complex and fear about marriage. Even Eva and Nel ask her about marrying and having children. Sula answers that she feels no commitment in depending or pleasing none but herself. In this extract Sula speaks to Nel,

Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world." "Really? What have you got to show for it?" "Show? To who? Girl, I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me." "Lonely, ain't it?" "Yes. But my lonely is _mine._ Now your lonely is somebody else's."⁴⁸

Indeed, Sula lives the life of independence that other black women have been deprived to live because they are tied to their husbands who dictate for them what to do and not to do.

For bell hooks, women must found families by marrying and having children because the feeling of motherhood is unique in the world,

They imply that motherhood is a woman's truest vocation; that women who do not mother, whose lives may be focused more exclusively on a career, creative work, or political work are missing out, are doomed to live emotionally unfulfilled lives...this perspective is often voiced by many of the white bourgeois women with successful careers who are now choosing to bear children. They seem to be saying to masses of women that careers or work can never be as important, as satisfying, as bearing children.⁴⁹

When Sula starts to love Ajax, her assumption about marriage and the idea of living alone all her life begins to change. She likes how he talks to her, as if men and women were equivalent.

Yet when he feels "possessiveness" from Sula towards him, he is scared and abandons her.

Like Sula, Ajax does not like commitment. In the same context Morrison states,

Marriage, apparently, had changed all that, but having had no intimate knowledge of marriage, having lived in a house with women who thought all men available, and selected from among them with a care only for their tastes, she was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one person she felt close to.⁵⁰

From this extract, we can notice that no one teaches Sula about the institution of marriage; no one educates her to understand what sexual relations means.

Finally, in her novel Toni Morrison describes many married women, each one of them experiences the life of wife and motherhood. Some of them are betrayed by their unfaithful husbands, others divorce. Yet the main female character prefers not to live that feeling and focuses on building her own life.

To conclude, we can say that both novels present and treat the problem of marriage and motherhood for both white and black women. On one hand, there are some women who support and agree with marriage, being housewives. On the other hand, some others reject to live only as wives and mothers because they see that women are despised in these roles.

End Notes

¹bell hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 138.

²Ibid., 139.

³Ibid., 137.

⁴Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (New York, NY: Bantam Classic, 1899), 19.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸bell hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting," in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, 134.

⁹Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 19.

¹⁰Simone de Beauvoir, "The Mother," in *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 611.

¹¹Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 31.

¹²Ibid., 145.

¹³Ibid., 21.

¹⁴bell hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 140.

¹⁵Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 12.

¹⁶Ibid., 19.

¹⁷Ibid., 18.

¹⁸bell hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 133.

¹⁹Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 47.

²⁰Ibid., 121.

²¹bell hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 134.

²²Ibid., "Revolution: Development Through Struggle," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 158.

²³Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 187.

²⁴Ibid., 218.

²⁵Ibid., 250.

²⁶Ibid., 70-71.

²⁷Ibid., 196.

- ²⁸Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, *We Should All Be Feminists*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2014).
- ²⁹bell hooks, “Black Women: Shaping Feminists Theory,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 01.
- ³⁰*Ibid.*
- ³¹*Ibid.*, “Revolutionary Parenting,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 141.
- ³²*Ibid.*, 133.
- ³³Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 76.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, 80.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, 49.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, 50.
- ³⁷bell hooks, “Revolutionary Parenting,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 135.
- ³⁸Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 27.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, 26-27.
- ⁴⁰bell hooks, “Revolutionary Parenting,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 133.
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*, “Black Women: Shaping Feminists Theory,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 01.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 22.
- ⁴³Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 26.
- ⁴⁴Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 166.
- ⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 115.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 137.
- ⁴⁹bell hooks, “Revolutionary Parenting,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 135-136.
- ⁵⁰Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 116.

Chapter Three: Freedom and Death

Our intention in this chapter is to study the final step of the female characters; Edna Pontellier, in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Sula Peace in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). We will demonstrate how these female characters obviously succeed to break the norms of their societies in order to fight for their rights, and confirm their existence within their societies, and how they manage to free themselves from their communities' commands. Therefore, we will deal with how these protagonists ended up by finding themselves alienated by making reference to bell hooks' theory; *Feminist Theory from margin to center*.

