

AN ANALYSIS OF THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AS  
REFLECTED IN SELECTED WORKS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
FEMINIST WRITERS

A DISSERTATION

BY

JONGKIT WONGPINIT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in English

at Srinakarinwirot University

September 2006

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AN ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore the female protagonists in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Toni Morrison's Sula, Alice Walker's Meridian, and Maya Angelou's The Heart of a Woman by closely investigating how the protagonists empower themselves despite various kinds of oppression and restriction in life which keep them from happiness and peace. It is found that the causes of the protagonists' life problems and oppression can be classified into four categories; ignorance, patriarchy, stereotypical attitude and racism. The protagonists use five empowering strategies to empower themselves. The five strategies comprise making an assumption, experimenting, realizing, rejecting and resisting, and educating. By using these strategies, they are eventually successful in freeing themselves from oppression and restriction. They finally discover themselves and feel real happiness from inside. The discovery is like enlightenment which makes their lives more meaningful.

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การวิเคราะห์การพัฒนาความเป็นตัวตนของสตรีในงานเขียน  
ของสตรีชาวอเมริกันเชื้อสายแอฟริกัน

บทคัดย่อของ  
ของ  
จงกิจ วงษ์พินิจ

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่ง  
ของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรบัณฑิต  
สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ  
กันยายน 2549



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งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ตัวละครเอกหญิงในงานเขียนของนักเขียนสตรีชาวอเมริกันเชื้อสายแอฟริกัน 4 เรื่องประกอบด้วย Their Eyes Were Watching God ของ โซรา นิด เฮอร์ตตันส์ Sula ของ โทนี มอร์ริสัน Meridian ของ เอลิส วอล์คเกอร์ และ The Heart of a Woman ของ มาซา แองเจโล เพื่อศึกษาตัวละครเอกหญิงแต่ละคนว่า ได้พัฒนาความเป็นตัวตนและสร้างความแกร่งให้กับตนเองท่ามกลางการกดขี่และข้อจำกัดตลอดจนอุปสรรคนานัปการอย่างไร

จากการวิเคราะห์พบว่าของปัญหาชีวิตของตัวละครเอกหญิงทั้งหมดเกิดจากสาเหตุ 4 ประการ ได้แก่ ความไม่รู้ ความเชื่อในเรื่องของผู้ชายเป็นใหญ่ และค่านิยมเก่าๆ ที่ปฏิบัติสืบต่อกันมาเป็นเวลาช้านาน และการแบ่งแยกชนชั้น ตัวละครเอกหญิงทั้ง 4 คน ได้ใช้กลวิธีในการสร้างความแกร่ง 5 กลวิธีประกอบด้วย กลวิธีการตั้งสมมติฐาน กลวิธีการทดลอง กลวิธีการตระหนัก กลวิธีการปฏิเสธและยืนกราน และกลวิธี การให้การศึกษาแก่ตนเอง กลวิธีเหล่านี้ช่วยให้ตัวละครเอกดังกล่าวได้ค้นพบตนเองและได้พบกับความสุขที่แท้จริงในที่สุด การค้นพบนี้เปรียบดังการได้หลุดพ้นซึ่งทำให้ชีวิตของพวกเธอมีความหมายยิ่งขึ้น

The dissertation titled

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

African American female authors have always illustrated in their work a direct result of specific political, social, psychological and economic experiences. Their literary products have been thematically produced from their direct experiences. They also illustrate in their works women's struggles for their own identities, which may reveal how they sacrifice themselves for the family, community or race and relate to how they explore their own abilities, needs and desires. These authors always clarify black women's self definition as one of the important elements in their writing (Tyson 395).

According to, Nelly McKay, black women writers transform their identities from "uneducated to professional" in their writing. They narrate their confrontations, contesting and challenging black male gender oppression. Besides facing oppression caused by male patriarchal power, black women have also been oppressed by the system of slavery. However, their reaction to the oppression is surprisingly admirable. Instead of lamenting their inability to be like white women or letting themselves be trapped in the cage, black women gracefully determine their survival strategies based on black womanhood. Eventually, they discover and affirm their identities and self-authority. They are empowered by turning to their own resources. Within their powerlessness, they are able to resist the devastating impact of the white power (99-100).

Larue Allen and David Britt state in their work, "*Black Women in American Society*", that black women have learned to struggle as individuals in harsh environments since the seventeenth century, and they have persisted despite life

difficulties (62). Maya Angelou also illustrates in her essay “*They Came to Stay*” that black women in the United States have lived through cruel and horrible conditions. Through this stressful phenomenon these women have tried to release their torture by finding solace and sacredness inside themselves. They have had to learn to forgive, to be real to themselves and, to bear life’s difficulties. According to Angelou, black women are surprisingly and undeniably strong and unapologetically direct. For this reason, black women are worthy of admiration (41-43). Similarly, Alice Walker states in her essay “*In Search of our Mother’s Garden*” that black women are called ‘the mules of the world’ in folklore, indicating that they carry a burden everyone else denies. Walker also affirms that black women are skillful artists and capable thinkers. They can very well produce a variety of cultural products for the world (2374).

Many African-American female authors realize their responsibility to declare black women efficiency in enduring harsh lives and show the positive sides of their lives. Most works written by black female writers are rich in many interesting ways, the themes of which are worth exploring, such as the victimization of women, the oppression of women, racism, sexism, classicism, the themes related to slavery and the theme of empowerment. The theme related to female empowerment is often portrayed in many works of famous black female authors. Among these authors are Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou.

These authors illustrate black women’s life experiences in various impressive ways. Moreover, they also give a broader vision of black women in American society to the audiences outside black culture and society. As a result, it is interesting to investigate how African American women can survive despite oppression, injustice or many limitations in life and still endure suffering. Though experiencing harsh lives, black women can finally gain power to stand tall by themselves. Their impressive

and unique writing styles in which some elements of traditional African literature and the modern style of writing are fused to illustrate black women's lives also make the names of Hurston, Morrison, Walker and Angelou mentioned in many criticisms.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to explore the female protagonists in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Toni Morrison's Sula, Alice Walker's Meridian, and Maya Angelou's The Heart of a Woman by closely investigating how the protagonists empower themselves despite various kinds of oppressions and restrictions in life which keep them from happiness and peace. Specifically, the study will examine how these protagonists question, challenge, resist, or reject patriarchal rules and other kinds of injustice. The four selected works, though different in details, reflect similar hopes and dreams of liberal black women who aim to reach for liberation.

More particularly, the study aims to obtain answers for the following questions.

1. What are the causes of the oppression of women presented in these works?
2. How do these protagonists develop inner strength and decide to resist what they find unjust and unfavorable, which in turn, leads them to achieve self-empowerment?
3. What are the impacts of this empowerment upon the lives of these protagonists?

### **Significance of the Study**

Black women have to struggle very hard in order to escape from an oppressed world. Though there are many severe problems many of them can overcome all difficulties. This study will prove women's empowering strategies that eventually lead them to real happiness and freedom. The path through freedom these women take can be analyzed through the four selected works. It is hoped that an exploration of the

empowerment of female protagonists in Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Morrison's Sula, Walker's Meridian and Angelou's The Heart of a Woman will help readers interested in these works to better understand many essential issues. First, they will learn how the female protagonists in the selected works are oppressed. Second, they will understand how these protagonists react to all oppression and how they empower themselves. Third, they will learn the uniqueness of self-empowerment of these protagonists, which leads them in different life fulfilling directions. In addition, this study will also remind us, especially women, of the way to attain real liberation.

### **Scope of the Study**

The researcher will explore self-empowering strategies of African American women as reflected in the works of four African American female writers. This research will be divided into seven chapters.

Chapter I, Introduction, presents the background, the objectives, the significance of the study, the scope and the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 is related literature review. Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 will discuss each work chronologically that reflects social conditions, values, beliefs and mindsets of the people with a focus on female protagonists' strength and weakness and their attitudes toward life. The discussion will start with Their Eyes Were Watching God, followed by Sula, Meridian, and The Heart of a Woman in order to see the development, the personalities of black women reflected in each work in parallel with the development of black American society. After the introduction, the researcher will discuss each chapter as follows:

Chapter 3 will analyze Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. The investigation will be on how the protagonist of the novel empowers herself

against patriarchal values and traditional beliefs which are the by products of slavery. The discussion will be focused on Janie, the protagonist, who is very strong, independent, and intelligent and does not meekly follow mainstream ways of life but learns over time from her failures. The researcher will analyze Janie's self empowering by dividing her life into four phases. The first phase is called by the researcher "an innocent phase" which depicts Janie's childhood experiences from birth to the time she becomes a young teen. The second phase investigates Janie's experiences during her time with her first husband, Logan Killicks. The third phase explores Janie's life with her second husband, Joe Starks. The fourth phase examines her life fulfillment when she marries a man named Tea Cake, who is much younger than herself, and her struggles for justice. The overall picture of this chapter is the development of Janie's inner strength which she gains through her hard life experiences.

Chapter 4 discusses Toni Morrison's Sula. This chapter will underpin the protagonist's empowerment through modern conflicts in the black community and modern change. The discussion will be on Sula Peace, the protagonist of the novel who is weird, rebellious and mysterious. The researcher will investigate the influence of the family and community in which Sula is brought up, and discuss the effects of being the daughter of Hunnah Peace, a woman who is independent, self-indulgent, and polygamous and the granddaughter of Eva Peace who is arrogant, strong, and powerful, with a strong impact upon Sula. Moreover, the researcher will try to answer why Sula grows up to be even more rebellious and independent in an unexpected and shocking way. This chapter will seek the elements that shape Sula's self and her strategies of self-empowerment.



Chapter 5 discusses Alice Walker's Meridian. What will be examined is the empowering strategies of a black woman whose ancestors were slaves and who is brought up among political conflicts between blacks and whites and patriarchy. This chapter will explore how Meridian, the protagonist of the novel, struggles through the problems of her own psyche and injustice framed by patriarchy and racism until she can gain inner strength and liberate herself from all kinds of oppression. The researcher will first explore the origin of her problem by looking at her family background, her community, and the impact of slavery and racism followed by investigating her empowering strategies to cope with all obstacles in life.

Chapter 6 analyzes Maya Angelou's The Heart of a Woman. This chapter will investigate Maya Angelou's life journey during which she has struggled very hard to overcome all obstacles in life. What will be proved is in the present era, black women's problems become more complicated in parallel with the chaos of racism and capitalism. Still, they are the victims of patriarchal beliefs and of racism, which have been deeply embedded from one generation to another. What will be examined is how she can empower herself and get through the stormy weather of life without depending on men and stand tall over the hard rocks of life.

Chapter 7 discusses the unique and shared characteristics of the protagonists and their empowering strategies reflected in the four works. As mentioned, the research argument is that oppression and patriarchal injustice can be the factors that encourage African Americans to fight for power and freedom. In this last chapter, it will be proved that rather than being destined to oppression and meekly bowing to patriarchal rules, the oppressed African American women resist and thus empower themselves in order to survive happily and proudly.

## Theoretical Framework

In the works of these African-American female writers, it can be obviously seen that the protagonists aim to achieve the same goals in life comprising individual freedom, personal independence and equality to do and get whatever they want based on the belief that women should have individual rights to self determination which they bring into the world with them. To achieve their goal, these protagonists empower themselves by resisting conventional social constructions and doing things according to their own needs and dreams.

Empowerment refers to a strategy of constructing inner strength and stability to confront obstacles, life conflicts and oppression in order to survive happily in the real world. The empowerment of the protagonists in the four novels will be analyzed based on radical feminist theory. This theory focuses on personal things such as sexual exploitation of women, the use of women's bodies in reproductive technology, domestic violence, or the sexual abuse of women (Hughes 8). According to radical feminists, women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. They firmly believe that women are historically the first oppressed group. Their oppression is the deepest and the most severe among many kinds of oppression. This oppression is difficult to eliminate and can cause its victims the great suffering. Additionally, radical feminists affirm that women are oppressed by a patriarchal system which is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition. This system cannot be reformed but only ripped out by roots and branches. Radical feminists have tried to propose several ways in order to help women to free themselves from the sexual domination of men (Tong 71-95).

There are many radical feminist theorists who have dedicated themselves to the task of eliminating women oppressions, such as Alison Jaggar, Paula Rothenberg,

Kate Millett and Marilyn French. These radical feminists have various attitudes about women's oppression. Jaggar and Rothenberg firmly believe that women were historically the first oppressed group whose oppression is the most widespread and the deepest. Millett argues that since men always have the dominant roles and women have always been subordinate, it is important to combine feminine and masculine because both qualities are likely to help a person grow and live in the community. Marilyn French also believes that oppression of women by men leads to a further system of domination (Tong 71-98).

The other radical feminist theorist is Cady Stanton, a feminist theorist and social activist who believes that to exclude black women from citizenship based on the ascribed status by race and / or sex, is an obstacle for women to obtain equality and liberation. Stanton considers the exclusion of blacks and women from citizen's rights similar to the right of an individual to independence and self-fulfillment. She argues that women should be given the right to achieve something for themselves. Individual freedom, personal independence, and equality of opportunity should not be open only to men, but also open to women. She also believes in a natural rights doctrine which claims that women should have the individual right to self-determination. According to Stanton, natural rights are a component part of individuals and cannot be taken from them. Women bring their rights into the world with them (77-80). Radical feminist theory is consistent to womanist theology which is female-centered. Womanist theologian is urged to claim for their voices, opinions, experience and faith. According to womanist theology, women must love themselves. Womanist also focuses on the value of mothering and nurturing (273- 275).

How the female protagonists in the four works struggle for individual freedom, personal independence, equality and the individual right to self-

determination within the above theory will be exemplified and discussed.

Furthermore, it will also be pointed out how womanist theology's claim relate to the beliefs, actions, determinations of the protagonists in each works.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For in depth investigation in this dissertation, some backgrounds of the four selected works are cited.

Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, written in 1937, focuses on the pure society of black people in the south. The setting is in a town with mostly black residents so that we can learn the people's mindset during that time and their impact on the protagonist of the novel. Henry Louis Gates Jr. states that it is a bold feminist novel and is the first one to be obviously so daring in the Afro-American tradition. The novel is also concerned with the process of finding a voice by using language as a tool to gain selfhood and power (197). In this work, Hurston presents Janie Woods, a beautiful black mulatto woman who can conquer the old stereotype which holds that a woman is the mule of the world. Janie searches for fulfillment of her life goals despite many obstacles caused by the system of patriarchy. Instead of allowing the destiny to beat her, Janie finally finds a way to liberation. At the end, she discovers true love and gets her own voice (Perkins and Perkins 818).

Their Eyes Were Watching God has been mentioned in many criticisms. Valerie Boyd discusses in Wrapped in the Rainbows that the novel has been considered a feminist novel in which Hurston intentionally portrays how Janie seek for self-realization, autonomy, and independence. She also illustrates women's inner lives and women's and men's equality in every way. It is, therefore, rich and worthy of exploration (303). In addition, Maggie Humm states that this novel resists realism and directly concerns women's empowerment. It illustrates how women regain identity through the heroine, Janie, who finally discovers her own identity and

freedom by ignoring masculine power. She also learns to exploit private and public language to free herself from committing murder (147).

The second novel to be investigated in this study is Toni Morrison's Sula, written in 1973, which illustrates a society of black people that is full of complexities. Morrison shows the development of the bottom land ignored by whites who later become interested because of its fertility. The changing attitude toward the bottom land brings many changes to black residents who live in the community. Moreover, Morrison also places the focus on Sula, the daughter of the community, who goes away from the town and brings significant change to the community. In this work, Morrison demonstrates the confusing mysteries of human emotions and relationships, ambiguity, and irony. Additionally it reveals that social conventions are inadequate as a foundation for living one's life. Morrison also explores the ways in which people try to make meaning of their lives which are filled with conflicts over race, gender, and peculiar points of view. Sula also examines female identity, and sisterhood as seen in the relationship of Sula Peace and Nel Wright, who have grown up together in the black community. It also investigates the growth of the individual spirit. In her narrative technique, Morrison abandons the unifying perspective of omniscient narrative technique so that the readers have to construct a coherent plot and meaning from separated events. In addition, Sula is an example of the African American female *bildungsroman* which shows the growth of a character from the early years into adulthood (Kubitschek 47).

The third novel is Alice Walker's Meridian written in 1976. This novel focuses on a female protagonist who has a strong will to fight against male oppressors and radical injustice. She educates herself and seeks her own voice and identity. In this work, Walker illustrates a story of a black woman's life, a story of a young

woman who struggles during the civil rights movement. The heroine, Meridian, is a black woman from a southern town whose spiritual and intellectual strength and self-confidence gradually increase when she confronts many traumatic experiences. After getting married at a very young age, she has a child and later gets divorced. She sends her child away, and ends up working in the voters' registration campaign, encouraging African-Americans to register. The outstanding point about Meridian that Walker tries to portray is that she interacts with people as individuals, rather than stereotypes. Barbara Christian notes that the novel has many interesting themes. Some of its major themes concern the ideology of black motherhood in America and a celebration of the true meanings of motherhood. Walker illustrates how motherhood is “an angle of seeing life” of valuing all life, of resisting all that might destroy it by tracing the lives of mothers (276).

The last work to be explored is Maya Angelou's fourth autobiography, The Heart of a Woman written in 1987. The title, The Heart of a Woman, comes from the poem of the Harlem Renaissance poet, Georgia Douglas Johnson. This autobiography portrays Angelou's search for identity and place. The readers learn about Angelou's life in her thirties when she tries to survive masculine and white prejudices. Unlike the other three novels, this autobiography focuses on the protagonist's struggles in the modern world. She has to play the role of a mother, a wife, and a black female activist fighting against racism in New York and the powerful patriarchal influence in Egypt. As its title reveals, The Heart of a Woman focuses on her real life experiences which illustrate her fondest dreams, life disappointments, her role as a mother and a wife, and specifically her lifelong resolutions against strong patriarchal beliefs which still exists in the present world. The Heart of a Woman, is an autobiography whose political issue illustrates the struggles of a black woman. As stated by McKay, an

autobiography is a personal narrative that is considered a historical site in which aesthetics, self-confirmation of humanity, citizenship, and the significance of racial politics shaped African-American literary expression (96).

Looking specifically at female characters in these four works; one can see that the authors make their characters tough, strong, rebellious and independent. Moreover, these authors also try to empower and liberate their characters from life's frustrations and the cage of injustice. We can also feel that though slavery ended a long time ago, its influence is hinted in the leading African American works. Its influential impact causes a severe racism for black women who are oppressed not only by racism but also, as obviously shown in the novels, by the patriarchal belief. For example, Janie in Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, after keeping herself voiceless for a long time, decides to escape from the tie of male power and patriarchal rules as opposed to other women in her society. In Sula, Morrison presents a rebellious girl who dares to challenge stereotypical traditions of her society by being an out law. In Walker's Meridian, Meridian, the protagonist has to endure her suffering caused by an unpleasant condition of her family and the history of her ancestors who were slaves and her love and the unfairness in her society. She has to get through lifelong depression and creates her new life. In The Heart of a Woman, Maya Angelou portrays how Angelou finds her own identity, and is proud of being a black woman.

To better understand what is going to be investigated in the four works and how the investigation will be processed, related literature comprising the development of women's literature, the significance of feminist theory in literature, the development of black women's literature and the origins of black women's oppression will be discussed as follows:



The history of women's literature reveals that women's literary works have been excluded and marginalized for a long time until the Renaissance Period when such writing was limited to church activities, courts or to women in the upper class. Only a few women in the western world wrote during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These women suffered a great deal from being considered as anomalies. For this reason, not many women writers dared to challenge and question their inferior condition (Gilbert and Gubar 1-53). Only men assumed an active role in producing literary works. As Virginia Woolf implies in Shakespeare's Sister from "*A Room of One's Own*", women's opportunities to write in the old days were restricted by the rule of patriarchy. To be ambitious like men in the world of literature was meaningless and it was almost impossible for women to realize their dreams (Gilbert and Gubar 1376-1383). Simone de Beauvoir mentioned in The Second Sex that women were less influential because all concrete powers were in the hands of men. The space of women in putting their creativity into words was narrowed. As she asserts: "*Women do not set themselves up as Subject ...they have no religion or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men...*" (150). She states that patriarchal rules had kept women voiceless and put them in the state of dependence since the earliest days (149).

However, in the nineteenth century, there were changes in the roles and status of women in the west including England and America. According to Gilbert and Gubar, in addition to the formation of women's status, there was also the initiation of a powerful female literary tradition. The nineteenth century is considered the time of the feminist revolution and the golden age of women's literature. There were many female writers during this era, such as Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Emily Dickinson, Margaret Fuller, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, to name

only a few. In the modern literary realm, then, women produced more literary works. Female novelists and poets were hardly considered anomalies by the turn of the century (161-965). The feminist movement provided a wider horizon for women to turn their thoughts into words. Women began to translate the experiences of being suppressed into such literary forms as drama, fiction, and expository prose. From the end of the nineteenth century to the early years of the twentieth century, most women writers felt that they were in a period of transition. Many of them were empowered to write about what they were against and to emphasize their request for equality and justice in society (966-968). The era roughly from 1914 to 1939 was called the modernist period in which many literary men felt more anxious than their female counterparts. They were anxious about the rapid change of the world they were living in. For this reason, the period of change was called “The Age of Anxiety” by W.H. Auden. Women’s lives during this period were distinctively different from the lives of Victorian women. They no more adhered strictly to femininity ideology. Rather they searched for progress by entering universities, and joining cultural institutions from which they were once excluded. There were popular women novelists and memorists whose works were best-sellers like Edith Wharton and Willa Cather who explored the dynamics and the triumphs of female lives. There were also prominent feminist writers like Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Zora Neales Hurston whose works presented similar ideas about the power of women. These authors illustrated the strength of their heroines and their ancestresses (1215 -1672).

Because of the existence of the feminist movement, a large number of works written by contemporary African-American female authors who were once marginalized by the African-American literary canon have become of great interest to many critics since the 1970s. The outstanding evidence is the essay of Alice

Walker "*In Search of Our Mother's Garden*" which focuses on many significant points that provoke African-American feminist criticism such as the issue of a female aesthetics and the issue of black literature creation. Many critics have turned to an exploration of the works of African-American female writers for the reason that African - American feminist criticism embodies many interesting aspects. According to Humm, there are four areas that African - American feminist criticism incorporates. The first area is reclamation criticism, which expands traditional literary history to include African-American women writers. The second concern is the eradication of black feminine stereotypes by taking attention to cultural history as a means. The third concern is the focus of the audience's questions and relations of black writers and both Black and white readers. The fourth issue concerns the relationship between black women's writing and postmodernism and today's related theories being debated (145-153). Additionally, Barbara Smith states in her work, "*Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*", that in exploring the works of African-American female authors, we will see both their provable historical tradition that parallels in time with the tradition of black men and white women writing in America and their simple approaches to creating literature (8-9).

Some black women oppose feminist ideology which they think is regulated by white feminists. For instance, Bell Hooks puts in her work, "*Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory*", that feminism in America has never been for women who have really been oppressed but for a group of educated, middle and upper class white women. Women who are most victimized and oppressed, according to Hooks, are powerless to change their life condition. Only women who have leisure time and money can shape their identities on the model of the feminine mystique. Hooks further states that white feminists are not really opposed to patriarchy, capitalism,

classicism, or racism. They just expect various kinds of alternatives in life such as equal pay, equal work, and more lifestyle choices. Black women, therefore, resist feminist thought which focuses on the pleasure of some groups of women and try to criticize, reexamine and explore new possibilities because they think that white feminists are unable to fully understand how sex, race, and class oppression are interrelated (25-32).

Because of opposing white and black attitudes toward women's oppression, black feminists choose to follow womanist theology. Delores S. Williams states in, "*Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices*", that the concept of the womanist provides an opportunity for women to claim their roots in black history, religion, and culture. Womanist theology emerges among African-American Christian women. Womanist concepts embrace beliefs and patterns of women's behavior. In Alice Walker's definition, womanist theology is a code that contains conditions, events and values which are female-centered and crystallized in the Afro-American community around women's activities and formed traditions. According to Williams, the cultural codes of Walker are valuable resources to indicate and validate the data that womanist theologians can reflect as they bring black women's social, religious, and cultural experience into the discourse of theology, ethics, and biblical and religious studies. The authoritative sources of womanist theologians are female slave narratives, modern fictions, autobiographies written by black women, works of women in academic settings, and testimonies of the black church. Walker's concept of womanist is for non-bourgeois black folk culture. The literature of this culture respects female intelligence and ingenuity much more than the bourgeois culture does (273-274).

Before black women's writing was taken into account, Tyson states that African American literature had been initiated by an effort of African slaves. These slaves were determined to prove their humanity to whites by creating literature for the purpose of challenging slaveholders' belief that their people were not fully human because they could not write nor read. They also point out that these slaves were incapable of educating themselves because of their regulations which state that learning to read and write was illegal for them. The effort to declare their identity made African American literature later widely known by readers and critics (358-389).

The slave narrative is considered a uniquely American literary genre, which first appeared at the beginning of the eighteenth century and became well-known during three decades before the Civil War. It originated from various literary forms and genres such as African and African American folklore, the Bible; travel writing, the Puritan spiritual autobiography, novels, the abolitionist press, and the American success narrative. In recent years, the novel *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, the first African American to win the Nobel Prize in literature seems to be the most creative reworking of the slave narrative form. Morrison narrates the dehumanizing conditions of the slave system and the impact of slavery on the African American family (Tackach 15-28).

However, Joanne M. Braxton states in her work, "*Defining the Slave Narrative in Female Terms*", that the criticism concerning the slave narrative has focused on those written by men, such as the works written by Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass. Narratives written by women are secondarily important. For this reason, a more balanced view of the slave narrative genre, one that includes those written by women should be taken into account (115). Braxton points out the

limitation of female slave narratives in that the slave narrative genre has been dominated by male bias. She exemplifies that Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass's being viewed as the central text of the genre made some critics define the primary Afro-American archetype as the one that voiced the hero who succeeded in discovering the bonds among freedom, literacy, and struggle. On the other hand, the female slave narratives were not part of the definition. Braxton suggests that in order to balance our understanding of the slave narrative, we need to closely read those narratives written by women and expand the range of terms used in writing.

Investigating the work written by women will help us to perceive the experience and culture of Afro-American and fulfill the missing and mistaken analyses which based too exclusively on experience and writing of male models (121-123). According to Harzel V. Carby, black women authors play active roles as historical agents to show in slave narrative the outstanding characteristics of black women. These authors attempt to present black women as ones who can liberally voice their own visions and make decisions over their own lives. The sufferings and brutal treatment of black women are documented in a context as well as the story of resistance to that brutality (135).

To study how black women can escape from their voiceless world and develop their strength and empower themselves, the origin of their oppression needs to be fore-grounded. It is important to investigate the causes that drown these women in the sea of suffering. And more importantly, why instead of meekly accepting their destiny, many black women question and resist the traditional rules that keep them from liberation and equality.

