

***Sula's rebellion against the black conventional values as the indicator of her feminist spirit in Toni Morrison's Sula***

**Pemberontakan Sula Melawan Norma Sosial Kulit Hitam yang di Indikasikan Terhadap Semangat Kaum Perempuan di Novel *Sula* Karya Toni Morrison**

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**Abstrak**

*SULA* adalah novel karangan Tony Morrison yang menceritakan tentang seorang wanita kulit hitam yang memberontak melawan sistem patriarki, rasisme, dan diskriminasi kelas sebagai norma sosial masyarakat Bottom, yaitu tempat dimana orang-orang kulit hitam tinggal. Tesis ini menekankan pada pemberontakan Sula melawan norma sosial masyarakat yang di indikasikan sebagai semangat feminisme. Novel ini bercerita tentang Sula sebagai tokoh utama yang mencoba melawan dan memberontak norma sosial masyarakat di lingkungannya. Faktor-faktor yang paling kuat mempengaruhi pemberontakan Sula adalah dari masyarakat, keluarga bahkan teman dekatnya. Dia mematahkan sistem patriarki dan masalah-masalah rasial dilingkungannya dengan menentang pernikahan dan melakukan sex bebas. Sula dijuluki sebagai pariah dan berhati jahat karena perbuatannya. Tesis ini menggunakan analisa Marxis dan Feminist kulit hitam Amerika untuk memaparkan kekuatan dan pengaruh ideologi kulit putih, pembagian kelas, dan wilayah rasial di ranah feminisme kulit hitam. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif yang mengaplikasikan teks-teks terkait dalam novel sebagai data utama. Data tersebut dianalisa untuk menunjukkan alasan Sula dalam menolak sistem pernikahan dan lebih memilih melakukan sex bebas. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa wanita kulit hitam mengalami dua bentuk penindasan yaitu sistem patriarki dan rasialisme. Oleh karena itu, kajian tesis ini penting untuk memahami perjuangan wanita-wanita Afro-Amerika yang berjuang melawan sistem patriarki dan rasisme.

**Kata kunci:** Pemberontakan, Norma sosial, Feminisme Kulit Hitam Amerika, Struktur Kelas, Kesadaran, Rasialisme, Patriarki, Pariah

**Abstract**

*SULA* a novel written by Toni Morrison tells about a black woman who rebel against the patriarchal system, racial oppression and class discrimination as the conventional values in Bottom society, where the blacks live. This thesis focuses on Sula's Rebellion against the black conventional values as the indicator of her feminist spirit in Toni Morrison's *Sula*. Sula as the main female character breaks and rebels the conventional values surrounding her. The strongest influential factors that shape and influence Sula's rebellion are coming from the society, family and friendship. She breaks the patriarchal culture and the racial problems within her society by rejecting marriage and having free sexual partner. For those reasons, Sula is named a pariah and evil. The research employs Marxism and Afro-American Feminism to discuss the dominant ideology of whites, classes, and racialism in the world of black feminism. The research is qualitative research which applies text in *Sula* as the basic data. The data are analyzed to show the reason of Sula's rebellion in rejecting marriage and having free sexual life. The data reveals that black women face double oppression such as patriarchy and racialism. Therefore, the study is significant to understand Afro-American women and their struggle against oppression of patriarchal system and racial problems in their society.

**Keywords:** *Rebellion, Conventional Values, Afro American Feminism, Racialism, consciousness, Patriarchy, Class discriminations, Pariah*

**Introduction**

Toni Morrison's *Sula* is the reflection of women's independent and feminist spirit. As one of Morrison's novel, *Sula* is one of the most popular one that has influenced millions of people throughout the world,

especially among black women and others who praised the novel as feminist fable. This novel tells about the conditions of blacks especially black women who live into patriarchal, racial, sexual, and class discrimination. The term Feminism came from the need of women to break out the patriarchal system that control society's norms. Patriarchal system is

generally known as the men's way to get higher position than the women. Women, on the other hand, do not have the same opportunity with men. The issue of feminism and women movement give great influences on women's rise for independence and equality with men. These women movements inspire Afro-American women to raise and struggle against not only about patriarchal issue but also racial problems which are not faced by the white feminism. Sula Peace as the name of the main character in the story is a black woman who breaks the conventional values in her society and become an independent woman. Her society is dominated by racial problems, patriarchal system, and class discrimination. She breaks the social traditions and the conventional values in the Bottom society by rejecting marriage and choosing sexual partner. Therefore, this thesis focuses on Sula's Rebellion to conventional values as the indicator of her feminist spirit in Toni Morrison's *Sula*.

