

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Toni Morrison is a great contemporary African-American novelist and is renowned for the prominent themes and vivid dialogues concerning people of her race in her works. The current research focuses on her three novels namely, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*, which discusses the issues related to African-American culture. This chapter reviews past literature encompassing multiple perspectives including linguistic, patriarchy, feminism, post-structuralism, class and social status to identify the gap in the field of knowledge. The chapter consists of two parts; 1) prior studies concerning Toni Morrison's three novels and 2) previous studies concerning linguistics and stylistic tools that can assist in achieving the objectives of the current study.

#### 2.2 Morrison's Selected Novels

##### 2.2.1 The Impact of Racism on the Lives of African-American

Racism is a major central theme in Morrison's novel. These selected novels allude to two types of racist themes where the first theme revolves around the notion

that racism is a product of White ideologies treating people of colour as inferior to them. On the other hand, the second type concerns internalised racism within the Black community, where certain cliques or class within the African-Americans community itself views other members as inferior to them.

Several studies have employed Toni Morrison's three novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved* as their data. These studies significantly reflect the status of African-Americans' lives and can contain important elements which are necessary for setting the tone of this dissertation. These previous analyses of Morrison's texts demonstrate certain tropes that highlight the superiority of White people. For instance, in *The Bluest Eye*, the protagonist, Pecola, desires physical features that are often attributed to White people such as blue eyes and fair skin to gain a respectful status in society. Middleton (2016) argues that Morrison uses language to clarify how African-American characters internalise dominant values concerning race, class and gender where *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970) is seen as an attempt to depict a sense of inferiority felt by African Americans as a result of internal inferiority in the community itself and White racism. A study by Shabani (2018) raised questions on how Morrison reflects Black women's status via language through the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison is found to employ soliloquies and vivid dialogues to illustrate how African-American women suffer from hatred and discrimination due to the colour of their skin. Priyah (2019) contrasted the female characters in *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* who were depicted as suffering from marginalisation due to the rigidity of social conventions in their community. In these two novels, the community views the protagonists negatively. For instance, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison refers to the protagonist as the earth in which marigold seeds cannot grow since Claudia and Pecola threw marigold seeds in the hopes that they would grow but the marigold does not grow. In this context, marigold represent hope. This

representation of hope is also observed when Pecola gets pregnant, but her baby dies prematurely.

Morrison's do not only focus on the discrimination of female characters by White women but also by the male gender. In *Sula*, the patriarchal community exploits Sula and her friend Nel causing Sula to break patriarchal traditions in her community while Nel adheres to them (Jean, 2017). In both novels, Black women are oppressed by men of their race and White people, highlighting the negative attitude towards Black women and their exploitation by men. Bhuvanewari (2019) discusses the protagonists of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* in the light of this issue critically. He theorises that the protagonists in both novels encounter multiple patriarchal persecutions whether physically or psychologically. The researchers focus on the persecution of African-Americans is manifested, from one hand, by White community based on racism and from the other hand, by people of their race due to the sense of inferiority they have obtained throughout their lives. Besides, the sense of inferiority resulted from persecution is projected remarkably in her novel through vivid dialogue and soliloquies. A connection is observed between Middleton (2016) and Shabani (2018) who investigated how Morrison's language is employed to convey the themes of female discrimination by Black patriarchy and White people. Furthermore, Priyah (2019) and Bhuvanewari (2019) argue that females tend to be negatively portrayed as a result of patriarchally heavy social conventions leading to female persecution at both physical and psychological levels. Therefore, these studies provide accounts of the plights of African-American women under patriarchal forces and White cultural hegemony where Morrison's characters tend to emerge as icons reflecting the agonising experiences African Americans have faced during times of racism.

In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the concept of beauty is seen to have an enormous impact on the life of African-Americans. Unfortunately, beauty is standardised against the notions of White beauty, emphasising the superiority of White features. Being beautiful is portrayed as having blue eyes, fair skin and blonde hair, driving the protagonist Pecola to attain these features in search of love and independence. Xinxin (2007) argues that these features of what women's beauty entails tend to also be propagandised by mass media as the ideal, influencing the narrative of the society. This standardisation of beauty not only impact individual consciousness but also triggers a crisis in the construction of African-American identity and is observed to be iconised in Morrison's work since it reflects the ideology introduced by White authorities. Abass (2008) who studies *"The Black Character Quest for Identity in Selected Novels of Toni Morrison"* discusses how racism destroys the identity of the characters from the beginning. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola wants to adopt a White identity because her feelings of self-worth and her expression of personal attitude and independence are faced with rejection and humiliation from both the White and Black communities including her family. Maureen, a light-skinned character in the novel, makes fun of Pecola's skin colour in the presence of Frieda and Claudia leaving Pecola unresponsive and with "unspeakable words unspoken." Abass (2008) argues that the voicelessness (unspeakable) on the part of Pecola may be an expression of deep pain and shame when the character thinks about her 'ugly' appearance. In the following extract, Pecola did show any reaction when Maureen remarks to her that she is ugly: "*I am cute and you ugly: Black and ugly Black emos, I am cute!*" (Morrison, 1970, p. 35). Pecola's silence demonstrates Morrison's characters iconicity in terms of representing the 'unspeakable' in her text due to the text structure.

The issue of relationships among women in African-American society is described as a threat to their female identity. Morrison's second novel, *Sula* (Morrison, 1973), tackles the common issue faced by African-American women within two concepts, *death* and *love*. The novel portrays how 'Sula', the protagonist, behaves in her community and the relationship she shares with the other main character, Nel. Nassief (2019) studied Morrison's *Sula* and shed light on how social liberation in traditional settings of the Black community can disrupt the identity of women. The author's work explores the contrast between the protagonist, Sula, and her close friend, Nel. Sula is described as an African figure who is unable to reason when it comes to solving problems because she tends to act on impulse and use her body as a solution. Her behaviour leads her to lose her social identity, dignity, and reputation. In contrast, Nel is depicted as a reasonable role model who constantly utilises logic and her brain when dealing with social issues since she is bound to the social traditions of the African-American community. The researcher concludes that in *Sula*, Morrison attempt to highlight the difference between the two characters, Nel and Sula, in terms of worldview and behaviour as well as in the likelihood of being reasonable/unreasonable, leading to self-recognition and identity formation. Morrison's *Sula* is a complex character where the character's life events revolve around the social convention of African-Americans which can contribute to exploring Morrison's icon. Sula's character is constructed in a complex metaphorical manner, challenging the convention and social traditions, demonstrating the fragmentation of Black female identity through the character's consciousness. It is on this basis that Morrison uses her style to subtly challenge the norms of the literary canon set up by the Whites.

Although the novel does not sympathise with *Sula's* acts of self-destruction, the sympathy expressed in the relationship with her close friend Nel is obvious and

remarkable despite the issues that exist between them. Morrison set her novel between the 1960s and 1970s in an attempt to provide a role to African-American women. Thus, *Sula* is written in 1973, an era that witnessed the emergence of women movements in the United States as women step up for their rights. These movements sought women liberation and independence by rising against traditional norms. Abdulbaqi (2017) argues that Morrison's ideas of liberation in *Sula* are not demonstrated through Sula's seemingly irrational behaviour that involves breaking the honourable norms and values set up by her community. The researcher claims that the sense of pity towards Sula is not a result of her deeds that defy moral values but in knowing that her actions are heavily influenced by her personal experiences where *Sula*'s irresponsible actions can be observed as a reaction to the actions of racism she was exposed to growing up and throughout her entire life. Abass (2008) views the character *Sula* as an agentive tool that Morrison utilises to rebel against White and patriarchal ideology which is deeply ingrained in the society and as demonstrated by *Sula*'s friend, *Nel*. While *Sula* embodies the contemporary and free African-American spirit, *Nel* and her family stand for the traditional African-American community; the former stands for rebellion and liberation while the latter stands for preservation and tradition. Both characters can be discussed as icons for African-American women.