The history of black women and narratives of black women show that black women are oppressed by many factors. However, an influence of slavery in the old

days which reflect the present lives of black women, racism, and patriarchal ideology are considered the significant factors. This dissertation will point out some evidences seen in the four novels and exemplify how slavery, racism and patriarchal ideology obstruct women in their reach for liberation and at the same time encourage them to drag out all energy that they all have to empower themselves. As already mentioned, patriarchy, slavery, and racism are the outstanding factors that cause black women's oppression. These three factors can be explained respectively as follows:

According to Perkins, Warhol and Perkins, patriarchy means that men are the ones who hold property and official political power which they later pass on to their sons. Women have to economically and socially depend on male relations for the definition of their social identities. American society has been organized under the principles of patriarchy and has practiced this ideology since colonial times during the late seventeenth century (3). The strongest influences of patriarchal ideology obviously occurred during the nineteenth century. Women were regulated by laws which men formulated. A clear example of patriarchal influences can be seen in the stereotypical code known as the Cult of True Womanhood, which stated the expectations of the whole society concerning the place and behavior of nineteenth century women. Barbara Weltor stated that American women had to follow virtues formulated by the patriarchal society. The quality of True Womanhood is divided into four cardinal virtues- piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Without these virtues, all kinds of achievement women possess were considered useless and worthless. On the contrary, a woman who possessed them was promised with happiness and power. Religion or piety was the first and the core of a woman's virtue and the source of her strength which held that women must be religious by behaving right before God and joining church activities. Purity, the second virtue, was the

quality of being virgin before getting married. It was as essential as piety to a young woman. Without purity, she would be considered unnatural and unfeminine and unworthy. The loss of purity brought misery and would make her feel guilty of having committed a crime. For this reason, women were taught to strictly maintain their virginity. Submission, the third virtue, was the state of being submissive. Men were considered to be the movers, the doers, and the actors, whereas women were the passive and submissive responders. The fourth virtue was domesticity which put women by their own fireside performing responsibility as daughters and sisters, but especially as wives and mothers. Women were expected to dispense comfort and cheer brothers, husbands and sons (151-162).

Another factor that oppressed black women was the system of slavery. When black people were victimized throughout America by the system of slavery, it was black women who carried the heaviest trauma. Slavery is an act of deconstruction. According to the history of slavery, many people were destroyed in the process. The slave system tortured many slaves in the work force. The black female body was considered useful because the slaver holders could exploit it in many ways, such as for sexual pleasure, for laboring and reproducing. Violence was necessary with enslaved women in order to make them docile and under control (Bibi Bakare-Yusuf 177-178). According to Perkins, Warhol and Perkins, about two million black women had to live as slaves during the mid-nineteenth century, and only about 200,000 were free. Slave women could not enter legal marriages. They had no right to marry the men they loved so that they had no legal claim to their child if they had one. The law stated that the child of a slave would be the property of the slave's master. Slave women who dared to fight against injustice and struggled for freedom by individual acts or by escaping, would still face difficulties caused by racism and the oppression



of gender discrimination (4). Helen Thomas points out in *“Enslaved Black Women: The politics of Reproduction and Infanticide”* that transmitting slave status through the enslaved mother created a particular problem for female slaves and their reproductive rights. That is to say, a child born to a female slave must continue its slave status even if the father was not a slave (184-185). A clear example of the brutality of slavery can be seen in Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987), her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, which is based on the true story of a runaway slave, Margaret Gardner who kills her infant to save it from a lifetime of slavery. In Beloved, Seth, the protagonist of the novel, has escaped a Kentucky plantation called Sweet Home. Fearing that her child will be as brutally enslaved as herself, she cuts the throat of the baby she holds in her arms.

Racism is another factor that concerns black women. The experiences of black women being victimized by racism have been illustrated in the works of many black feminist writers. For instance, in Morrison’s The Bluest Eye (1970), the limitations in the life of a young black girl, Pecola Breedlove, caused by racism, are narrated. Due to her ugliness and blackness, Pecola was victimized by her schoolmates, Maureen and Louise Junior and an adult, Geraldine. Even her parents were not fond of her. The hatred caused Pecola to be obsessed by the blue eyes. Another example is the case of Maya Angelou in I Know Why the Caged bird Sings (1970); she laments her hard time in a segregated community in the South in Arkansas, during the 1930s. Even when she got a serious toothache, the white dentist refused to heal her pain and said that he would put his instrument in the dog’s mouth rather than the mouth of a black. It is obvious seen from what have been exemplified that racism is still disturbance because has been deeply rooted in American society for a long time. Racial conflicts in America were caused by the opposition of black and

white, which was deeply engraved in European society and later spread to America. People hold color as the cultural symbol. They assume that white is associated with purity whereas black referred to evil. Since blackness held negative meanings, black people in the western world had to encounter difficulties in life (Anthony Giddens 218). Slavery and racism were related. Giddens points out that the slave trade was carried on by Europeans who believed that the blacks were inferior. Racism supported and justified colonial rule over black people, who had no rights to participate in political events (219). According to Allen and Britt, black women have suffered a lot from harsh environments since the seventeenth century. Some of them have faced difficulties in life because they are people of an inferior race; some have suffered from the problem of complexion, and many of them have faced gender limitations and economic problems. Additionally, black women have largely been disregarded by many scholars who investigate ways to prevent psychological disorder and analysts who work on solving the problems of unemployment. Moreover, they have been overlooked by researchers who evaluate the impact of unemployment. Furthermore, women's studies have been for and about white women. For this reason, black women are not in the forefront (61-62).

This dissertation will point out how patriarchy, slavery, and racism oppressed black women in American society through the novels of Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and an autobiography of Maya Angelou.

Zora Neale Hurston is a model author who has influenced many well-known black writers (Schuster and Pelt 445). She became a model for many famous writers like Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Gloria Naylor, and Toni Cade Bambara (Gates (196-197)). Hurston's works show blacks existing within a positive environment. She put

many of her female characters in the novel like herself; very strong and determined. Her strength was inherited from her mother and her self-confidence was gained from her hometown (Gilbert and Gubar 1637). Humm further states that Hurston's novels take up the issues of proclaiming an identity. Many feminist critics are interested in Hurston's work for various reasons. First, she is considered the mother of twentieth century Black women's writing. Second, her works reflect the tensions of audience and self involvement in the tensions of race, sex, and class. The third reason is that her literary job clearly answers questions about traditions and the academy (146-147).

Toni Morrison focuses on the experience of black Americans, particularly emphasizing slavery, prejudices, black women's experiences in an unjust society, and the search for cultural identity in most of her novels. She uses fantasy and mythical elements along with realistic depictions of racial, gender and class conflicts (Schuster and Pelt 445). Cynthia A. Davis suggests that what makes Morrison's novels interesting is their inventive combination of reality and imagination. Additionally, Morrison also combines a social analysis with social observation. Her fictions contain symbolic quality of myth; the search for a myth adequate to reflect experience is one of her central themes (27). Gilbert and Gubar state that most of Morrison's fictions frequently focus on black, Midwestern communities. Her novels, The Bluest Eye (1970), Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977) and Tar Baby (1981) have been widely praised as "evocative meditations on black cultural identity in America"(2068). Morrison illustrates the pain of race and simultaneously maintains a sense of joy. She investigates the unique cultural inheritance of her people by looking at universal ethical issues such as the pressures on the individual caused by the society, both good and evil. Her characters are usually rebellious and daring so they are always condemned by the whole community they live in.

Alice Walker, similar to many other black female writers, intentionally portrays something of the effects of the world. According to Christian, the form, the theme, imagery, and critique are marked by her belief in a coherent but developing philosophy or ideology of life that relates to external reality. Her works do not reflect only herself but also reflect how she relates herself to the world. The outstanding point of her work is her focus on black women's freedom, which indicates the health of the entire society. Her focus involves a complexity of vision. It leads us to question what it means to be a black woman in the world. To discover the answer, one must face the combination of sexism, racism and poverty so integrated that the parts of the whole can hardly be separated (213).

Maya Angelou is a famous black female autobiographer who writes a series of her own life. Besides her autobiography, Angelou also writes essays, plays, film scripts, poems and documentaries. In 1970, she began to narrate her life with I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, which was The New York Times bestseller for nonfiction for two years. It was the longest run for an African American writer (Ammeson 40). Her autobiographies that followed are Gather Together in My Name (1974), and Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976), The Heart of a Woman (1981), All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986) and A Song Flung Up to Heaven (2002). Smith says out that Angelou uses lyrical imagery in her writing along with realistic matters (10). Her writing style is unique because she writes as if she were writing a song (Gottlieb 23). Doris Grumbach adds that "Angelou is keen, sharp, earthy, imaginative, lyrical, spiritually bold, and seems destined for distinction" (12).

## **Finding of Previous Research**

The four selected works have been interested and investigated by many researchers which can be exemplified as follows:

McAninch-Runzi and Wolfgang Manfred's dissertation, African-American Women Writers and Liberation Theologies: Religion, God, and Spirituality in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker (1990), investigates the novels of Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker by looking at the influence of religion ideology upon the societies of the western world. They examine theology's implications for the black community in general and African American women in particular. It is found that the protagonists in the works of Hurston and Walker are aware of the patriarchal ideology's influence which conspired in their linguistic marginalization and religious disenfranchisement. Not only aware of the undesirable conditions, the protagonists also struggle to liberate themselves by abandoning their deity and the norms of society.

In her dissertation, Mouth, Tongue, Voice: Crossing Boundaries in Selected Works of Zora Neale Hurston (1996), Kathy Lyn Hilbert examines the works of Zora Neale Hurston by looking at how the female characters search for their own voice which is seen unusual when comparing to the normal social order. It is found that through the struggle and pain each character can go beyond the boundaries of accepted behavior in society. This ability eventually changes both the individual who gain voice and the community who witness the story.

Diana Frances Miles' dissertation, Women Violence and Testimony in the works of Zora Neale Hurston (2000), also examines Hurston's first two novels, Jonah's Gourd Vine and Their Eyes Were Watching God and her autobiography Dust Tracks on the Road. Miles finds that Hurston's works address her persistent return to

violence and oppression of black women in her community. Additionally, Hurston is found different from other female writers of her era that she makes her heroines leave their husbands and control their own income. Miles also discusses domestic violence appears in Hurston's novels. For example in Jonah's Gourd Vine, violence is introduced from the beginning and in Their Eyes Were Watching God, there are 14 acts of violence against women.

Apart from the above dissertations related to Hurston's works, there are also many dissertations that explore the works of Toni Morrison, Alice Walkers and Maya Angelou.

In his dissertation, Toni Morrison's Womanist Discourse in "The Bluest Eyes (1970), "Sula (1974), and "Beloved" (1987): Analytical and Computational (2004), Mohamed Ahmed Deyab examines some of the womanist issues in Morrison's three novels, "The Bluest Eyes (1970), "Sula (1974), and "Beloved" (1987) in order to see the development of the womanist tenets in each work. He finds that in the Bluest Eyes, Morrison writes by using a typical womanist approach that is she writes as an African-American women with the audience of African American Woman in mind. In Sula, Morrison's womanist ideas develop. She makes women the main protagonists in her novels. In Beloved, Morrison's womanist ideas have moved from individual bases to collectives one.

Lowell Clark Martin's dissertation, A woman's place: The politics of Race and Class in Female Characters of black women writers (2000), examines the restrictions of sex, confinement of race and deprivation of class that define the notion of self and freedom achieved by many black women. Martin explores the works of Alice Walker's Novel, Third Life of Grange Copeland and The Color Purple, Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Sula, and Puale Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones

and Praisesong for the Widow. He concludes that the female characters in the novels of black women writers provide hope for achievement despite the odds and dread of failure.

Angela LaViola Cotten's dissertation, Womanist Philosophy of Revolutionary Struggle: Human Being, Power, and Social Totality in the early Writings of Alice Walkers (2001), explores the early writing of Alice Walker by looking at the development of critical thought on problems of revolutionary struggle, critical method, human being social totality and power. She also discussed that Walker's works contribute to Marxian social Theory.

Siphokazi Z. Koyana's dissertation, The Heart of a Woman: Black Women's lives in the United States and South Africa as Portrayed in the Autobiographies of Maya Angelou and Sindiwe Magona (1999), investigated the autobiographies of Maya Angelou and Sindiwe Magona. She differentiates Afro-centric womanism from Western feminism and contextualizes Magona and Angelou within their respective autobiographical traditions. Koyana also emphasizes how they advance the womanist consciousness. She finds that the protagonists' experiences of motherhood enable them to challenge the notions of maternity by questioning the supremacy of the nuclear structure. It indicates how black working-class mothers are not domesticated. In addition, she points out that the selected autobiographies enable both writers to teach the following generations how to survive and thrive against severe obstacles.

Many scholars and researchers have examined the works of black female on several different issues. However, the analysis of how black women empowered themselves remains largely unexplored. To my knowledge, we have not engaged in strategies which women use to liberate themselves from oppression. This dissertation, therefore, attempts to identify self-empowering strategies which the female characters

in four selected works use as a tool to free themselves from oppression and overcome all kinds of obstacles.



## CHAPTER 3

### THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

In Their Eyes Were Watching God Hurston presents woman's success in searching for freedom and identity through her effort to reach for her goal in life and to gain power. This chapter will therefore investigate the protagonist's self-empowering strategies to find out which strategies she uses as a tool to fulfill her hopes and dreams. The researcher argues that Janie, the protagonist, can achieve the goal in life comprising individual freedom, personal independence, power and equality to do and get whatever she wants based on the belief that women should have individual rights to self-determination. To achieve what she wants, Janie attempts to empower herself by resisting conventional social constructions, doing things according to her own needs and dreams. Janie uses five empowering strategies which consist of realizing, rejecting, and making an assumption, experimenting and using knowledge as a tool. To make it clearer, when Janie first realizes what she needs in life, she then rejects what she thinks useless and will obstruct her will. After rejecting undesirable matters, Janie continues by making an assumption about the way to get her dream fulfilled, and directly experiences what she thinks will lead her to success. Apart from the above four strategies, education is another factor that makes her know how to defend for herself in crisis. Interestingly, Janie's passion, demand and dream are not framed by stereotypical traditions. She is confident to take her own route and is not afraid of walking alone in a lonely way of life. Hurston makes Janie's journey very challenging to follow.

Throughout this chapter, the researcher will investigate Janie's empowering strategies by exploring her life which unavoidably relates to many people close to her

from the very beginning of her life until she is grown up and gets her own voice. Four significant phases of life that Janie has gone through will be discussed. By looking at these four phases, the researcher will point out how her attitude toward life, her belief, and her experiences influence her strength and power to get her dream fulfilled or to reach the destination which she calls 'the horizon'. We will gradually learn how she empowers herself and travels through unsatisfactory events and life restrictions. Four phases of Janie's life consist of the phase which starts from when she is born until she marries Logan Killick, a man whom her grandmother chooses for her. Her life in the three following phases is unavoidably related to the men she lives with. The second phase that the researcher will discuss is the period during her life with Logan Killicks, the third phase is the period when she escapes from Logan to Joe Stark, a man who searches for authority and whom she thinks will bring her new opportunity, and the fourth phase is the final phase from the time when Janie meets Tea Cake, the third man in her life, a man who finds her real beauty and makes her know true love until she becomes a widow when she kills him on self defense.

### **An Innocent and Curious Phase**

At this stage of life, Janie used three strategies to deal with her problematic situations. The three strategies consist of realizing, experimenting and making assumption. In the beginning phase of Janie's life Janie is still new to the world. Being brought up by her grandmother, an ex-slave and a nanny for a white family without knowing who her parents are Janie spends her childhood living with her grandma in the backyard of the Washburn family. Because Janie is raised along with white kids, she does not even know that she is colored until she sees herself in the picture looking different from other kids when she is six as she says: *'so when Ah look at the picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real*

*dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor....Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be' (8-9).*

During the early period, Janie can be compared to a white rose, pure, clean and innocent. However, she is not too innocent to realize who she is. Janie realizes that she is different from other kids. When Janie sees this difference she does not mention her negative feelings about herself so we can assume that Janie's blackness is not an important matter that will obstruct her life. She is always positive about herself. The picture of black Janie among white kids signifies her uniqueness. Later Janie grows up to be different. She has her own belief and her own dream. When she becomes a teenager, her heart and soul are mixed with desire and passion. If we compare her to the white rose, the petal now has been turned to pink. Janie gradually turns to suspect life. She finally steps into the period of change. Hurston intends to make Janie imaginative, creative and self-trust. Presumably, her creativity and imagination are her innate nature. The clear example is how Janie sees the pear tree in bloom and the singing bees. Janie is capable of linking the real world and the imaginative world together. As Hurston writes:

She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest brunch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation (11).

Bush puts that Janie has a poet's sensibility who, as called in Wordsworth's phrase, 'sees into the life of things'. The image of a blossoming pear tree, buzzing with bees and dusting the world with pollen is transformed to be her image of community and marriage (1207). Janie becomes more curious about love so that she seeks for its meaning by watching the honey bee and the flowers, she lets her

imagination flow and gradually feels more suspicious of being a woman, being loved and loving someone. When she sees a pear tree in bloom with kissing bees she compares them to herself and starts to question, “*Where were the singing bees for her?*”. (11) Being curious about this phenomenon, Janie makes experiments by approaching Johnny Taylor though she does not really love him. Though being curious about things is just ordinary for girls who step into the teenage period, we can learn that what Janie wants in life is different from most women in her community, particularly the women of her grandma’s age who dream of wealth and good protection. The different attitudes in life are caused by their different backgrounds. Women of Janie’s grandmother generation had encountered brutal slavery in which they had very little choices to live their own lives or they had no choice at all before they were freed. Due to what they have faced such as starving, rapes, violence, what these women always dream of is to live in a better condition. Moreover, since they used to be in the lowest status and were treated like they were not human, they also need acceptance from the society. To be accepted, they believe, is to be like the wealthy white people so that they should marry men who have big houses and many acres of lands. For Janie, though she is a granddaughter of an ex- slave, she does not directly face the brutality of slavery. Both Janie and her grandmother are treated well enough in the roof of the Washburn. Janie is sent to school and is raised like other kids in the family of her master. Nonetheless, what seems to be the problem is Janie’s lack of paternal and maternal love, being brought up by an old grandmother who cannot fully provide love and care. For this reason, Janie’s desire for love is strong. Her need of parental love is mixed with the natural need of a young teen.

To sum up, at this stage of life, Janie used three strategies; realizing, experimenting and making assumption. When these strategies are used, Janie

gradually learns about herself and others. Moreover, two sides of Janie's growth are seen. First, Janie becomes aware that she is not white. She gets the perception of self that she is black and is different from the other kids in the Washburn family. Another thing is the growth of her curiosity about things which comes together with the desire for love. These two things are very significant because it will later encourage Janie to take an important journey, the journey of dream fulfilling or as Hurston calls 'the journey to the horizon'. We learn at this stage that when Janie is grown up she instinctively realizes her own desire. When she knows what she wants in life she attempts to find out the way to get it. She starts from questioning. Janie asks about love and dreams of love. Instead of letting other people tell her what love is like, Janie makes an assumption and chooses to experience it by herself. This is why she approaches Johnny Taylor and this is why she decides to marry Logan Killicks. One might say that because of her grandmother's force that make Janie unavoidably steps into marriage life but the researcher argues that it is her hope for love Janie step into the arm of a man whom she is not sure she loves. Janie makes an assumption by herself that love will come together with marriage and directly experiences it.

### **Logan Phase**

At this stage of her life, Janie uses two strategies to deal with life situation; rejecting and realizing strategies. Janie's second phase of life begins when Nanny witnesses Janie kissing a boy. She realizes from the minute she sees her niece with the boy that Janie has already been a woman and is ready to get married. At this phase, Nanny is a very influential person who brings the change to Janie's life; therefore, it is necessary to trace the life background of Nanny in order to find out why she wants her niece to marry a rich man. Her determination to have her niece get married is caused by several reasons which can be explained as follows:

First, it is because of Nanny's oppressive experiences when she was a slave. Because of her traumatic life experiences, Nanny always bears in her mind that she will not let a bad destiny happen to her granddaughter. What Nanny has faced is too deeply engraved in her memory. She cannot forget her pain in the past, being brutally raped even after she has just given birth to a child and seventeen years later this kind of event happens to her own daughter. As a result, Nanny is now aware that she must prevent Janie from facing the same destiny so that she urges her to marry Logan Killicks, a man who has sixty acres of land.

The second reason that Nanny wants Janie to get married is to fulfill her own dream. She tries to convince her niece by saying:

You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. ...Ah didn't want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neither (16).

It is quite obvious that Nanny has always been dreaming of having a normal life as other women such as getting married, having her own land, and being well protected. These are what she yearns for all her life but she can never fulfill her dream due to the limitations of slavery. During her time in the system of slavery, Nanny has neither the right to complain nor to ask for justice. Nanny's two broken dreams are more than enough to make her put all her hopes and dreams on her only granddaughter, Janie. Nanny tries to convince her niece to take the opportunity she chooses for her by telling her about her past. This is the reason why Nanny wants Janie to marry Logan Killicks. Marrying Logan, Nanny believes, Janie will have a good protection so that she will not face any harmful events her mother and her

grandmother once experiences. More importantly, her dream will be completely fulfilled.

The third reason is the society values that she firmly clings to. Nanny believes that it is natural for women to get married and women should not care much about love but property that men have and the good protection they provide. Black women in Nanny's society always long for a lawful marriage because their former generations suffered a lot of social prejudice toward slavery in which women had no right to be themselves. They were raped and whipped by the masters and cannot claim for justice. When they have children, slaveholders could sell their children to anyone they want. Due to this limitation, black women always dream of having a perfect family. However, what they consider perfect is not love but material and physical pleasure that men are supposed to provide. Most women in Nanny's community think that to marry a man who has his own house and a big piece of land will make them happy. Nanny firmly clings to this attitude as she says to Janie: *'If you don't want him, you sho aughta. Heah you is de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land.* (23). Nanny's statements shows her strong view of marriage. She thinks that Janie should want Logan because he has sixty acres of land and a big house which most black women dream of. However Janie disagrees with her grandmother because she thinks love is more important than all property. Janie insists that: *'Ah ain't takin' dat ole land tuh heart neither. Ah could throw ten acres of it over the fence every day and never look back to see where it fell'* (23-24). From this statement, we learn that Janie does not care about what Logan Killick has. Moreover, she does not love him at all. Janie and her grandmother's different attitude toward marriage bring her a problem and frustration. Apparently, Janie is different from other black women in her

community. She has her own will and dream based on her own belief. However, being too weak to defend her own rights she has to take a risk at the early stage with the hope that marriage will bring love, Janie steps into the route into which Nanny guides her.

Though Janie realizes what she wants in life, she is too young to realize that marriage does not always bring love and joy. As Hurston puts: "*Janie had had no chance to know things, so she had to ask. ...Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?*" (21). Not strong enough to argue with Nanny about the marriage, Janie decides to find the answer of the mysterious questions by herself. At this stage, though Janie learns something about marriage, she is not perfectly mature. Janie is aware that she does not love Logan Killicks but innocently thinks that she will love him after the wedding. Her first impression about him is negative so that she has to try very hard to adjust herself to the new circumstance. Janie even asks Nanny how to love Logan. What she is searching for is love, sweetness, and beauty of life which nobody can understand. Janie can see beauty in nature while other people cannot. She is a kind of imaginative and romantic person who certainly clings to mental pleasure much more than physical pleasure. Janie tells her grandmother that she wants things sweet with her marriage like when she sits under a pear tree but her grandmother thinks it is nonsense. Nanny does not realize that Logan's wealth means nothing to her niece.

At this phase of life Janie has to struggle very hard to cope with her feeling for Logan and with Logan himself. The problem occurs because Logan is like other men who is attracted by Janie's youth and beauty which is just superficial. He just wants Janie to be his servant who can provide him with sexual pleasure and take care of domestic tasks and mind the mules. For this reason harmonious words are heard at the early stage of their marriage. Logan later tries to show his authority by asking



Janie to do his work. It frustrates Janie when he tries to push Janie down and show her that he is bigger than her which can be exemplified through the argument between both of them. When Logan harshly calls Janie to help him move the manure pile, Janie resists against it as she says: “ *You don’t need mah help out dere, Logan. Youse in yo’ place and Ah’m in mine*” (31). Logan does not care what she says, he replies: “ *You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and that quick*” (31).

From this conversation we learn that Janie is not afraid of her husband which means that she does not fear male power. She suddenly fights for her own right when she encounters injustice. Logan is a by product of patriarchy which always wants to dominate women. But Janie can make him feel even more frustrated and angry when Janie says she does not feel honored marrying him. When her life with Logan Killicks is not like what she has expected. Janie realizes that there is another hope for herself as Hurston describes: “*She knew that God tore down the old world every evening and built a new one by sun-up*” (25). She becomes more mature and finds the answer which she is curious to know at first that “*marriage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman*” (25). For this reason, instead of letting herself be trapped in the cage of marriage and being destined to only one man who likes to beat her down like Logan Killicks, Janie starts to seek for a new light of hope. She looks ahead of herself with a strong will and chooses the new road. Janie always realizes that when there is a will there is a way. The third phase of Janie’s life begins after she feels tired of Logan. She decides to run away with Joe Starks, a man who she thinks, acts and dresses like Mr. Wasburn, her Nanny’s white master. When Janie feels that her life with Logan is not suitable for her, she has a strong determination to leave him. Eager for change, she then leaves Logan behind.

Obviously, it is not Joe Starks who encourages Janie to take a risk. Janie decides to go with him because of the frustration from the present life and the expectation for change. She even tells herself that even if there was no Joe, she would still take a new road of life anyway.

To sum up, at this stage of Janie's life, she evidently uses rejecting and realizing strategies. It is clear from the strategies she uses that that she becomes stronger and more mature. There are many evidences that show her strength and maturity. The first thing is the way she speaks out her own attitude about marriage to her grandmother that she does not consider her spouse's wealth important, but love. The second evidence is the way she reacts to Logan Killicks when she realizes that it is unfair for her to work too hard for him. Janie dares to talk back without any fear. The third evidence is when she makes her decision to go with Joe Stark. When Janie meets Joe Stark, Janie does not trust him wholeheartedly. She realizes that Stark does not represent the sun-up and pollen and blooming tree. However, what interests Janie is that he speaks for change and chance or he speaks for the horizon. According to Bush, the horizon represents Janie's need to explore all the dimensions of life and of her own self. This ability to understand and express her inner life through powerful figurative language characterizes Janie throughout the novel (1027). During this period, Janie has gradually discovered the strength inside herself which she built up from her experience. Moreover, though Hurston does not clearly mention it, it is not difficult to remark that Janie possesses some of her strength from her grandmother. Once, Nanny tells her that "*Nothing can't stop you from wishing. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob' em of they will*" (16). Besides the strength she gains, she finally gets the answer to her innocent question at the early stage that marriage does not bring love.