In her theory *from margin to center*, bell hooks argues that ending sexist oppression means having a complete societal, economic, political transformation. Thus, to succeed and do this, one can understand that it is obviously necessary to include people of all races, sexes, and genders. She states,

Feminist consciousness-raising has not significantly pushed women in the direction of revolutionary politics...as a system that exploits female labor and its inter-connection with sexist oppression. It has not urged women to learn about different political systems like socialism or encouraged women to invent and envision new political systems. Most importantly, it has not continually confronted women with the understanding that feminist movement to end sexist oppression can be successful only if we are committed to revolution, to the establishment of a new social order¹

Furthermore, in hooks' theory it is stated,

Friedan's famous phrase, "the problem that has no name," often quoted to describe the condition of women in this society, actually referred to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women—housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of this life.²

From these words, one can notice that these women are tired of the role assigned to them by society. Therefore, they want to go out of their houses, instead of staying at home and taking care of their families and doing other boring household affairs.

In addition to this, hooks, in her *Feminist Theory from margin to center* declares, "There are many ways to make revolution. Revolutions can be and usually are initiated by

violent overthrow of an existing political structure.”³ According to hooks, it exists several pacific manners of manifestations other than the use of violence.

a-Freedom and Death in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*

Throughout the novel, Edna Pontellier breaks the Creole’s rules in order to gain her right as an independent and strong woman, rather than being repressed and live according to illusion. This could be seen when Chopin says,

‘The trouble is,’ sighed the Doctor, grasping her meaning intuitively, ‘that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost’.

‘Yes’ she said. ‘The years that are gone seem like dreams- if one might go on sleeping and dreaming- but to wake up and find- oh! Well! Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life.’⁴

From the quotation above, the reader is aware that Edna refuses to live under domination. She wants to get rid from her society’s orders and take decisions by herself, far from the pressure that requires from her to be a "mother-woman".

Moreover, Edna wants to confirm her existence in society through her art. She proves to the Creole that women could live without the support of men. Since she becomes an artist, she succeeds to be financially independent. She is no longer under her husband’s domination.

Through her relations with her friends in Grand Isle, Edna becomes aware of her feeling and emotions. With Arobin, Edna expresses herself through sex; she practices it freely. hooks expresses this in these words, “Many women choose to be heterosexual because they enjoy genital contact with individual men.”⁵ She adds, “They urged women to initiate sexual advances, to enjoy sex, to experiment with new relationships, to be sexually free.”⁶

Hence, Edna really becomes sexually free; she expresses her desires openly and practices sex whenever she wants.

With Robert, she dreams of a life of freedom, far from the discrimination that she faces. However, Robert wants Edna to become his wife, after that she declares herself independent. He tells her “Something put into my head that you cared for me; and I lost my senses. I forgot everything but a wild dream of your some way becoming my wife.”⁷ But Edna is far from thinking about him as a husband. She wants to live with him; but not as a man and his wife. However, Robert does not understand what she means, “his face grew a little white ‘what do you mean?’ he asked.”⁸ Since, Edna transforms into an independent woman. So, she would never accept to be discriminated again, or be someone’s possession as well. This is well demonstrated by Chopin,

You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, ‘Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours, I should laugh at you both’.⁹

From the quotation, one can notice that Edna is no longer that weak woman. She refuses to be Robert’s wife. Since she succeeds to escape her husband’s authority, she decides to never let a man control her life again. She wishes to choose everything by herself. Chopin indicates in her novel that Edna “had resolved never to take another step backward”¹⁰ Unfortunately, Robert is not strong enough to break the rules of his society. Hence, he decides to move away and leave a letter to Edna where he says, “I love you. Good-by- because I love you.”¹¹ the note that Robert leaves for Edna makes it clear for her that she is alone in her revolt, since he does not accept to fight against his society in order to be with her as she did.

While Edna realizes her new position in society, she decides to oppose the Creole’s norms; she abandons her social duties. Thus, Adele’s final words to Edna are “Think of the children, Edna. Oh! Think of the children! Remember them.”¹² However, Edna does not want to be the mother of Raoul and Etienne, and Léonce’s wife for the rest of her life. As it is stated in hooks’ theory, “I want something more than my husband and my children and my

house.”¹³ Edna does not allow herself to be tied to the natural and societal titles. Therefore, she decides to free herself, to let lose all the restraints. In fact, “The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days.”¹⁴

In her book, hooks affirm, “Our emphasis must be on cultural transformation: destroying dualism, eradicating systems of domination.”¹⁵ Therefore, Edna chooses to neglect her duties toward her family, she also does not want to live without Robert, and at the same time, she cannot change the Creole’s norms.