### Research Methodology

The type of research in this study is library research. Blaxter et al (1997:151) describes the library research aims at producing a critical of an existing area of research writing. The library research is collecting data information in a library room. It means that data and other information are taken from books, journals, and dictionaries that are relevant to the topic of discussion. Thus, library research is done to find a specific theory used for the theoretical framework of research. In addition, a number of data taken from internet resources to support the analysis of this thesis.

The type of data in this study is qualitative data. As stated by McMillan (1992:2), qualitative data are based on a research that focuses on understanding and meaning through verbal narratives and descriptions rather than through numbers. The data of this research are discourses of feminist spirit which taken from narration, text, and conversation in the novel of Toni Morrison's *Sula*. Selecting and sorting dialogues, narration, and description from the novel that have strong relation to the discussion in Sula's family, friendship, marriage, and sexual life that oppose black conventional values. The form of verbal narrative in collecting the data of this study focuses on books, journal, and other notions that are relevant to discussion such as theory of black feminism uttered by Patricia Hill Collins "*The Black Politics*", Rosemary Putnam Tong in *Feminist Thought* and other reliable internet websites for the overview of the previous feminism study.

Data analysis is needed to determine the composition of the thesis. The method used to find out the information whether or not Sula's Rebellion reflects feminism. Inductive method is applied to search the specific deeds, action, event or attitude of the main female character in the novel. Then the particular facts of the Sula that lead to her rebellions is used to prove that her rebellion reflect of feminism. The Marxist theory break down the base and the superstructure in the story, it discusses on how the ideology is produced where the white lives in the higher scale of human stratum. The next, Patricia Hill Collins's

theory, gives the explanation about the stigma of black woman is completely described and it is related to the discourses happened in the novel. Whereas, the stigma has strong influence to Sula's life and the stigma is driven by the bourgeois to maintain the class structure. Hence, to analyze the Sula's social life is to study the influence of the society to her feminist views of life.

### Result

Using Marxist feminist, it gives a series explanation on how the economic power determine the consciousness and the existence of men. The main source of all oppression is indeed the the whites as the upper class people to oppress the blacks as the lower class people. Bottom society dominated by the ideology of whites which put the blacks as the lower people live in the wrong system of oppression, especially blacks women. The applied literary theory by Patricia Hill Collin, Black Feminism is taken to give a clear reading over the black women as the victims of oppression. This also gives the explanation about the stigma of black woman which is completely described and related to the discourses happening in the novel. Whereas, the stigma has strong influence to Sula's life and the stigma is driven by the bourgeois to maintain the class structure. Having pressed down by the whites ideology and neglected by the white feminist, racial issues become the issues for black woman. The skin color has made them less worthy not only as human but also woman. The inequality and disrespect are translated into the novel. Sula seeks power over the white by having sex with white men though she has to pay a great pain for violating the black society values.

The study shows that women, especially black women have been manipulated, oppressed and tricked by the double powers both patriarchy and racialism. Thus black women are challenged to gain a class consciousness to breakthrough their chain of sorrow. Moreover, this thesis has proven that many women are indeed irrational in some cases, they let themselves to be slaves for men and higher ideology. The task is now to see things clearly, and to make a wise move for black women to strengthen their position before the overwhelming ideology, class, power, racialism and patriarchy. The complexity of the problems becomes a duty for every black woman that they need to built a greater sense of awareness that they actually can to walk on the same path with men.

Sula's rebellion motivates most of women to have the same opportunity with men, particularly for black women. Black feminism is not only about the gender equality, more importantly this is about the racial problems which is not faced by the white feminism. With the expectation, most of black women finally have gained consciousness of the wrong system which have been locking their chance. They can be independent in any aspects of life and they are ready not to change any physical attribute that they have on them, for example change their black skin color into white. Moreover, they are already able to behave and act freely in their society with no segregation and any

label of dissimilarity. Lastly, this thesis is expected not only to give new thought of Feminism fight against patriarchy but also against the racial problems which is only faced by blacks.