Rodriguez (2009), in a study on Morrison's *Sula* entitled "*Formation of the Self in Terms of Love- Death Relationships with Other and with Oneself*", examines how the protagonist, *Sula*, is constructed by the author as a complex female character who represents the resistance in the eyes of the reader rather than the usual cooperation, making it difficult for the readers to label *Sula* as a good or a bad character. In *Sula*, Morrison is not simply interested in racial issues where she also simultaneously explores the depth of human nature through the clever exploitation of language use and

style. In a broader sense, the author utilizes language reflecting social persecution , economic slavery as well as political servitude (Rodriguez 2009). Moreover, Morrison's *Sula* extends beyond the simple reality of binary opposition such as whore/ virgin and good/ evil, enabling a complex construction of metaphorical relations from the quality of context set up.

The third novel, *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987), narrates chronologically the events of an African-American woman, Sethe, during the pre-civil war era where she was a slave in Kentucky making her journey to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1878. Sethe escapes from the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky when the schoolteacher tasked to run the plantation is atrociously abusive towards the slaves. As she made her way to cross the Ohio river on the way to Cincinnati, officers surrounded the house Sethe was in and seizes a knife in a fit of hysteria, killing her newborn baby daughter. This killing is not a representation of the mother's cruelty, but an expression of the terror of slavery, an act of protection to save the baby from slavery which is worst than death itself. The plot this the novel and how the events are described demonstrate Morrison's utilisation of language to produce complex work. Renee (2016) argues that Sethe's act of murdering her baby is a reaction to the racist atmosphere and a blatant rejection in accepting the role of a slave mother where this murder also represents Sethe's destruction from within. Thus, this murder is not only the result of outward violence but is also a product of inward destruction. Similarly, Whitehouse (2018) scrutinises Morrison's *Beloved* by highlighting how the author aesthetically engages with the tragedy based on the master-slave relationship. It is stated that in *Beloved*, Morrison explains the concept of loss where Sethe's action is a reaction to her master's persecution, leading her to kill her daughter to save her from the torments of slavery (Ibid). While Renee (2016) refers to Sethe's act as simply the

reaction to her master's persecution, the Whitehouse (2018) examines how Morrison aesthetically explores form to convey African-American persecutory images.

The textual construction of *Beloved* invites the readers to explore and discover the unspoken and underlying realities beneath the projected surface of African-Americans. This type of textual work may draw on past events to cure the current issues faced by Black people. A research on folklore and the emancipation of African-Americans by Abdulrahman (2014) expands these notions further when the researcher examines the painful history in Morrison's *Beloved* to discover how the novelist considers fear and the events of times as instruments to empower African-Americans to obtain self-emancipation from the era of cruel slavery. Abdulrahman (2014) discusses the process of narrating the story which involves communicating ideas and effectively and subtly influencing the various ways as to how readers think about the world, bringing African-American beliefs to the fore. Abdulrahman (2014) elaborates that in *Beloved*, the process of storytelling is more prominent than novel writing, classifying Morrison's style as non-traditional since this work largely depends on spoken words where oral exchanges are participatory. Additionally, Morrison's *Beloved* consists of three parts, twenty-eight fragmented chapters where flashbacks and the process of reminiscing are achieved through the remarkable shifts from the present to the past. The evident gaps and unspeakable events centring on African-American lives serve as motives to break the bondage of slavery by illustrating the untold stories and pain experienced by the Black community. Qasim (2012) states that Morrison's novels break the stereotypical images of Black women who are often presented as 'whores', 'matriarchs', 'breeders' and 'beasts'. He adds that Morrison's use of unspoken language is an attempt to create a Black aesthetic that captures the experience of coloured women who are often voiceless and left out when it comes to literature. These negative images

of Black women are promoted to hide the rampant political, social and economic exploitation. In *Beloved*, Morrison rejects a world that steals the subjectivity of African-American subjectivity. In Qasim's (2012) study, he focuses on discussing the image of African-American women, while Abdulrahman (2014) dissects the dilemma faced by the race as a whole.

Similarly, Sistani (2016) in *To Remember or not to Remember: Questioning Trauma of Slavery i Beloved* examines the concrete desire of the characters to free themselves from the painful memories of slavery. *Beloved* provides an image of myth and imaginary conception of real social relationships that influences the structure of ideology. These memories are deprived of love and affection since slave mothers are not allowed to care for and show affection to their children. In addition, Sistani (2016, p. 56) argues "*in Beloved, the fact of remembering the past is a crucial issue in the life of major character...*" *it helps them to free their psyche from the trauma of slavery and play a constructive role in their community*". The idea of the reincarnation of the dead in *Beloved* is significant in shaping the manner in which African-Americans move on and commemorate their painful past, destroying the bondage of slavery and racism.

Based on the above discussions, Morrison works can be concluded as portraying how African-Americans resist harsh socio-cultural environments in a racist community by discussing marginalisation from different perspectives. Moreover, her works also shed light on the bitterness of racism and racialism that hinders African-Americans from defining themselves and their identity.

### **2.2.2 Viewing Morrison's Selected Novels from the Psychoanalytical Lens**

Many past studies investigate the psychoanalytical elements of Morrison's three novels where these researches explored Morrison's novels via two perspectives of

psychoanalysis: the first being the traditional view and the second is considered a non-traditional psychoanalytical view.

The structure of Morrison's three novels is remarkably beautiful when explored from a psychological lens as observed in Lei (2011) research on the concept of uncanny *Objet a* present in Morrison's works. The concept of *Objet a* is a Lacanian term in psychoanalysis representing ego. On the other hand, Tyson (2006) argues that *Objet a* is related to one's repressed desire for his/her lost object where the researcher tackles the concept of love in Morrison's novels. Lei (2011) provides an insight into the African-Americans' desire concerning ideal maternal roles. He argues that Morrison's three novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved* are three stories that offer an account of how African-American sense of self is destroyed as an effect of racism and slavery. *The Bluest Eye* explores the struggles in negotiating self-love and self-hate that result from White hegemony and the dehumanisation of African-Americans where Pecola cannot be loved because she is Black and ugly, prompting her to desire for White features to be loved. On the other hand, *Sula* is about sisterly love tainted by the degradation and eroticisation of African-American women in a cultural atmosphere of racism and sexism. *Sula* betrays her close friend, Nel, when she had a relationship with Nel's husband, Jude. Finally, *Beloved* discusses the buried memories of the dead over time where the reincarnation of the dead baby indicates the process of reminiscing. Hence, *Beloved* metaphorically represents the dark and horrible cultural history of African-American people.

In *Beloved*, Morrison utilises different styles of describing the psyche of African-Americans during the times of slavery. Glazier (2003) who studied unspeakable things in the representation of Black women in Morrison's *Beloved* scrutinizes the possibility of Morrison merging Magic Realism as a supplement to develop her narrative of the

African-Americans' oral traditions in describing the increasing significance of rejecting main-stream of Euro-American literary convention. Glazier (2003) adds that unspeakable things are Morrison's attempt to restore the lost voice of the people of her race and restore the power of imagination and fantasy. Magic realism merges realistic events with surrealistic dimensions, reflecting African-Americans' unconscious; for instance, the reincarnation in *Beloved* has greatly impacted the development of the narrative. Furthermore, *Beloved* has also been researched from a psychoanalytical point of view to depict the traumatic psyche of African-American women. Murphy (2005) examines the exploration of violence and guilt in Morrison's *Beloved* by tackling Sethe's act of infanticide based on the Lacanian re-reading of Freud and Zizek's theories. While the current study is not psychoanalytical per se, it capitalises on the Lacanian theory drawing on the two linguistic processes of metaphor and metonymy based on Hiraga's model, interconnecting metaphor and iconicity.