Indeed, Edna decides to continue her struggle and does her last step to show her final independency to everyone. She comes back to Grand Isle, where she recognizes that she has become that woman she wants, and refuses to give up her entire life and soul for her children. She decides to fight for the last time. This is shown in the last scene where Chopin writes,

The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water.¹⁶

From the passage above, the reader can understand that Edna Pontellier does not want to agree with the society’s norms and to fight against it anymore. As Hannah Wright once declares, “Death is easy. To live is the most painful thing I could imagine and I’m weak and no longer willing to fight.”¹⁷ Therefore, Edna decides to make an end to her struggle and her life as well. hooks indicates, “It is now evident that many women active in feminist movement were interested in reforms as an end in itself, not as a stage in the progression towards revolutionary transformation.”¹⁸

Going to the beach, Edna wears her bathing suit, but when she reaches the sea, she decides to undress and enter naked into the water. “She cast the unpleasant, pricking garments

from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air,”¹⁹ indeed, Edna succeeds to free herself from her old being. Therefore, she finally accomplishes her rebirth by giving herself to the sea. Edna “felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known”²⁰ When she starts swimming “she went on and on,”²¹ this means that the further she swims in the water, the more she becomes free.

In addition, Edna thinks of many people she knows in her life while she swims far in the water. She thinks of her husband and children, but as being just part of her life, not something she was devoted to. She does not want to let them possess her soul and body for the rest of her life. This makes her move forward and swim deeper and deeper until she gets tired and cannot come back. “The shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone.”²²

Moreover, as she is swimming, she recalls her happy and innocent childhood. Edna then, feels as if she was that little girl who has no responsibilities and duties to perform. Indeed, she remembers all the good things that she lived through in her early days.

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father’s voice and her sister Margaret’s. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pink filled the air.²³

To conclude then, the reader recognizes that Edna has kept saving her life from the oppression and the discrimination of her society until the last minute of her life and that her suicide is her last act of liberation. In her thesis, Ilma Mala Sofa states that,

Edna relieves herself from the obligations of her surrounding, and undergoes a development that leads to new strength and independence. However, Edna never succeeds in her desire to be free in her life, because she is not able to get her truly happiness that she wants, and goes the only possible way she commits suicide. It makes the writer conclude that Edna’s suicide is an act of her liberalization²⁴

From the quotation, it could be seen that Edna’s death is not viewed as surrender but rather a successful achievement of freedom. She finds that her only freedom is through suicide, better than stilling alive and being oppressed and discriminated the rest of her life. On that account;

Natascha Kampusch mentions that suicide for her is viewed as freedom, the freedom of everything, of a lifelong destroyed. In the end, Edna succeeds to free herself spiritually in the water.

In her literary work, *The Awakening* (1899), Kate Chopin depicts the final struggle of the main female character Edna Pontellier. In fact, the latter decides to leave everything behind her because she finds herself isolated in her society. She finds herself with a "Solitary Soul". None of the Creole understands her. In fact, Edna represents the mocking-bird that Chopin mentions at the very beginning of the novel. She writes, "He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood,"²⁵ Edna then is like that bird, she speaks a language that the Creole society does not understand anymore. Thus, Edna is tired of the society's rules that demand of her to be the perfect woman who devotes her life to her family, and forgets about her own self as an individual.

b-Freedom and Death in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

Toni Morrison's *Sula* depicts many African-American female characters living in a small community in Ohio, who become slaves of racism and sexism. They experience oppression and unequal treatment by men. In the novel, the author sheds light on the female characters, yet she does not neglect men because both black men and women are victims of discrimination, they face injustice from the white communities.

Black women in America are considered and viewed as inferior, weak, unimportant, and unequal to men. They endure sexism within the black community. Hence, they struggle for their rights to be equal to black men, to free themselves from this sexist oppression. Therefore, feminism is an important and a great movement to eradicate this discrimination. This movement according to hooks is the solution to change a system based on dominance, in order to transform the relation between the two sexes from dehumanization to intimacy.

bell hooks says in her *Feminist Theory from margin to center*,

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into. Diverting energy from feminist movement that aims to change society,²⁶

Black men have controlled women's sexual freedom, they have restricted them. However, Sula disagrees with such type of treatment against her society's women. Accordingly, she tries to break these rules that hinder them from gaining their sexual freedom. In the same sense bell hooks states, "Men are socialized to act sexually, women to not act (or to simply react to male sexual advances)"²⁷ For hooks, society gives men more freedom in leading sexual relations, yet they have deprived women from their most basic rights letting them always follow men's desires. On the other hand, women are neglected, oppressed, denied by both white and black communities, their rights are stripped.