### Discussion

To study about Sula's social life and its influence to her view of life is to study the background of her society, family, and also friendship. Because the strongest influence of Sula's rebellions is coming from the interactions of her surrounding. Sula's view of life, then involve a very complex issues. The first influential factor to her view of life is the Society. The dominant ideology of the whites makes the black inferior in many aspects of life. The patriarchal system and racism also happens in her society. Next, in family, sula never experiences a wholeness of family, because she does not have a figure of a father. This surely affects her psychological development. The incomplete yet broken family during her childhood is leaving a big hole in her life. Sula's mother could not suffice the needs of love by rejecting Sula's existence. Her grandmother who is dying for money decides to cut her own legs to get money insurance. This family of course is not a kind of family that common people could live with it. The next is in Sula's friendship. Sula's needs of friends lead her to be friend with Nel. In her friendship she sacrifices almost everything even to cut her own finger to protect from the bully of the white boys which is also the symbolism of double oppression, racialism and patriarchal system.

Sula's social background is opened by the trick played by a white farmer to give a hilly land name, the Bottom. The event involves a white farmer's promise of freedom and a piece of bottom land to his slave upon completion of arduous chores. The slave performs the tasks well, and then he asks his master for the promise of freedom and land. The farmer deny the slave's freedom and gave him "a piece of the Bottom". However, the Bottom is not in the valley like the slave expects, but it is locates on the summit of the nearby hills. In the end, the blacks get the hilly land, where planting is bone-breaking and life for the blacks becomes even tougher. This mind bending trick becomes the most hurtful facts that the slaves have to face.

Moreover, the blacks are not given a chance to compete with the whites. They are portrayed as the bottom race. The less evolved kind, they are not permitted to study higher than the whites. Even in the very last of the story they are only allowed to teach mathematics at junior high. Morrison is never losing her touch to convey every social aspect felt by the black.

Furthermore, this Sula's social life and its influence to her view life are conceptualized by the many events on her society such as, patriarchal system, racialism, whites domination and violence done by the white boys. Those aspects damage her insight to see the world as peaceful place for black women like her.

In the terms of family, Sula lives in a chaotic family. In her young age she has to see many events which is unusual to be seen by a girl at her age. Sula does not have a right figure of a man or a father for Sula. Her mother could

not be a good model of a loving mother as same as her grandmother. Her family surely affects her concept of marriage and her perspective toward men in her life. her mother Hannah Peace, exploits the pleasure of sex by sleeping with many men in her surrounding. She does not even care about other women's feelings. As a result, she has never succeeded in building a good social relationship with other women. Hannah's attitude becomes the one of the patterns that influences Sula's view on man.

Sula has to face different life outside and inside the house. Her heart is even hurt when she hears that her mother does not love her. She overhears the conversation between Hannah and Eva (Morrison, 1973:49). It is sure has made her though shaken, knowing her existence is a trouble for her mother.

In terms of friendship, Sula be friend with Nel, a black woman who is oppressed by her own mother because of her nose shape (Morrison,1973:47). Sula and Nel are dying to fight the racialism and patriarchal system which are shaped by their social environment. The story mostly talks about the friendship between Sula and Nel. Sula and Nel are filling their own emptiness by their friendship. Sula's acceptance of Nel has made a strong bond between them. Unlike Sula, Nel does not live with her grandmother, and the view of this one-legged and powerful woman, Eva, impresses her. As for Sula, she is impressed with Helene, who is able to manage and control everything in her house, including giving love to her own daughter. Through the contrast of the two homes, Morrison demonstrates the difference between the two families who inhabit them. Sula and Nel provide one another a mutual friendship in maintaining their identities. In hostile context of family, Nel escapes her mother's stifling conformity to middle-class norms in the less conventional household. Doing the chores and being domestic house wife is what Nel's mother want to make for Nel. In contrast, with Nel, Sula experiences the sense of order and control which is never given in Sula's family, as well as the love that her mother cannot offer her.

In the most utter friendship they have, they get to share a very cruel secret. The death mark of Chicken Little's drowning signifies one of the strongest moments of their bonding. As the time goes by, they come to realize that best friends are not only sharing happy times, but also supporting during difficult periods. Sula and Nel share and keep their secret, it is demonstrating a remarkable sense of sisterhood.