Forsbery (2018) when researching the concept of possession, displacement and uncanny in Morrison's *Beloved* investigates the idea of unconsciousness in Morrison's characters and settings. He argues how Morrison exploits '124 Blue Stone', a place where African-American dwell, and the possessions of the character *Beloved* as a channel to communicate what is unspoken in the process of self-destruction. The researcher adds that 124 Blue Stone is addressed as a character while the ghost of *Beloved* refers to the unconsciousness of African-Americans. These are utilised to repress and displace the horrible elements in the times of slavery and provide an avenue to move forward after the treacherous events. The place *124 Blue Stone* and *Beloved* are used metaphorically by mapping metonymy unto the traumatic history of slavery. Nonetheless, it is observed that there is an analogy in the opinions of the three researchers Lei (2011), Forsbery (2018), and Murphy (2005) whose studies explore Morrison's

*Beloved* from psychoanalytical perspective. Their researches envision the psyche of African-American under the shadow of painful racism and slavery.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Morrison's characters attempt to free themselves from the social bondage and restrictions, set up by the White authority and Black patriarchy. There is also a conflict observed between the imaginary world, representing the utopian world of African-Americans and the realistic world, representing the painful experiences that set the tone of their living conditions. Furthermore, the painful experiences articulated in Morrison's works focus more on psychological violence. For instance, in *Beloved*, there is no physical persecution during the time of Mr Garner but the injustices and racism inflicted upon African-Americans remain strong psychologically.

### **2.2.3 Metaphors in Morrison's Selected Novels**

Morrison's novels contain an abundance of metaphorical expressions reflecting the essence of African-American sufferings. Far from representing the African-American Utopia, this painful experience is a coercive migration towards the West and an escape from persecution. Willis (2014) postulates that the metaphorical expressions in Morrison's works are not rooted in the nostalgia of the past since they are anchored in the grips of historical transition. Generally, Morrison uses metaphorical language to provide her readers with an insight into African-Americans lives and the transition they face at the socio-cultural and socio-economic levels. For instance, it is observed that the metaphorical elaboration reflects the impact of White racism and racialism on African-American people. Tyson (2006) argues that racialism is institutionalized racism; the biological and mental properties of the White s is superior to the people of colour.

While Morrison's fictions are not a product of authorial intervention in exploring socio-cultural and psychological fragmentation of Africans in America, they are portrayed metaphorically as images in the language (Willis, 2014). As demonstrated in Morrison's works, the concept of beauty is constructed as a social metaphor socially where Whiteness is superior, and Blackness is inferior. Consequently, the classification of beauty according to the White culture serves as a key factor that simultaneously degrades Black culture. In *The Bluest Eye*, the concept of beauty is envisioned as iconic via various metaphorical expressions as the descriptions internalise the complex issue concerning African-Americans. Jess (2017) research the decay of symbolic impotence in *The Bluest Eye* where she argues that the decay and loss of Pauline's teeth because of *candy* is metaphorically mapped onto the humiliation of African-Americans by White people represented by *candy*. The decay metaphorically suggests the lack of impotence in the life of the Breedlove family which can be metonymically attributed to African-Americans. The word *candy* represents the White persecutory system. Jess's work is significant for the current study since metaphors can be extracted as the main source of iconicity. Ruizhen, & Wencheng (2019) explore that conceptual metaphors in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* by theorising four main conceptual metaphors in the novel: 1) 'Life is four seasons' mapping the source domain 'life' and the target domain 'man' while the four-season represents man's cycle of life; 2) 'Black slave is a bird in a cage' where the bird is Claudia who is imprisoned socially; 3) 'Value is the doll' where the doll is the source domain while 'value' stands for the target domain – the doll has features Pecola desires such as blue eyes and blonde hair; 4) 'Death of hope is marigold' as the marigold represents the source domain and the death of hope represents target domain. The metaphorical manifestation of beauty and ugliness in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is prominent where the construction of textual form is cleverly done to

represent the content. These textual properties can be extended to include the iconic perspective in relation to the multi-layered meaning surrounding African-Americans.

In *Sula*, the metaphorical expressions of *death* and *love* are significant in delineating the circumstances of African-American people. These metaphors cannot be easily deciphered or decoded by the readers since the construction of metaphor may also be turning points in the novel. There are no limits in preventing readers from inferring metaphorical expressions since they are products of multi-semiotic systems. These kinds of metaphors provide profound insights into African-American issues such as emotions and relationships. The following extract metaphorically shows the ambiguous nature of Sula and Nel's future meeting: "*it would be ten years before they saw each other again and their meeting would be thick with birds*". While it may be difficult for readers to decode the metaphorical expressions '*their meeting would be thick with birds*', this metaphor provides a signal that predicts the upcoming events. In this case, metaphors are constructed to induce curiosity of what might happen next as a reaction towards racism and discrimination. Moreover, the metaphorical structure of *Sula* in deconstructing binary oppositions is a significant aspect due to the depth of ideas it produces. The notion of metaphorical expressions can be scrutinised from an iconic angle, bridging the gap that exists in previous studies where metaphor and iconicity are intertwined.

The metaphorical constructions of love and death in *Sula* heighten the complexity of the themes in the novel. For Morrison, the concept of love and death do not progress straightforwardly since they are built and destroyed in different dimensions and perspectives. In terms of whether death can destroy love, *Sula* eternalised love by death and is evident when Nel weeps over Sula's death. The use of love and death, in this case, provides an insight into the confusing ambiguity of female emotions and relationships

in the African-American community. Morrison refers to racial issues in this novel by exploring the depth of human nature, transcending the simple traditional ways of explicating racism. *Sula* cannot be completed from a single dimension prompting Morrison to use language, specifically metaphorical construction to achieve the intended meaning of the novel. The use of these metaphors inspires the current study to investigate it from the iconic angle by deconstructing the binary opposition (good/ evil; virtue/ vice) to encourage the transition in enabling the narrative.

Hutter's (2010) research investigates the morality of metaphor in Morrison's *Sula* discovering that Morrison does not tackle ethical stance in a direct moral manner. However, she reveals that the novel illustrates better through symbolic language. The metaphorical construction offers a broader insight into Morrison's style in *Sula* by bringing new insights to the old propositions. The researcher describes imagery and metaphor as reminders of the world's malice as well as an antidote to the nihilism that transpires from injustices and suffering. Furthermore, Talmantaite (2008) conducts a study concerning conceptual metaphors of death in Morrison's *Sula*. The researcher attempts to provide an insight into archetypal individual and collective cultural cognitive models, symbols and implicit attitudes. Additionally, the study also analysed the function of linguistic and conceptual metaphors related to death and love as text-generating devices in Morrison's narratives. These studies depict the complex nature of Morrison's textual structure that is worthy of exploring from the iconic dimension. This dissertation discusses metaphors and metonymies as cognitive processes besides explaining how metaphors and metonymies co-occur to produce iconic perspectives in Morrison's three novels.

The exploitation of the linguistic tools, metaphor and metonymy, can stimulate readers' imagination where Pambo and Diaye (2012) theorise that the textual

construction of Morrison's *Beloved* is not linked to the Saussurean concept of sign that is strongly founded on the arbitrary connection between code and the coded. In a broader sense, the signs used in *Beloved* text do not denote anything since they have designated rather denoted signification. Morris (1971) signs within the semiotic terms can be classified into two types: 1) designatum – when a sign designates something but does not necessarily denote anything, and 2) denotata – when a sign denotes an existing object. For instance, the use of unspeakable elements in Morrison's text like silences are instances of designatum because silences do not denote anything but are designated. While concepts of love, hate and racism are considered denotata because they refer to something in the world. Morris's concept of signification hints at the nature of signs used in Morrison's textual structure, internalising the notion of unspeakable. Pambo and Diaye (2012) argue that *Beloved* text produces sounds rather than words that metonymically become a source of disremembering. The signifier in Morrison's text is also incorporated in the process of metaphorication, making Morrison's writing unspeakable. Thus, in *Beloved*, the textual structure is formulated to stimulate the imagination and facilitate readers to fill the gaps of diminished African-American history. The exploration of Morrison's text from the iconic perspective is significant to understand better the lives of African-American lives by iconising her characters and their deeds. The revelation of these understandings occurs when language is structured effectively to motivate readers' imagination and fantasy. Morrison's textual structure does not merely consist of words in the traditional sense but also contains signs from various semiotic systems, adding much depth to her works.