Despite the many movements and actions made by feminist activists, it is neither easy nor enough to modify the norms. In the quotation below, bell hooks thinks that to achieve women's rights, the feminist movement has to take the necessary time to change the habits and the behaviors of the members of society. As she declares,

Today hardly anyone speaks of feminist revolution. Thinking that revolution would happen simply and quickly, militant feminist activists felt that the great surges of activity-protest, organizing, and consciousness-raising-which characterized the early contemporary feminist movement were all it would take to establish a new social order.²⁸

In her novel, Morrison describes the major character, Sula Peace as a woman who struggles against traditions. She wants to attain and achieve freedom to build her selfhood through rebelling on social constructions. Living in a racist and sexist community, Sula finds herself obliged to fight for freedom and equality, she opposes the racial discrimination and tries to overcome patriarchy. Sula refuses to conform to the norms of society and objects taking the conventional role of a black woman. Sula thinks that a man is not as worthy as

herself. She says to Nel, ““They ain't worth more than me. And besides, I never loved any man because he was worth it. Worth didn't have nothing to do with it.””²⁹

She also presses other women to break away from the patriarchal system with its sexist oppression. Through her, Morrison shows African-American women's need to create their selfhood and challenge men's dominance.

After being ten years out of Medallion, Sula learns to be completely self-reliant, to take care of herself, putting her own choices in the first position. She revolts against whatever is societal; she works to escape all the traditionalism related to women. Sula desires to be different and unconventional; she gains her power from opposing her society. Toni Morrison claims, “Like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous.”³⁰

Toni Morrison describes Sula as an emancipated woman, who expresses her desire openly without fear of any judgment by her town's people. Sula reclaims sexual freedom, what lets people call her "bitch" and detest her because she has sexual relations with different men without engagement, thinking that she will bring liberation to other women of the Bottom, by doing such act. In the same context, hooks claims, “Feminist thinkers, like Greer, believed that assertion of the primacy of sexuality would be a liberatory gesture. They urged women to initiate sexual advances, to enjoy sex, to experiment with new relationships, to be sexually "free.””³¹ From this extract, the author asserts that many feminist thinkers as Greere thinks sexual freedom will be as a starting point for women's liberation. Therefore, they start to convince women to make relations in order to free themselves.

When Sula asks for sexual liberation, she betrays Nel with her husband. Meanwhile, Nel is the only person who visits her because the entire town's people hate her, Sula says, ““You know you don't have to be proud with me.” "Proud?" Sula's laughter broke through the phlegm. "What you talking about? I like my own dirt, Nellie. I'm not proud.””³²

Unfortunately, Sula does not regret what she does because she wants to share all things with the only person with whom she gets along. Nel says to her, ““But you a woman and you alone””³³ Nel has never been affected by her best friend’s behavior, she still abides to her thoughts that women are not equal to men, in a way that men can live alone but women cannot. She adds, ““You can't have it all, Sula.”...“You _can't__ do it all.... You can't act like a man.””³⁴ Nel, in this conversation, is convinced that Sula cannot go far with her choices to reach independence because her mother teaches her to be a traditional and conventional woman. Therefore, freedom to her means to gain social identity. She is like her mother Helene. Both of them have consecrated their lives to satisfy the Ohio’s people. Sula says to Nel, ““I don't know everything, I just do everything.””³⁵ She wants to tell Nel that they are not living their own lives, but they live the life that society has traced for them. Nevertheless, Sula experiences and discovers many new things without dictation from anyone.

For Sula, if black women do not ask or revolt against the oppression, they will live a dead life as objects under men’s orders. They will pay for being black women. She states that she does all what her mind asks for. As it is mentioned in this conversation,

You think I don't know what your life is like just because I ain't living it? I know what every colored woman in this country is doing." "What's that?" "Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world." "Really? What have you got to show for it?" "Show? To who? Girl, I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me." "Lonely, ain't it?" "Yes. But my lonely is _mine.__ Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely."³⁶

According to Toni Morrison, Sula asks for unlimited freedom until all people of her community dislike her, even her own family calls her "selfish". She refuses to give up, no one can guide her, she is very different comparing to the women of the Bottom.

