



African folkloric elements in Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's Trilogy

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Abstract:

This paper examines the utilization of African folkloric elements in Toni Morrison's Trilogy and Alice Walker's Trilogy, exploring how these elements contribute to the portrayal of African American culture, identity, and heritage. Through a comparative analysis, the study investigates the ways in which Morrison and Walker integrate folktales, myths, spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices into their narratives to convey themes of resilience, resistance, and cultural continuity. Drawing on close textual analysis and theoretical frameworks such as post colonialism and Afro futurism, the paper examines the significance of African folkloric elements in bridging the past and present, reclaiming cultural heritage, and fostering dialogue about the legacies of oppression. By shedding light on the complex interplay between literature, folklore, and cultural memory, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the enduring impact of African storytelling traditions on contemporary literature and identity formation.

Keyword: African Folklore, American culture, identity, heritage, literature, comparative analysis.

Introduction

In the novels, African folklore is highlighted in the literature context and then analyzed in relation with the development of African American identity. According to Anand Prahlad, the study of folklore is omitted from African American literary criticism. The second reason is the socioeconomic conditions that was endured the African American people. Folklore is criticized in many ways and defined accordingly until it has severely noticed by the critics to be acknowledged. Folklore is widely spread among categories like myths, music, short stories and is constantly connected with identity of African American people. Richard Bouman defines the folklore as ‘a function of shared identity. Which means common factors can be shared. Folklore makes the identity reveals through specified generations. Therefore he states that the folklores does have a connection between a person’s identity. Theorists stated that the folklores can be shared among the groups it can also be related with gender, class and religion. Black American folk spirituality has a strong influence on the book. Mixed African American spiritual and cultural components can be seen in Celie's trip, her relationship to the land, and her discussions with God. To help them overcome their problems, the characters resort to spirituality and folk cures that have been passed down through the ages.

Ancestral ties and the significance of knowing one's origins are highly valued. Shug Avery encourages Celie to question and confront the conventional religious doctrines she was taught, which helps her connect with her ancestors. African American folklore frequently explores this idea of exploring one's roots and heritage. The story is intimate and is based in the custom of passing down tales down the centuries as the characters use letters to tell each other about their lives. Purple as portrayed gives symbolic reference to ancestral connections. This roots to the Cellie's character which resonates with the history that makes folkloric elements filling the story. While she endure the pain of being alone in between the racism, abuses she represents herself with the identity of a girl becoming strong with each of torturing moments in her life. It is all because of her strong Afrcan heritage she has in her blood.

The color thus became a dominant element in the novel. It shows how convincing the characters to the readers that they represent the notion of royalty and spirituality. Author tries to impose the color ‘Purple’ as a most important element that is connected with the folklore. IT shows the African background is rich with cultural materials and

bodies which makes them not to bow in front of whites even one's in their life in as Afro Americans. The characters represent the most transformative elements brought up by Alice Walker in the novel. Names have important spiritual and cultural connotations in many cultures, including African American customs. Celie underwent a change in identity and self-perception as she changed into Celie Olivia. To emphasize Olivia's newly discovered strength and agency, "Olivia" may represent a rebirth or renewal. Folklore and cultural traditions are fundamental to the process of naming objects symbolic of symbolic meaning; names are frequently indicative of individual experiences, goals, or even ancestry. Folk wisdom and herbal treatments are frequently relied upon by the novel's characters for healing. This mythical link between healing and nature is best embodied by Shug Avery. Herbal medicine and other natural medicines are used to emphasize the importance of traditional knowledge that has been passed down through the centuries and to show a cultural continuity with ancestral customs. Shug Avery is a character in "The Color Purple" who is closely associated with nature, spirituality, and customs. She is a metaphorical representation of many folkloric themes. Her function in the book extends beyond that of a typical character; instead, she serves as a conduit for the ideas of empowerment, cultural continuity, and traditional wisdom.