The main feature of the spoken text is being transient and can be contrasted to written text as oral text ceases to exist once the speaker falls silent. Silence facilitates the filling of the gaps during the unspeakable times for African-Americans where

Morrison style can provide a better understanding when it comes to their cultural heritage (Ahmad, 2017). For instance, her texts contain many gaps and silences which are considered signifiers that represent African-American lives. Pambo and Diaye (2012) who studied the language of slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, theorizing that the language system of Morrison's text does not function according to Saussurean mode of representation. It is noticed that language viewed from non-binary relationship between signifier and signified (referent and object) which is one of the salient features of unspeakable form of language. Also, the two researchers clarify that language in Morrison's text is manifested in complete absence of signifier. They state, "the language of slavery writes unspeakable through a displacement of signified" (ibid: 52). In a broader sense, the lack of signifier turns slavery text into a text with quality of silent signified. The construction could take part in the process of metaphorization via metonymic relation that raises the association and/or commutative value of a linguistic sign. Thus, a lack, of signifier is the kind of language used by Morrison, which might help to convey a clearer message about the intricacies of African-American lives. Perhaps, this kind of text activates imagination and creates a clearer vision about African-American experiences under a racist community. Understanding the construction of Morrison's text can facilitate the investigation of her text from an iconic perspective.

The past literature discussed in this section considers the significant exploration of Morrison's themes on the African-American way of living under different eras of slavery from the pre-civil era in 1873 to the mid of 1960s. Morrison's selected novels have been discussed from poststructuralist, feminist and psychoanalytical angles but remain understudied when it comes to the iconic perspective. Previous studies show that Morrison's message uplifts the voice of African-Americans against racism and

slavery to establish their rights at social, cultural and economic levels. These messages/themes are realised through the remarkable use of language that adds to the uniqueness of Morrison's literary work. In this study, Morrison exploits the linguistic tools rather than the content of the novel as a means to unveil the hidden history of African-American lives. The depth of her themes is evidence of the effective formulation of her textual structure. Morrison uses various metaphorical expressions to reflect African-Americans' need for self-definition and justice from the socio-cultural and socio-economic perspectives. Thus, in analysing Morrison's text, the iconic dimensions must be thoroughly investigated by exploiting metaphorical expressions to gain a fuller interpretation of her works.

### **2.3 Contextualization of Selected Toni Morrison's Texts**

The section provides a contextual insight into Morrison's three selected novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*, delineating the various issues at the social, political, cultural, and economic levels which are reflected in Morrison's three novels. Furthermore, how Morrison's works gain fame in highlighting the Black subjection to White authority in her works will also be discussed in this section.

These novels contain Morrison's perspective concerning the social and political prejudice that exists within the society due to colour discrimination. Her literary works can be seen as an attempt to integrate African-Americans into American society by rejecting the persecutions exercised by the White authority. Each of these novels is constructed by the novelist to reflect the circumstances experienced by African-Americans where the novels employ the historical perspective in fighting the social persecution of African-Americans accompanied by economic servitude due to the lack of political power on their part.

### 2.3.1 The Importance of Civil War in Delineating African-American History

The Civil War took place in the year 1860 to 1861 between the United States and the American Southern States due to the expansion of slavery in the Western states. The Civil War has had an enormous effect on American literary production where authors make known the various issues concerning the lack of equity and imbalance in social, cultural and economic status triggered by racism. Casey (2016) mention that Civil War literature is exploited to measure the existing ideas during the era such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, to justify the war. The Civil War is a cornerstone of Morrison's literature that explores the circumstances of African-American lives throughout history. Pattnaik and Itishri (2018) argues that Morrison's novels shed light on the three-hundred-year-old injustices that breed in the American society manifested in the form of segregation, racial and sexual oppression. These literary works is an attempt to unveil the historical truth of African-Americans' persecution, revealing the torments they have to endure as they are tortured via methods such as whipping and being made disabled. These practices are exercised long before the Civil War. Turner (2014) mentioned that these practices are not the form of mistreatment practised on African-American plantations in the Antebellum South. White masters also commit extreme physical violence that leads to blindness and psychological trauma where many victims succumb to mental illness. When disfigured and disabled African-Americans are plenty, the White monsters then sell them to medical institutions.

Toni Morrison utilises the violence and traumas of the Civil War exercised against the African-American community as a central theme for her literary works as most of her characters are Black. One of the novels that draw on the history of the civil war in America, is *Beloved*, inspired by the real-life story of Margaret Garner who escaped slavery in Kentucky in pursuit of freedom. The novel is set after the era of the Civil War

in America (1861- 1865). During this period, the States of North America implemented a law imposing freedom to create a political balance while the Southern States were declared as the state for slaves. The enactment of the fugitive slave law allows White authorities to treat slaves as properties or objects, triggering the Civil War. For Morrison, the history may not be as effective in narrating the experience of Black victims.

Therefore, she uses literature to narrate history in a fictional manner to portray the sufferings of the Black community then. From stealing mother's milk to the killing and burning of African-Americans alive. Additionally, these stories hint at the importance of love, trust and kindness in facilitating African-American ancestors to endure the bitter life of slavery. Abdulrahman (2014) mentioned that in *Beloved*, Morrison aims at awakening the national awareness of the African-Americans in confronting their painful past as a way to transform their shame into pride, to heal the generational trauma, and establish strong will from their disability to move forward.

Nonetheless, the rediscovery of the African-American past is not a mere nostalgia but an attempt by the novelist to immortalise the valuable legacy for the next generation. Moreover, the three novels do not only focus on particular eras in which African-Americans were traumatised but also other times that reflect the effects of persecution and segregation on the Black community throughout history. Selenka (2011) argues that Morrison refers to the multi-faceted pain of a newly freed community from slavery and the anguish is a combination of experiences by the African Americans in the 1870s as well as in the racial setbacks of the 1980s.

### 2.3.2 The Impact of Slavery

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Africans are abducted by European slave traders to be sold as slaves in America and its colonies abroad. The nineteenth-century witnessed the massive migration of Africans to America to work in various fields such as agriculture, specifically, indigo and rice plantation and tobacco factories without any rights. The Civil War that occurred between the years 1861- 1865 in the Southern State of America is a reaction to the long-standing disagreement over the institution of slavery. Upon the clash between the citizens in the Northern and Southern states in America, a new US constitution is introduced acknowledging slavery as an institution, where a slave is considered an individual but White Americans can possess a slave for the sake of service and labour. In North America, the law of slavery was completely abolished causing an economic crisis in the South since slaves are required to revive the cotton plantations, making the law of slavery vital in the South. Slaves are dependent on their owners in every living aspect as their masters have full control over them culturally, socially and economically. Slaves are often prevented from getting an education, having a family and owning any property to ensure that they remain obedient workers. Morrison uses history as a cornerstone to uncover the subjugation of African-Americans despite the introduction of the constitutional law in 1865. Pattnaik and Itishri (2018) mention that Morrison recognises that the reality is vague and the truth is nearly impossible to apprehend because although the Emancipation Law (1863) provides freedom to slaves and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1865) banned bonded labour, the Blacks were already marginalised and segregated and continue to suffer the repercussions of this trauma.