For bell hooks, feminists must understand first the socio-political system that denies women’s rights and give all the freedom to men. Then, after that, they can ask gradually for

changes because in order to change society's beliefs women must do many sacrifices to success in this revolution because, it takes time for the community to accept these changes. Sula tells Nel that her town will someday understand her decisions, "'Oh, they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me.'" ³⁷

It has taken a long time for women, especially African-American women, to recognize the oppressive life they had lived through. Accordingly, it proved to be very difficult to receive the changes which were not familiar with what the African American women were educated for, bell hooks confirms,

New social orders are established gradually. This is hard for individuals in the United States to accept. We have either been socialized to believe revolutions are always characterized by extreme violence between the oppressed and their oppressors or that revolutions happen quickly. We have also been taught to crave immediate gratification of our desires and swift responses to our demands. Like every other liberation movement in this society, feminism has suffered because these attitudes keep participants from forming the kind of commitment to protracted struggle that makes revolution possible. As a consequence, feminist movement has not sustained its revolutionary momentum. It has been a successful rebellion. ³⁸

Toni Morrison argues that even though Sula travels to many places and experiences things, does all what she desires, and expresses her sexual freedom openly without fear of rejection, she returns to her town of origin after unsuccessful quest for freedom. In their dissertation entitled "'Black Feminism and the Quest for Identity in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *the Bluest Eye*'" the students: Righi Imane and Rekioua Hanine explain,

Sula is controversial since she practiced her freedom but still could not succeed to build her identity. She is totally focused on her self-development and didn't care about what people in the Bottom community said about her. She is independent and people's opinions of her did not mean much for her. Sula's identity is shaped and reshaped for various times during her life's countless experiences. Yet, at the end of the story; when she was dying she admitted that she did not find her true self and couldn't find inner peace. ³⁹

In her last moments, Sula thinks about the way her mother, Helene died though she prefers to die like a "redwood" rather than a "stump". Generally, one must feel fear and horror in the face of death, yet Sula's death is not frightening. She does not regret dying because she

has lived her own life not somebody's life, rejecting all society's instructions and orders. Morrison describes her last moments as follows, "a crease of fear touched her breast, for any second there was sure to be a violent explosion in her brain. She was not breathing because she didn't have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead. Sula felt her face smiling."⁴⁰

To hooks, feminist revolutionary must state by changing the communities norms and beliefs. As she says,

Our emphasis must be on cultural transformation: destroying dualism, eradicating systems of domination. Our struggle will be gradual and protracted. Any effort to make feminist revolution here can be aided by the example of liberation struggles led by oppressed peoples globally who resist formidable powers.⁴¹

Sula is depicted as a symbol of independence; she breaks the traditions that tied women for a long time. She decides to live her life for her own and takes charge of her own body. She begins to control men's mind to take charge over them. She wants neither to give in the arms of men nor to tie them into marriage. This, in her beliefs, will lead her to concede her self-identity and freedom. Sula strives against the conventional values that oppress black American women. She then rejects the idea of becoming a traditional wife and mother. She believes that marrying in such a society makes women suffer. Accordingly, they will lose their freedom. As a result, Sula constructs new values for herself, which are opposite to those of her environment.

The main character is proud of what she does in her life; she never wants others to feel sorry for her. On her deathbed, Sula is still proud for her accomplishments, to die as a respectable woman, who really lived her life and never lost her self-identity for a man contrary to many women in the Bottom, who lost their self-respect as they lived their lives for somebody else after their marriage.

Through the character of Sula, Toni Morrison criticizes the tradition, which has restricted black women in realizing their dreams. Sula is the unique woman in the novel who

fights against racism, sexism, and demands sexual freedom to women. While most of them understand sex as an act for reproduction and love given to a husband, Sula sees it as a self-serving act that is connected to death. When she is dying, she immediately remembers her best friend Nel. She enters death thinking about her “Wait'll I tell Nel.”⁴²

Sula expresses the message that death is the companion and the meaning of life not an end to it in order to continue her fight to achieve freedom. This shows clearly, when she continues speaking and thinking after her heart has stopped to beat.