## Starks Phase

At this stage of life Janie uses three strategies to solve her life problems. The three strategies consist of; making an assumption, realizing and rejecting. When she leaves Logan, she assumes that Joes will probably lead her to the horizon. Later, she starts to realize that Joe Starks is not her compatible spouse, she finally rejects him but her rejection is different from what she does to Logan. The ways she uses the three strategies are explained as follows:

Janie's new life seems to be exciting and challenging at first. It is because Janie's hopes and dreams are still new and the fruit of hope has not yet revealed to her. Janie feels energetic and enthusiastic with the newness of life with her second husband. However, not too long after Joe and Janie have settled in Eatonville, Janie starts to discover that she has not yet reached the horizon. She feels that her dream has not been fulfilled yet. Gradually, she realizes that she is again in the wrong track of life. It is obvious that the main factor that brings Janie an unpleasant life is the differences between herself and Joe Starks. Joe seeks for big voice and luxury but Janie seeks for true love from a simple life. Janie's and Joe's differences can be explained as follows:

While Janie always wants warmth and harmony in the family, Joe dedicates so much most of his time to building his power and wealth that he neglected their marriage. He firmly believes that being a ruler of things bring him joy and happiness. Janie realizes what Joe is trying to do and she disagrees with him, believing that he is struggling too much for it. Their different attitudes can be seen from the following arguments:

'Well honey, how yuh lak bein' Mrs. Mayor?' Joe says.  
' It's all right Ah reckon, but don't yuh think it keeps us in uh kinda strain?' Janie replies.

‘ Naw, Jody, it jus’ looks lak it keeps us in some way we ain’t natural wid one’ nother. You’ se always off talkin’ and fixin’ things, and Ah feels lak Ah’ m jus’ markin’ time. Hope it soon gits over.’  
 ‘Over, Janie? I god, Ah ain’t even stared good. Ah told you in de very first beginnin’ dat Ah aimed tuh be uh big voice. You oughta be glad,’ cause dat makes uh big woman outa you. (46)

From this conversation we learn that Janie and Joe think differently. Janie considers the relationship between husband and wife more important than holding the highest position to become bigger than other people in the community. Joe cannot provide the love and warmth she has always sought. Instead, he treats her like a puppet. Besides love, Janie also yearns for equality and a chance to speak her mind and needs. While Joe’s high ambition leads him to success, Janie is pulled down to a lonely and miserable world. He prevents her from indicating all her abilities for fear that people will admire him less. For example, when Janie is asked to give a speech Joe tells people that Janie cannot do it without asking her whether she can do it or not. *“Thank yuh fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ bout no speech-making”* (43). He further shows his attitude about women’s role by saying that *“Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She’s a woman and her place is in de home”* (43). What Joe says reveals that he has strong patriarchal beliefs that women must not show their ability in public. What they must do is to serve men’s need at home. Joe’s interrupting without giving Janie a chance to say for herself which makes Janie feel frustrated. He also forbids her from joining the conversation with other people whom he considers trashy. As he says:

You’ se Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can’t see what uh woman uh yo’ stability would want tuh be treasurin’ all dat gum-grease from folks dat don’t even own de house dey sleep in.’ Tain’t no earthly use. They’s jus’ some puny humans playin’ round de toes uh time. (54)

Critically speaking, this statement does not show Joe's care for Janie but himself. He fears that Janie's talk with people lower than himself will lessen his honor. For fear of being degraded, he keeps Janie busy in the store and the kitchen. He even forbids Janie to let her hair down because he is jealous when he sees other men looking at her beautiful hair. Many times Janie lets Joe rob her pride and charm and try to weaken her. For instance when Janie cannot figure out where she puts the bill, Joe blames her for being forgetful as he says: *'Somebody got to think for women and chillum and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves'* (71). Joe's statement shows that in his view women are very stupid, brainless and helpless like children, chicken and cows. By saying this to Janie, he deeply feels proud inside because to beat her down he will gain more power. Janie is not only mentally abused by Joe but also physically hurt. For example, he slaps her when her cooking does not satisfy him.

The way Joe behaves to Janie is very shameful. It indicates his fear and weakness. What he is always worried about is his wife, Janie. He is afraid of her beauty, her youth, her charms and her intelligence. Joe himself realizes all the time that Janie possesses all these qualities which some days will probably pull him down from his throne. Joe's fear reminds us, readers, of Janie's power and strength. Her strength grows quietly inside her and Joe, the closest person feels it. Barbara Johnson suggests that Janie's power and resistance grow, whereas Joe is weakened in both his body and his public admiration (212). His weakness obviously appears when he becomes older. Joe cannot accept himself for being old and physically weak. He cannot even sit on a chair but fall in it. However, Joe keeps making fun of Janie's appearance in front of other people saying that she is like an old hen. The purpose of doing this is to keep people from seeing that he is no longer a young and energetic

man. One day when Joe makes fun of her in front of many men by criticizing her appearance, saying that she is an old woman and nobody wants a woman of her age to be his wife, Janie talks back to him immediately.

Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo'but den Ah ain't no old women neither. Ah reckon Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n you kin say. You big-bellies round here. (79)

The above statement gives us a remarkable implication that Janie's being silent and submissive to Joe at first does not really mean that she is a weak woman. When her rebellious action explodes Joe is extremely shocked. Janie's verbal attack causes Joe a fatal injury. It is not a common hurt but Joe painfully feels, as Hurston writes his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish is robbed. He does not eat the food she prepares and sleeps in a different room. Being too angry and disappointed by Janie's words, Joe has no energy to recover, and he finally dies.

As mentioned, there are many kinds of dissatisfaction Janie has to encounter. However, Janie intelligently manages to cope with what is going on though there are so many frustrations around her. Hurston attempts to show Janie's potentiality of coping with all obstacles. Instead of being submissive, Janie silently builds up her inner strength. She slowly empowers herself and waits for the day she will be able to do things according to her ambition. As Hurston describes; "*No matter what Jody did, she said nothing. She had learned some to talk some and to leave some*" (76).

It is quite obvious that Joe Stark can only physically control Janie but he cannot control her mind that is always against him. Janie has her own thought and reasons to judge things by herself. She is intelligent enough not to let it explode because she realizes quite well that Joe will not rest when she speaks her mind. Janie is always aware that her disagreement with what Joe does must be revealed at a

proper time because if she argues with him Joe will not listen to her reasons but use all of his physical efforts to control her. Osho, an Indian philosopher says that it looks as though men had completely destroyed women's self because of marriage but women's ego is not actually killed. Instead, it goes silently inside or as Osho puts "*It went underground and worked in an underground way*" (38). As a result, women become very evasive in their egotistic needs. Therefore all kinds of feminine tricks are used. Women have to indirectly act out their demands in order to get something because men will not allow their egos any direct expression (38). When Janie discovers Joe's nature, we learn more about her strategies of empowering herself to fight against all obstacles. Just like the above what Osho says 'she goes underground' (38). Joe cannot completely rob her ego. When she realizes that there is a hard rock of life that she has to jump across, Janie tries to find the way out. Joseph says that Janie knows the difference between an inside and outside feeling. She knows how to separate the two things without trying to merge them into one unity. According to Joseph, it is from this point that Janie begins to show her opposition to Joe. Thus, Janie's acquisition of the voice does not come out of her identity but out of her division into inside and outside. She empowers herself in order to overcome life conflicts quietly from within. Though she loses her time of harmonious love and she wastes her time on the man who does not really love her, she also gets an important lesson which enables her to get close to the destination she aims to reach for. Bush says that 'Janie grows steadily in self-knowledge and discernment' (1027).

### **Tea Cake Phase**

After Joe dies, we learn how hard and stressful the force is that Joe has put on Janie's wings from the freedom she touches and feels. Janie first tastes the sweetness of independence without men's control. More importantly, she can sit and think

about her future that is to search for the horizon. At this stage of life, Janie uses five strategies; rejecting, realizing, making an assumption, experimenting and using education as a tool to cope with all kinds of problems. Janie rejects stereotypical tradition, realizes of her own rights, makes a positive assumption about her new lovers, experiments lives with him and finally she has to gathers knowledge she gains at school to use in crisis. The way she uses these strategies will be explained in details as follows:

Janie rejects old stereotypical tradition that women should be honest to their husbands even when their husbands die. It is obvious that Janie rejects this rule by going out with Tea Cake in a colorful dress, without thinking of mourning for Joe Stark. She does not feel sad for Joe's funeral as Hurston describes: "*She sent her face to Joe's funeral, and herself went rollicking with springtime across the world*" (88). This situation shows that Janie is finally free and ready to search for the newness of life. At this period, we learn more about Janie's characteristic and her strength that she has possessed for a long time as Hurston mentions that "*she had found a jewel down inside and had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around*" (90). The only problem in the past is that she is not free to gleam because her grandmother sets a plan for her life. Hurston compares Janie to '*the goods in the market*' (90) when Nanny marries her off to Logan Killicks just because of his wealth. Though Janie encounters many unpleasant things she is always enthusiastic to fulfill her empty dream. No matter how hard she has to struggle, Janie still wants to gleam.

After Joe Starks dies, Janie's self-determination is more authentically revealed. Janie firmly holds that her thoughts and dreams are totally hers. Though she listens to what people say, she does not allow outside attitudes or beliefs to have an influence on her. For example, people tell her over and over that women should



not live by themselves, they need assistance from men and Janie too needs a man to take care of; Janie does not worry about this warning because she has already learned a lot from her own experiences while living with Logan and Joe. Moreover, Janie is not satisfied with men who come around and try to flirt with her, although they show their respect to her as if she were the Empress of Japan. Janie loves her freedom and she does not worry about Joe's death. Apparently, Janie's strength is developed after Joe's death and she has gained more power to control herself from any force outside her environment. The example can be seen from the way she lives her life. She does not mind taking care of the store alone; even when a man named Hezekiah helps her around the store, he is not her boss. Janie is ready for the change.

Janie's life gradually changes when Tea Cake, a young laborer and a gambler, steps into her life. Tea Cake is a young and optimistic man, the first man who amazes and impresses Janie by persuading and teaching her to play checkers. It surprises her a lot when Tea Cake thinks that it is natural for her to play. He is the first man who can make Janie feel like she has known him all her life. The things Tea Cake introduces to her bring Janie new joy which she has never experienced before. Being with Tea Cake, she feels like a child breaking rules which she is really satisfied with. Additionally, Tea Cake admires her charms and reminds Janie of her own beauty. While Joe Starks forces Janie to tie up her hair, Tea Cake wants to see it fall down as he says "*Ah been wishin' so bad tuh git mah hands in yo' hair. It's so pretty. It feels jus' lak underneath uh dove's wing next to mah face*" (103). Many things Tea Cake does for Janie really impresses her as Hurston writes: "*She couldn't make him look just like any other man to her. He looked like the love thoughts of women. ...He was a glance from God*" (106). From the ways Janie feels for Tea Cake, we still cannot conclude that Janie is easily moved by sweet words, care and respect from Tea Cake

within a short period of time. Janie has not yet jumped to the door Tea Cake opens for her. In this case, Hurston shows Janie's carefulness by making her think, consider and suspect about this young man. She listens to the town's people because they are not positive about her relationship with Tea Cake. They think that Tea Cake probably just loves her property. She considers what people say, takes all experiences she has gained, puts these two things together and reconsiders. Still she does not judge whether Tea Cake is good or bad, qualified or unqualified for her. What Janie plans to do is to make an experiment. She starts dating Tea Cake. Going out with him several times, Janie gradually learns about him and feels that he is different from other men so she confidently tells her friend about her new man: "*Naw, Pheoby, Tea Cake ain't draggin' me off nowhere Ah don't want to go. Ah always did want tuh git round uh whole heap, but Jody wouldn't' low me tuh.*" (112)

The differences between Joe and Tea Cake seem to be the most influential factor for Janie to have a positive attitude toward him. While Joe presses, Tea Cake releases. Hurston says that Tea Cake is a glance from God, the one who gives Janie a key to explore the kingdom. Despite this feeling she stops moaning for Joe. What she does disappoints and frustrates the town all over. Being in the arms of Joe's force until her forties, Janie has gone far enough to make her learn how to cope with things.

After Joe's death, Janie has plenty of time to be herself. It is like a time of recovering from serious sickness which takes a very short time to get well. Janie feels very confident to choose her own route. For this reason, when she gets familiar with Tea Cake and knows him well enough she decides to marry him. Janie again shows her strength that she does not care what will happen in the future. No matter how bad or good the new love will be, she will go through it. It is Janie's nature that she always tries to experience thing rather than let other people tell her as she once says to

her friend: “*Pheoby, dese educated women got up heap of things to sit down and consider. Somebody done tole’ em what to set down for. Nobody ain’t told poor me, so sittin’ still worries me. Ah wants tuh utilize mahself all over.*” (112)

Janie confidently tells Pheoby that she is in the game of love, not a race for wealth. Moreover, she no longer lives her grandmother’s ways but hers. After Janie feels confident to experiment life with Tea Cake, she decides to marry him and leave Eatonville. In this case, Janie shows her strong will to change her life. To take a new road for a little woman is not an easy thing to do for other women of her age and time but Janie proves to us her boldness and strength. It is even more admirable when she tells her friend that she does not worry about what is going to happen. No matter how bad or good it is she will confront it.

Her new road, though, seems to be more exciting, and better than the past. Janie is still challenged by many unexpected events that seem to come and go like strong wind. When she follows her young husband to Jacksonville and eventually, to the Everglades, Janie’s new journey is not completely successful. As if to test her strength, Hurston makes Janie encounter some uncertainty in her relationship with Tea Cake. Joseph asserts that “*her relationship with Tea Cake becomes, in the sense, emblematic of her orientation toward the desired object in general*” (472). Tea Cake does confirm his love for Janie but never makes her feel confident about the future. In Jacksonville he steals her money and leaves her alone for a few days. Though he finally comes back, confesses what he does to Janie and gambles back the money, Tea Cake seems to prevent Janie from knowing all things about himself (Joseph 472). He sometimes makes himself quite mysterious for Janie. However, Janie does not give up her will to join her life with her young husband.

In his criticism, Philip Joseph points out that, in the first place, Hurston

reminds us many times about the newness and the strangeness of the Everglades. The second half of the novel shows us more of discovery than recovery. It is the first time that Janie learns what it is like to be jealous. When she pays more attention to people and things around her she sees some new things (471). And as Hurston describes: *“To Janie’s strange eyes, everything in Everglades was big and new”* (123). Janie proves to us that she can cope with things around her quite well. She can keep her life balanced. In Everglades, they join other workers, working side by side, picking beans from the rich black soil of the ‘muck’, coming home and making supper together. Soon, after a short period of time, their house becomes a gathering spot for the community, a place where all their working –class friends come in the evenings to play cards, to sing, and to tell stories. Life in the muck is significant. The muck personifies the fertility of life Janie confronts. Though it is full of dirt, the soil is fertile so it is the places where plants and all lives grow. It is the muck that brings Janie fruitful experiences; loves, cares, unity, friendship, loss and jealousy. She learns how to adjust herself to an environment. At this place, Janie has a chance to gleam and she is considered the center of the joy.

The new marriage enables her to build up her inner power and strength. She confidently shows her beauty to the eyes of other people, especially to the one who loves and admires her. Janie’s life with Tea Cake is considerably very significant. Tea Cake treats Janie as his equal and lets her speak her mind. Being with him Janie is free to become herself. Though she is no more a mayor’s wife or a store owner and works as a bean picker, she is happy with the simplicity of life. What we learn is Janie seems to get closer to what she has been searching for all her life; the horizon. She reaches for freedom. Joseph suggests that Janie probably faces freedom because of her recognition of self-incompleteness. This freedom is derived from the

acceptance of the world's mystery (471).

Hurston further shows Janie's self reliance and strength at the final period of her life with Tea Cake during the time both of them escape a horrible hurricane. Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog while he is trying to protect Janie. He is unaware of his illness until it devolves into madness. Unconsciously, Tea Cake tries to kill Janie but she kills him instead in self-defense. The decision Janie makes is very remarkable because normally it is very difficult for a little woman to kill the one she loves. More importantly, we can see that Janie is a kind of stably conscious woman who can consider the most important thing to do during the crisis.

After killing Tea Cake, there is again a high wall for her to fight against. Janie is arrested and has to be in jail for three hours before the court is set for her case. Hurston makes the final situation very challenging for Janie. It looks as though her journey is nearly ended but we have to hold our breath and see how she will make it go. There seem to be two destinations for her- freedom and punishment. In this situation, though Janie realizes that she is innocent for the killing case, she does not feel so confident to prove her innocence. However, when it is her turn to talk, Janie is well concentrated. She intelligently processes her thought what to illustrate what to talk first and last before she speaks out.

First thing she had to remember was she was not at home. She was in the courthouse fighting something and it wasn't death. It was worse than that. It was lying thoughts. She had to go way back to let them know how she and Tea Cake had been with one another so they could see she could never shoot Tea Cake out of malice. She tried to make them see how terrible it was that things were fixed so that Tea Cake couldn't come back to himself until he had got rid of that mad dog and live. He had to die to get rid of the dog. But she hadn't wanted to kill him. A man is up against a hard game when he must die to beat it. (187)

In the above situation, Janie gathers knowledge of using language properly she has gained from school. Though it is not directly described how she is educated, Hurston does tell us that Janie goes to school by the support of her master's family. She tries her best in describing the events to the court and the audience though she is full of fear and feels unsure about the judgment. However, her fear is an honorable thing as Hurston describes: "*It was not death that she feared. It was misunderstanding*" (188). Janie is afraid that if they make a verdict that she does not want Tea Cake so she kills him it will be a real sin and a shame which is worse than murder. This situation shows that Janie has self-dignity. She loves her dignity more than her life. Though she is in a severe situation which she does not know her fate, death does not frighten her. Janie is afraid of sin and guilt which she will surely feel if people misunderstand and think that she does not want Tea Cake. Fortunately, her language ability in defending for herself in the court sets her free. Janie is safe from committing such a crime.

Unlike Joe's death, the loss of Tea Cake is very hard for her. Still Janie strongly and intelligently manages with this loss. Instead of sinking in the miserable sea, Janie turns to soothe herself by thinking of sweet memories and feeling that Tea Cake is still around. She tries to think that Tea Cake will never be dead until she herself stops thinking and feeling for him. For this reason, Janie feels love shining near her all the time. She can feel love and peace at the same time.

The final phase of Janie's life brings her a full and complete sense of self. She can fulfill her missing dream and needs no more horizons. Janie's discovery is like her enlightenment. All obstacles of life in the past have given her a precious lesson. Experiences in the past both good and bad enable her to stand tall by herself. Because Janie directly encounters life by herself and uses her own way she can

confidently tell her story to her friend, Pheoby. Janie can make her friend understand instead of blaming her. After listening to the story, Pheoby then feels guilty for those who misunderstand and criticize Janie. However, Janie does not consider the gossip an important matter. It is because she understands why people do so as she says:

Now, Pheoby, don't feel too mean wid de rest of'em' cause dey's parched up from not knowin' things. Dem meatskins is got tuh rattle tuh make out they's alive. Let'em consulate theyselves wid talk.'Course, talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill beans when you can't do nothin' else. And listenin' tuh dat kind uh talk is jus' lak openin' yo' mounth and lettin' de moon shine down yo' throat. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. (193)

The above excerpt shows Janie's maturity which grows along with her experiences and her age. Not only does she understand herself but she also understands others. Though her ways of life are different from others, she does not think people should be like her. She realizes the differences between human - beings and accepts their nature. She does not mind what people say about her because she understands why people talk and act the way they do. Janie is full of generosity and morality so she forgives them for criticizing her. Moreover, she can also discover the secret of living. For Janie, to learn about things is to experience them as she tells Pheoby, one must learn things from their own experiences instead of letting other people tell them what to do and how things are. Additionally, Janie also finds the reality of life as she says: *"Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about living fuh theyselves"* (193).

## **Conclusion**

It looks as though we had taken a long journey along with Janie. As we follow every word Hurston illustrates we feel as if we were walking along with her in every road she had taken. Together with her, we touch and feel the bitterness and sweetness of her life. It is at the end that we, readers, are awakened to the reality.

Janie's triumph revealed on the last pages reminds us of what Hurston puts on the first page of the novel. It is a remarkable implication.

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (1)

The above excerpt tells us about the discovery of women. Like womanist theology's claim, woman must search for voices and experiences. The novel consistently exemplified how women discover their ability from hunting for their dream. They are always aware of their life goal and do not depend on any other restrictions. When men's dreams are mocked by time, women do not let their dreams evaporate but put all effort they have for them. In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie is a very prominent example of a strong black woman that Hurston intends to present. Janie is full of potentiality in surviving in the world of patriarchy and traditional belief. She eventually gets individual freedom, personal independence, power and equality to do and get whatever she wants based on the belief, as has already been mentioned that women should have individual right to self determination which they bring into the world with them.

Though Janie Crawford seems to be rebellious, self-reliant and intelligent, we can see that she is not an aggressive woman. Janie possesses a feminine quality. She is delicate, sweet, and beautiful and she is also a good cook. Janie does not walk alone in the road of life fulfilling. One might argue that if Janie is really strong why does she have to throw herself in to married life as if she needs protection and why does she still keep herself frustrated in problematic situations? To make it clearer, it is



her experimenting strategy which encourages her to directly confront the real situations in order to find the way out. Boyed mentioned that Janie “*seeks her identity, her selfhood, in the eyes and arms of men*” (303). Janie empowers herself in restriction and limitation. Her enduring gradually builds up an inner power.

To sum up, her empowerment consists of five strategies; realizing, rejecting, making an assumption, experimenting and using knowledge as a tool. These strategies can be briefly explained as follows:

Just only at the age of sixteen, Janie realizes that love will make her life happy so she approaches a boy and later marries Logan. Janie decides to get married when her grand mother forces her to. Not because of her grandmother’s force, she marries Logan because she makes an assumption that marriage will bring love. Within a short period of time after she marries Logan Killicks, Janie starts to realize that marriage does not bring her love as she assumes and she runs away from him. Janie rejects her grandmother’s rule which holds that a woman should be under men’s protection. Additionally, her grandmother also forces her to consider love more important than wealth and material pleasure. After Janie discovers that her grandmother’s suggestion is not consistent with her need, she later rejects Logan. Besides Logan, Janie later rejects Joe Starks, but her rejecting him does not mean to run away from him. Janie quietly opposes Joe’s force and totally disagrees with his ambition. Janie also rejects what people say about Tea Cake; she chooses to take her own way so she marries him and tries to figure him out by herself. When Janie is accused of intentionally killing her husband and has to defend for herself, Janie uses knowledge of language using which she gains from school to convince the court and the audience. Finally, after the death of Tea Cake, the final thing that seems to be rejected by Janie is marriage commitment. At the end of the novel, we learn that Janie feels sufficient and self-

fulfilled as she tells Pheoby that she has already been to the horizon. Janie triumphantly tells her story to her friend because she can overcome the severe battle in the past and now can live by herself. When she gets her own voice and discovers her own strength and power she stops searching for the embrace of men. Boyd suggests that Hurston seems to imply that marriage is a fatal proposition to which one had to devote his or her life. In most cases, it looks as though a woman has to subordinate her life to her man. A woman always has to choose whether to live her life or his life. Hurston makes the case that a woman reacts to this force very impressively; that is to say she will not die of grief or feel sad for her actions. In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston intends to make Janie young and attractive, with firm buttocks like she had grape fruits in her hip pockets' -living a fulfilling life and loving whomever she chooses (304). According to Bush, Janie's rejecting the rules which others think she should cling to enables her to come to self-discovery and self-definition which comprise learning to recognize and trust her inner voice. She gradually empowers herself from within and reaches the position which Bush calls '*the kingdom of God within*' (1027).

## CHAPTER 4

### SULA

In analyzing Toni Morrison's Sula, not only women's potentiality in empowering themselves or the ideal black women who possess moral characteristics are presented but this analysis also investigates various perspectives of black women's empowering strategies which can be both seen as positive and negative models. Additionally, the researcher does not focus on the moral issues or give judgment as to which is good or evil. In African American feminist novels, especially Morrison's, the definition of good and bad is usually ambiguous and very difficult to be separated from each other. As Linden Peach observes in Modern Novelists, the European literary works are largely influenced by the binary opposition within European religion and show a clear distinction between good and evil characters. Unlike the European literary tradition, good and evil often coexist in African literature. It has been wildly criticized that Morrison's works, especially Sula usually questions and examines the terms "good" and "evil," which seem very difficult to be separated (45).

Sula, written in 1973, portrays how women are victimized by an inharmonious society and how an individual like Sula, the protagonist, can survive by her resistance to strong traditional ideology. Interestingly, Sula does not cling to what has been tightly gripped by most people. Besides the traditional ideology that the community holds for ages there is also the new change that people in the community are facing. These two oppositions, old and new, seem to be inconsistent so that people find it hard to cope with them. Morrison points out how these influential factors affect some individuals. Because of its interesting themes, Sula gets many remarkable observations from many critics. For example, Timothy Powel says that in Sula,

Morrison presents the revolving world which relates to the black cultural center and a community governed by black mythology (52). Dubey observes that Sula presents a radically new black femininity that offends all the oppositions (70). The novel presents human's confusing minds in new social conventions and explore the ways in which people try to make meaning of lives which are full of conflicts and complexities. In the case of the female issue, Kubitscheck remarks that the question that is raised in Sula is what strengthens a girl or woman and whether strength is enough to make an individual psychologically healthy (60).

Though there are many interesting themes that are worth exploring, this chapter will investigate the female protagonist named Sula, an heir of the Bottom who possesses a weird personality which awakes all people in town. It is interesting to discover how an individual like Sula, a representative of rebellious black women, survives in the chaos of the changing world which old and strong stereotypes and modern growth of materialism are incompatibly beating their wheels along the track. As we can see in many works of black female authors such as Alice Walker's, Zora Neal Hurston's, Maya Angelou's and Toni Morrison's, these authors always present black women who have unique and different attitudes toward life and society in general. Due to strong patriarchal values, women have to struggle very hard in order to live their lives, survive their beliefs, attitudes and dreams. This struggle comes to be termed 'self-empowering'. To make it clearer, one who resists conventional ways of life and draws herself out of the old stereotype has to possess a lot of strength to conquer the permanent attitudes and beliefs which they think unacceptable. She also encounters the community's disintegration and a problematic environment she lives in which is considered as the strong force that pushes her to struggle.

In Sula, Morrison determines to make Sula, her protagonist, unique and

different from other black women in the society. Sula is very independent and free of ambition. She is contented and is not greedy. While other women yearn for men's protection and are meekly in the control of patriarchal ideology, Sula has a strong determination to live by her own values.

With reference to the above claim, the researcher argues that Sula's power of resisting conventional rules originates from her being independent to revolt against all mainstream patriarchy. Sula is honest to her own belief and never betrays herself. She lives her life unconventionally without caring that people will consider her an outcast. It is her being unconventional that enables her to see the different aspects of the world. To put it other words, Sula insightfully conceives a perception of life that other women cannot see. Seeing sufferings of women and the unfairness they all get, Sula attempts to declare the fact that if women choose to follow stereotypical virtues, they are not better than dead living things. Women at her time are surviving heartlessly and hopelessly waiting for the last breath. Sula, in fact, has to possess enough strength to break the wall of convention. Without enough power she will not be able to communicate her message of reality. Sula realizes that strong conventional beliefs are deeply engraved in people's hearts and souls, only violence will awake all victimized women from a long deadly sleep in their oppressed world. Different from Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God, Sula uses violence as a tool to strengthen her power and declare the reality of women's sufferings.