In Morrison's *Beloved*, the crisis of African-Americans in the South is being discussed where she attempts to eliminate the memories of slavery among African-

Americans, leading them to freedom and emancipation based on the real stories of their ancestors. Abdulrahman (2014) states that *Beloved* is an attempt to give a voice to those who died without a voice. The novel revives the painful history in which Morrison utilises her approach to seek and portray empowerment in times of fear and to highlight the ultimate self-emancipation from slavery. *Beloved* story is a history presented in fictional manner in order to be an effective icon for coming generations to ensure the drudgery of African-Americans during the era of slavery. Shahrezaee and Zahra (2014) mention that in *Beloved*, Morrison deals with various issues such as victimization, racial discrimination, motherhood, as well as the psychological and emotional crisis of African Americans in a community dominated by the White.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison sheds light on the vulnerability of African-American females during the racial crisis of the 1960s where women struggle to negotiate their identity amid their emancipation from slavery. The novel explores the impact of racism in terms of the bondage of White dominance and the restraints of the Black community that acts as a stumbling block for women to obtain freedom and independence. The protagonist of the novel 'Pecola' represents the African-American women who have suffered from racism and patriarchy. Khati (2020) argues that the plight of 'Pecola' can be observed as the consequence of the terrible racism and interracial conflicts. Moreover, Morrison also attempts to deliver African- American feelings toward the status quo. While there is some sort of similarity between Morrison's fiction and her real life, her works are not autobiographical, making her fictional works unique. Rigney (1991) states that Morrison's narrators are most often unidentifiable that act as vehicles to transmit information and convey emotion rather than to provide moral interpretations or represent a personality. Thus, the construction of Morrison's character is never meant

to dehumanise the White authority but to represent the voices of the African-American society, in particular, its most vulnerable members, the 'female'.

### 2.3.3 African- American Status in the Great Depression

The Great Depression occurred in 1929 when the American economy was faced with an economic collapse with the crashing of the stock market resulting in the shutdown and bankruptcy of various factories and financial institutions. These changes in the American economy pose negative consequences on African Americans as it deepens the racial conflicts and wounds in the rural areas and the migration to California as described in Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 1939).

Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* is set in the economic history of the United States in the 1930s and 1940s up till the year 1965 where the timeline of the novel ends. The beginning of the novel in the 1930s is significant because this period is after the Great Depression where African- Americans were only beginning to gain economic independence, as reflected by one of Morrison's characters. Additionally, the 1940s saw the mass migration of African-Americans to cities where they were recruited as army personnel. Willis (2014) mention that Morrison's *Sula* expands the 1940s by making flashbacks to WWI when African-Americans were incorporated into the capitalist system as soldiers, enhancing the economic aspect of many Africans in America. For instance, the character 'Nel' gains some prosperity during this period while Sula remains under segregation living in squalid conditions. Morrison uses one of her characters, Shadrack, to metaphorically refer to the Blacks who serve in the American Army to gain political independence but fail to do so. Abbas (2008) argues that Morrison also depicted National Suicide Day metaphorically, simulating real events that took place during WWI where about 350 African Americans who served in the war were denied

their rights. Shadrack's idea of suicide indicates the futile efforts of African-Americans to escape from political slavery and to gain independence socially, economically and politically. Rigney (1991) mention that Shadrack's perspective focuses on marginalisation as well as the male-centred African-American community, encompassing the injustices towards both men and women. *Sula* is an example illustrating the manifestation of societal, economic and political failures in protecting the welfare of Africans in America.

#### **2.4 The Concept of Semiotics in Literary Text**

This section contextualizes the relationship between literature and iconic notes since the symbols in literature is not merely for aesthetic purposes but are also considered signifiers that can be more generic than symbols. In Chapter Three, the expression signifier will be observed as more inclined and invested in Lacan's theory, proving the notion that the galaxy of signifiers in literary language consists of two very distinct linguistics processes: metaphor and metonymy which are exploited as tools to achieve the objectives of the study. It is important to discuss the term semiotics briefly before understanding the notion of iconicity.

Semiotics refers to how communication systems work as a system be it written or spoken. It concerns the process of sign signification as studied by its prominent pioneers De Saussure (1966) and Charles Peirce. Semiotics studies the sign as elements of the signifying system where Morris (1971) classifies semiotics into three sub-fields: the first is syntactic elaborating on how signs are combined to constitute a compound sign, the second is semantic which studies the signification of signs, and the third is pragmatic addressing the effect that signs bring. Signs are observed to have an essential effect on social and cultural patterns as theorised by Morris (1946) who defines the sign as a

stimulus to responses of behavioural patterns. Therefore, a sign is a stimulus for an interpreter to initiate a response or consecutive responses within a social setting. There is an intrinsic significant relationship between semiotics and communication because both aspects deal with symbols in terms of verbal or non-verbal communication as well as meaning and process of codification (Pearson, 2008). Semiotics is concerned with the sign phenomena while communication deals with the cultural manifestation of the sign. Yakin and Totu (2014) explain that both semiotic and communication exists on a continuum, and can be deemed as a support apparatus towards a big umbrella, i.e. social culture. Halliday and Hasan (1989) define semiotic as a study of sign systems as the sign exists when it is recognised as a signifier by all members of the linguistic community (Noth, 1990, p. 104). It is concerned with the signalling system and also the exploration of the communication process in a language in which meaning can be obtained through the structure. It concerns how the sign system functions in a community and the relationship between signs and the things to which they are referred. Furthermore, signs are considered as a communicative instrument and can be classified into verbal and non-verbal where the former is expressed as a combination of sounds organised according to certain rules enacted by phonologists whilst the latter is expressed paralinguistically through motions and gestures. Peirce defines it as "something which stands to somebody for something in the same respect or capacity" (Buchler, 1958). It is thought that signs are connections between the mind of a person and the objects around them.

A sign consists of *signifiers* used as referents whilst *signified* are objects in the world in which Tyson (2006) elaborates as  $signs = signifier + signified$ , defining semiotics. People use signs to refer to various things around them and to make sense of the world since every meaning-making practice makes use of two elements: a signifier

and a signified (Kramsch, 1998, p. 15). The relationship between signifier and signified range from natural to arbitrary depending on the context in which a sign is employed.

#### **2.4.1 The Greimas Model of Semiotics in Literature**

Greimas developed the model of the semiotic square for narrative as depicted in Figure 2.1. This model provides an interpretational insight into literary text by analysing the relationships between the signifiers, adopting a slightly different route in explaining the language system. In the square, *S* stands for signifier or concept while the visual manifestation of the square illustrate the vertical relationship between *S1* and *S2*; and a horizontal relationship between *S* and *- S*. Therefore, the square explains the overlapping of several semantic levels. The relationships postulated in the square can be exploited in literary works, supporting the notion that the meanings embedded in these relationships are not present solely in the signifier. Lacan states, "no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to another meaning" (as cited in Lodge & Nigel, 1988, p.188).



sign formation (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 25). Instead, the term of arbitrariness from the Saussurean theory is interpreted by Greimas's square from a contemporary perspective where he expresses that the sign itself has an arbitrary nature with other signs but do not possess an arbitrary relationship with what they are referred to.

Hence, semiotics does not only concern the signification processes in ordinary language, but also what is called literary semiotics concerning the signification processes in a literary context. *Dictionary of stylistics* states that "...*literary semiotics* studies the verbal signs of literary texts as systems in their own right..." (Wales, 2011, p. 380). The proposed square is thereby strategies for analysing textual narratives. Additionally, the *Dictionary of Stylistics* describes Greimas's semiotic square as "one of his concerns is to develop a complex semantic model of the narrative structure with a deep as well as surface-level involving semantic features or semes" (Wales, 1989, p. 417). Thus, in light of what is discussed above, the study contributed to analysing Morrison's selected texts as a semiotic system rather than a communicative system in the traditional sense. By analysing Morrison's text within the semiotic field, multi-levelled meanings or messages can be identified. These meanings are considered property of iconic text. Thus, the study of literary text from the semiotic point of view is significant in understanding the concept of iconicity

## **2.5 The Non-Arbitrary Nature of Signs**

Structuralism assumes that the type of relationship between signifier and signified is unnatural but arbitrary. From a traditional perspective, this means that when a speaker refers to things in the world, there is no similarity between the referent and object – "There is no necessary connection between a given sound-image and the concept to which it refers" (Tyson, 2006, p. 214). However, this quality of language is quickly

ignored when authors and literary writers use language to convey their messages. The linguistic values are observed to have solid connections with their social referents. The work, *Language with an Attitude* elaborates, "...since linguists know, however, that linguistic details have no values of their own (in spite of the "life" they seem to achieve by the virtue of their social associations)..." (Preston, 2007). Another study discovers that the type of relationship between signified and signifier is determined by cultural conventions where signification is subjective depending on the cultural systems and differs according to culture and language (Veen, 2015).