To conclude, we can notice that in Toni Morrison's novel, even though Sula loses her social identity, she gains personal identity and self-respect. Acting as an emancipated and liberated woman, reclaiming sexual freedom leads her to die alone, with no one around her because her society blames her for breaking the rules. Despite everything, Sula does not regret her choice to live her own life as a free woman. As Powell Brent writes in his article that Martin Luther King Jr says, “Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”⁴³ which means that women of the Bottom must ask and claim their freedom to reach equality and make an end to discrimination, as Sula does.

Finally, we can say that the two main characters, Edna Pontellier and Sula Peace in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and in Toni Morrison's *Sula* respectively request freedom in their lives. Even when they are dying, they still estimate to be free. The two reject the conventional rules given to them by society and manifest against the tradition and the inequality between the two genders in order to gain their selfhood.

End Notes

¹bell hooks, "Revolution: Development Through Struggle," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 159.

²bell hooks, "Black women: Shaping Feminist Theory," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 01.

³bell hooks, "Revolution: Development Through Struggle," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 163.

⁴Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (New York, NY: Bantam Classic, 1899), 291-292.

⁵bell hooks, "Ending Female Sexual Oppression," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 154.

⁶*Ibid.*, 147.

⁷Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 281.

⁸*Ibid.*, 282.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 294.

¹²*Ibid.*, 289.

¹³bell hooks, "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 01.

¹⁴Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 300.

¹⁵bell hooks, "Revolution: Development Through Struggle," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 163.

¹⁶Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 300-301.

¹⁷Lorenzo Jensen III, "100 Quotes About Suicide," Thought Catalog, July 24, 2015.

¹⁸bell hooks, "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression," in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 19.

¹⁹Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 301

²⁰*Ibid.*, 301.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, 302.

²³*Ibid.*, 303.

²⁴Ilma Mala Sofa, “Edna’s Desire to Get a Freedom of Life Described in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*,” (Thesis, Faculty of Humanities Dian Nuswantoro University Semarang, 2012), 63.

²⁵Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 01.

²⁶bell hooks, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 26.

²⁷*Ibid.*, “Ending Female Sexual Oppression,” 150.

²⁸*Ibid.*, “Feminist Revolution: Development Through Struggle,” 157.

²⁹Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 138.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 118.

³¹bell hooks, “Ending Female Sexual Oppression,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 147.

³²Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 136.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*, 136-137.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 137.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, 139.

³⁸bell hooks, “Feminist Revolution: Development Through Struggle,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 159.

³⁹Imane Righi, Hanine Rekioua, “Black Feminism and The Quest for Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*,” (Thesis, University of Mohamed Boudhief- M’SILA, 2019), 69-70.

⁴⁰Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 143.

⁴¹ bell hooks, “Feminist Revolution: Development Through Struggle,” in *Feminist Theory from margin to center*, 163.

⁴²Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 143.

⁴³Brent Powell, “Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King Jr., and the American Tradition of Protest,” OAH Magazine of History 09, no. 02 (1995): 28.

Conclusion:

This dissertation has been an attempt to study feminist revolt in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). This comparative study has come up with some conclusions concerning the two works. Indeed, our study shows that both authors tend to liberate women from the oppression and the discrimination of the patriarchal system. In other terms; both the American and the Afro-American writers attempt to liberate their female characters from a system where men are socialized to act violently and oppress women.

In fact, in the patriarchal system, the only role assigned to women is that of housewives and mothers who should take care of both husband and children. It insists on women to devote themselves to their families. This has been clearly illustrated through the novels where women are not allowed to reach the public space, which is considered to be men's sphere. This system does not allow women to obtain the same privileges as men; therefore women choose to liberate themselves from these limitations, even if it costs them their lives.

The result we have reached in this comparative study is that, like Kate Chopin, Toni Morrison rejects the confining image made by the patriarchal society for women. In fact, both authors deal with gender inequality, and show how their female characters face the sexual division and symbolic violence within their societies. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Toni Morrison's *Sula* examine the way patriarchal system reduce the role of women in society, and demonstrate how their female characters tend to achieve a feminine self-awareness, which allows them to secure a place in men's world.

Since these female characters make the first step, and succeed to reach the public place, they continue their struggle and neglect the role assigned to women in the patriarchal

American society; they refuse to be tied to the natural conventional status of the female. Therefore, they decide to fight against society in order to escape from their responsibilities as being wives and mothers.

In fact, both characters; Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* and Sula Peace in *Sula* revolt to achieve their individuality and the independence they want. However, their desperate attempts to gain female emancipation tragically bring their own end. They end by finding themselves alone in their communities. Therefore, death is their only refuge, and their ultimate strategy to resist patriarchy.