Presumably, in proclaiming paradoxical reality Sula hopes that women will perceive their inferior and unjust conditions and their oppressions will be released. Throughout the novel, the researcher will explore how she attempts to empower herself by violently resisting conventional social construction and behaves according to her pure instinct.

The discussion will be divided into 6 parts. What will be first examined in detail is how her power has been originated and obtained, followed by her awareness of reality concerning the oppressed conditions of women. Then, to exemplify how Sula uses violence to communicate her will, the researcher will investigate the impact of her violence on people close to her like Eva and Nel. Additionally, her relationship with Ajax, a man who loves her rebelliousness is also discussed since it significantly has an influence upon her weakness and strength. In the summary part, her success and failure using resistance will also be evaluated. Additionally, the researcher will also point out how her rebellion affects society as a whole. The discussion will be conducted as follows:

### **Origin of Power**

According to the researcher's argument, Sula's power of resisting convention originates from her free spirit to cling with nothing and have no commitment with anybody. Violence is what the researcher considers as part of her power. It is necessary, therefore, to investigate how Sula's power has been shaped. The researcher claims that Sula's self empowerment is processed by two factors. The first factor is her innate nature which comprises her independence, her fearlessness of things and her curiosity about the world that she has possessed since she was born and the second factor is the characteristics of violence such as aggressiveness, rebelliousness and toughness that grow from her interaction with others people within her family and her society. When these two elements, her innate nature and violence come together, Sula's strength increases.

In order to clarify how her nature and her interaction with environments are seen as the origin of her power, we can first start by considering from what has been described in the novel:

She was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments- no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself- be consistent with herself ... And like any artist with no art form...(119-121).

The above excerpt clearly indicates Sula's natural characteristics. As mentioned earlier, because of her being free of ambition and commitment, Sula can see things the way they really are without any bias or illusion. She makes judgment about life by her pure instinct and acts thing accordingly. However, since her independent quality and her values are the opposite of what most people have, Sula is seen as a black sheep by most people in her community. She is not fully accepted even by the member of her family like her grandmother, Eva, and her mother, Hannah. Only Nel, her close friend that Sula thinks has similar ways of living and thinking, accepts her.

Sula gains credibility from her differences from other women in her community because they make her so outstanding that people turn to look and criticize her. So we can say that her uniqueness can be considered as one of many elements that make her powerful. Sula has no feminine quality such as submissiveness or dependence. Instead, she is bold and does not fear anything even death and she dose not depend on men.

Through her interactions with people around her we can see her unique quality. The first significant situation that Sula faces is when she kills Chicken Little. It is the first time that she learns to manage with her worry and fear. When finally, she can calm herself down, Sula's strength increases at a certain degree that makes her keep on using her violence. The situation when she threatens the Irish boys by cutting her finger can assure the above claim.

Morrison describes:

Holding the knife in her right hand, she pulled the slate toward her and pressed her left forefinger down hard on its edge. Her aim was determined but inaccurate. She slashes off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh. (54)

Gaining some strength from the death of Chicken Little, Sula becomes daring in the use violence. From the above excerpt, it is the first time we see Sula intentionally using violence as a tool to communicate her message. Not only cutting her finger, she threatens the boy by saying “*If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you*” (54-55). In doing this, Sula determines to tell the boys that she is not afraid of them and remind them of what they will get back if they do anything harmful to her. From this situation, Sula has learned that violence is helpful for her in crisis. Her success in preventing herself from being insulted by using violence confirms Sula of her strong power.

Apart from her innate nature, some of Sula’s characteristics are shaped by the environments she interacts with which consist of people close to her and the unpleasant community she lives in. Apparently, Sula’s family is considered as the most influential factor that makes her grow up to be tough, weird and rebellious. Being a daughter of Hannah Peace, a beautiful woman who sleeps with most of the husbands in the community and a granddaughter of Eva Peace, a widow who is very strong and powerful, Sula becomes eccentrically mature. That is to say, she becomes too bold enough to decide about things and behave in ways herself opposite to what people expect. Sula's family is very eccentric in the eyes of the town especially her grandmother, Eva , and her mother, Hannah. Their house is served as a home for three informally adopted boys. She lost her father when she was only three years old. Her grandmother, Eva, has also encountered severe life conditions more than half of



her life. The impact of these two women, Eva and Hannah, upon Sula is described as follows:

Her grandmother, Eva is the most important and influential person in the family. She has a matriarchal personality which makes others considerate. Despite her broken marriage, Eva has to take responsibility for all her children alone. Though Morrison does not state directly how Eva manages herself with all crises like poverty, starvation of her children and loneliness, her loss of one leg does imply that she puts most of her effort and strength into protecting her children by losing one part of her body signifies that Eva's love for her children is great and admirable. She sacrifices an important part of her body for a better life for both herself and her children. Without men's help, she turns out to be very tough. She spends most of her time solving the family's problems, making sure that everybody has enough to eat, and has enough space to sleep. However, she gains credibility from her experiences of being responsible for the children alone. It brings her power and strength. Her matriarchal personality is respected by most people in town. As Morrison describes in the novel:

The wagon was so low that the children who spoke to her standing up were eye level with her, and adults, standing or sitting, had to look down at her. But they didn't know it. They all had the impression that they were looking up at her, up into the open distances of her eyes, up into the soft black of her nostrils and up the crest of her chin. (31)

The above excerpt shows that Eva is very powerful; even when she sits on the lower position, people who are in the higher position still feel her greatness. She is a tough mother who will not always warmly hug her children and say to them how much she loves them. Though she does love them enough to dare to get rid of one leg for their survival, she does not tell them directly. This is why Hannah always feels that her maternal love is not fulfilled. She asks Eva whether she loves her or not. Instead of soothing her daughter, Eva responds to her daughter's suspicion by

insulting her for asking such a nonsense question which really hurts Hannah. However, we eventually know how much Eva loves her when she tries to save her life from being burnt. Eva's love for all of her children is very mysterious for everyone but if we look more critically at what she does and why she does it we can see that all she has for her children is true and great love. It is too big for the eyes of those who have been loved to see. Her bestowal of love is very powerful, like a sacrifice. Though it is seen as a destructive performance, its result is rewarding. Her losing one leg makes all lives in the family survive and burning her son Plum prevents him from long and severe suffering caused by drugs. Still, Hannah suspects her mother's love for her.

Hannah is the second person from whom Sula takes some part of quality. She behaves unconventionally by having an affair with other women's husbands but does not request any serious relationship with those men. Since Hannah lost her husband when Sula was only three years old, she does not have any commitment with any men but finds pleasure from each of them just within a short period of time. Living under the same roof, Sula sees all events happen in her family. Gradually, Eva and Hannah's unconventional behavior has been assimilated into Sula's mindset. However, both inheritors' qualities have been transformed to be her own nature which is much severer, as Morrison describes in the novel:

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. (118)

Though Eva and Hannah are seen as an influential people in Sula's life, the above excerpt clearly indicates that Sula does not directly imitate her inheritors. Instead she applies their ways to create her own way which is much weirder and more

peculiar.

What the three women in the Peace family have in common is the quality of toughness, fearlessness, aggressiveness, and independence. These characteristics come from their experiences of living and struggling on their own for a long time. Problematic situations in life teach them that depending only on their own will and desire will make them survive. In times of crisis, serious decisions are made just to survive.

Apparently, Sula has no knowledge of what a family led by a male leader would be like. The toughness of her grandmother and the irresponsibility of her mother are what Sula absorbs. Nonetheless, though Eva's strength is raised by her tough experiences, she realizes what she is doing and why she is doing certain things. With regard to Hannah, the ability of realization about what and why she is doing certain things is lessened. However, her lack of consciousness to realize does not reach a harmful level. For example, though she sleeps with other women's husbands, she does not ask for a serious commitment, so those men's wives do not hate her. Different from Eva's and Hannah's, Sula's degree of independence is the most extreme of all. Sula is much more rebellious and aggressive, so her aggressiveness turns to be unloving for both of them. Her mother even says "*I just don't like her. That's the difference*" (57). Presumably, her reason of doing thing aggressively and weirdly is because she has experienced many kinds of violence such as when she cuts her finger to scare the Irish boys and when she kills Chicken Little by accident.

Sula being seen an unloving clearly indicates her opposition from both of her inheritors. The most apparent example is how Sula and Eva are in the opposite position. Eva conforms to old traditions whereas Sula does not. For Eva, though she lives her life without clinging to male protection, she does cling to the old belief that

women should get married and have children. Her urging Sula to follow traditional ways raises her niece's fury. We find that Sula is entirely opposed to her grandmother on the day she comes back to the Bottom. This opposition will be explained later.

Besides people in her family, Sula's aggressive and rebellious behavior is also based on the severe conditions in the community. Morrison begins her novel by presenting the Bottom, a place in Ohio where black people live, situated in the high hill of Medallion which is infertile. Its infertility does not refer to only the land itself but also every life in the Bottom. Besides the dry land, people also live their lives among inharmonious circumstances which are quite difficult to cope with. At present, most black people in the Bottom are poor. The town is full of struggles. Many women are deserted by husbands and some men try very hard to find better jobs. Morrison exemplifies this unhealthy community by mentioning many troubling people such as Eva Peace, a one-legged woman who was abandoned by her husband Boyboy when their children were young and by her family members; Plum the youngest son who joins in World War I and returns home with haunting memories and heroin addiction; Hannah Peace her oldest child whose husband died when their daughter, Sula, was three years old; Shadrack, a World War I veteran who becomes insane from the effects of the brutal experiences during the war time, and many more minor characters that show the confusing conditions of the town, such as Tar baby, a white alcoholic man who aims to drink himself to death; the Deweys, three deserted orphans supported by Eva Peace, Teapot a neglected, malnourished child; and Helene Wright, the daughter of a New Orleans Creole prostitute who tries to forget her past by clinging to the standards of the white middle class. Though these characters play minor roles in the novel, they appear like pieces of jigsaws which can be woven

together and enable us to see the whole condition of the community. These examples can be seen as the seeds planted by the community which directly concern all individuals.

Presumably, the community's problems originate from three factors; slavery and racism, the strong wave of materialism and the conformity of its population to traditional beliefs such as men are more superior to women or women must get married and conform to patriarchal standards.

If the land Sula was born and grown up in were compared to a mother's womb, the Bottom would be the womb that consumes non-nutritious and poisonous food which seems to hurt rather than heal. The community eats the rotten fruit of slavery that has been transmitted from generations to generations, drinks from the cup of materialism which brings changes, conflicts and complexity, and also it lingers with the taste of traditional ways and beliefs. The three substances melted and digested in the womb cause permanent and long term sickness which is hard to cure. Like heredity, the sickness is inherited by all of its children. They grow like the trees in an infertile land, some are crooked, and some are in odd and imperfect shapes, too short or too long with distorted leaves. The three factors; slavery, materialism and conformity to old beliefs consumed by the community are obviously indicated in the novel. This consumption produces destruction rather than creation. To make it clear about how the condition of the community relates to the growth of Sula's aggressiveness, it is necessary to explain the influential factors in details.

The first factor is slavery which comes together with racism. Sula grows up seeing the sufferings of her people. Though slavery has been erased for a long time before the events in the novel take place and now is just a tale for new generations of the Bottom, its pain is still felt and its results are severe. Moreover, black people in

the community are the grandchildren of slaves whose ancestors have historically been oppressed and exploited for ages. They then unavoidably face the racial problems which press them down to inferior status. They are restricted in the voiceless world, the world whose rights are closed for them. Dubey asserts that what happens to Jude is a clear example of racial oppression. Jude not being successful in attaining adult masculinity is seen from his forced employment as a waiter and his inability in any other meaningful works (71). Moreover, the example is seen through the event when Sula and Nel are insulted by Irish boys just because they are black girls.

The second factor that brings chaos is the strong force of materialism which has completely destroyed the harmony of the Bottom. Morrison does describe in the novel the harmonious picture of the community in the past such as laughing, loafing, music-loving, nurturing, and knitting, shucking, knee-slapping, or wet-eyed laughing and explain how the new change has robbed all its happiness. A long time ago, though the place they live in was not fertile, the citizens of the Bottom could endure the infertility. They gradually get used to backbreaking farm work so there are still laughter and daily routines which showed their uniqueness and identity. As Peace states, one of Morrison's purposes is to portray the black community that exists beyond the white boundaries which have tried to define and contain it and through self-centeredness, or what the novel calls 'me-ness' (42). However, later the pictures of laughing people, the sound of music, daily routine that people do together gradually faded. New changes turn to replace all these harmonious pictures. It is the replacement of the craze of materialism. The community has to encounter a new complexity, which sometimes people find it hard to figure out. It is the strong force from the bigger world outside, the greed of materialism that strikes all corners of the world that make the Bottom quiver. This is the reason why the black, harmonious

lives are gradually eliminated. They eventually face innovative things mixed with complexity and confusion. It is materialist ideology that enhances the greed of human beings. Those who have the highest desire for wealth and have much strength to struggle for it turn to exploitation of the weaker fellows. At the bigger level, there is war between two opposed worlds. The opposition brings disaster to all nations and their citizens. People from every corner get its result- loss, fears and unbearable sickness. The clear example is when Shadrack, a young soldier of World War I, *“Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened, not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn’t even know who or what he was”* (41) comes home with his insanity. Though only Shadrack himself faces the brutality of the war, people in the Bottom perceive its result from this victim.

The novel obviously indicates how the chaos from the outside world affects the smaller world like the Bottom and its population. Morrison’s portrayal of World War I destruction infers that the society is being disintegrated and disorganized. The novel clearly describes how human greed disturbs the community. The example of this disturbance indicated in the novel is how the land’s status shifts from being an infertile land situated in the hilly land, being unwanted and worthless to being wanted and valuable when the wealthy whites want to build the golf course. When the land becomes precious white people try to move in and black people are forced to move down. There is a big empty space between wealth and poverty. Most black people are poor as Eva tells Hannah about the condition of the community in the year 1895: *“1895 was a killer, girl. Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies”* (68).

The last significant factor that steals the community’s harmony in Sula’s view is conformity. Conformity of people to traditional ways of life is also the cause of women’s sufferings. What can be clearly exemplified is the gender issue. In other

words, it is related to patriarchal ideology. Though Morrison seems to illustrate women's strength she also points out the mindset of women in general such as the way women mind the family and the customs of getting married, or that black women sleeping with white men is forbidden. Apparently, women's role in the novel is consistent with the Cult of True Womanhood. In the 1920s, women's roles are still controlled by this ideology. The example to affirm the above claim is seen through Helene Wright, a daughter of a prostitute, who yearns for respectability more than anything. This is the reason why she tries to keep a clean house, considered sex as an unimportant matter, takes care of a child, and above all tries to behave herself conventionally. Moreover, she does not rebel against male authority openly, but she works quietly to control it. Surviving by the standard of True Woman, Helene can keep the towns people from knowing that her mother is a prostitute in New Orleans. Wives and mothers who cling tightly to the rules receive much praise. However, for most women who are black, there is little actual support and status. This is the reason why Eva Peace has to struggle very hard to make everyone in her family survive. However, because of her hard battle Eva still conforms to the traditional belief that women should have male protection. While conforming to old things, the community's door is also open for new changes. And this is, in my opinion, the cause of all conflicts and confusion. The conformity and nonconformity are hard to be congenially assimilated. There are those who cling tightly to the old values and those who determine to free themselves from patriarchal ideology. Naturally, the bigger group is seen as the representative of the right values so the smaller one is seen as the wrong. This is the reason why most people in the community accuse Sula of her unconventional behavior.



When the community is in a problematic situation like what has been mentioned, it surely affects all lives within it. Kubitscheck suggests that community and individuals are related because individuals and communities always influence each other. Prawes Wasi states that “*community is social cohesiveness from small to large scales where everybody can exist and participate*” (22). The Bottom is in trouble because it is disintegrated. Because of this disintegration, people in the Bottom are full of tension. Finally, they have to face all kinds of psychological, health and economic problems. In the case of Sula, since Sula was raised in this community, she unavoidably encounters and witnesses many unpleasant events and conditions. Sula directly experiences what is going on in the community so that the experiences she has gained press her to think and act the way she does. Being a black girl, Sula is easily insulted and humiliated. Sula gradually learns what is going on in the society. She knows her limited social status, especially as a woman. However, when Sula realizes the limitation, she gradually turns to resist the unfairness and inequality that the society provides for women.

On the case of materialism, when its strong power makes most of the town people struggle very hard, Sula’s family is not an exemption. More importantly, the struggle of her family members is hard because they fight against economical crisis alone without any assistance from male leaders. The atmosphere around Sula is stressful. Her mother and grandmother have no particular ways of bringing her up. Additionally, because both of her mother and her grandmother do not give her a proper lesson, Sula has never been told how to deal properly with all problematic events in life. Her heart and soul are not completely fulfilled by love and care. She learns to stand on her own feet and lives by her own values which ones cannot judge whether they are good or bad, wrong or right. On the case of conformity, many

unsuccessful marriages and the repeated ways of life that people in the Bottom hold frustrate Sula. Sula refuses to conform to traditional values. She sees the society as a boring place which is full of people keeping doing the same thing.

The researcher considers what happens to Sula to be like the process of vaccination. Sula has been vaccinated by the harshness of life so that instead of being beaten down by sufferings she becomes strong and ready to resist against things. This is an important thing that makes Sula unique. Surprisingly, Sula cannot be drawn into the stereotypical sphere like other people in the community. For an individual having different attitudes which opposes the ideas of the rest of the town, her resistance, then, is not easy. Sula has to rebel and violate old traditional values. Only rebelliousness and violence can make people turn their heads and see what she is trying to communicate.

### **Awareness of Reality**

In her book, The Feminine Mystique, Friedon states that feminists have been trying to prove women's humanness. Sometimes when necessary, they have to use violence to prove that women are not passive, useless, or mindless like animals. They also attempt to make women capable of using their own existing voices. In enabling women to get their rights, equality should be first provided to them as it is to men. Women in the past were seen to be changeless and childish. They were left alone at home while men were out in the wider world. Unlike women, men were changing. Though women had minds, they were not trained to explore the world like men so they had to depend solely on men and always kept their mouths shut (81).

The problematic condition of women in Sula can prove Friedon's above claim and what most feminists have been trying to do is like what Sula is doing. In Sula, many women have been deserted by men. For example, Eva is deserted by her

husband Boy Boy, Nel by Jude and Helene has been left alone most of the time. These women have to struggle very hard, minding their children and running the household. Moreover some of them even have to be responsible for the expense in the family without the men's support. Ironically, most women prefer to live in these oppressed conditions and accept their destiny even though they have to undergo many traumatic experiences. They struggle very hard for their children and themselves without men's support.

Unlike the women in her community, Sula is aware of what is going on and is disappointed to see many women being victimized, exploited and oppressed. Though she does not directly face married life, she does learn that women following old stereotypes are not surviving happily. As she argues with Nel:

Sula: Every man I ever knew left his children.

Nel: Some were taken.

Sula: Wrong, Nellie. The word is left.

Nel: You still going to know everything, ain't you?

Sula: I don't know everything, I just do everything.

Nel: Well you don't do what I do.

Sula: 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.

Nel: What's that?

Sula: Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those red woods. I sure did live in this world. (143)

From, the above argument, we learn that Sula knows what exactly happens to women while Nel seems to blame Sula for what she does and superficially judges that Sula does not understand the real condition of life because she does not directly experience things like her. She implies that women do not have to follow old tradition because it does not do them any good but causes fatal suffering. Presumably, Sula first thinks that her grandmother and her mother do not conform to the old tradition because both of them can live without men. Only when her

grandmother urges her to get married, Sula discovers that Eva does not really respect the value of the life she is living. This finding really disappoints her. For this reason, she turns to trust and lives on her own belief. She creates the concept of life based on her own instinct. Sula spends her days exploring things. She critically observes even her own thought and feelings. As the novel describes: *“As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life”* (118). What Sula has done in the past, such as killing the little boy named Chicken Little, though by accident, makes her sense of responsibility for her own fear become strong. When this event passes by smoothly and people gradually forget, nobody suspects her. Sula controls all the fearful feeling by herself until she can stay calm without feeling guilty. When she hears her mother say that she does not like her daughter, Sula makes her own judgment that even her mother is unreliable so she chooses to live on her own values and beliefs. As Morrison writes: *“The first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either”*. (118-119)

Sula also lives her life adventurously. Adventurousness is one of her characteristics. She loves to experiment with life in an adventurous way, and when the outcome of her experiment pleases her she is convinced that what she does is full of advantages. For example, in the case of the Irish boys, cutting her own finger makes Sula feel confident that she is likely to be successful in using violence in other situations. As a result, Sula entirely refuses to conform. Apparently, when her close friend, Nel gets married, Sula does not feel jealous or show any interest in the marriage. Instead of getting married like Nel, Sula decides to go to college. Sula is eager to search for the newness of things or new aspects of life. In the researcher's opinion, being educated, Sula's eagerness for these things is not fully fulfilled.

Education can serve only some part of her curiosity. Presumably, what she gets from education is the realization of rights, freedom and equality. Knowledge confirms her of her rights to get equal opportunities in the society. The second half that is still unfulfilled is her desire to see new aspects of life. Education seems to be another influential factor for Sula's determination to resist old values. Being educated enables Sula to widen her vision and learn various perspectives of life in new places. However, she finds that people are alike wherever she goes. As Morrison writes: "*All those cities held the same people, working the same mouths, sweating the same sweat*" (120). Bored with this reality Sula decides to go back to the Bottom. At the Bottom, she remembers that Nel is there for her and is always on her side so she decides to come back.

Sula's frustration increases as time goes by. She is frustrated because women do not seem to perceive their inferiority or even if they realize the disadvantages they do not struggle to free themselves from the tie of oppressions. Sula then acts out oppositely in order to make people interested and see the reality so she starts her work as the reality revealer.

### **Administering Violence**

The development of Sula's unconventional quality and her strong degree of resistance are clearly seen when she comes back home ten years later. She brings with her full energy to resist old stereotypes. On the day of her return to the Bottom, a plague of robins occurs. The plague signifies Sula's strong destructive power which is like a very strong weapon to expose the reality. The novel implies that the robins' death is caused by her mysterious power. Even Eva realizes that Sula's coming back to the Bottom is not ordinary. As she says: "*I might have knowed them birds meant something...You ain't been in this house ten seconds and already you starting*

*something*” (91-92). By instinct, Eva knows her niece well enough, probably because Eva brings Sula up during her early youth. Moreover she does not forget the event when she tries to save Hannah’s life. She sees Sula standing on the back porch just looking at what is happening in front of her. Some of her friends say it is natural that Sula is probably dumb when seeing her mamma burn up. Eva does not disagree and remains convinced that “ *Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested*” (78).

Morrison makes Sula’s rebelliousness very powerful when it comes together with the robin plague which can be seen as the sign of destruction. The phenomenon of the plague tells us that Sula’s aggressiveness and rebelliousness become fully mature. It can be assumed that Sula’s self-empowering has progressed. The progress of her empowerment is obviously revealed after ten years. Her using violence to communicate the reality in her own perception with other people can be exemplified through her reactions to Eva and Nel’s conformity.

When Sula sees that Eva clings too tightly to old stereotypes, she has a strong argument with her grandmother. The quarrel starts when Eva suggests that Sula should get married and have a child of her own. Sula replies firmly: “*I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself*” (92). Eva is offended and she suddenly scolds her niece: “ *Selfish. Ain’t no woman got no business floatin’ around without no man*”(92). From the quarrel, we learn that Eva is tightly attached to stereotypical values but Sula is not. Madhu Dubey claims that Sula’s greatest point of difference from her community is her refusal of reproduction. It is what makes people of the Bottom consider her evil and unnatural (76).

Sula’s disagreement with Eva’s suggestion is very strong. She attempts to explain that Eva does things oppositely from what she tries to force her to do. What

Eva has done appears quite clearly to Sula that she herself as well as Hannah cannot do like what she asks Sula to. This is why Sula has no respect for her grandmother and talks back: *“You (Eva) did, Momma (Hannah) did”* (92). Though Eva tries to explain that she cannot avoid living without the care of men as she says: *“Not by choice”* (92) Sula does not listen but goes on mentioning what Eva has done wrong in the past. Her purpose is to make Eva accept the reality that what she conforms to and what she really does are not the same thing. Sula’s violently argues with her grandmother so as to raise the question whether or not conformity actually brings real happiness. It is quite obvious that Sula can use only violence as a tool to communicate her message. As a result, Sula aggressively continues showing her fearlessness and disrespectfulness to Eva by saying: *“Just’ cause you was bad enough to cut off your own leg you think you got a right to kick everybody with the stump”* (93).

Sula’s above statements imply that in cutting her own leg, it is impossible for Eva to walk properly. And if Eva herself cannot walk properly she has no right to teach people to walk. For Sula, Eva’s loss of one leg is like her loss of knowledge in walking in the road of life. In the eyes of Sula, lacking knowledge of living makes Eva misconceive the perception of life so that Eva has no right to teach the life she does not live. For this reason, her urging Sula to follow old tradition is useless because she herself cannot do as she tells her niece to.

Apart from that, Sula also terrifies Eva when she mentions her burning Plum. Eva is very angry so she says that Sula should have been burnt instead of Hannah. Instead of giving up Sula firmly replies:

Any more fires in this house, I’m lighting them.....  
 Whatever’s burning in me is mine. ....And I’ll split this  
 town in two and everything in it before I’ll let you put it out  
 (93). .....I ain’t never going to need you. And you know

what? Maybe one night when you dozing in that wagon  
 flicking flies and swallowing spit, maybe I'll just tip on up  
 here with some kerosene and-who knows- you may make  
 the brightest flame of them all. (94)

From what Sula says to Eva we can learn that Sula's power of rebelliousness is so strong that it can violate Eva's arrogance and strength. Eva who is always very arrogant and proud of her being respected and accepted by people in the community is finally beaten down by her own niece. Not only does she threaten, she also does as she says. It shocks the town's people when she finally takes Eva to the elderly house.