In some contexts, language may not refer to the world around us. However, it reflects the complex feeling we experience about the world in which we live. For modernist writers, the form of language has become a core element to be experimented and experienced with in the process of stimulating the reading experience (Thornborrow & Shan, 1998, p. 170). In literary texts, language is utilised to illustrate the relationship between the signifier and the signified. This relationship is influenced by various factors such as feelings, emotions, beliefs, the way of conceptualising the world, and the unconscious mind. In this sense, "Words have become interwoven with the social and cultural texture of people's lives. Some native speakers feel that language has non-arbitrary nature" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 21).

For modern writers, language should be explored from the perspective of arbitrariness where images and their playfulness can offer new forms of expressions and identity, making the conventional writing style exhaustive (Bradbury, 1992). When people communicate verbally, they express their basic needs alongside their emotions, memories and their desire, all of which contributed to the motivated nature of signs. This nature of signs can be stimulated socially and culturally because they can suggest similarities between the signifier and the signified, leading to a more natural relationship

between the referent and the object instead of arbitrary. "Todorov defines the symbol as a motivated sign. At the same time, he points out that the Saussurean symbol is an icon in the terminology of Peirce" (As cited in Noth, 1990, p. 118) as seen in the following excerpt: "*They make a hill. A hill of Black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her*" (Morrison, 1970, p. 309). This excerpt of text is from Chapter Twenty-Seven which tells of Paul D's decision to stay with Sethe for good, remembering their history and learning from their past simultaneously creating the sense of a better future for the next generation of African Americans. This text does not communicate Paul D's decision in a traditional sense which will be elaborated on later in the analyses chapters alongside how signifiers are employed in literary context to suggest social and cultural implications in Morrison's three novels.

## **2.6 Iconicity as a General Concept**

Iconicity refers to the non-conventional way of using a language where meaning is often distilled by resemblance and not conventions. It is largely dependent on how a writer employs language to convey a message via language. Preston (2007) states that the presumed social attributes of a group are also transferred to the associated linguistic features. In the iconic text, the writers utilise linguistic elements in a complex manner, leading to new construction of the text structure to convey specific social and cultural meanings. Lande (2013) expresses iconicity as "new and complex ideas or old ideas by new means". In the significant work that developed the studies of iconicity in literary texts, *Words the Most Like Things: Iconicity and the Rhetorical Text*, language is shown to be invested in literary works in the attempt to gain the principle or maxims of

iconicity. The term icon is specifically defined as "...according to semiotic theory, is a sign that has non-arbitrary relation to what it represents" (Leff & Sachs, 1990:, p. 258).

In the context of literature, different worlds are created out of languages where it is the product of a writer's imitation, following Aristotle's concept of imitation or '*mimesis*' which suggests that writing literature is also a mode of imitation. In this sense, whilst the *content* of literature is important, it can be mediated by the manner of its imitation or representation (Dutton, 1984, p. 21), magnifying our imagination and establishing our moral and social responsibilities. The research *Mimesis and the imaginable other* mentions that mimesis functions as an invention in its original sense of the term where *inver* means both to discover and create (O'Hara, 2009). Iconicity was discussed when Aristotle first introduced the principle of mimesis, indicating that the notion of imitation shapes the development of iconicity (Noth, 1990, p. 124). Within a language system, iconicity is observed when a sign imitates another sign and when a sign imitates an object outside the language. There are two principles of miming in language namely, form miming form and form miming meaning (Fischer & Nanny, 2001, p. 22). More specifically, iconicity can be achieved at multiple levels. Firstly, on the semantic level where form suggests meaning rather than content. Secondly, on the onomatopoeic level which is often exploited as an expressive iconic device. Thirdly, on the tone level where the tone of a sentence is enacted as representational content. This third notion is supported by Lande (2013) who argues that a source of iconicity is when there is phonetic motivation or sameness between form and meaning. Fourthly, on the syntactic level in which iconicity is achieved through chronological and psychological sequencing and juxtaposition. Therefore, iconicity in literary texts is observed as a product of analogy between form (word or syntactic levels) and meaning.

Onomatopoeia is the perceived sameness between form and meaning on auditory and visual levels i.e. a word sound suggests its meaning. In the *Dictionary of Stylistics*, onomatopoeia is defined as "the lexical process of creating words which actually sounds like their referent, e.g. *bang; crash.*". This level of iconicity is not a feature that is relevant to the current study since it has been dismissed as marginal if not trivial when it comes to the arbitrariness of language as a whole (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 234). Additionally, at this level, imitation is not only restricted to how words sound but also involves manipulating language structure at the word level, a process known as phonetic iconicity or phonaesthesia. This term is defined in the *Dictionary of Stylistics* as "the study of the expressiveness of sounds, particularly those sounds which are felt to be appropriate to the meaning of their lexemes" (Wales, 2011, p. 316).

On the other hand, semantic iconicity can be articulated when words are chosen to socially motivate or when there is a direct relationship between signified and signifier in a sound. Phonetic and semantic iconicity are only suggestive of meanings in the presence of a suitable semantic stimulus, "the sounds evoke rather than represent its meaning" (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 234). Leech and Short (1981) argue that the nature of literature exploits iconic possibilities to highlight the associations between form and meaning which are ordinarily dormant (ibid). The following extract shows how language is used to convey an iconic note: "*They took my milk and saw it and didn't come down*" (Morrison, 1987). The text contains metaphorical expressions and metonymic relations which suggest iconic note. In the following chapters, the selection and combination of words are seen to affect the creation of a text with iconic perspectives.

Juxtaposition is yet another process that may generate iconicity. It refers to the links between the constituents of the text at the semantic and syntactic levels. Leech and

Short (1981) states that juxtaposition may conjure an impression of closeness or connectedness in time besides offering psychological and locative relatedness in the fiction. In the following example, "*He could feel both Sethe and Denver pulling in, holding their stomach muscles, sending out sticky spiderwebs to touch one another*" (Morrison, 1987), the principle of juxtaposition is manifested by connecting *holding their stomach* and *sending out spiderwebs*. The ambiguous structure is significant for readers to create an associative connection. The construction of the text is a product of connectedness between semantic arrangement and the syntactic makeup of its constituents which the current research will focus on as one of the sources of iconicity.

It is important to note that iconicity in literature is not depicted by the virtue of resemblance as found at the onomatopoeic level where a sound suggests the meaning of the referent. Rather iconicity is when a word gains an iconic note after being cognitively processed in a certain culture in association with a set of beliefs or ideas. Muller and Fischer (2003) strongly argue that perceived iconicity is not an objective likeness between a referent and a linguistic form, but a mentally construed correspondence between two cognitive products

Following this, meaning in literary texts is then a product of both presentation and representation whereby literary expressions tend to have both, a presentational function directed towards the reader's role as a decoder and a representational function miming the meaning that it expresses (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 233). Peirce identifies three types of signs: icon, index and symbol where these three categories are interchangeable since symbols can also be icons or indexes (As cited in Hiraga, 2005). Peirce further elaborates that the iconisation process of a symbol involves the shift of attention from the symbolic meaning of the linguistic sign to considering the iconic meaning as linguistic properties of the sign (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 26). This process depends

on the reader who interprets the literary text as perceiving iconic features in language and literature depends on the readers' ability in connecting meaning with its formal expression (ibid). Thus, iconicity is a rhetorical device used in both non-literary and literary texts, which can be classified as an important principle in language. This feature adds to the aesthetics of literary works and widens the interpretational dimension, creating an effect on the reader.