Natural healing and herbal medicines are shown to be deeply understood by Shug Avery. She presents herself as a fount of folk wisdom due to her familiarity with plants, medicines, and conventional medical procedures. People possessing this expertise are frequently regarded as healers and cultural wisdom bearers in various societies, including African American traditions. Among the folklore, Shug's intimate relationship with nature is major. By gathering herbs and spending time in nature, she frequently interacts with the natural world. The natural environment is viewed as a source of wisdom, healing, and spiritual connection in folklore, which frequently emphasizes this bond with the natural world. Shug's persona gains societal significance from her embodiment of this link. The image of Shug is one of a mystical figure who frequently questions accepted religious doctrine. The novel's folkloric element is enhanced by her spiritual essence and unconventional beliefs regarding God. She turns into an icon of spiritual emancipation, inspiring others—Celie foremost among them—to reevaluate and reinterpret spirituality in a way that is consistent with their personal encounters.

The nickname "Lillie," which Shug Avery was given, reflects her symbolic status. As a symbol of purity and regeneration in many cultural traditions, the name "Lillie" is reminiscent of the lily flower. The symbolism of Shug's name, which emphasizes themes of rebirth and spiritual development, is consistent with her metamorphosis and her symbolic affiliation with nature. Shug Avery's arrival in Celie's life in "The Color Purple" is a crucial turning point in the story that causes a radical and uplifting change in Celie's experiences and viewpoints. With Shug's presence, Celie experiences a breath of new air as he challenges the repressive constraints she has lived under and ignites her quest towards self-discovery and emancipation. Celie has deeply rooted self-beliefs that Shug confronts. At first, Celie believes she is unimportant and undeserving because she has been abused and subjugated her entire life. Shug forces Celie to reevaluate the restrictive narrative that has been put upon her with her unwavering confidence and acceptance of her own goals.

Promote the oppression of oneself in Shug which inspires Celie to explore and communicate her own emotions since she is honest about her own wishes and has a free-spirited personality. With her letters to Shug, which record her ideas, aspirations, and experiences, Celie starts to discover her voice. A pivotal point in Celie's quest for self-discovery is reached through this act of self-expression. Outlining sexuality for Celie, Celie is introduced by Shug to a positive, collaborative sexual expression. With Shug, Celie discovers the emotional and physical aspects of intimacy for the first time, having only known sex as a chore and an act of submission. The harsh and demeaning events Celie has had have significantly changed from this. Questioning the dogmas of religion in that its Celie is challenged in her understanding of spirituality by Shug's rejection of traditional religious ideas. After being taught a harsh and critical view of God, Celie starts to doubt and reevaluate her relationship with the almighty. Shug creates new opportunities for spiritual growth with his more experienced and intimate approach to spirituality which emits new possibilities.

To put it simply, Shug Avery's function as a catalyst in Celie's life is evidence of the importance of love, support, and exposure to different viewpoints in promoting personal development and self-discovery. Celie is able to recover her agency and imagine a life full of freedom and self-worth thanks to Shug, who not only becomes a loving partner but also a mentor, advisor, and symbol of emancipation.

Because it is linked to cultural memory and legacy, folklore in "The Color Purple" is significant. In this context, things that are passed down through generations within a community, such as customs, oral histories, spiritual practices, and music, are considered folklore. Shug shows how to express one's culture in a way that defies social norms and fosters a connection to one's African American heritage through her blues singing. The book examines, via Shug's character, how honoring and conserving folklore can help underprivileged populations fight and gain power. It becomes an instrument for cultural reclamation, resilience building, and preserving ties to one's past. Shug's acceptance of her own ethnic heritage and her encouragement of Celie to follow suit support the overarching idea of self discovery and liberation. Further, Alice Walker's examination of African American cultural resilience and the value of maintaining cultural memory in the face of hardship is reflected in "The Color Purple's integration of folklore. As a result, the book adds to the larger cultural memory of the African American experience by implying that people can derive power, knowledge, and a feeling of community from stories connected to them.