On the case of Nel, people in the Bottom see Nel as the victim of Sula's peculiarity and rebelliousness. However, the reason that Sula chooses to rebel against Nel is not difficult to be traced. In order to understand Sula's determination to make Nel see the reality, we have to look closely to their relationship. Sula and Nel's relationship is very meaningful for both of them. Since they were very young, the two girls have shared some important elements in life that others lack. Their friendship becomes more intense when they grow up. The opposite quality that each girl has does not disturb their closeness. Nel is very submissive and disciplined whereas Sula is very aggressive and irresponsible. Compared to her friend, Nel, Sula seems to be uncontrolled as Morrison writes "*Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes*" (53). For this reason, Sula and Nel appear to be two consistent oppositions. Nel's submissiveness and Sula's stubbornness are consistently mixed. Sula begins to feel that Nel is the only sincere friend she has, the only person who always stands on her side, listens to her and accepts her rebellious nature. Only after Nel gets married Sula leaves the Bottom to further her education are they apart from each other. When Sula comes back, Nel can again taste the feeling of independence which she misses. However, their friendship is broken when Sula has an affair with



Jude. Looking more critically, we will have to reconsider why Sula does things harmfully even to her best friend. The explanation is clear from Morrison's description:

Sula had clung to Nel as the closest thing to both an other and a self, only to discover that she had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude. They had always shared the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed, what line he used with one and then the other. 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. (119)

According to the above excerpt, we learn that Sula's hurting her best friend is done out of two reasons. First it is because of her innocent perception that she and Nel can always share things, even one's husband, and second it is Sula's determination to prove Jude's honesty. She thinks that, like a boy's kissing both she and Nel have experienced when they were young girls, she can share Jude with Nel. Moreover, Sula understands that between Nel and herself, there is no boundary of possessiveness. Sula realizes that she stands on the opposite side from the town people but Nel is on her side. After Sula has an affair with Jude she is heart broken to find that Nel is not on her side at all. Nel's sorrow saddens Sula not because she feels guilty about it but it is because she discovers that Nel is not on her side anymore as Morrison writes: "*It had surprised her a little and saddened her a good deal when Nel behaved the way the others would have*" (120). This statement shows that Sula attempts to drag herself out of everything conventional and thinks that Nel will understand what she is trying to do. She hates the way people thoughtlessly and lifelessly keep doing the same things. This is why she says "*The real hell of Hell is that it is forever*" (107), she means that attaching too tightly to stereotypical values

cannot make people happy. According to Sula, living life that is unchangeable, people would surely suffer as if they were in hell. Nel entirely disagrees with Sula. She oppositely thinks “*Hell ain’t things lasting forever. Hell is change*” (108). These opposite concepts of ‘hell’ make us learn that Nel has eventually been pulled into the conventional sphere like marriage while Sula attempts to flee from it as far as she can. What Sula holds is consistent to what Simone de Beauvoir asserts in her book, The Second Sex that “*the whole marriage is today a surviving relic of dead ways of life and the situation of the wife is more ungrateful*” (479). De Beauvoir means that marriage is ungrateful because though women have certain duties, they have no exact rights, privileges and honors as men have (479).

After Sula discovers that Nel is part of a conventional community, she very quickly adjusts herself to her disappointment. In hurting Nel, at least Sula proves that Jude is a betrayer though Nel does not realize it. Sula does not take the affair seriously. Not long after the incident, she deserts him and sleeps with many different men in town which makes the hatred of the town people for her increase a great deal. The growth of people’s hatred means that Sula can attract people’s attention. From this situation, we learn that Sula’s using violence as a tool to communicate the message of reality is quite successful. However, people are not conscious of the change and what they are facing. Nel, though, finds out that Jude betrays her but keeps blaming Sula for his betrayal. Similarly the town’s people condemn Sula for her bewitching behavior; putting her grandmother in the elderly house and sleeping with her best friend’s husband and other women’s husbands. They keep on cursing Sula without realizing that what she does brings peace and unity back to the family. Many daughters take better care of old people in their family. They also pay more attention to their husbands and children. People are not conscious of what Sula is

trying to tell them. Only Ajax, a man whom Sula has known since she was young is attracted by her peculiarity and uniqueness. The rumors about Sula make Ajax curious about her. Additionally, Ajax finds Sula very impressive because her personality is like his mother's in that Sula is independent, self-reliant and daring. Having someone interested in her, Sula is amazed and full of curiosity. Presumably, it is because she knows very little about him. And when they meet again Sula is easily impressed by Ajax but it is not because of his physical charm as Morrison writes:

Her real pleasure was the fact that he talked to her. They had genuine conversations. He did not speak down to her or at her, nor content himself with puerile questions about her life or monologues of his own activities. Thinking she was possibly brilliant, like his mother, he seemed to expect brilliance from her, and she delivered. (128)

After being disappointed by Nel's conforming to the community's ways of life, Sula's disappointment is replaced by the interest of Ajax. It is he who makes Sula's strength tremble for the first time. Only when Ajax appears is Sula's sensitivity shown. Ajax's stepping into her life makes us see her ordinary quality which is similar to that of other human beings. It is natural that all creatures on earth are born with the need for company. Sula, though very independent and strong, still needs companionship as we can see at the beginning of the novel when Nel is an only friend she has. When her friendship with Nel is broken, Ajax comes to replace Nel. He appears to be her new compatible partner. The newness of the relationship from Ajax makes Sula's detachable nature changes. She is gradually and emotionally attached to the sense of possessiveness. As the novel describes:

Sula began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it. She was astounded by so new and alien feeling. First, there was the morning of the night before when she actually wondered if Ajax would come by that day. Then there was an afternoon

when she stood before the mirror finger-tracing the laugh lines around her mouth and trying to decide whether she was good-looking or not. (131)

What can be interpreted from the above excerpt is that Sula's strength is possibly lessened because of her desire for love and understanding that all human beings need. But the more remarkable observation is that Ajax is different from other men she has seen, so it is easy for Sula to be trapped by his charm. As mentioned in the previous excerpt, he listens to what she says and seems very eager to take pleasure from her charm. Moreover, at the time that Nel is absent from her real life and even from her dream, Sula has no one conventional like her, so what Ajax has done for Sula makes her clumsily fall into the trap of stereotypes that most women in the Bottom cling to. It is for the first time that Sula loses her spirit of independence. As we learn from the beginning of the discussion, Sula has always been doing things to please only herself but this time, she is trying to please others.

Her dressing nicely and minding domestic tasks clearly reveal her determination to please Ajax. Sula does not realize that what Ajax likes in Sula is her uniqueness comprising her independence, her stubbornness and her rebelliousness. For this reason when Ajax senses Sula's change, seeing she behaves like other women he knows, he decides to leave her behind, which really astounds Sula. More disappointedly, Sula heartbrokenly discovers that she really does not know this man, even his real name, Albert Jack, which she finally sees from his license. Eventually, it appears to Sula that she can trust no one on earth. Her soothing herself by a lullaby and sucking her finger like a baby indicate that she can trust and cling to only herself. This situation confirms the values that Sula always holds. As what the researcher has argued, Sula is unconventional on the case that she clings with nothing and has no commitment with anything and anybody. Sula lives her life unconventionally and

independently. For this reason, when she is facing loneliness and disappointment in life, she soothes herself instead of running to the embrace of others. With reference to her saying that her loneliness is hers, Sula's soothing and singing herself a lullaby shows that even when she is in the most terrible crisis, she does not ask for any mercy from anyone. For Sula her two arms can embrace herself without the arms of others.

However, we cannot say that Sula is in a lonely battle against the conventional world. Here, it is important to mention Shadrack, an insane man who created a National Suicide Day because he is the one who is unconventional like her. Shadrack sees her killing Chicken Little by accident. Though Morrison does not directly mention Sula and Shadrack's similarity, we later learn that Sula and Shadrack share similar characteristics in that they create their own life spheres. And similarly, they are both strange in the eyes of the community. Sula has never been aware of her compatible companion; only at the very last minute of her life does she recognize someone saying 'always' to her. When Sula runs into his house, he says 'always' which aims to let her know that he will always be her friend who will live together with her in the same unconventional world; as Morrison writes: he says the world "*to convince her, assure her, of permanency*" (157). For Shadrack Sula is as Morrison describes: "*his visitor, his company, his quest, his social life, his woman, his daughter, his friend*" (157). Sula is meaningful and powerful for him, for when she dies we can see how Shadrack is emotionally attached to her. He feels deeply depressed and his misery drives out the energy to celebrate a brighter National Suicide Day on which fatal disasters occur. When Sula dies, Shadrack functions as her message carrier. We can say that the loss of Sula strengthens Shadrack's will to do his annual task. Mysteriously, his performance can convince many people. His celebration is destructively successful. The destructive phenomenon on Shadrack's

National Suicide day is not caused by the power of Shadrack but of Sula.

## **Conclusion**

According to the researcher's argument at the beginning of the chapter, Sula's power of resisting convention is gained from her determination to cling with nothing and have no commitment with anything and anybody but her determination to be herself. Sula attempts to empower herself by resisting conventional social constructions and does things according to her pure instinct. As has been exemplified, we can see that Sula's power of resistance gradually grows through her violent experiences in which she herself is a violator and seeing others' violation in many incidents such as Eva's burning plum or her mother getting burnt. Gradually, Sula creates her own life sphere. Sula's aggressiveness, stubbornness, boldness, and weirdness grow out of her innate nature and the environments and people she interacts with. However, the outside factors only build up some parts of her aggressiveness and her eccentricity to resist. The outside force functions only as chemical substance that accelerates her weirdness and rebelliousness. It cannot draw her into the conventional sphere. Sula attempts to empower herself by violating the system. As clearly shown, she is not willing to be easily affected by the strong stream of traditional values, beliefs or ways that most people cling tightly to just to be part of them. Sula finds the reality that to repeatedly do something that people have done for ages is wasteful. It makes no good but steals women's hearts and souls until their freedom and dignity are completely gone. Sula cannot pretend to like things that she does not like. In other words, she cannot lie or betray herself. Instead, she tries to find a way which she thinks will please her and is right for her. Moreover, Sula also wants others, especially the ones close to her like Eva and Nel, to perceive life as she perceives it. For this reason, she tries to prove to them that the conventional values

they are holding bring nothing but suffering by using violence as a tool.

Sula is successful in using violence as a tool to do her task of indicating reality. Her inability to feel sad is one part of her success. The severe experiences in the past make Sula tough and senseless so that when she encounters serious problems or does harmful things she does not realize their harmful result. For this reason, her fearlessness is helpful when she does things unconventionally. Though the outcome of her strange behavior is not preferable to the eyes of others and even Sula herself gets nothing but loneliness and being isolated, it reveals at the end that people get a result of her rebelliousness. Sula's putting her grandmother in the elderly house, though is not directly described in the novel, that Eva finally perceives the sense of losing the freedom which she once has when she is the controller at home. To make it clearer, when Eva once administers her life without depending on anybody she is powerful and gets respected. She can control the lives under her roof. Oppositely, when she is taken to the elderly house, she has no power left and her freedom is eventually gone. The elderly house signifies the limitation of the conventional world that Eva finally perceives when she tastes the lack of freedom.

In the case of Nel, only after Sula's death does Nel feel that the lack of Sula Peace is very significant and meaningful for her. Nel eventually realizes that Sula's guilt is hers. Losing Sula is like her soul has been robbed. When Nel cries in vain and calls Sula's name out loud: *'Oh Lord Sula, girl, girl, girlgirlgirlgirl (174)* she indicates that losing Sula is like losing everything. Eventually, Nel comes to understand what Sula is trying to tell her when she sees the community's change. Nel realizes the community's disintegration as Morrison describes:

Maybe it hadn't been a community, but it had been a place.  
Now there weren't any places left, just separate houses  
with separate televisions and separate telephones and less  
and less dropping by (167).

Nel now perceives the reality of loss. She loses an only friend who is part of herself, the one who makes her proud of her own value, who guides her to know that the loneliness she once feels belongs to others not her. Nel also sees the loss of a harmonious life, the one her community possesses. What happens to the community is consistent to what Kubitscheck states that the community needs all its elements, just as friends need to grow and mature properly. As a result, the Bottom has to get a destructive ending because of its rejection of its member like Sula. The Bottom's destruction is caused by its rejection of the powerful, independent female spirit embodied in Sula (63).

Most importantly, people in the Bottom finally learn that even an individual like Sula who is just like a small cell that shapes the community, can be meaningful to its growth. Looking just superficially, the community has eventually collapsed because Sula is rejected, just like the building in which one piece of brick is broken, and the crack leads to a wider crack and finally the building tumble down. However, looking more critically, the exact reason for the community to break down is its citizens' ignorance. Obviously, people, especially women do not realize their own value and identity. They live their lives by clinging to things that bring suffering rather than happiness. They live and breathe for others. Yet, what Sula does might not be worth their praising but her realization of her own value and identity is admirable. Women can probably choose their own ways of living different from Sula's but what they choose must be for their own. They do not have to walk along the track others choose for them. This is the message that Sula wants to communicate to her people. Sula functions as a revolutionist for oppressed and suppressed women. Though her revolution seems destructive, it does awaken us, women. Women must no longer let anything or anybody block their ways to freedom.





## CHAPTER 5

### MERIDIAN

In analyzing Alice Walker's Meridian, we will see another aspect of black women's empowering strategies. Unlike Morrison's Sula in the previous chapter, this chapter presents how Meridian, an individual black woman who detests violence, fights against all injustice by clinging to tranquility and nonviolence. Her battle is done through the harshness of ignorance both of herself and of her people. More importantly, her own psychological and physical sickness is considered as severe obstacles. In the case of ignorance, even if the rights have equally been given to all people in her community, these people do not perceive its value but willingly accept their inferior status. For this reason, the new generation seems to realize that equality must be given to all lives in the society, and they must start to defend their rights by joining the civil rights movement. Fortunately, in the era that the world is moving into, more opportunities are provided for people of all races and sexes. Women who used to be limited to domesticity can now join the world of knowledge. Though the educational system is organized to serve men's passion it still can widen their vision and raise women's awareness of their own rights.

Meridian is a representative black woman who has the nerve as well as a chance to educate herself and is conscious of the responsibility to eradicate her people's suffering. She believes that it is ignorance that blocks people's way to freedom and equality. These people are not aware that they have the right to get equal opportunity and to defend for themselves. They are unaware of their rights because they get accustomed to the inferior status that they have hold for a long time.

Presumably, this inferiority was caused by slavery. Though, during the time the novel takes place, slavery has gone, its affects are still felt. Many black people get used to the lower status and do not ask for any changes. Only a few realize that all opportunities should be equally provided to them. During the time the novel takes place, many things once open only to men are now given to women; women can be school teachers or they can go to school though compared with men the percentage of women in this new status is low. For this reason, women who realize the unjust social system start to take an active role in order to lift up their own status by educating themselves and being independent without men's help. Additionally they also realize the importance of their rights so they try to encourage black people to vote. According to the Civil Rights Movement, the event usually ends up with loss and disaster. Violence is always used as a tool for their struggle. People who joined the protest are considered aggressive and rebellious. However, in this novel, Walker exemplifies the severe battles of Meridian, the protagonist, who fights against injustice by using nonviolence as a tool.

Meridian is a granddaughter of slaves and is brought up among the conflicts of racism, patriarchy, and the suspicious feeling of maternal love. Walker interestingly portrays how Meridian struggles through many difficulties in order to improve the living conditions of her people in an unjust society while she herself has to carry lots of personal problems and psychological conflicts. Despite many obstacles from outside forces and the conflicts within her own psyche, Meridian tries to build up her strength by taking her own way. Surprisingly and powerfully her power of strength grows steadily among suffering and obstacles.

For this reason, this chapter will examine Meridian's empowering strategies to cope with life obstacles and to liberate her people from the tie of ignorance. While

having to fight against her own psychological problems, she encourages her people to keep their own rights by voting. In order to gain power and strength she has to seek for effective empowering strategies by herself. The researcher argues that Meridian uses nonviolence to gain power and achieve her goal in life. Her strategies consist of seeing her own value and potentiality, being independent and free of desire for materials and positions, and getting rid of ignorance.

The discussion will be divided into seven sections. What will be first explored is the origin of her problems based on her family background and the condition of the community where she lives. Then the researcher will discuss her psychological problem, followed by the growth of her maturity, the period of her love and endurance, her dedication to people in the south, and her enlightenment. Finally, the researcher will summarize how she can cope with the suffering and regain energy and power within herself.

### **Origin of Problems**

Apparently, Meridian's problems have originated from two factors. First, it is the ignorance of both herself and others and second, it is the strong force of patriarchal belief. These two factors obstruct her spiritual growth and bring her many problems and difficulties. As a result, she is pulled down to many limitations and restrictions in life. The two factors are discussed as follows:

In the case of ignorance, Meridian's problems are caused by her lack of knowledge about heterosexual relationships which is initiated by her mother's ignorance. Meridian faces many sophisticated problems. The problem of the relationship, for example, occurs because nobody has educated her about how to adjust herself to the opposite sex. From the novel we learn that no one tells her how to deal with men and what to expect from them, even her mother has never mentioned

it. Mrs. Hill cannot teach her daughter because she is also ignorant of this matter. As Walker describes, her mother's "*lack of information on the subject of sex was accompanied by a seeming lack of concern about her daughter's morals*" (60). We can say that Meridian is the victim of her mother's ignorance. It makes her easily fall into problematic situations.

Knowing very little about relationships with men, Meridian innocently takes her own instinct to make a judgment about a boy she dated and does not know what to expect from him. Actually, she is always afraid of men but Eddie, her young husband, easily steps into her life because he appears just when she is in need of protection. She does not really know much about sex so she assumes that sex does not mean pleasure but "*a sanctuary in which her mind was freed of any consideration for all the other males in the universe who might want anything of her*" (62). We can learn that what Meridian wants, like Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God, is not sexual or physical pleasure but love and warmth, while Eddie demands too much for sexual pleasure.

Besides the wall of stupidity that she has to conquer, there is the high wall of inequality between the two sexes. As a result, Meridian's problems also originate from the limitation of gender framed by the patriarchal society. During the time the novel takes place, human rights have been promoted and equal opportunities are provided to all races and sexes. However, the novel reveals that women's rights are still vague like smoke. We can obviously see in the case of Meridian, though both women and men can educate themselves when they commit the same mistake, it is women who have to be responsible for it. This injustice occurs because people in the society strongly believe that women should be inferior, dependent, and submissive, whereas men can be superior, aggressive, authoritative and independent. When they

say 'women are dependent and submissive', it looks as though women must receive protection from men. However, in reality when women are labeled helpless and submissive, it makes them become more and more victimized and exploited.

To prove the above claim, we can see how Meridian and her mother are victimized by strong patriarchal values. On the case of Mrs. Hill, she has to struggle very hard against her father's strong false idea that prevents her from being educated. According to her father's idea, it is unnecessary for a woman to go to school. He thinks that it is better for her to learn to cook collard greens, shortbread and fried okra to please men.

Yet, Mrs. Hill can educate herself but she has to bear lots of suffering, especially financial problems and her father's disregard. When it comes to Meridian, her education is blocked because of her pregnancy which is not only her fault but also Eddie's fault. Meridian who is eager for knowledge is expelled from school while Eddie who sees no value in education can go to school as usual. Because she is a woman, Meridian Hill at only the age of seventeen becomes "*A drop-out from high school, a deserted wife, a mother, a daughter-in law*" (75-76). All these positions - a drop-out student, a deserted wife, a mother and a daughter-in law are pressing and severe. They mean a big burden for Meridian. Being dropped out from school is embarrassing. Meridian cannot help feeling down as if her dignity has been stolen. She knows herself that she loves education more than anything but her chance is blocked by being a wife and a mother. Being Eddie's wife is not pleasant. The relationship begins with uncertainty. Many times he makes her feel lonely and miserable. It is because her husband does not know what she really wants. He knows only what he wants from her. As Walker explains:

She loves the warmth, the lying together, the peace. She endured the sex because it gave her these things. She would

have been just as happy, happier, without it. But he did not understand this and would sometimes seem hurt and complain. (65)

The above excerpt makes us see the sympathetic reality that the happiness women yearn for cannot be easily gained. They have to endure and suffer just to get a small piece of biscuit named 'warmth and pleasure' which is not durable. Meridian has to face this kind of problem for two reasons; first, it is because she innocently thinks, like Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, that love and warmth can be gained from a man and second it is the system of old belief like patriarchy that men can do no wrong. Meridian is sympathetic and even though she endures, her heart is still unfulfilled. Apart from what has been discussed, Meridian also suffers from being a mother. When her status shifts from a high school student to a hardworking housewife and a mother, her time is spent for her baby by days and nights while Eddie enjoys his time at school and goes everywhere he wants. Meridian can feel the harshness of raising a child. As Walker describes:

It took everything she had to tend to the child, and she had to do it, her body prompted not by her own desires but by her son's cries. So this, she mumbled, lurching toward his crib in the middle of the night, is what slavery is like. (69)

The responsibility she carries is severe. Comparing this burden to slavery, Walker attempts to tell us that having a child is like being a slave. A mother has to put all of her energy and spirit to her child as if she were a slave to her master. Additionally, as a daughter-in law, she has to be nice and sweet. Her life is much harder than her young husband's.

When Eddie leaves her and the baby, people especially her mother do not blame him. Eddie is good in the eyes of her mother and other people. As Walker describes: "*he was good because he did not cheat and beat according to her mother, his mother and the other women in the neighborhood*" (65). Men are considered nice

just only because they do not beat and cheat. People do not blame them for letting their wives raise the children alone; they are still decent. But women are condemned and labeled a witch, a monster, if they leave their children. Meridian is different from her mother, who accepts the submissive role and is willing to follow the regulations the rest of the society have formulated. She attempts to find the way out of all limitations and restrictions which frustrate her. Her inspiration is initiated by her frustration. When she realizes that she can do things better than just being a wife and a mother, Meridian steps into a new road of life.

### **The Growth of Maturity**

Meridian is finally aware of what she is facing. Instead of swimming in the sea of foolishness, she tries to widen her eyes to see the wider world. She realizes that only education can help. Meridian activates her brain by reading. However, she does not let herself be fooled by nonsense matters in what she reads. Though she has no opportunity to go to school anymore when she is found pregnant, she loves to educate herself by reading and watching TV. She feels that she knows about books and the world more than Eddie who still goes to school. She hates the fact that “*he was not interested in ‘education’, but in finishing school*” (71). Eddie has absorbed the belief that only a diploma will provide him better opportunity not knowledge. Meridian thinks differently; she wants knowledge and is eager for it. Though some information she gets from reading does not please her, she can digest the information she has consumed. As Walker writes:

She read *Sepia, Tan, True Confessions, Real Romances* and *Jet*. According to these magazines, woman was a mindless body, a sex creature, something to hang false hair and nails on. Still, they helped her know for sure her marriage was breaking up. She lived with the awareness in her usual fog of unconcern. (71)



Spending time reading and having more free time for herself, Meridian gets a chance to think more critically about life. She becomes aware of her inferiority, her limitation of being a woman. After learning this fact, she starts to feel that boys are brainless. She cannot stand it when she is spending her life with a man who holds such the stupid idea that a degree is more important than knowledge. For Meridian, *“none of the boys that she had dated or been friends with seemed capable of becoming men. ....they became older but still boys”* (70). We can obviously see that Alice Walker wants to challenge patriarchal belief which holds that women have no intelligence and supports feminists’ claim that women do have brain by making Meridian see male ignorance and realize her own value.

Meridian becomes mature over time. After enduring severe sufferings, her dark world has been lightened up by her own positive instinct and her determination to get rid of ignorance. This is one part of black women’s potentiality that Walker determines to present. What Walker tries to communicate to readers is that black women are not always brainless. She makes Meridian a representative of women who fights against old stereotypes and breaks the hard shell of strong patriarchal value. Because of her own instinct together with the knowledge she gains from reading, Meridian starts to realize that she can make herself more valuable than just being a wife and a mother. Her realization becomes stronger when she sees the bombing news on TV. The news reminds her of her own ignorance as the novel describes that *“... it was that one day in the middle of April in 1960 Meridian Hill became aware of the past and present of the larger world”* (73). What can be interpreted from this statement is that Meridian is aware of the necessity of exploring the wider world. At first, she mistakenly thinks that she knows well about the place she lives in but when the bombing occurs, Meridian is awakened from her long sleep. She now finds that

there is a lot more about the world that she does not know and needs to know. Besides, she is also aware that she can take a bigger responsibility not only just wasting her time minding her family but she can also dedicate herself to the civil rights movement. This phenomenon indicates that Meridian's maturity is not ordinary. For this reason, we can say that Meridian is spiritually mature.

Though there are a lot more obstacles and unknown things for her to explore and probably many more problems ahead of her in the new and wider road, Meridian is ready for them. She has her strong will as a weapon on an adventurous journey. We can say that she is like a strong warrior who is ready for the battle. Though she does not know how many enemies she will confront, she will never surrender.

### **Psychological Problem**

Meridian was born in the southern town where most poor black people live. Her ancestors were slaves, so the history of slavery that has been passed on to her is painful. As what have been discussed, she confronts many unpleasant events in her family history. The condition of her family is not peaceful, caused by the differences between her parents. Both of them are school teachers who have painful experiences. Her father suffers from the feeling of losing his beloved land while her mother is always frustrated by the lack of freedom which she thinks has been robbed by her daughter. Additionally, Mrs. Hill had a severe battle attempting to educate herself when she was younger. Because of many restrictions in life, Meridian's mother is full of stress. She always complains about things. We, therefore, can assume that Meridian's psychological sickness is initiated by her mother's mental weakness. As Walker writes:

Her mother was not a woman who should have had children. She was capable of thought and growth and action only if unfettered by the needs of dependents, or the demands, requirements, of a husband. Her spirit was of

such fragility that the slightest impact on it caused a shattering beyond restoration. (49)

From the above excerpt, we learn that Mrs. Hill's motherhood is not qualified. The reason is that she has negative feelings against having a child. Moreover, being dependent on her husband makes her incapable of thinking and growing steadily. As a result, she cannot perfectly raise her daughter. She is also frustrated by the lack of independence. Being a wife and a mother prevents her from reaching this freedom. As a result she is full of stress and pushes it all to her daughter. Meridian, by instinct feels guilty as if she has done something wrong to her mother but she does not know what it is. As the novel describes:

Her frail independence gave way to the pressures of motherhood and she leaned much to her horror and amazement- that she was not even allowed to be resentful that she was 'caught' that her personal life was over. (49-50)

Mrs. Hill's pressure is strong enough to make Meridian feel it. For this reason, Meridian struggles to figure it out and explain her feelings. Unfortunately, Mrs. Hill does not seem to understand, so when she sees her daughter act out as if she does something wrong, she always asks "*Have you stolen anything?*" (49). Walker gives us a clear answer to this question that it is her mother's serenity that she steals. Meridian also feels guilty for interrupting her mother's self. She feels ashamed because of her mother's strong frustration. However, Walker says: "*she was unable to understand how this could possibly be her fault*" (51).

As mentioned above, it is her mother's personal freedom that she steals. The case of Meridian and her mother clearly indicate how women have been oppressed through the process of reproduction. Not only Mrs. Hill who has been in this frustration because of motherhood but also the other women in the society.

Meridian's mother understands them through the eyes she sees and she finds the fact that "*they were dead, living just enough for their children*" (51).