## **2.7 Iconicity: A Brief Background and its Implications**

Toni Morrison's semiotic use in her novels may reflect the unconscious desire to live like the White community. This intent is clear when Morrison uses language that is outside the Western cultural tradition. Her style subverts the concept of textual unity and defies totalised interpretation (Rigney, 1991). This study focuses on one of the many aspects of textual rhetorics namely iconicity in Morrison's fiction. In contrast with the traditional perspective of structuralism, iconicity is a phenomenon in language that occurs when there is a sense of sameness between referent and the object. Thus, iconicity is a principle and not a rule, because there are always exceptions to its operation (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 235).

According to the traditional view of modern linguistics, language itself is not iconic, supporting the Saussurean concept of the concrete relationship between the concept and the referent. In a broader sense, the relationship between sign and object is conventionally characterised as arbitrary. "The relationship between signifier and signified, Saussure observed, is arbitrary" (Tyson, 2006, p. 213). However, ordinary language use differs vastly from literary language use. The former utilises language as a tool to refer to the world. For instance, it is used to communicate needs as well as to express feelings and desires literally where signs are utilised for social connection.

However, they do not take part in stimulating complex emotions by producing sophisticated ideas. The *Dictionary of Stylistics* describes the nature of human language as "... symbols, with the relation between sign and object determined by convention, are unmotivated, i.e. arbitrariness. On the other hand, literary language differs from ordinary language due to the construction of its structure as it informs us of complex feelings and emotions via sophisticated ideas. Here, the concept of arbitrariness is interpreted differently in a more complicated way. Palmer (1981) argues that in language, both signs and messages represent the signifier and signified respectively where the relationship between both concepts is of greater complexity than the concepts themselves. For this reason, arbitrariness is not the only quality of ordinary language but also the quality of literariness. The arbitrariness in the non-traditional sense can be seen as the primary ingredient in stimulating complex emotions and experiences on the part of the readers through the relationship between concepts and their meanings. Literary language is often thought to be motivated when it presents various kinds of actions, characters and settings by imitating the real world albeit not referring to it directly. The *Dictionary of Stylistics* defines motivation as "the sense of relationship deliberately suggested or actively perceived between sign and referent is particularly striking in literary language" (Wales, 2011, p. 278). In light of the above discussion, literary language can be said to be motivated due to the complex connectedness between form and expression, suggesting mental similarities between these two.

The motivation of these signs is strengthened when humans desire to communicate needs that are bound by cultural and social needs. Sign-making and sign-interpreting practices are often motivated by the need and desire of the language users to influence people (Kramsch, 1998, p. 21). Iconic language adds to the aesthetic dimensions of the literary text by enhancing the artistic appeal allowing the readers to

potentially identify themselves with the somewhat odd world (Lande, 2013). Thus, we can conclude that iconicity is not only used as a means of communication which is what iconic originally refers to, but also as linguistic signs where, in literary texts, these symbolic signs are transformed into iconic ones when both iconic and indexical dimensions function simultaneously. These dimensions must require reconstruction on the part of the readers who must use both memory and imagination to properly comprehend the conceptual content and relationships (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 384).

Therefore, signs are said to be iconic when a structure imitates different ways of reality in literature. They are never exclusively iconic, indexical, or symbolic but are the uniting features of all three classes (ibid). In literary text, signs do not only present meaning but they can also represent various meaning due to the properties of mimesis that literary texts have. Putting it differently, in literature, signs do not communicate needs and feelings in the literal sense but they describe them to communicate complex emotions and ideas via imitating the world around us. The following extract from Morrison's famous novels *Beloved* shows how language is being utilised by the novelist to express certain facts about the people of her race. In the extract, she conveys certain feelings by creating an image for the readers from a linguistic perspective, urging the reader to use his imagination based on linguistic reality.

*Come on come on you may as well just come on" The sideboard took a step forward but nothing else did. "Grundma Baby must be stopping it," said Denvor. She was ten and still mad at Baby Suggs for dying Sethe opened her eyes. "I doubt that," she said " Then why don't it come? (Morrison, 1987).*

For Peircean, there are three types of iconic signs in semiotics: images, diagrams, and metaphors which lead to three ways in which text can be iconised: 1) identification and recognition of elements represented in the text i.e. imaginative iconisation, 2) diagrammatic structuration i.e. structuring of what is represented as a network of relationships and 3) constructing the relationships between related and the universe represented in the text to other conceptual structures i.e. allegorisation (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 385). These three ways serve as aspects of motivation via suggested sameness between form and concept.

From this perspective, iconicity is not only the product of apparent resemblance between the referent and the object experienced by the reader or the hearer (e.g., onomatopoeia when a sound of a word suggests its meaning). Iconicity may also be achieved when there is an analogy between the lexical and syntactical structure alongside the meaning expressed in the structure. The similarity of many icons is not purely based on the similarity in the ordinary sense of the word where the sound of a word imitates its meaning. It is also the similarity of a product of the analogous sensations in the mind (Noth, 1990). In *imaginative iconization*, the writer exploits the interrelations between semiotic signs to conjure imaginary forces such as memories and fantasies in the mind of the reader that exists base on his/her emotional experiences. This process is achieved when there is a sort of natural relationship between signs and expressions. In *diagrammatic structuration*, the abstract relationships between the constituents of the text are similar to the ones found in algebraic equations as elaborated in "the text as an algebraic structure, albeit a very peculiar kind of algebra" (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 392). This kind of iconicity is achieved when there is parallelism between two or more structures suggesting similarities between structures as their meanings since iconicity includes the similarity between abstract relations or structural

homologies where many icons also participate in other modes of semiosis (Noth, 1990, p. 122). The current study attempts to highlight the importance of indexical and symbolic specifications in the interpretation of iconicity. By doing so, the concept of iconicity can be demonstrated via language as a paradigm that represents the arbitrariness of the signifier-signified dichotomy.

The modern movement in literature refutes the notion of the arbitrary nature of signs that has created a shift in styles of literary productions since they believe that words are interwoven with the social fabric of people's lives. Thus, from the perspective of the users, words are motivated and culturally bound and language is said to have no specific meaning. For modern critics, "objects have started to lose their fixity and become icons" (Bradbury, 1992, p. 218). Hence, on this basis, it is significant to explore literary language from an iconic perspective due to its motivating nature.

Inspired by the non-traditional psychoanalytical view that depends heavily on Freudian's statement "the literary work as analogous to a dream, and the author's as a patient's neurosis" (As cited in Lodge & Nigel, 1988, p. 52), literary works are considered to be products of the unconscious. In this context, language does not refer to the outer world, but an inner world because it is a product of unconscious. Within the literary context, readers cannot just refer to the meanings illustrated at the symbolic level because the text requires interpretation in which meaning can be distilled in connection to what is seen as being connected or less connected to reality. Literary language is constructed out of two linguistic very processes, manifested in the unconscious as two psychic processes 'displacement' and 'repression'. The former is expressed as *Metonymy* and the latter as *Metaphor*. Metaphor is formed when there is an analogy between two concepts from different semantic fields while metonymy is constructed between two forms belonging to the same domain or semantic field. Lacan

states "... it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning 'insist' but that none of its elements 'consists'..." (ibid) where the signifieds slide continuously under a signifier. A signifier may have multiple meanings due to its connection with several signifieds where meaning is not a result of the binary relationship between the signifier and signified, but where a signifier can refer to many signifieds. This relationship extends beyond arbitrariness to create complex feelings and emotions via sophisticated ideas. An extract from Morrison's *Sula* shows how signifiers are employed as metaphors and metonymies. The extract presents the signifiers, such as *girl*, *cry* and *circles of sorrow*, serving as metaphors and metonyms that can be explored in terms of how they function in the analysis.