Sula's rebellion against the conventional values of black as the indicator of her feminist spirit is the opposition to black conventional values which define women as a domestic being. In terms of environment, the Bottom is the place where the black get together. The woman existence is to serve the whole family. They become the overworked labor in the end of the day. They could not fight this system since the society rejects the idea of non patriarchy. However, in the novel, the story emphasizes on the racial issue of black women which leads the readers to the picture feminist spirit. In the story, Sula fights against two



majoring forces the patriarchal and racial issues, which lead her to carry out two extraordinary conducts, rejecting marriage and sleeping with white men.

The stage finally comes to refusal in marriage. Sula rejects the concepts of marriage. Truly, being unmarried is a concept that can not be tolerated by the people in the Bottom. Denying the tradition of marriage brings a great cost to Sula's life. Sula shows her rebellions acts in very extreme way. She tries to send a message to all woman in the bottom that marriage is not compulsory. In fact she wants to help people to view marriage from different angle, her angle. Marriage in her point of view is never good, because woman should remain obedient in patriarchal ideology where to follow man's instructions is a must. Her grandmother experience has strong influence in this case. Sula says to her grandmother, eva that she rejects to get married and she is better to be alone forever (Morrison, 1973: 79-80).

Woman with her physical characteristic can not escape the judgmental eyes of the society. The body of the woman is always the object of prejudice. Unlike female, the male's body is never considered as a sexual object. Pregnancy becomes the symbol of woman who has performed sex. This should be defended by a marriage, if not then social consequences will emerge as punishment. Sula sees this unfair system of how people's treats woman and she starts to react differently. Struggling over the ideology that has been restricting the freedom of women to behave in their own way, she finally comes up with decision not to get marriage and apply free sex to please her biological needs. Sula has freedom to determine sexual partner and to be treated as the same as a man. She wants to gain a full control of herself. Neglecting any religious or social dictates in this case the ideology of whites has view women as a lower class.

The last stage is choosing and determining sexual partner which has strong effect to understand the oppression. Sula decides not to get settled with one man. In this effort of having a free sexual life, she also conveys equality in terms of racial aspect, so she sleeps with a white man. The risk of having this peculiar behavior leads into a sanction. Sula is labeled as pariah, a term to call a being as a disaster bringer (Morrison, 1973: 105-106). A pariah is indeed is a very evil term to be put on human. Her existence is curse by the community. Sula now lives her life to the fullest because she has total authority of herself. She does not care about people's thought or opinion. Her grandmother and Nel, her best friend are the ultimate epic fights to describe Sula's rebellion. Marriage is never the symbol of happiness for Sula. Instead of getting married like her Grandmother asking her, she is uncontrolled by having free sex to every men she likes.

Having sexual intercourse outside the race is another way of denying the race. Maintaining the pure race has been a tradition. A mixing race baby is always said as the result of bad conduct, symbol of denial with the black community. This is the subtleties of institutionalized racism. The norms which live inside the black community.

Sula in the opposite wants to send different message by having coitus with a white man (Morrison, 1973:105-106). She wants to open the black people's view that the black could stand equally with the men and the only way to send the message effectively is by having sex with a white man. She is quite aware of the risk by purposing the conflicting ideology of hers to the blacks. In silence, Sula leaves her message to be discovered by the people later in the future. She expects woman can do more without men and she also sees the white stands equal with the black. Thus having sex with a white man is never serious matter for Sula.

### Conclusion and Suggestion

The power of the society, family, and friendship forces Sula to have different perspective in seeing the oppression which results in her feminist spirit. The society looks her differently by naming her as pariah and evil. Furthermore, the family mistreats Sula, especially her mother who rejects her existence. The last is her friend, Nel who chooses her husband over her though in the past they shared many valuable memories. Nel is discriminated by white boys but Sula protects her by cutting her own finger. Those aspects affect her vision to see that there is double oppression within the society racism and patriarchy.

Rejecting marriage and determining sexual partner become the resolution of her feminist spirit. However, great consequences have to be faced by Sula during her action. Her conducts are considered to oppose the conventional black values. She is outcated and she is also considered to be a sinner. Thus, her existence is a disaster to entire black society.

However, Sula has strong reason to do those actions. Her action is to reveal the subtle oppression that is given by the patriarchal society. Moreover, she also sees that there is strong power of the white to make blacks suffer. In practical way, she helps her best friend Nel to realize that the adultery of Sula with her husband should not be only put to Sula. Jude should also be responsible because they do it together. Feminist spirit has advantages to reveal black feminism as the subordinate being to the eyes of men, especially the black women. Feminism also helps to see the sociological problem in the society which limits black woman from outside world.

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