Mrs. Hill feels that her independence has been robbed because of her being a mother, but Meridian also feels just the same when she herself becomes a mother. Meridian begins to feel confused by this status. Publicly, she has to pretend to be sweet and gentle as a mother but inside herself the strength of rebellious thought against the role of a mother is gradually increased. As Walker puts it: "*she began to dream each night, just before her baby sent out his cries, of ways to murder him*" (69). Meridian feels as if her baby were a chain that had been tied up tightly around her. It does prevent her from real freedom and independence. The stress she leads from having a baby presses her very hard. The degree of pressure increases to the level that she yearns for peace from death:

It seemed to her that the peace of the dead was truly blessed, and each day she planned a new way of approaching it. Because of her growing reliance on suicide, the thought of it, she was able to function very well. (70)

From the above excerpt, we learn that Meridian is facing a psychological problem. The harshness of motherhood and a domestic role builds up conflicts in her psyche. Meridian's suffering is double because as a daughter, she grows up with the feeling of guilt that her mother puts on her and later directly faces problematic situations when she herself becomes a mother. Apart from what have been mentioned, it is also the feeling of being exploited and victimized by the idiotic rules that bring advantages and better opportunities to men rather than women. For example, in education, men have more opportunities than women because women's opportunities are blocked by being wives and mothers. Like when Meridian gets a scholarship to go to college she has to give her son away. In doing this, Meridian is blamed by her mother. Mrs. Hill speaks out furiously:

Well, it can't be moral, that I know. It can't be right to give away your own child.....Unless you're some kind of monster. And no daughter of mine is a monster, surely. I just don't see how you could let another woman raise your child. It's just selfishness. You ought to hang yourself in shame. (87-90)

Mrs. Hill strictly clings to God and ignorantly trusts in the rule of good and bad. She thinks that Meridian will surely commit a big sin if she refuses her own son. She also painfully complains that many young people have lost their respect for the church and God. Mrs. Hill confidently feels that she is holding the right things because she always goes to church and raises her own children. However, it is not her belief in God that pushes Mrs. Hill to detest her own daughter for rejecting her son. Actually, Mrs. Hill has inherited this belief from the patriarchal society that she grows up in. According to Rosemarie Tong, the patriarchal idea holds that women who bear the children should be the ones to rear them. Feminists have made strong arguments against this taught. They think that it is too demanding because it presses upon women's bodies and lessens their energies (84). Meridian's mother submissively follows the patriarchal rule. Undoubtedly, the curse of her for Meridian is strong. It makes Meridian feel guilty all the time.

As a result, when she goes to Saxon College, the feeling of guilt follows her days and nights and haunts her thoughts and dreams. It is a miserable feeling of deserting her own child. Though Meridian once feels and that her son is a chain, a burden and an obstacle, due to a mother's instinct she does love and feels sympathetic to him. At Saxon, Meridian cannot get rid of her miserable feeling, gradually, she becomes psychologically sick. She always hears the voice that curses. It is:

A voice that cursed her existence-an existence that could not live up to the standard of motherhood that had gone before, it said over and over: Why don't you die? Why not kill yourself? Jump into the traffic! Lie down under the

wheels of that big truck! Jump off the roof, as long as you are up there...(91)

The haunted voice signifies that Meridian's attempt to deny her motherhood is not successful. She is not conscious that it is her weakness and guilt that creates the voice. Walker writes that "*the voice that said terrible things about her lack of value was her own voice. It was talking to her, and it was full of hate*" (92). The early period of time at Saxon college, Meridian's emotion is mixed between the haunted dream and the newness of life at college. Saxon impresses her, especially the Sojourner tree, the big shading tree that makes her feel calm and peaceful.

The mixture of two things does not do her good but troubles her more. Her sickness becomes more serious, not only psychologically but also physically. While feeling graceful with her extraordinary chance to study in the place with a good reputation, Meridian gets a terrible headache from the horrible dream that frightens her whenever she is awake. Moreover, her hair becomes thin and her sight is blurred. However, she is gradually conscious of the sickness that troubles her. She tries to empower herself and endure it. Meridian courageously tells herself, "*whatever happened to her she should be prepared to accept*" (98). She still studies well and participates in the demonstration. Meridian's strength has been gained out of her endurance. She becomes mentally strong. She values her body less than her soul. Though she cannot get rid of her physical illness, she is successful in keeping her spiritual strength. It is because she can discover her own value.

### **Love and Endurance**

After spending some of her life time with Eddie, Meridian discovers that she does not love him. When he leaves it does not hurt much, but she feels a little disappointed just because she is accustomed to having him home sometimes and seeing him playing with the baby. It is Eddie's stupidity which she later finds that

prevents her from loving him. Presumably, Meridian will only be attracted by a man who is not brainless. When she meets an activist named Truman Held, she is easily impressed by not only his appearance but also his intelligence and his spirit of dedication. For Meridian, Truman is different from other men in that he fights against obstacles and as Walker describes: *“a man who could become anything and a man whose very worlds were unintelligible without considerable thought”* (100).

Because Meridian thinks that Truman is qualified and probably because never once in her life has she seen a man who possesses intelligence, she easily falls in love with him. However, after dating her and finding out that Meridian is not a virgin, Truman later disappoints her by dating a white girl named Lynne. It upsets him more when he discovers that she also gives away her own child. Though he has never said to Meridian that he knows her past, Meridian is painfully aware of his rejection. The moment he discovers the reality, his abhorrence for her instinctively grows. As Walker writes:

When he knew about the child he thought of her breasts as used jugs. They had belonged to some other man. He wanted a woman perfect in all eyes of the world, not a savage who bore her offspring and hid it. ...For him she would not even have existed as a woman he might love (142).

Truman's first objection is merciless for Meridian. In this case, Walker makes readers see the nature of men in the patriarchal ideology. Though Meridian lives her life during the period of changes, she is still a victim of men who are the by product of patriarchy like Eddie and Truman. His name 'Truman' signifies that he is a 'True Man' that exists in parallel with 'True Woman' in 'the Cult of True Womanhood'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ideal true women existed a long time ago. They are women who cling tightly to four cardinal virtues; piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. In the novel, Mrs. Hill is the representative of

women who cling to this virtue. A true woman is still required in the era in which opportunities are equally provided to all races and sexes. This claim is clearly seen through the case of Meridian and Truman. Truman like Eddie and many other men in the society need women; who are pure, submissive, and mind domestic tasks. This is the reason why women are still victimized and exploited. On the case of Meridian, Eddie is the first man that oppresses her by putting a stain on her. He not only destroys but also blocks her way to freedom by giving her the role of wife and mother. Truman is the second man in her life who oppressed her by denying her because she lacks good qualifications based on the standard of old belief. She feels more miserable than when she was with Eddie because she loves him and almost trusts him wholeheartedly. As mentioned earlier, Truman rejects her for a traditional reason; she is not a virgin, she has a child and gives away her child. Lynne gains credibility from this situation. For Truman, Lynne is much better than Meridian. He is charmed by his own assumption that Lynne is his ideal so he ignores Meridian. Lynne's idealism impresses him. It makes him "*eager to tuck her under his wing*" (141). Once he intentionally insults Meridian by telling her that white women are seen to be valuable because they read New York Times.

It saddens her when Truman does not seem to perceive her real value. Meridian's broken relationship with Truman is sympathetic because it is difficult for her to define Truman. His intelligence and physical charm keep her from seeing his basic instinct that is similar to that of most men. Critically speaking, Truman is in the transition of old and new. He has inherited the old patriarchal belief and his new vision of the world makes him uncertain. These two aspects weaken him. Meridian then is the victim of his weakness and uncertainty. She disappointedly realizes that Truman would have liked her better if she behaved as she did with Eddie. It saddens



her more when after having a relationship with Truman he has gone to Lynne without knowing that she is pregnant. Meridian decides to have an abortion. Apparently, Walker determines to expose the brutal situations that women have faced. Moreover, she wants readers to comprehend the necessity of women who sometimes have to make a destructive decision. Women are not praised for what they have done, but people in patriarchal society do not realize that men are the cause of all the problems. Radical feminists claim that men are always more violent. They always used women's bodies in an exploitative way to serve their own need (Hughes 9).

Meridian's enduring the pain without telling Truman shows her dignity. She keeps a painful secret because her pain, she thinks, is worth only just Truman's sympathy which she does not need. For Meridian, she would rather have bitten her tongue in half rather than tell him. Truman has never realized that he extremely hurts Meridian. His hesitation has already destroyed his own baby. Though Meridian faces a sympathetic destiny, she can empower herself out of sufferings. Her strength is very powerful. Truman himself has never realized that it is Meridian's power of strength that attracts him. However, Truman has conflicts within himself. There are two oppositions occurring within his mind. He cannot accept her past, and he loves her. The first thought he feels for Meridian when he discovers her past is influenced by strong patriarchy that has been deeply engraved in his head for a long time. But Truman lives in the modern era and he is well educated so he can cope with changes. To make it clearer, Truman is not totally ruled by traditional ideology. He is living in the transitional age in which old beliefs and new demands are mixed in him. As a result, he has to struggle very hard with his own conflicts. It is the strong demand for Meridian's love that convinces him. Meridian remains in his thoughts as Walker describes: "*Wherever he was he would think of her face, her body*" (142). As a

result, Truman finally deserts Lynne and confesses that he has always loved Meridian. He adores her charms and beauty and her intelligence and madly needs her love. But Meridian is now stable as she says: “*My love for you changed...I set you free*” (216). Truman is stunned by her words as she explains to him what she means by saying she lets him free.

I meant it when I said I set you free. You are free to be whichever way you like, to be with whoever, of whatever color or sex you like-and what you risk in being truly yourself, the way you want to be, is not the loss of me. You are not free, however, to think I am a fool. (216)

From what Meridian has said we learn that she is very strong, arrogant and proud. Truman comes pleading for the love she once felt for him but Meridian cannot fulfill his dream. At this situation we come to know that Meridian is successful in curing her pain caused by Truman’s betrayal. Meridian intends to tell Truman that what he has done to her is meaningless because she does not lose anything. Though once she might have felt lost, she now can eradicate all sad feelings. Her final meaningful remark is that though Truman is free to do whatever he wants, he is not free to think that Meridian is foolish.

To sum up, Meridian’s strategy in coping with the crisis is to try to be stable by telling herself that whatever happens she will be responsible for it. This is one of her good qualities. Whenever she is in crisis, Meridian can stay calm like a ship trying to get to shore in stormy weather. Staying calm enables her to raise her own consciousness and see her own value. As Walker writes:

Meridian appropriated all the good qualities of black women to herself, now that she was awake enough to be aware of them. In her life with Eddie she knew she had lacked courage, lacked initiative or a mind of her own. And yet, from somewhere, had come the will that had got her to Saxon College. At times she thought of herself as an adventurer. (110)

From the above excerpt, we can obviously see Meridian's potential empowering strategy. Whenever there are failures or loss, Meridian empowers herself by clinging to her own value. Thinking of black women who are sergeants in the army, doctors, schoolteachers, and so on strengthens Meridian's will to conquer all obstacles. She feels that she belongs to the people who produce Harriet Tubman, the only American woman who had led troops in battle. Meridian is also satisfied with her intellectual growth. She is aware of her stupidity in the past and knows that she is now free to take an adventurous journey with courage and strong will.

### **Dedication**

Meridian perceives quite well that the fruits of slavery such as racial discrimination and inequality are bitter. The painful story of slavery has been passed on to her. Additionally, she witnesses how her father has lost his land to public control by white people. For this reason, when her vision is widened she cannot stand to see the unfairness and ignorance of her people. She has a strong determination to get rid of what has blocked the way to freedom and equality. This is the reason why Meridian decides to volunteer to work for the Civil Rights movement. Though she knows very little about the work, she is willing to learn. It is her positive consciousness and her realization of responsibility that drive her determination. Meridian makes an important decision for the first time in her life, leaving her child and going to college ignoring the curses of her mother.

Unlike Mrs. Hill, her mother, Meridian is conscious of her responsibility as a black citizen. Not just being conscious, Meridian knows how to dedicate herself to something more meaningful and important for her poor black folks. In her dedication, Meridian has to encounter many obstacles. The one who obstructs her determination is her own mother. Mrs. Hill is not interested in anything political because she has no

desire to understand politics and has never voted in her life. Her opposition to what Meridian is doing is strong. She says:

As far as I'm concerned, you've wasted a year of your life, fooling around with those people. The papers say they're crazy. God separated the sheep from the goats and the black folks from the white. And me from anybody that acts as foolish as they do. It never bothered to sit in the back of the bus, you get just as good a view and you don't have all those nasty white asses passing you. (85)

We can assume from the above excerpt that Mrs. Hill is the representative of many black people who are ignorant and unaware of their own rights and value. For this reason, we can further assume that Meridian will have to fight very hard against the ignorance that is deeply engraved in her people. Marlene Dixon mentions that one obstacle that obstructs women's life development is women's belief in their own inferiority (187). Mrs. Hill's accepting her inferiority and considering it as a destiny given by God make her see no value and potentiality of herself. Though Meridian tries very hard to convince her, she is not successful. Nonetheless, when Meridian critically thinks about this opposition, she looks back to the past of her grandmother and her mother and comprehends the situation. Meridian finds that, unlike her, both of them "*had not lived in an age of choice*" (124). The limitation of women in the past is stronger than at the present, especially in slavery in which women cannot choose. Besides, Mrs. Hill's world has been limited to feminine virtue, as one of Meridian's friends, Dolores, warns her that "*No matter what your mother says, just remember she spends all her time making prayer pillow*" (87). As a result, the opposition between Meridian and her mother is strong. However, Meridian's will is stronger. Meridian realizes that she has more choices to choose and more roads to take. She does not give up her will to help her people to be freed from sufferings though there are things that obstruct her such as her psychological and physical

sickness and her opposition to many demonstrators that she will not kill for the revolution. After graduating, she attempts to eliminate the conflicts in her own psyche by exploring her own value and potentiality. She can pass through all obstacles by ignoring her own personal problems and minds only the greater task that is to educate people and make them fight for their own rights.

The causes of her psychological sickness are her own guilt because she cannot raise her own child and her pain caused by an unreliable love. She can eliminate the traumatic feeling by thinking that she belongs to people who produce Harriet Tubman. Additionally, the guilt is gone when Meridian feels as if she were forgiven by her mother. Due to the painful history of her ancestors and her mother, Meridian learns that what Mrs. Hill's burdens in the past were hard. She wishes that "*with all her heart, she had not been born to this overburdened woman*" (124). Apart from this feeling, Meridian also feels that she is the one who oppresses her mother by making her feel distrust as if she stole something. On the day she is extremely sick, Meridian is at Saxon College. She becomes unconscious and dreams of her mother. In the dream, she is on the ship with her mother, sailing in the sea of danger. As a result, her mother refuses to let her go. In the dream, Meridian hears her mother saying: "*I forgive you*" (125) which actually is the voice of Miss Winter, a teacher at Saxon who takes care of her. Though it is just a dream, Meridian feels maternal love and warmth which she has lacked for a long time. Additionally, it is the sense of forgiveness she perceives. When she is awake, she becomes healthier and gains spiritual strength. She can continue a greater task for her people as she determinedly says: "*I'll go back to the people, live among them, like Civil Rights workers used to do*" (31).

However, Meridian is only mentally cured; her body is still suffering from paralysis but nothing can destroy her strong determination. She is willing to suffer though her sickness is fatal. When Truman tries to encourage her to see the doctor, Meridian refuses by saying that *“I don’t need one, I am getting much better by myself”* (26) and *“I’m strong, actually...I’m just not a Superwoman”* (32). This situation shows that Meridian is extremely strong and arrogant. She tries to empower herself by not depending on others. In struggling, she abhors violence. Once when she participates in a demonstration, Meridian realizes that she does not like the idea of killing for the revolution. For this reason, she chooses to take her own ways. Though Truman worries that Meridian is living a risky life by not caring about her sickness, Meridian is aware that she is in the process of healing it.

After graduating, Meridian leaves the north and comes back to the south, moves to many small towns, finds jobs, and gets close to people. Her strategy is to get close to black people, learn as much as possible about them and try to understand them, educate them and make them see the importance of voting. As she tells

Truman:

I would like to teach again. I respect it, when it’s done right. After all, people want to be taught how to live... I imagine good teaching as a circle of earnest people sitting down to ask each other meaningful questions. I don’t see it as a handing down of answers. So much of what passes for teaching is merely a pointing out of what items to want.  
(188)

One of Meridian’s effective strategies to get rid of people’s ignorance is to give them knowledge. Additionally, her attempt is not easy because people are accustomed to living traditional lives. Some of them say: *“What good is the vote, if we don’t own nothing”* (204) and *“What will it get me but a lot of trouble. I don’t have time for foolishness. My wife is dying”* (205). However, Meridian never gives

up her will. She tries to convince them, explains to them how important voting is. In order to educate them, she does not put herself in a high position but tries to be in the same ground as those people. Meridian's task is finally successful. As Walker writes:

They came to her and offered her everything, including the promise that they would name the next girl child they had after her. Instead she made them promise they would learn, as their smallest resistance to the murder of their children, to use the vote. (191)

Her task is very rewarding. It turns to be the efficient treatment for her sickness because she gradually recovers. Her will and hope is eventually fulfilled.

### **Enlightenment**

One reason that Meridian is able to overcome all life obstacles is her discovery of the true meaning of being human. More specifically, she comes to perceive the meaning of motherhood. Once it was the guilt of her failure at being a mother that haunted her and tortured her along the way of her struggle. Meridian eventually succeeds in eradicating this guilt when she learns that being a mother is not just nurturing her own children. Meridian does not limit herself to only the role of biological motherhood but she goes beyond this boundary. According to Barbara Christian, Walker intends to widen the definition of motherhood by indicating that motherhood is how we see and value life, and resist all things that might be destructive to it (216). Her dedication is greater than that of biological mothers who nurture their children. Though she does not nurture her own children, she nurtures the world, helping poor and ignorant people to see their own value as she see hers. Her discovery eliminates her sin giving away her child and aborting her second child. Meridian's motherhood becomes mature after she has suffered a great deal from her sin. Christian says that she becomes a mother by "*expanding her mind with action*

*which is directed toward the preservation of life*" (217). Because of this, Meridian's spirit finally becomes healthy and energetic to fight with obstacles as Walker describes: "*For she understood, finally, that the respect she owed her life was to continue, against whatever obstacles, to live it, and not to give up...*" (200).

In the process of her struggle, she carries not only her own sufferings but also the sufferings of her people. Her power and consciousness grow out of misery. Meridian determines to tolerate since she realizes that the fruit of toleration is sweet. Additionally, one of her empowering strategies is to cling to no material and rank. Each time Truman sees her, Meridian has "*less and less furniture, fewer and fewer pieces of clothing, less of a social position in the community*" (31). What Meridian is doing can be compared to how the Lord Buddha has practiced his virtue. He ignores all ranks and properties, even his beloved family which he leaves behind in order to search for reality which can permanently liberate people from sufferings. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a Buddhist philosopher, says "*Suffering is caused by the desires to have and to be*" (44-46). The feeling of not to get or to be is powerful. It can protect us from being enslaved by defilements or any kind of emotional involvement. Meridian's having no attachment to things and sensuality leads her to inner awareness. According to the Lord Buddha's teaching, the state of inner awareness helps us to insightfully see the world. With this awareness, our mind will become tranquil, steady, flexible, manageable, and peaceful. We are the masters of our minds so that we can use them for any purpose, particularly in eliminating defilements (Bhikkhu 96). By this strategy, she can acquire strength and power. She is strong and powerful enough to get respected by people and convince them to love and see the value of their own rights. Meridian is confident in what she is doing and being as she says to Truman: "*What you see before you is a woman in the process of*



*changing her mind*" (25). She does not believe in God or anything sacred but her lack of admiration cannot lessen her will. She struggles in a lonely battle most of the time but Meridian has her own faith. We can interpret from the poem she writes:

There is water in the world for us  
brought by our friends  
though the rock of mother and god  
vanishes into sand  
and we, cast out alone  
to heal  
and re-create ourselves (213)

The poem written by Meridian implies that, there is no God's power and mother's love that people can count on. However, she believes people can help each other by sharing in the world full of sufferings. We do not have to wait for God to create but we can create our world and ourselves. This poem reaffirms Meridian's determination to walk steadily in the rough roads of life with her people. This is why at the final stage, Meridian's both mental and physical sickness is gone. Nobody heals her but herself. For the psychological sickness, it is the sense of forgiveness that cures. Meridian needs both forgiving and being forgiven. Once when she becomes sick and unconscious, Meridian feels, though dreamily, that she is forgiven by her mother. When time passes, she learns to forgive everyone who oppresses and victimizes her. Her forgiveness liberates her sufferings.

I want to put an end to guilt  
I want to put an end to shame  
Whatever you have done my sister  
(my brother)  
Know I wish to forgive you  
Love you  
It is not the crystal stone  
Of our innocence  
That circles us  
Not the tooth of our purity  
That bites bloody our hearts (213)

As soon as Meridian possesses and comprehends the sense of forgiveness, her guilt has gone. She comes to realize that rage and revenge is destructive and is not worth keeping. Meridian is eventually free from all defilements. There is only her determination to liberate her people from suffering and ignorance that flamingly shone in her heart. From her thoughts and actions at the final stage we can say that Meridian eventually reaches the state of enlightenment. Walker describes in the final chapter that “*she was strong enough to go and owned nothing to pack*” (219). When Truman says he hates her always being alone, Meridian firmly replies: “*But that is my value. Besides, all the people who are as alone as I am will one day gather at the river... And in the darkness maybe we will know the truth*” (220). From what Meridian says, it later reveals that her dark world is lightened up. Meridian finally discovers her own power and strength. However, she does not stop her journey but keeps on moving ahead, exploring the world; as she says to Truman there will probably be the truth in darkness. Additionally, Meridian does not need to depend on men anymore. She needs no male protection because she can now protect and depend on herself. It is like some of radical feminists’ thought that men are too dangerous to be involved and too unpleasant to contemplate (Hughes 9). Before Meridian becomes involved with married life, she is always afraid of men but now she is fearless and even stronger than many of them. Eventually, Meridian is blissful and triumphant not because she can be over people, but she can conquer her own passion, her sufferings. Osho says bliss is for those who are brave and daring. It happens when one moves beyond the known to the unknown. He means that if we confine ourselves to something we know our lives will become routine and repetitive. It is the cause of misery (10-11). Meridian is courageous because she is always moving forward from the known to the unknown.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we can see the whole picture of all the problems and the causes of all the problems. We have learned how victimization and exploitation of women have been processed by ignorance and the selfishness of the old traditional beliefs. Ignorance is considered as the key part to all sufferings. Historically, black people are the unluckiest group that has always been governed by ignorance. According to history, most free blacks in the United States were literate in 1850 though they were excluded from public schools in many parts of the country, and were forbidden to establish their own schools. In a plantation-slave society, education was prevented by the masters. Slaveholders had to pay a high price in lost productivity by keeping slaves ignorant. The Southern society, for example, had to pay a price in restricting the education of a quarter of a million or more free blacks (Sowell 198-199). As a result, the society of black people does not develop as fast as the dominant society. Many of them, as have been exemplified in the novel, turn to be accustomed to living within restriction and limitation and feel no need to improve their life condition.

Critically speaking, out of ignorance, many false values and ideologies have been regulated. Patriarchy is one among them. Patriarchy has been created out of men's greed for power and their fault and ignorant beliefs that only men possess high potentiality so they must be the ones who lead the way and women can only be brainless and submissive followers. Black women are considered as the most sympathetic victims. Allen and Britt point out that black women are below black men white women and white men. Presumably, race, class and sex discrimination work together to oppress and deny opportunities to them (61). Additionally, according to

Harris, black women are known as working beyond endurance. They are always the one who give and are good at protecting others rather than needing protection (4).

The above claim can be proved by what Meridian, the protagonist of the novel, has experienced. In the case of education, though women can enroll in education, still what has been provided for them is organized to set men's need. Saxon College for example, emphasizes that girls who graduate from the school must be accepted and behave themselves properly according to the social rules. Saxon, Meridian realizes, wants her "*to become something-ladies-that was already obsolete*" (95). However, what Meridian considered obsolete is still practiced everywhere. Women who act unfeminine and possess no feminine quality cannot be accepted by men. Meridian directly encounters this problem when she is refused by her lover just because she is not a virgin. Fortunately, Meridian is a woman who realizes her own value so she can free herself more readily from all unjust conditions than those who are fooled by ideology regulated by men. Meridian knows that if she wants to escape from all kinds of oppression, she must realize that she is capable of living independently without men's help. According to Dixon, the core of women's struggle for freedom is their knowledge that they are not inferior and that they are not animals or sexual objects or commodities (194). In the struggle for their own good and to reach their goals in life, they have to spend much more energy than the ones who see the ways through.

As what have been earlier discussed, we come to know how Meridian has been victimized by ignorance and patriarchy. Ignorance traps her in the cage of suffering and many disadvantages. It takes her quite a long time to get out of problematic situations. Knowledge is considered a significant weapon that enables her to free herself. Specifically speaking, together with knowledge, Meridian can

conquer all obstacles by her own realization and determination and her ability to create strategies to empower herself. Her strategies include seeing her own value and potentiality, being independent and free of demand for materials and positions, and getting rid of ignorance. Only by these strategies can Meridian live her life in the world of prejudice and inequality.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE HEART OF A WOMAN

An autobiography is what black American women use as a means to assert their right to live and grow. According to Stephen Butterfield, the autobiographical form of writing can lead black women to freedom. This kind of writing can be used as an armor to break the hard shell of slavery and exploitation (2-3). Susan Friedman asserts in '*Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice*' that when we closely examine the autobiographical texts from a psycho-political perspective based on the lives of women, they are found alive as a literary tradition of self-creation. Historically, women have been known as an oppressed group who have been gathered, colonized and governed. The difference of race, class, or sexual preference has marginalized women from their society. However, this kind of oppression cannot destroy women's consciousness of self (79). In addition to fiction, in autobiographical writing we can also find the portrayal of black women's strength and potentiality.

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss more authentic and recent aspects of black women's life in the modern world in Maya Angelou's fifth autobiography, The Heart of a Woman, written in 1981. Angelou is a well known autobiographer whose writing is considered imaginative, lyrical, daring and powerful. The Heart of a Woman depicts her life during the period of change both of the world and herself. The investigation will be on how Angelou strongly and admirably plays a multi-functional role in life as a mother, a wife, a writer, a singer and an activist. Additionally, because of the racial conflicts and the chaos of capitalism in the present era, black women's problems become more complicated. Moreover, though the world

is always moving forward, some women, whether they are willing or not, still practice the ideology of True Womanhood and there are many women, especially black women, who are still victimized by patriarchal beliefs. In The Heart of a Woman, Angelou portrays her struggle against men's unjust power. It is, therefore, interesting to investigate Angelou's life experiences reflecting how an individual black woman empowers herself to survive in many kinds of life difficulties.

The researcher argues that Angelou's fighting strategies consist of setting life goal, making a plan, being optimistic, taking experienced people's advice as part of her decision making and most importantly trusting her inner will. As she writes: "*I had to trust life, since I was young enough to believe that life loved the person who dared to live it*" (4).

To prove the above argument, this chapter will explore her strategy of self-empowerment which will start from tracing her life background in order to find out how she acquires her strength. The researcher will discuss her life experiences and problems, comprising the sources of her strength, the problems of being a single mother, working experiences, racial conflicts, and the limitations of being a wife and a woman. In each category, the researcher will discuss her strategy for solving a single problem and her strength.