To help her characters feel more connected to their cultural heritage, Toni Morrison incorporates folklore into the story of "The Bluest Eye". In addition to influencing character development and adding to a larger cultural memory, folklore acts as a storehouse of shared experiences, customs, and beliefs. Pecola Breedlove, the main character serves as a vehicle through which Morrison examines how cultural ideals of beauty affect African American women. As exemplified by the white dolls she adores, Pecola's desire for blonde hair and blue eyes is a reflection of the pervasive impact of Eurocentric ideas. Using folklore, Morrison analyzes the roots of these beauty standards, connecting them to a past of cultural erasure and colonization. Taking On Cultural Trauma: Morrison also uses folklore in "The Bluest Eye" as a means of tackling cultural trauma. The protagonists confront the past traumas imposed on the African American community via myths, stories, and group storytelling. Recognizing and overcoming the wounds caused by racism, slavery, and institutional oppression are made possible by the story.

Morrison's trilogy delves into the topic of folklore transmission between generations, as it encompasses a range of experiences. Stories that influence the younger characters' perspectives are passed down by the community's elders, including Pecola's mother Pauline. Cultural memory endures because of this intergenerational exchange. To

enhance the story, Morrison incorporates African American folklore symbolism and ceremonies. One recurrent motif that links the characters to nature and their cultural history is Pecola's mother planting marigold seeds. This image represents optimism and renewal. The group uses these rituals and symbols to withstand cultural erasure and preserve a feeling of identity. It is possible to observe how Eurocentric beauty standards inspired Pecola's desire for blue eyes and her conviction that having them will make her more attractive and accepted. The historical tales of colonization and oppression, which exalted European qualities, are the foundation of this yearning. Pecola's portrayal highlights how African American folklore sustains specific standards of beauty.

The most important character Pecola and her life describes how African folklore and ancestral rituals getting destroyed by the ideal believes of modern world. The study of culture always get linked with past. But in meantime the practices and rituals get ruined by the present standards. Especially the myth that revolves around the novel, took the characters like Pecola, Choly Breedlove into the highlight. Pecola melts into the eurocentric perspective but in other hand Choly Breedlove represents having terrible life over his oppressed past. So its difficult to get in touch with this character as a he ruin himself with present day pleasures forgetting his African history.

His impactful life of traumatic nature resulted in getting linked with the Pecola's life who is already got ruined in Afro American life. The collective identity they shares throughout the novel proves their bonding of same community. Elders within the community, such as Pecola's grandmother of MacTier family, serves as storytellers who pass down tales of survival of resistance and cultural wisdom. Cultural wisdom shares an incorporation of bonding which is transferred by ach family throughout the generation. The African community in 19th as well 17th CEs shares the story of plantation fields which they had worked with sweat and blood was marked as a wisdom of generations in their history. The novel *Bluest Eye* represent the old history and pain of Balck's who were held captive in America as salves. Later they confronted their life against abusing and fought for the freedom. But some characters remain in the realms of white ideals and western thinking. Example is Pecola, who always long for the Blue eyes which is considered as the ideal beauty in her school as well the society at thts time. This shows how much the character Pecola the young girl get change into a new culture forgetting the culture she have in her own blood. The *Bluest eye* examines the dick and Jane which symbolizes the stream of cultural impact with the realm of folklore. Morrison portrayed the themes of folkloric features with the interconnection of characters like Soap

head Church introduce the spiritual impact on the communities. The mule of the world incorporated tested of folklore in the African American context. It represents the burden carried by the Afro American people in their lives.

Next feature is adding of musical into narrative style. The bluest which is a symbolic element in the novel. It resembles the portrayal of pain and resilient life of Blacks. It is way of expressing the harsh realities of brutal the characters and the world of Blacks outside from the novel. Pecola poignantly resembles this element which made the reader to focus on emotions of struggles. Cultural continuity examines the polaroid between heritage and the novel. The black traits which are being transferred shows how heritage happens in novel from the first generation itself. The symbolism of authenticity make the novel force the readers to analyze the superficial ideals presented by mainstream society. Folk songs and lullabies, represent the emotional childhood as a theme which connects her adulthood life in times of hardships. Divergent musical tastes which resembles the African American community and stereotypic life. They wrote lines for their community and sang among themselves which make the outer world realize the identities of them. The novel exemplified the folkloric elements on the basis of American and African identity. The embarks of the tradition in addition with colonialism made the novel to prove the path for the culture and tradition of the colonial period.