*We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girl girl girl." It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow (Morrison, 1973).*

The emergence of pragmatic studies of language in the 1970s shifted the way critics respond to the text by proposing that meaning in the process of textual formation does not exist in the words but in the context, tone and structure. This proposal prompted the emergence of a new kind of text, namely the writerly text which characterises the modernist and postmodernist texts. The meanings in such kinds of text are difficult to decipher compared to readerly text. Writerly text makes the meaning-making process more difficult for readers since there is from a range of different possibilities, undermining the 'naturalness' of the text" (Thornborrow & Shan, 1998, p. 149). The structure of writerly text consists of signifier groups with meanings hovering over them.

## 2.8 Iconicity in Literature

As discussed earlier, literary language differs from ordinary language since the former adheres to the principles of imitation in which the time of fiction resembles the time of reality where the fiction world is not a real world but shares a relationship with it. The *Dictionary of Stylistics* states that "most of our everyday speech and writing is anchored in a discourse world orientated towards the real world as a frame of reference" (Wales, 2011, p. 439). For this reason, literature is heavily founded on figurative language through rhetorical figures. Metaphor and metonymy are considered common rhetorical components. The current study capitalises on the modern perspective of rhetoric in which metaphor and metonymy are considered as signs belonging to various semiotic systems rather than being described as mere tropes. The *Dictionary of Stylistics* defines modern rhetoric as "the principles of information structure and 'signalling' strategies" (Wales, 1989, p. 407). On the other hand, Leff and Sachs (1990) describe modern rhetoric as "...a complex structure of meaning by imbricating the formal and ideational dimension of language". The juxtaposition between the form and the representational content can depict the principle of language recognised as 'iconicity'.

Iconicity is depicted by the writer who manipulates semantic conceptualization as linguistic iconicity influences the formation of semantic network relations (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 37). Secondly, iconicity is also achieved by manipulating syntactic relations whereby "the syntactic relations between words characteristically imitate relations between objects and events for which words signify" (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 234). The model of iconicity is selected according to the sameness between form and meaning and is achieved mentally by mapping the structure of form and meaning. Thus, in literary language, the similarity between form and object is utilised to create a new

process of reading literary text. As mentioned earlier, literary texts can be iconised via three methods:

### **2.8.1 Imaginative Iconisation**

In this case, iconicity is achieved when a writer conjures an image out of language where these images are then compared with different signifiers. In semiotics, images are signs that share certain qualities with objects. The *Dictionary of Stylistics* argues that "literary images, whether in prose or poetry, are not simply decorative, but serve, for example, to de-familiarize: to reveal aspects of experience in a new light, or to reinforce the theme, setting or characterization" (Wales, 2011, p. 215). In imaginative iconicity, the signifier represents the signified on the visual level alongside different qualities. Images, in the technical sense, are not confined to visual representations since they include representations of all other qualities (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 380). Imaginative iconicity deals with the perception of the reader and can be achieved when iconised text draws on the emotions of readers through texts that are utilised to imitate various situations of life. When a writer exploits language, he creates a direct relationship between the signifier and the signified where these signs then become motivated through the phonetic representation or phonemic combination. This representation/ combination suggests meaning or the structure of the form creating a concrete image for the readers. Morrison demonstrates this when she uses capital letters to create a kind of analogy which will be discussed later.

### **2.8.2 Diagrammatic Iconisation**

Apart from the concrete similarities between form and simple qualities of objects, iconisation can also be achieved when there is an abstract relationship between the

structure of form and the structure of the object. In other words, diagrammatic iconicity concerns the analogy between textual form and its meaning. Fischer and Nanny (1997) theorize that diagrammatisation is abstract, systematic, and encompasses the totality of the text that affects the different relationships of different parts of the text. Diagrammatic iconicity is significant for readers who are concerned with keeping track of the abstract semantic attributes of the textual elements rather than the realisation of the images. In a broader sense, the analogy between form and meaning is not substantially concrete but can comply with certain conventions, for instance, parallelism (Hiraga, 2005). Even if signification presupposes the possibility of intersemiotic translation, the different sign systems of human communication especially in language may have relative autonomy where understanding is possible without any conscious translation into other sign systems, e.g., from symbolic into iconic signs. During conversations or when reading, we do not translate every single part of the text into still or moving pictures but still manage to understand the text. It is difficult to consciously activate every semiotic connection that exists in the mind to make sense of a text. Hiraga (2005) theorises those diagrams are more abstract than images because they are abstract structures that make meaning via the aid of certain conventions rather than sensory perspective.

The incorporation of different relations and transformations on a semiotic level can create iconicity where one of the ways, according to Muller and Fischer (2003) is achieved by conjuring several images in the mind of the speaker to create diagrammatic relations that can be found when textual relation resembles sequential relations of events. In the chapters of analysis, we will observe that Morrison's *Sula* demonstrates how language is utilised on an abstract level. It entails the diagrammatic relations of

textual components suggesting the analogy between abstract textual structure and the meaning.

### 2.8.3 Metaphoric Iconisation

The metaphor is a language process in which a reader discovers the similarity between two or more dissimilar attributes constructed for rhetorical purposes. The *Dictionary of Stylistics* defines metaphor as "...a device usually to make sense of relatively complex, abstract or unfamiliar experiences in terms of more familiar ones". Peirce offers a more complicated definition where metaphor is described as "a relation between two signs in which the representative character of the former is expressed through, and by the virtue, of the latter" (Muller & Fischer, 2003, p. 383). Metaphor is a form of iconicity because of the sameness that induces causes motivation making metaphor motivated while its literal expression remains arbitrary. The cause of motivation is the sense of sameness or similarity between these two contents (Noth, 1990, p. 130). The work entitled *The Use of Metaphor in Morrison's Beloved* states that "Morrison employs the image of water and the power it possesses metaphorically to explore the mental and personal experience of Black people as well as unfold the Black history" (Chen & Wang, 2014, p. 93). Additionally, Daniel (2009) who produced the influential work *Ghost Metaphor in Morrison's Beloved* argues that the novel uses the substantiating impulse inherent to both the speaker and metaphor to reclaim the immense absence and the loss associated with the history of slavery.

Metaphoric iconicity is different from imagic and diagrammatic iconicity as it combines different representational signs from different semantic fields. Generally, metaphor and iconicity go hand in hand in the rhetorics of the text. Hiraga as cited in Muller and Ficher (2003) explains the dynamic interplay of metaphor and iconicity via

two perspectives: (1) iconicity manifested as image-schema in metaphor, (2) metaphor providing an iconic interpretation to form (ibid). Thus, metaphoric iconicity provides a basis in conceptualising abstract ideas because it familiarises unfamiliar experiences. Iconicity is theorised to not only achieve onomatopoeic phonaesthesia or sound symbolism levels but also through the entwining of metaphor or metonymy. Iconicity can be the product of the cognitive theory of language that extends beyond these forms of motivation. Mariera and Evans (2018) argue that the communication function of human language is more complicated than proposed because it is multifunctional and involves communication, cultural integration and social cohesion. The researchers add that in language, a name does not have an arbitrary relationship to what it refers to but has a psychological form leading to motivation. In a broader sense, motivation is observed as a product that maps what is virtually perceived in non-verbal language to meaning where there is a common ground or shared knowledge about the world. While metaphor or literal meaning alone is not adequate to achieve cultural integration and societal coherence, these can be gained within the field of pragmatics. Totomir (2003) notes that iconic meaning is not a product of denotative level but a result of the pragmatic effect. Hence, the current study capitalises on the two processes, namely metaphor and metonymy on the cognitive level to discuss the iconicity of literary text.

Metaphor and metonymy can be observed as the main elements in the construction of literary texts where they are not mere language processes, but they participate in constructing cultural and social aspects, influencing how society views the world. Both metaphor and metonymy result from the analogy between two forms or concepts. The analogy between two concepts or forms may suggest analogy or similarity between concepts and meanings which is the key attributes of the three intermingling types of iconicities: imagic, diagrammatic and metaphoric.