### **Sources of Strength**

Maya Angelou has confronted various kinds of oppressions since she was very young. Her adventure begins when she and her brother are abandoned by their parents. The little girl accompanied by her brother meet her grandmother in Arkansas where she has to confront severe racial discrimination most of the time. When she is 8 years old, she is raped by her mother's boyfriend. And later, just wanting to test her womanhood, Maya has a relationship with a boy and gets pregnant. With strong

determination, Angelou insists on taking care of her fatherless son alone and encounters many more traumatic experiences in life. And because of many kinds of problems, she gains credibility rather than loss.

In The Heart of a Woman, we will see Angelou's more complicated experiences in her thirties, relating to political conflicts, economic problems, racism, and gender limitations. It is admirable that Angelou, a single mother who earns very little and has always been disturbed by patriarchy and racism can endure all kinds of sufferings. Instead of giving up, Angelou can powerfully take care of her own life and her son. Furthermore, she can also dedicate her time to civil rights activities. Apparently, Angelou's strength and maturity arise from her experiences in solving many of life's obstacles. Additionally, the encouragement of people close to her is also an important factor that makes her live properly in society. When she was young her grandmother seemed to be an influential person in her life. Angelou's strength and self pride grows steadily because of her grandmother's love and care in the past. In her interview with Jane Ammeson for World Traveler Magazine, Angelou mentioned what her grandmother had told her:

If you walk up a path that somebody else told you to walk,  
and you look ahead and you don't like where you are going,  
and you look back and you don't want to return, step off the  
path. Pick yourself a brand new road. (40)

Obviously, Angelou lives her life as her grandmother once guided her. Her first autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, portrays her childhood experience when she lives with her grandmother in Arkansas. Her grandmother is the first one to make Angelou grow steadily. During her time in segregated Stamps, Angelou little by little absorbs her grandmother's quality of patience and perseverance. She sees how her grandmother runs a store alone while at the same time taking care of her crippled son and her two grandchildren. Additionally, she has



to confront severe racism as well. Angelou remembers that pain when her grandmother is mocked by white kids and learns how her grandmother copes with the racist problem. Living with her grandmother, she perceives the concept of 'self-dignity'. Once when her grandmother takes her to the white dentist, he refuses to cure her toothache which makes her grandmother very furious. When she thinks that it is not fair for her to face this unjust refusal she then forces the dentist to cure Maya terrible toothache. Angelou learns from this situation that in some crisis when things are unfair, there is no need to be polite or submissive to people's selfishness. Besides good love and care, Angelou is also encouraged by her grandmother to read. Presumably, because of reading she learns to love writing and becomes a skillful writer. When she is grown up most of Angelou's reinforcement comes from her mother and friends. At the age of seventeen she has a child of her own and her energetic mother Vivian Baxter is always the one who pulls her out of crisis. Vivian gives her many useful life lessons. However, based on the mentioned factors, Angelo has created her own life strategies to empower herself in order to overcome all her obstacles.

### **Being a Single Mother**

Along the life's journey, poverty, starvation, or health problems are probably what most people in society have to encounter. However, what seems to be different is how each individual reacts to the problems they have. One little problem might cause a disastrous ending. On the contrary, one worst problem cannot beat some people down. Angelou is a representative of black women in a modern world who have possessed great strength. She has to struggle alone most of the time in order to survive.

Angelou has a child when she is seventeen years old. At that time, she refuses to depend on anybody even her mother. Giddens says that only a few people wish to be lone parents. There are some people who choose to have a child without the support of a spouse or partner. However, most single mothers by choice refer to those who possess sufficient resources to manage satisfactorily as a single-parent household (154). Angelou chooses to be a single mother out of her pride and strong dignity which sometimes causes her to struggle too. Though she is successful and famous for her creativity and talents, Angelou is just an ordinary woman who has to stand on her own feet. She has to take care of not only herself but her only son and fights for her people's rights. As she states:

When I stepped of the subway at Park, I was no longer the bright young woman executive dedicated to justice, Fair Play for Cuba and the Harlem Writers Guild. I was an unmarried woman with the rent to pay and a fifteen- year-old son. (98)

Generally, her problems and life obstacles are considered superficial in that the problems are similar to what most people have probably faced. However, her strategy to cope with all problematic situations is worth exploring. Since Angelou has to take responsibility for herself and her son alone in a modern society where it is not easy for a black woman to get a good job, her problems are generally limited to financial matters such as the rent and her son's educational fee. Besides her financial problem, Angelou also has to solve the problem of her adolescent son, Guy. When the expense increases Angelou has to work hard, trying to get a job to pay for the rent and the daily life activities. It is not easy for a single mother to be responsible for everything in the family alone. However, we learn earlier that Angelou is always moving forward. She always looks for chances instead of waiting for them. For example, when she realizes that the houseboat where she and her son live is not a

proper place for her, she decides to move to a better place, as she says *“I did believe it was important to be in the right place at the right time”* (5). This statement indicates her prudence in thinking of a better future. Angelou is an ambitious woman who always dreams of a better life, and she sets the goal and plans things and does things accordingly. She is not a kind of black woman who will *“stay black and die”* (9), as Billie Holiday, her short time friend and a black artist, sarcastically says. On the other hand, Angelou is optimistic about life; she will do whatever her ability and her rights allow her to. This is why she moves to a more elegant place. Angelou does her best, decorating and repainting her house, buying a car, and enrolling her son into a local school. Though her house is small and her car is old, she is satisfied with what she possesses. This is one of Angelou’s best qualities, having self respect and pride. As she writes: *“I felt more like an eccentric artist than a poor black woman who was living above her means out of her element, and removed from her people”* (6). Her statement shows that Angelou is self-contained because she is satisfied with what she has. Though other people live in bigger houses and have more expensive cars, she can create her lovely little world for herself and her son and live happily in it. Though her only son, Guy Johnson, has only a mother to share his life with, he gets full love and warmth as well as physical convenience. However, she cannot avoid conflicts all the time. Unexpected problems always come to her but every time she can intelligently cope with them. A clear example is the event during the time she lives in New York with the support of the Killens family. Guy has a dispute with a dangerous gang of boys called the Savages. Maya realizes that her son is in real danger so she makes a plan:

First I had to understand the thinking of the Savages. They were young black men, preying on other young black men. They had been informed, successfully, that they were worthless, and everyone who looked like them was equally

without worth.....They the black youth, young lords of nothing, were born without value and would creep, like blinded moles,.....I understood the Savages. I understood and hated the system which molded them, but understanding in no wise licensed them to vent their frustration and anger on my son. (81)

From the above excerpt we can see that Angelou is very careful. Instead of letting panic weaken her, she carefully examines the roots of problems and makes a plan. She realizes that it is too risky to act without thinking. Angelou is thoughtful. She kindly understands all the gang's members who are black and worthless. However, as a mother, Angelou has to protect her son. When she talks with the head of the gangsters, she is conscious of what she is doing and knows at what degree she should make it serious. She threatens:

Well, I came' round to make you aware of something. If my son comes home with a black eye or a torn shirt, I won't call the police. ...If the Savages so much as touch my son, I will kill then find your house and kill everything that moves, including the rats and cockroaches. (84)

The head of the gangsters deserve Angelou's threat. It is necessary for her to be aggressive and violent to the boy though she does not really mean to destroy any life. She threatens him because his gang is dangerous. Even the police are afraid of him. Obviously, Angelou's performance is similar to that of her mother. Vivian Baxter is seen to be very daring, tough and bold as Angelou says: "*Nothing frightened my mother except thunder and lightning*" (25). Part of her boldness has been inherited from her mother. As once she implies this by referring to Biblical assurance, "*Fruit does not fall far from the tree*" (4). Angelou's love for her son, Guy is similar to transmit the love that Vivian Baxter has for her. The similarity between Angelou and Vivian Baxter is what they both do for their kids. What her mother does for her and what she does for Guy is the message of love and

understanding. For example Maya talks to Guy: *“Guy, you know I love you, and I try to be a good mother. I try to do the right thing but I’m not perfect”* (36).

## **Working Experiences**

Though her responsibility as a mother is full of difficulties, Angelou can do what she loves such as writing and being a social activist. Besides trusting her own ability to survive, Angelou also uses the advice of people who love her as a tool to solve problems. For example, when Angelou first tries to write she is assaulted by many writers. However, she listens to John’s advice. He says: *“You got some very important criticism. If they think you’re too sensitive, you won’t get such valuable criticism the next time you read”* (39). Because of John’s words, Angelou realizes the value of the criticism she gets. She tells herself if she wants to write she has to be willing to develop a kind of concentration found mostly in people awaiting execution. She firmly holds that she must learn technique and surrender her ignorance. Later Angelou is successful in writing plays and songs.

Another example about Angelou’s strategies for dealing with daily life problematic situations is when she volunteers to work for SCLC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference), Angelou shows her leadership. She can direct the show to raise money for the group. Because of her good administrative skill, Angelou is later asked to be a coordinator for SCLC, and she has to work for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as well. Angelou is not confident but John Killens suggests that she get the job as he says:

Every try will not succeed. But if you’re going to live, live at all, your business is trying. And if you fail once, so what? Old folk says, every shuteye ain’t sleep and every goodbye ain’t gone. You fail, you get up and try again. (88)

What John says assures Angelou of her confidence, so she decides to work for SCLC and within two months she proves her ability. Angelou sends out ten thousand

letters signed by Dr. King and later the letters bring a large donation. Maya Angelou's power rises and falls depending on how serious the problems are and how much success she gains along the journey. Remarkably, her weakness comes and goes. Only within a short period does it stay with her and later disappears but her power and strength grow steadily and are deeply engraved inside her. Angelou always takes her mother's advice as a guide. She thinks that if she can survive it would be her triumph. She realizes the strength of her old mother and how she participates in the merchant marines so Angelou reminds herself not to give up though she will probably be defeated at the end. She bears in her mind that "*trying to overcome was black people's honorable tradition*" (43). Angelou's strength increases over time. The obvious proof is when, Vivian Baxter, her mother who finally becomes weak, turns to ask for her warm support. Angelou writes:

We reversed roles. Vivian Baxter, began to lean on me, to look for me for support and wisdom, and I automatically, without thinking about it, started to perform as the shrewd authority, the judicious one the mother. (210)

Because Angelou accepts this reversal and can do it well, her mother is thankful to her and says that she is proud to raise a woman who can stand up to crisis. Her mother's pride is a gift for Angelou. Whenever she has problems she always thinks of her mother.

## **Racial Conflicts**

Patricia Collin states that since black women in America have historically been oppressed, they have produced social thought which is different from standard academic theory in various forms. The message of thought reflected in poetry, music, essays, and the like. However, Collin observes that the purpose of black women's collective thought is distinctively different (9). Black women had historically been excluded from higher education, from learning and teaching about creative writing by

a double or even triple oppression comprising race, class and gender (Goodman and Digby 153). For Maya Angelou, the purpose of her writing is quite obvious: she wants to portray the life of black women which she exemplifies through her own experiences. Besides, the ordinary problems of women found in daily life, Angelou also depicts women's struggle to conquer the conflicts of capitalism, racism and patriarchy.

In most of her autobiography, the impact of racism on black women is outstanding. From her first autobiography entitled, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, we can see her traumatic childhood experiences caused by racism. Because of the gap between races, Angelou feels that she is trapped in the cage. From the time since Maya Angelou is very young until she becomes an adult, she has faced many life restrictions and limitations. Maya is discouraged by severe segregation. She is separated from her parents at a young age and lives with her grandmother and uncle for most of her childhood. When she was young she always considered herself ugly. She felt that her eyes were too small and squinty and her feet were too large. Her blackness prevents her from having rights to live a perfect life like white people. Her being female brings her most embarrassing sexual experience. Angelou has faced the conflicts of race since she was young, and most of the time she feels inferior. When she grows up, she still faces the limitation and restriction of being black. Angelou remembers her tough experiences in the past and she realizes her limitation as a black woman at present so she bears in mind that it is also her responsibility to take an action in fighting for her own rights and the rights of her people. In the world in which black people are subordinate, Angelou always keeps on her mind the lessons she has got and the warning of people who love and care for her. For example, her

mother once gives her advice: *“Since you’re black, you have to hope for the best. Be prepared for the worst and always know that anything can happen”* (52).

Angelou follows her mother’s advice to live a sensible life in the racial world. However, she cannot avoid conflicts. Though Angelou lives in modern society she still confronts limitations and restriction caused by racism. For instance when she rents a house in a white neighborhood, the landlord refuses her to rent it when he finds out that she is black. However, because of the help of some kind white people, Angelou can rent it. The problem occurs again when at school Guy is accused of saying profanity in front of the girls. Without asking the reason from the boy and other reliable witnesses, the white teachers conclude that it is Guy’s fault and he should resign from school. Apparently, the root of the problem undoubtedly concerns racism. Just because Guy is black, his defense, therefore, is weaker and more worthless than that of the white girls. Angelou solves the problem by moving out to new a neighborhood and enrolling Guy in a new school because she realizes that it is no use defending rights and justice against strong prejudice. Realizing that her staying in this strong segregation does no good, she decides to move. She says: *“I did believe it was important to be in the right place at the right time”* (5).

Angelou’s life is hard because it is very difficult for black women to find jobs. Angelou gets a singing job. Though she gets the job she likes, she is still an outcast. She does not have a chance to get good pay or work in a good place. As she says:

Midtown white agents would only book unknown black entertainers for out-of-town or night gigs, stag parties or smokers. I knew one white New York club owner who has been a loyal friend to me, but with my recently acquired new level of black dignity I refused to go pleading to him for work. (44)

According to Marilyn Pearson, black women are in the lowest position in the society, especially occupational positions. They are put at the bottom of the ladder.



As a result, they have to carry a great deal of sexist, racist, and classist oppression (32). The above excerpt shows Angelou's limitation - being black. It is hard for her to get an equal opportunity to work in the society in which race is still a matter of conflict. We can also learn from the above excerpt that Angelou, as a representative of the rest of black women in a hard battle, has dignity and pride. Instead of asking for mercy, she chooses to try first. She tries and she finally becomes successful. She gets a job by her own ability which makes her much happier than depending on others without trying. Angelou's sense of resistance increases after having experienced many painful racial conflicts. For this reason, she willingly participates in all kinds of activities concerning the human rights movement. She dedicatedly works as a coordinator for Martin Luther King Jr.

Angelou's strength and power is gradually developed over time. Her power to resist racial injustice rises from many sources. First, it comes out from her traumatic experiences in the past. When she was young, she had no power to fight against the unfairness of race, but at this time Angelou realizes that she is ready to struggle for the right of her people. Second, because of her mother's support and good advice and even being a good role model, Angelou's fear of being inferior is finally evaporated so she can use all of her energy to be a representative of black women to fight for justice. Once when Angelou and her mother meet at the hotel where most guests are white, they are unquestionably the center of attention. This situation makes Angelou lose her confidence. However, Vivian Baxter reminds her:

Animals can sense fear. They feel it. Well, you know that human beings are animals, too. Never, never let a person know you're frightened. And a group of them...absolutely never. Fear brings out the worst thing in everybody. (26)

The scene at the hotel teaches Angelou that she should not be too afraid, which later makes her feel more confident when she lives in New York. The third

source of Angelou's strength is from her love for black people. Though in the past Angelou considered herself ugly and longs to be beautiful, her attitude toward self is changed as time passes. Angelou's self respect increases. Not only of herself is she proud, but Angelou is also proud of her race. She loves her people. It is love for them that empowers Angelou to struggle even in crisis. She mentions that what she has always found is that older black women are full of generosity. Angelou says: *"The right plea, arranged the right way, the apt implication, persuade the hungriest black woman into sharing her last biscuit"* (72).

### **Limitation of Being a Wife and a Woman**

Presumably, the desire for love, warmth or even sexual pleasure leads women to be caught in the trap of male diabolical power. These kinds of desire mentally and physically weaken them so they have no strong defense to protect themselves from victimization. Angelou is a clear example of those who have been victimized. It is her loneliness and her desire for fulfillment that pulls Angelou down to the trap. Because for a long time she has been living with empty arms and rocks in her bed, her loneliness needs to be replaced by love and warmth.

Angelou is just an ordinary person, who always longs for love, care, and understanding from the opposite sex. Though she is successful in working and being a mother, Angelou cannot fulfill her lonely heart with male's love. Many times her loneliness weakens her and makes her reach a rough conclusion about men that attract her. This weakness leads her to failure. During the years of her thirties, Angelou has a crush on a few men but is never serious. Only her relationship with Thomas, a bail bondsman, that almost ends up with marriage and later when Angelou meets Vusumzi, a South African freedom fighter, Angelou decides to get married.

Angelou's relationship with men makes us learn that black women at her time are still victimized by patriarchal ideology. Men always cling to the notion that they are superior and have to be the first to make decisions. The example can be seen through her relationship with Thomas. When Thomas engages her he does not ask for her opinion about the marriage plan. Angelou writes: "*The decision to marry me automatically gave him authority to plan all our lives*" (103). We can assume that if Angelou decided to marry Thomas she would surely be trapped in his patriarchal power and her marriage life would not be harmonious and successful. Angelou meekly accepts his idea. However, she has to change her mind when she meets a South African freedom fighter, Vasumzi Make or Vus who her friend says is the smartest and calmest African she has ever seen. Vus's charming appearance easily impresses Angelou the first time she meets him. For example, when John introduces him to her she writes:

My love no longer was in the hand of Thomas Allen.....  
My first reaction was to wish I could be the white cloth in his dark hand touching his forehead, digging softly in the concern of his lips. Intelligence always had a pornographic influence on me. (108)

Presumably, in this situation, one might think that Angelou is easily moved. However, her being too sensitive is understandable. It is probably because she has been too lonely for a long time. Her natural desire as a woman needs fulfilling all the time. Vasumzi Make comes to her life as a fish to the hook. Angelou who swims hungrily in the sea of loneliness suddenly grabs the prey without thinking of any danger that might approach her. When Vus's sweet words flow to her ears, Angelou's armor of confidence is cracked. Vus says:

I come with the intention of finding a strong, beautiful black American woman, who would be a helpmate, who understand the struggle and who was not afraid of fight. I heard about you and you sounded like one. (117)

As if Vus knows Maya's weakness, he uses his words as a tool to get her and he is successful. From her decision making, it is clear that not only love and understanding are what Angelou needs, she also needs acceptance. Vus makes her feel that she is full of good quality and is qualified to be his helpmate because she is a fearless fighter, strong, thoughtful and beautiful. His words impress Angelou because no man she knows realizes this real value. Angelou accepts his proposal and though she has been warned by her friends she does not listen to them.

Many black women are probably stuck in the role of submissive wives, mothers and lovers. These women meekly follow the instruction of their husbands without realizing that they are being victimized or even realize their inferiority. They have no power to get out of the trap so they keep quiet and permanently become victims. After marrying Vasumzi Make, Angelou tastes harmonious love only a short period of time. Through her narration about the marriage we learn that black women can be exploited by means of marriage. Angelou is an example of a black woman who has been exploited by the system of patriarchy which is reflected in marriage. Vasumzi Make is a clear example of men who practice patriarchal ideology. Though Angelou does her best as a good wife should do, she still gets some disapproval from her husband. For instance when she decorates the apartment, Vus is not satisfied with her decoration. He tells Angelou that the old sofa and the secondhand – store bedroom are not suitable for his position. He further says that *“I am an African. Even a man sleeping in the bush will lay fresh leaves on the ground. I will not sleep on the bed other men have used”* (140). From his statement we learn that Angelou is facing a strong patriarchal belief which will surely victimize a woman like her who is always independent. It does not take a long time for Angelou to realize that she is in the

unjust situation, working too hard to please her demanding husband. She is burnt out by her domestic tasks as she writes:

It seems to me that I washed, scrubbed, mopped, dusted and waxed thoroughly every other day. Vus was particular. He checked on my progress. Sometimes he would pull the sofa away from the wall to see if possibly I had missed a layer of dust. If he found his suspicion confirmed, his response could wither me. He would drop his eyes and shake his head, his face saddened with disappointment (140).

Simone de Beauvoir says in The Second Sex that at that time patriarchy was powerful, men robbed from women all their rights to possess. Marriage tore women up by the roots from their group into which they were born. Men bought women as one bought a farm animal or a slave. They threw all domestic divinities on women (87). However, in the modern world where they say rights have been equally provided to all men and women, many black women are still pressed under male power. Maya Angelou's married life is an obvious example. She has a hard time taking care of things around the house. Though she is unemployed, she says, she has never works so hard in all her life. She and Vus live luxuriously but Angelou has never known where his money comes from and she feels frustrated depending entirely on her husband. Without doing any thing but being a housewife Angelou feels that she is worthless. Angelou totally disagrees when her friend says that "*A man's supposed to be in charge. That's the order of nature*" (142) so she argues that she must be outside of nature because she cannot bear not knowing where her air is coming from. With frustration she says that: "*I wanted to be a wife and to create a beautiful home to make my man happy, but there was more to life than being a diligent maid with a permanent pussy*" (143). Angelou's complaint makes us learn that she is opposed to being submissive, though she does want to be a good wife, and to make her husband happy, she cannot stand performing a maid's duty all the time.

Angelou tries to have a chance working outside though her aim is not the wage. For instance when she is asked to take a role on stage, Vus does not allow her by firmly saying that *“No wife of an African leader can go on stage”* (174). Only after Vus realizes that his wife’s performance will do him good, does he allow her to take the role.

Not only his craziness in showing his power and authority frustrates Angelou, but also his dishonesty which is later revealed. When Angelou finds the lipstick smudge and smells the strange perfume on his shirt, she asks him directly and tells him that she understands that love is like a virus which can happen to anybody at any time but she is serious with their relationship so if Vus hurts her he can also get hurt. Angelou’s threat makes Vus furious so he angrily says: *“Don’t you ever threaten me. I am an African. I do not scare easily and I do not run at all... You are my wife. That is all you have to know”* (187). It is obvious that Vus tries to keep his authority. According to De Beauvoir, men have historically always tried to keep all concrete powers. They have a strong determination to keep women in a state of dependence (147). Moreover, Pearsall observes that society in general considers men’s nature as the standard for human nature and women’s nature is based on this standard. Generally, women have always been described as emotional rather than rational, intuitive rather than logical, passive rather than active. Obviously, Vusumi Make firmly holds this standard and is practicing patriarchal belief. He cannot bear being insulted or even suspected. Though he is the one who should feel guilty, he does not accept reality. His being too authoritative then oppresses Angelou. What has been mentioned not only discourages Angelou, even the life expense which Vus says he will take care of, turns out to be an important problem. Vus’ being fond of luxury

brings them a big debt which Angelou learns just when the furniture is moved out from her apartment because the rent has not been paid.

Angelou starts thinking of separation but her pride keeps her from making any decision. She remembers that once many friends warned her about the marriage, she does not want to prove them right so she chooses to hold this heavy burden. Angelou later learns that life is what one makes it. She comes to realize that she has to be responsible for the consequences of her first decision to marry him.

After Angelou has suffered from many kinds of conflicts in the house for a long while, Vusumsi takes the family to Cairo, Egypt. Though Angelou is fascinated by the new environment, the same problems that the family faced in America repeatedly happen. Vus is stuck on luxurious ways of life but he cannot afford them. Every piece of furniture in the house is bought on installment and the rent is past due. Moreover Guy has to go to college. For this reason Angelou decides to find a job. Angelou meets an American friend in Cairo, so he finds her a job as an associate editor. Vus is very angry that she does not consult him about this. He says:

Black and American. You think you can come to Egypt and just to go get a job? That's foolish. It shows the nerve of the black woman and the arrogance of the American. I must say, my dear wife, those are not very attractive quality ... You took a job without consulting me are you a man. (225-226).

Having a heavy burden, Angelou's love for Vus has gone and so has Vus's. While Angelou brings money to the house, Vus spends it wastefully. He expects her to be faithful and steady but he comes home with the evidences of betrayal, the smell of cheap perfume and lipstick stain. Feeling that she does not love him anymore Angelou decides to separate but her decision is obstructed by the traditional patriarchal beliefs. Though this tradition ridicules Angelou, she has to follow it. Both Angelou and Vus have to sit in the meeting room facing the committees which consist

of people from six different countries who will judge whether it is acceptable for her to divorce him. Angelou is asked many questions which frustrate her:

Have you kept yourself clean?  
Do you refuse your husband his marital right?  
You are an American, after all; how well can you cook  
African food? Do you curse and act unbecoming? Do you  
try to dominate the man? Do you press him to have sex  
when he is tired? Do you obey him? Listen to him  
carefully? (252)

Angelou feels the unfairness and bias. She realizes that it is not fair to be asked the above questions, while, on the contrary, the questions for Vasumi Make are too simple and Angelou says they are “*weak and without heart*” (252). The questions for Vus such as “*Do you love her? Do you satisfy her? Do you want her?*” (252) obviously provide him an opportunity to easily escape from admitting guilt. Fortunately, the committees conclude that Angelou’s objection is stronger than his reply so they decide that Vus is the loser. Angelou feels relieved though she does not really need anyone’s approval but hers. Being able to separate from Vusumzi, Angelou feels as if the rope of strong patriarchal power tied up tightly around her had been loosened. Nonetheless, she is asked to stay with the man for six months. The request does not aim for any reunion but apparently for his reputation. However, the divorce agreement makes Angelou feel less stressful. Moreover, she can sense liberation for the first time and does not feel lost nor miserable. While many other women whose marriage life is not successful probably feel discouraged by the situation, Angelou finds her way to freedom.

After six months, she and her son have moved to Ghana where again she has to endure an unexpected accident of her son. Maya Angelou, a single mother, a woman who raises her son alone in the foreign country, struggles very hard in the crisis when her son is in the hospital and she is still looking for a job. Her traumatic



experiences enable her to be strong. Guy passes the admission test to study in Ghana University and though Angelou has no academic degree, she gets a job as an administrative assistant and can stay in the house within the campus. Angelou learns that her son is grown up and becomes mature. She has to accept the reality that it is the time that he should depend on himself. When Angelou warns him not to carry heavy things because he has just recovered from a serious accident Guy strongly says that:

Mom, I know I'm your only child and you love me. But there's something for you to remember. It is my neck and my life. I will live it whole or not at all. I love you, Mom. Maybe now you'll have a chance to grow up. (271)

Angelou does perceive her son's maturity but as a mother she still cares for him. His departure saddens her a little but because of this situation Angelou has a chance to reconsider all things that happen, examine her own thought and feeling. As she writes:

I closed the door and held my breath. Waiting for the wave of emotion to surge over me, knock me down, take my breath away. Nothing happened. I didn't feel bereft or desolate. I didn't feel lonely or abandoned. I sat down, still waiting. The first thought that came to me, perfectly formed and promising, was 'At last, I'll be able to eat the whole breast of a roast chicken by myself. (272)

The above excerpt indicates that Angelou is in the process of finding the truth within herself. Osho, an Indian philosopher suggests that truth is already inside us which cannot be found anywhere else. The only way to find it is to sit silently and look inside. Osho says that truth appears when we are in a state of non-doing and being relaxed (51). Consistent with what Osho states, after Angelou has concentrated and examined her feelings she finally finds that she does not feel miserable or deserted. Her statement: "*at last, I'll be able to eat the whole breast of a roast chicken by myself*" (272) signifies that Angelou finally gets real freedom and she can

fully administer this freedom. Additionally, she no longer has to share her heart and soul with anybody and depend on anyone. Angelou can finally discover her own power and strength.