This rituals as a conventionalized joint activity given the stories to rise up with the heritage and tradition. Alice walker donates her experiences during the period of colonization which debited the identity if African American people. The forgotten stories of past memory makes the theory embarks the both novel of Morrison and Walker. Broken community of Afro American people were still confronted by dominator system in the 21st CE. "Healing through empowerment, critical theories and recovering historical memory ". The stories portray the these lines in the living people of the colonization. "Carefully tended grief rituals provide a safe way to encourage adaptive copying , rituals provide a controlled transformation touching on the liminal. That something outside of the ordinary is happening".(Poninghaus ,Black 2023) "Our childhood touchstone stories, those Stories that live deeply within us and inform our perspectives of the world." (Tanging. P.4) These lines show how they are tormented by the past and still living in the dominated world. The childhood memories are covered up with something that cannot be forgotten in their entire life till death. Carefully the rituals and practiced provide a sense of relief for

them to live further with the whole memories still weeping in their minds. These lines was exerted from the indigenous poems of Yangu and Kathy the poets who resemble the blacks and their memories from the past. Functional basically with aesthetic elements have passed down through the generations in a combination of music, stories etc.

In the later half of the African American fought against protecting the traditions they had through the civil rights including their equal participation in labor as well political socio economic situations. G.K Chesterton analyzed the following into the single sentence,“ Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure classes our ancestors. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the birth ; tradition objects to their disqualification in accident of death.” (Walzer 2000) In term of other aspects of form and function still the concept is considered tradition. Which exemplifies the importance of memory in relation with the culture studies where Chesterton points out that tradition are always in fond of class based and the ancestors. Politically and philosophically he meant the word “Tradition” itself a disqualification which states that past represent the harsh realities men and sufferings during the colonization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both Toni Morrison's Trilogy and Alice Walker's Trilogy prominently feature African folkloric elements that enrich their narratives and contribute to the exploration of African American culture, identity, and heritage. Through the use of folktales, myths, spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices, Morrison and Walker skillfully weave together complex stories that resonate with readers on multiple levels. These elements serve not only to connect characters to their ancestral roots but also to illuminate universal themes of love, loss, resilience, and the pursuit of freedom. By incorporating African folkloric elements into their trilogies, Morrison and Walker offer profound insights into the African American experience, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural tapestry that shapes their characters' lives.

Furthermore, the presence of African folkloric elements in Morrison's Trilogy and Walker's Trilogy serves as a means of reclaiming and preserving cultural heritage in the face of historical erasure and oppression. By centering

their narratives on these elements, both authors empower their characters to assert their identities and resist the forces of colonization and assimilation. Through the retelling and reimagining of traditional stories and symbols, Morrison and Walker celebrate the resilience and creativity of African American communities, highlighting the enduring legacy of storytelling as a form of resistance and survival. In doing so, they not only pay homage to their ancestors but also inspire readers to explore and embrace the richness of African American culture. Thus, the incorporation of African folkloric elements in these trilogies not only enhances the literary experience but also reinforces the importance of cultural heritage in shaping individual and collective identities. Moreover, the use of African folkloric elements in Toni Morrison's Trilogy and Alice Walker's Trilogy serves to bridge the gap between the past and the present, fostering a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural contexts that inform the experiences of African American characters. Through the retelling of myths, legends, and oral traditions, Morrison and Walker create a sense of continuity that links contemporary struggles to ancestral wisdom and resilience. By grounding their narratives in these cultural touchstones, they invite readers to reflect on the enduring impact of history on the present moment, encouraging dialogue about the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and systemic oppression. In this way, the incorporation of African folkloric elements not only enriches the literary landscape but also invites readers to engage critically with issues of power, identity, and justice. Overall, Morrison and Walker's trilogies stand as powerful testaments to the enduring power of storytelling and the importance of honoring and preserving diverse cultural traditions.

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