Both authors succeed to break the natural and cultural image assigned to women since a long time. Indeed, they both use their writing as means of revolt to create strong women in the patriarchal societies that are overpowered by male authority. Yet, as it has been demonstrated through this comparative study, it is difficult to end patriarchy and sexist oppression because, from long time, people both white and black have been socialized to accept sexist oppression and coercive authority.

To conclude, our research has not covered all the issues tackled throughout the selected novels, we hope that we have helped our readership find new issues for the study of the American and the Afro-American literatures from other perspectives.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. New York: Bantam Classic, 1899.

Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. New York: Knopf, 1973.

Secondary Sources

Books

Beauvoir, Simone de. "The Mother." In *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Masculine Domination*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory from margin to center*. New York, NY: Boston MA, 1984.

E-Books

Ngozi Adiche, Chimamanda. *We Should All Be Feminists*. London: Fourth Estate, 2014.

<https://www.Chimamanda-Ngozi-Adiche-We-Should-All-Be-Feminiz-lib.org .pdf>

Patte Fred, Lewis. "A History of American Literature Since 1870." Harvard University Press, 1915.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/42593>

Edited Book

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Edited by Culley Margo. Third Norton Critical Edition: Kate Chopin: *The Awakening*. New York: W.W.Norton, 1994.

E-Journal Articles

Dawson, Hugh J. "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Dissenting Option." *American Literary Realism* 26, no. 02 (1994). Accessed September 21, 2020.

<http://www.jstor.org/Stable/27746570>

Kaplon, Megan P. "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: Struggle Against Society and Nature." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse* 04, no. 07 (2012). Accessed September 26, 2020.

<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/657/2/kate-chopins-the-awakening-struggle-against-society-and-nature>

Nigro, Marie. "In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no.6 (1998). Accessed September 21, 2020.

<http://www.jstor.org/Stable/2784814>

Powell, Brent. "Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King Jr., and the American Tradition of Protest." *OAH Magazine of History* 09, no. 02 (1995). Accessed December 3, 2020.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163011>

Magazine Articles

Kenzie Mc, Jean-Philippe. "12 Groundbreaking Toni Morrison Books to Read Right Now." *The Oprah Magazine*, 2019. Accessed November 14, 2020.

<http://www.oprahmag.com/entertainment/books/a26536741/best-toni-morrison-books/>

Mohammed Sabbar, Abdulbaqi. "Rational and Irrational Emancipation of Women in Community: A Critical Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *Midad Al-Adab Magazine*, 2017. Accessed September 21, 2020.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333023788-Rational-and-Irrational-Emancipation-of-Women-in-Community-A-Critical-Analysis-of-Toni-Morrison's-Sula>

Unknown. "12 of Toni Morrison's Most Memorable Quotes." *The New York Times Magazine*, 2019. Accessed September 13, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/books/toni-morrison-quotes.html>

Articles and Websites

Godin Katherine. "Kate Chopin: Biography, Works, and Style." *Study. Com*, 2013. Accessed November 09, 2020.

<http://study.com/academy/lesson/Kate-Chopin-biography-works-and-style.html>

Jensen III, Lorenzo. "100 Quotes About Suicide." *Thought Catalog*, 2015. Accessed November 11, 2020.

<https://thoughtcatalog.com/lorenzo-jensen-iii/2015/07/100-quotes-about-suicide/>

Mankhi Azhar, Hameed. "Black Female Masculinity in Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *University of Wasit, Iraq*. Vol 25 (2020). Accessed September 29, 2020.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://dialnet.unirioja.es/dexarga/articulo/7406149.pdf&veb=2ahUKEwib_u7T8L3sAHWOoeAKHX83C3MQFjAAegQIAXAB&usg=AQvVaw2jGiUOOipVcSfKn6.U8g4E

Thesis

Ariparno, Erika. "Edna Pontellier's Liberation Against the Oppression Seen in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Marxist- Feminist Study." An Undergraduate Thesis, Faculty of Letters Sanata Dharma University Dean, 2016.

Righi, Imane. Rekioua, Hanine. "Black Feminism and The Quest for Identity in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*." Thesis, University of Mohamed Boudhiaf- M'SILA, 2019.

Sofa, Ilma Mala. "Edna's Desire to Get a Freedom of Life Described in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." Thesis, Faculty of Humanities Dian Nuswantoro University Semarang, 2012.