## Conclusion

Angelou's battle ends up with her victory. Though there will probably be more obstacles waiting for her, we can presume that she is likely to get through and overcome all of them. From investigating her life we learn that all dilemmas and life obstacles that Angelou has encountered are restricted to her being black and being a woman. Being black, Angelou has to confront racial conflicts. She faces limitations in finding good jobs and acceptance. Being a woman makes Angelou limit herself to the role of mother and wife. Apparently in The Heart of a Woman, her hardest time appears when she gets married. Elizabeth Cady Stanton considers marriage relation as the cause of unequal power relations that exists between the two sexes. Marriage takes away women's individual sovereignty so they have no personal freedom. Wifehood and motherhood entirely occupy women's lives which keep them away from expanding their horizons (qtd. in Phillips 88). Nevertheless, Angelou can jump out of this limitation. Yet, she is still a mother but not of the oppressed ones. She knows how to keep a balance between burden and freedom. And she proves that women do not have to depend on any unjust power, especially of men. Angelou can see her own value and she is satisfied with it. Angelou's poem, *Phenomenal Woman*, is the best description of herself. It states as follows:

Men themselves have wondered  
 What they see in me.  
 They try so much  
 But they can't touch  
 My inner mystery  
 When I try to show them  
 They say they still can't see.  
 I say,

It's the arch of my back.  
 The sun of my smile.  
 The ride of my breasts.  
 The grace of my style.  
 I'm a woman.  
 Phenomenally.  
 Phenomenally woman,  
 That's me. (39)

What have been discussed affirms the researcher's argument that Angelou lives her life by setting a life goal and making a plan, being optimistic, taking experienced people's advice as part of her decision making, and, most importantly, trusting her inner will as she writes: "*I had to trust life, since I was young enough to believe that life loved the person who dared to live it*" (4). Angelou's life goal is to have a better life and to be a writer so she plans what she should do. Angelou decides to move to a proper place where she can meet many writers and practice her writing. She has to struggle very hard to overcome poverty, racial conflicts, and unjust male power. One reason that all obstacles can not beat her down is that Angelou is optimistic about life and is always moving forward. The other factors that help Angelou walk steadily in the rough road of life are the people who are close to her. Allen and Britt call this '*social resources*' (66). According to Allen and Britt, social resources such as family, friends, medical advisors, colleagues, neighbors and so on, can help women overcome problems and lessen stress (66). For Maya Angelou, many of her friends give her advice on how to cope with problems. Her mother cheers her up whenever she feels weak and helpless. These people function as the wind beneath Angelou's wing with enables her to fly up high to reach freedom. However, it is her own will to empower herself that seems to be the most important of all factors. Without the determination for good, Angelou will not be able to discover her own strength. Her self discovery at the end is almost similar to Janie's in Their Eyes Were Watching God, while Janie sits calmly and peacefully on the porch alone

but not lonely, Angelou sits peacefully eating the whole breast of a roast chicken. It is no exaggeration to say that Angelou's discovery of her strength is her enlightenment.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter discusses the unique and shared characteristics of the protagonists and their empowering strategies reflected in the four works. The study can prove that rather than being destined to oppression and meekly bowing to patriarchal rules, the oppressed African American women resist and empower themselves in order to survive happily and proudly despite various kinds of oppressions and restrictions in life which keep them from happiness and peace. The following questions stated on the introductory chapter will be answered:

1. What are the causes of the problems?
2. How do these protagonists develop and achieve inner strength?
3. What are the impacts of the protagonists' empowerment?

#### **The Causes of Problems**

From the discussion in the previous chapters, the causes of the protagonists' life problems and oppressions can be classified into four categories; ignorance, patriarchy, stereotypical attitudes and racism. These factors are going to be discussed as follows:

##### **Ignorance**

We have learned from the discussed novels how victimization and exploitation of women have been processed by ignorance. Ignorance is considered as an influential factor that leads women to sufferings. As mentioned earlier, the society of black people does not develop as fast as the dominant society. Many people, especially women have a very little chance to enroll in education. Besides, women are also prevented from being educated by patriarchal beliefs. For this reason, women

have always been oppressed and exploited. In the four novels, we can see how women suffer from their own ignorance. For example, Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God is ignorant to think that marriage will bring love. Because of her perception of marriage, Janie has to face harshness and frustration for a long time. In Sula, it is obvious that ignorance has ruined women's lives through many female characters such as Nel, a woman who ignorantly sinks into stereotypical life. Additionally, Nel does not think critically so that she keeps blaming Sula, like other people in the community, for her misbehaving. Consistently, according to Lord Bhudda teaching, ignorance makes people misinterpret suffering as pleasure so that they cannot find the way out from the sea of suffering. Because of ignorance people misidentify the cause of suffering. People cannot see their own fault but go blaming the wrong things (Bhikkhu 148). Sula sees that it is women's ignorance that causes them big suffering, and she thinks that they are just dead living things. Sula seems to see the truth of things but she cannot accept it so she has to live her life among severe and stressful conditions. Meridian in the third novel is another example. Ignorance makes Meridian trapped in the cage of limitation. Lacking knowledge in relationships with the opposite sex, Meridian falls into a heavy burden in life. When she becomes a mother and a housewife, Meridian has no right to educate herself. Instead, she has to take care of domestic tasks and a family. For Maya Angelou in The Heart of a Woman, her ignorance of male nature leads her to an unhappy marriage.

### **Patriarchy and Stereotypical Attitude**

Patriarchy is considered as an influential factor upon women's lives. Looking back to what have been discussed in the previous chapters, Janie is first victimized by her grandmother's patriarchal belief that men are the best protectors for all women. Because of this belief, Janie is trapped in the unjust power of men for quite a long

time. She is first exploited by Logan Killicks, a man whom her grandmother chooses for her. Later, Janie becomes the victim of an ambitious man like Joe Starks who thinks of and cares for nothing but his own power and wealth. Joe Starks presses Janie down in order to get high. Even Tea Cake, her last husband who seems to understand Janie possesses patriarchal characteristics slaps Janie in front of other men. Though he pretends to do so, his determination is to govern her and show his maleness. From what Tea Cake does to Janie, other black men praise him instead of blaming him. For example, Sop-de- Bottom says to Tea Cake: *“You sho is a lucky man... Uh person can see every place you hit her. Ah bet she never raised her hand to hit yuh back”* (35). This statement clearly shows what most men think. They always hold that to be over women is a lucky thing. In Sula, Morrison portrays how men in the community leave their wives and children behind among poverty and starvation. Sula is disappointed by the insincerity of men she knows. Her experiencing male betrayal herself and other people around her makes Sula react aggressively. She becomes tough and weird in the eyes of most people. In Meridian it is disappointing to see how Meridian who, in the eyes of her lover, acts unfeminine and possesses no feminine quality is treated. Meridian directly encounters the problem when she is refused by her lover just because she is not a virgin. She is compared to the ‘used jug’ which sounds very sympathetic. In The Heart of a Woman, Angelou has to encounter life frustration when her husband insists that men are the controllers. Angelou is prevented from working and blocked to only domesticity during the time she lives with Vus, her African husband.

### **Racism**

The toughness of racism is what all black people cannot avoid. What black women endure is much heavier than men’s. The toughness is felt through what

Hurston has passed on through Nanny's word in Their Eyes Were Watching God that women are 'the mule of the world'. Though racism in Their Eyes Were Watching God is not the focus, Hurston does give us the hint that racism is still disturbing. For example, when many people die from the hurricane white people are treated differently than black people. Moreover, the novel also hints that white people's way of life is still an ideal model for many black people. For example, Joe Starks dressed like Mr. Washburn who is Nanny's white boss. Joe tries to make his life luxurious like a white rich family so that he gets respected from many black people in the community. However, Janie does not seem to suffer much from racism.

In Sula, we can see how black people's happiness is robbed by white people. Black people are fooled and finally lose their fertile land. All injustice leads to chaos and life difficulties. Jobs are provided for white people rather than black. As a result, most black families are poor. Many husbands leave their wives. For this reason all negative effects fall upon the younger generation. The belief of separating white from black makes Sula badly condemned when she sleeps with white men. In Meridian, we can see that Meridian, the protagonist, is valued by her lover Truman less than Lyne, a white woman. Moreover, she has to struggle very hard for the justice of her people who have been oppressed by racism for a long time. Meridian has a tough time encouraging people to vote just because most black people have already been used to being inferior. Racism in The Heart of a Woman is also clear. Not only Maya Angelou has to carry a big responsibility as a mother and a wife, but she also has to fight with racism. Angelou has difficulty in finding a job; even when she gets one her wage is very little just because she is black.



## **Self-Empowering Strategies**

From investigating the four novels, self-empowering strategies, each protagonist use can be classified into five strategies; making an assumption, experimenting, realizing, rejecting and resisting, and educating which can be explained as follows:

### **Making an Assumption**

Making an assumption, in my opinion, is one of many important strategies that the protagonists in the four novels use as a tool to free themselves from all kinds of oppression. It shows their prudence and intelligence; instead of meekly accepting stereotypical beliefs or traditions, these women suspect, question and make an assumption about things.

The prominent example is the case of Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God. Janie is not a by product of stereotypical tradition. She learns about life and things by not just listening to others or believing what other people tell her. When Janie starts to be curious about things she tries to make an assumption. Her curiosity and her demand for love occur at the same time. Janie wonders how love may come to her. When her grandmother forces her to get married, Janie innocently makes an assumption that marriage will bring love.

Though making an assumption is not clearly revealed in the other three novels we can assume that the protagonists do use this strategy to lead their lives. For example, Sula and Meridian decide to go to college instead of being wives and mothers, Angelou decides to move to New York in order to learn to be a writer. These protagonists do not know their future but they positively assume that they will have a better life.

## **Experimenting**

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu mentioned in Handbook for Mankind that in order to gain true liberation, the first thing we need to do is to examine things closely. This examination will enable us to understand the true nature of things so that they will know how to behave in a way that suits the true nature (13). This claim is consistent with what the protagonists in each novel cling to. They learn things closely by using experimenting strategy.

From the discussion in the previous chapters, we learn that experimenting strategy is what all protagonists in the four novels use as a tool to taste their assumptions. Not only tasting their assumptions but experimenting also helps them learn the nature of their obstacles and later enables them to find the way of solving them, free them from problematic situation, and finally helps them in empowering themselves.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, after making an assumption, Janie does not hesitate to prove whether her assumption is right or wrong. Instead of letting other people tell her about what she suspects, she chooses to directly experience things by herself. Janie tastes her own assumption by taking an experiment. She approaches and kisses a boy to taste how she will feel, and she marries Logan Killicks to find out whether marriage will bring love or not. Similarly, she directly experiences life with Joe Starks who she first assumes would probably take her to the horizon. Janie gradually learns she and Joe are not compatible. Her experiences with him make her know his nature so Janie can finally find the way out of Joe's restrictions.

In Sula, Sula also directly learns thing by herself. The way Sula experiments with things is eccentrically different from that of the other protagonists. She is bold to hurt herself and shock other people. For example, she cuts herself to threaten the Irish

boys in order to taste her power. Additionally, Sula tests Jude's honesty to Nel by sleeping with him.

In Meridian, Meridian attempts to directly cope with all life obstacles by herself. Meridian's strength grows from her patience. The way she endures suffering makes her thoroughly learn the nature of her problems. Gradually, she knows how to cope with the harshness of life. What Meridian has learned from her experience is that she can cling to nobody but herself. Additionally, in fighting for freedom and peace, violence does not always help.

Experimenting with life is like taking a risk because the protagonists do not yet know the outcome of what they decide to do. In The Heart of a Woman, Angelou likes to step forward in order to find the way out of all problems. When the place she presently lives becomes unpleasant, Angelou moves to the new place which she thinks is nicer without knowing that it will surely be as what she expects or not. Just like her second marriage with Vus, an African freedom fighter, Angelou decides to marry him though she does not know him well enough. The protagonists learn a great deal from what they have experienced. Their experiences both positive and negative build up power and strength.

### **Realizing**

It is quite obvious that all protagonists in the four novels realize what they want in life. More importantly, they also realize that they have potentiality and value and know that they have rights to reach for their hopes and dreams. For this reason, they do not hesitate to make their dreams come true.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie realizes that love is more important than wealth. She firmly believes that only love that will make her happy. This is why she seeks true love. The only mistake she makes is that she wrongly thinks that

marriage will bring love. However, Janie later finds that her assumption is wrong. Realizing that life with Logan is not pleasant for her she decides to take the new road spending life with Joe Starks. In every step Janie takes, she learns and is always conscious of what is happening to her. She finally realizes that living with Joe she again finds the hard rock to step over. Janie starts to gather strength and courage little by little, secretly and silently. Realizing that she has enough power and strength, she can eventually manage to get rid of the hard rock of life. Joe can no longer rob her pride.

In Sula, the protagonist, though in the eyes of her neighbors is weird and eccentric and behaves opposite to the social rules, Sula, in fact, realizes what she is doing and why she is doing it. Sula realizes that stereotypical ways of life are boring so she attempts to communicate to people around her that some traditional values are not always worthwhile existing. Sula is opposed to the belief that women should get married and mind their families. For Sula, women's following stereotypical virtues does not necessarily make women happy. She tries to tell this to Eva, her grandmother, and Nel, her friend, by exemplifying the negative effects they both face from following the traditional ways, but only Nel finally comes to understand what Sula tries to tell her. Sula's realization of her own desire makes her act rebelliously and eccentrically. Though many people cannot accept and do not understand why she lives her life differently, Sula feels satisfied with the life she chooses; even when she dies she dies peacefully. Every atom of her heart and soul belongs to her. Her death is triumphant for it makes people get the important lesson she teaches. Though it gives them a destructive effect, at least people learn that Sula is one of their cells and that the loss of her makes them quiver.

Meridian is another example who realizes her own value. Seeing herself valuable, Meridian finds the way to free herself from restriction, limitation and suffering. Meridian's power grows steadily because she learns to cling to her own value. She gradually recovers from a serious sickness without anybody's help but hers. Meridian first severely suffers from her mental and physical sickness. However, she can finally heal herself by trying to gather strength among pain and misery. Meridian can get rid of her suffering by thinking of her own value.

Maya Angelou in The heart of a Woman is also a clear example of a woman who does not let all obstacles beat her down. Though Angelou gets help from friends and mother, it is the realization of her own value that enables her to free herself from all kind of sufferings. Angelou is optimistic about life; as mentioned in the previous chapter she said: *"I had to trust life, since I was young enough to believe that life loved the person who dared to live it"* (4). Her being optimistic and discovery of her own value finally make Angelou calmly and peacefully eating the whole breast of a roast chicken which means that she finally finds real freedom.

### **Rejecting and Resisting**

Rejecting and resisting come together as one strategy. The protagonists in the four novels use this strategy to empower themselves in order to fight against all kinds of injustice and inequality. These protagonists realize that to receive traditional values and beliefs that have been passed on to them for ages, they will only be the victims of the system. For instance, these protagonists think that to cling to the belief that women should get married, have children, mind their families and husband, block women's freedom forever. Moreover, they also think that women have right to be in better and suitable places that they build by themselves. Women's places, therefore, are not only in the houses, kitchens and churches.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie rejects many rules that she does not agree with. First, she rejects the idea that wealth is more important than love. While her grandmother holds that a rich man who has many acres of land and a big house is a good protector for a woman, Janie insists that a man who can provide love is better. This is why Janie rejects Logan when she finds that he cannot provide what she wants. Janie later rejects Joe Starks for he cares only for wealth and authority. Janie rejects materials and resists sincerity and true love. For this reason, she gets on well with Tea Cake, a man who sees her value and provides her love.

Sula rejects all conventional rules, for she thinks that these rules will obstruct her freedom. Additionally, Sula sees that many lives, especially women's suffer a great deal from being conventional. For Sula, many women are dying. Their lives and souls are not theirs. Sula trusts her own values and beliefs. The clear example is how she chooses her way of life. Instead of getting married, Sula goes to college and lives independently. She resists that her life must be hers. Her resisting conventional social constructions turn out to be the factor that strengthens and empowers her. Her resistant power gradually increases along with her degree of violence.

In The Heart of a Woman, there are two main things that Angelou rejects; the betrayal and patriarchal power of her African husband and the injustice caused by racism. The reason for this rejection is that Angelou cannot accept being controlled and trapped in domesticity in which she cannot administer her intellectual side. In this autobiography we can see that Angelou is a kind of an independent woman who loves to work and learn new things rather than being just a housewife. Her need of male protection is natural for most women and she can also serve her man's need but when the relationship turns to be something overloaded Angelou does not mind rejecting it. When she finds that Vus betrays her, Angelou does not compromise but

ends the relationship instead. She insists on being independent rather than accepting all unjust powers. Her rejection and resisting finally increase her power to live in the world by herself.

### **Educating**

Knowledge is considered as a significant weapon that enables all protagonists in the four novels to free themselves from all kinds of suffering. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu mentions the Lord Buddha's taught that: "*Knowledge, skill and ability are conducive to success and benefit and are auspicious omens, good in their own right*" (13). All of these protagonists have a chance to enroll in education. They can use knowledge to defend their own rights and to live carefully in a world full of obstacles.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is lucky because her grandmother realizes that education is important. Nanny has no chance to educate herself due to the limitation of slavery she then tries to support her daughter and her niece. Janie is sent to school by the help of the Washburn family whom nanny works for. Apparently, education makes Janie unique and different from other women in the society. Janie thinks critically and imaginatively. She has her own belief and trusts her own will. Finally at the end the story, Janie can defend herself from committing murder by using her language knowledge. This knowledge makes Janie's speech very convincing.

Sula goes to college instead of getting married, whereas other women in her community step into conventional spheres that their ancestors created for them. Education is considered as an influential factor that makes Sula think and act differently. Sula's vision toward life is wider than other women's. She can see and understand what is going on in her community more insightfully because of education.

Similarly to other protagonists, Meridian is always eager to learn about the world. After suffering from being rejected from school and living within the restriction and limitation of being a wife and a mother, Meridian decides to leave everything behind and go to Saxon College. Education empowers her because it makes her think more critically which finally enables her to conquer all obstacles by her ability to create strategies to empower herself. It is knowledge that makes her see her own value and potentiality, be independent and free of desire for materials and positions. When ignorance is dissolved, she can live her life in the world of prejudice and inequality.

### **The Impacts of Empowerment**

At the end of each novel, we learned that all protagonists eventually discover themselves and feel real happiness from inside. The discovery is like enlightenment which makes their lives more meaningful. As a result, we can say these protagonists are successful in self-empowering. They can surely live peacefully in the world that is full of problems and obstacles.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie feels sufficient and self-fulfilled as she tells Pheoby that she has already been to the horizon which means that she can overcome the severe battle in the past and now can live by herself. Janie finally gets her own voice and discovers her own strength and power so that she stops searching for the horizon.

In Sula, at the end of her life we can see that even at the last minute of her life Sula is conscious of what is happening to her. When she is dying she fully perceives her life is totally hers and nobody can rob her soul and pride. Sula is not scared though she dies alone because she knows what is happening to her and who she is and what she has done up to the day she is dying. Sula's death also reflects the lives



of those who relate to her, especially her close friend, Nel. Nel finally feels the lack of Sula Peace. She eventually understands what Sula was trying to tell her when she was alive. For this reason, losing Sula is like her soul has been robbed. Sula's departure also makes her see the community's change and disintegration. Not only Nel, people in the Bottom also feel the destructive ending because of its rejection of the powerful, independent female spirit embodied in Sula. They finally learn that even an individual like Sula who is just like a small cell that shapes the community, can be meaningful to its growth. As a result, it is not an exaggeration to say that Sula functions as a revolutionist for oppressed and suppressed women. Yet, though her revolution seems destructive, it does awaken us, women, to know that we must no longer let anything or anybody block their ways to freedom.

It takes Meridian quite a long time to get out of problematic situations. She can finally build up her strength within severe mental and physical sickness. Meridian is successful in self-empowering because she sees her own value and potentiality, being independent and free of demand for materials and positions. Only by these strategies can Meridian live her life in the world of prejudice and inequality.

Angelou gets victory after her severe battle with racism and patriarchy. In the world full of prejudice and inequality only a strong woman like her can get through all obstacles and live happily. Angelou's life shows us that women do not have to accept their inferiority. Women can be both wives and mothers but not oppressed souls. Like Angelou, a woman knows a balance of burden and freedom.

What has been investigated affirms the researcher's argument that the protagonists search for the same goals in life comprising individual freedom, personal independence and equality to do and get whatever they want. They all realize their rights which seem to be their innate property that cannot be robbed or destroyed.

When many obstacles such as inequality, unjust power or ignorance obstruct their ways from reaching their goals, these protagonists empower themselves by resisting conventional social constructions, doing things according to their own needs and dreams. Consistently, what seems to be the most influential factor that prevents the women from real happiness is patriarchal power which many radical feminists believe will make it difficult for woman to obtain equality and liberation. The protagonists in the four novels are representative of strong black women who firmly hold that women should be given the right to achieve something for themselves. For this reason, individual freedom, personal independence, and the equality of opportunity should not be open only to men, but also to women. It is also noteworthy to say the four novels do not aim to suggest that women are great warriors or saints. Additionally, it is mistaken to think that all women should live without men like the protagonists in the four works. The most important message that readers must perceive is that many outside battles that these women have conquered are meaningless if they are unable to conquer the battles within themselves. At the end of each novel, Janie sits calmly and peacefully on the porch alone but not lonely; yet, Sula dies but she dies at peace and she teaches the rest who still survive, Meridian happily rejects all kinds of ranks, properties, or love and care from others and Angelou sits peacefully eating the whole breast of a roast chicken. These women realize that they are successful in self empowering and they can eventually taste real freedom. What the protagonists discover at the end is the discovery of self and real happiness.

## Conclusion and Implication

It is obvious that self-empowering strategies used by the protagonists in the four selected works lead them to freedom and independence. Not only do they set themselves free, they also try to pass on what they have experienced to other women. As seen in the novels, the four female characters do not hesitate to tell what they have learned to their friends.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie sits on the porch which was once controlled by Joe Starks, her second husband. When he was alive, Joe Starks prevented Janie from sharing her story with other people. She was kept in the kitchen and minded the store while her husband relaxed on the porch with other men. After Joe's death, Janie can eventually sit on her own porch, talking to her friend, Pheoby. This scene in the final chapter indicates a status of women in replacement of men. Janie tells Pheoby that she has been to the horizon by which she means that she has already discovered herself and appreciated her own values. Pheoby finally perceives what Janie tries to tell her. It can be assumed that her insightful perception of what Janie tells her will be passed on to other women by telling them what she has been told.

In *Sula*, Nel finally understands what Sula has tried to communicate before Sula died. Sula's death enables Nel to see the significance of loss and change. Nel is depressed when the community has become disintegrated after the loss of her best friend, Sula.

In *Meridian*, Meridian makes Lynne taste the bitterness of losing Truman's love. Truman finally leaves Lynne and turns to beg for Meridian's love and understanding. Meridian shows her strength by refusing Truman. Her refusal ironically teaches Truman that Meridian who is once compared to a "used jug" is not

brainless. Truman finally sees the differences between Meridian and Lynne. Her strong will to choose her own path gives both Truman and Lynne a painful lesson.

Angelou's passing on her power is seen through her conversation with the wives of many activists from different countries when these women are left in the hotel waiting for their husbands who go to the conference. Angelou brings those wives to perceive their own values that they can make themselves more valuable than just being '*a portable pussy*'. After Angelou explains what women should think and do, these women turn to exchange their experiences, telling one another how their female fellows have been oppressed, reading poems which encourage women to stand up for themselves.

The way these black women pass on their experiences is consistent with the womanist theory concerning women's rights. Williams and Walker's womanist concept includes conditions, events and values of the women. Consistent to a womanist point of view, the four selected works are female-centered. The four novels demonstrate how the protagonists struggle to liberate themselves from oppressions. These protagonists also attempt to communicate what they have experienced to other women. In a nutshell, each writer of these novels addresses the process of black women who regain their self-esteem through liberation and communication with other women. Except for the life of Maya Angelou in The Heart of a Woman, most situations and characters are fictionalized by authors. However, the characters and events that have been discussed are true to life. Though the four selected works represent strong black women in the community where the women are subject to discrimination, the situations and problems that occur in these works are found in many communities. They are silenced and controlled. It is still found that many men keep administering their power by using materials and wealth as a tool to attract

women who ignorantly think that materials will make them happy. Like Nanny in Their Eyes Were Watching God, they consider male wealth and protection important and necessary. In my hometown, for example, there are an increasing number of village girls who are married to foreigners because they want a better life, which means to be wealthy. Some parents even take their daughters to temples asking for holy water or join in the rituals in which they believe will make their daughters charming and attractive to their ideal men. Furthermore, women's attempt to attract men is seen in many advertisements on many Thai TV channels. Looking closely at the advertisements related to cooking, the models are always female. They are portrayed, for example, as a beautiful and talented cook. The advertisements show that it is necessary for women to be a good cook because it is the tool to attract men. The advertisement implies that kitchens are still women's place. The advertisement tries to convince the audience that women who are good cooks will win men's heart.

Many feminists are working hard to lift women's status, to make people see that women are not brainless while many women are walking to the cage of patriarchy. Many women still ignorantly think they are destined to be lower than men. As a result they accept their lower status. For example, many families in my village favor sons to daughters. The sons will be provided with a better chance like education or opportunity to choose their own lives. Most daughters have to be at home being busy in the kitchens or bending their backs under the sun in the rice field. They are taught to mind the families, husbands and children. There is even a local Thai proverb "*having a daughter is like having a toilet in front of a house*", which implicates the role of female as inferior to that of male.

The analysis of the empowerment of African-American women in the four selected works may shed a light to a better understanding of the situation of these

women and how they regain control of themselves. Presumably, the situations and problems that black women encounter are similar to real life situations of women in other communities. It is, therefore, interesting to investigate lives of women in different settings in parallel with the lives of black women such as the lives of white women in America, European women or Asian women. Furthermore, it will also be useful to apply this analysis to explore literary works of female authors in other countries in order to find out whether there are the situations and problems similar to the ones stated in this dissertation. It is also interesting to investigate how women in different settings release themselves from oppressions. Moreover, many people are probably curious to know whether patriarchal ideology becomes less powerful or is still strongly practiced among women in different societies or communities.

It is possible that there are many more women in many parts of the world who still swim in the sea of oppressions and it is also possible that there several other useful strategies that those women use to free themselves from oppressions. There are more unknown issues related to women's subordinate lives that are worth exploring.

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