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Folklore as a Means to Sustain African-American Identity: A Study of Selected Novels by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker

Al-Halbosy, Alaa

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**Folklore as a Means to Sustain African-American Identity:
A Study of Selected Novels by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker**

Mr. ALAA MOHAMMED KHALAF AL-HALBOSY

In Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Bangor University

School of English Literature

Bangor University

2019

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Abbreviations

<i>AAVE</i>	<i>African-American Vernacular English</i>
<i>FGM</i>	<i>Female Genital Mutilation</i>
<i>OCD</i>	<i>Obsessive Compulsive Disorder</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>OOD</i>	<i>Oxford Online Dictionary</i>
<i>PTSD</i>	<i>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Racial-Ethnic Identity</i>

Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of African-American identity in Toni Morrison's trilogy, published in the decade between 1987 and 1997, *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1997) and Alice Walker's 1982 to 1992 trilogy, *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of my Familiar* (1989) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). From an Afrocentric perspective, I consider the significance of African folklore for the formation, expression and maintenance of identity in African-American communities and literature.

I seek to answer two main research questions; firstly, the extent to which African folklore, in Morrison and Walker's writing, is deployed as a means to construct and interrogate African-American identity and, secondly, how developments in their use of African folklore can be traced across their respective trilogies.

The thesis consists of four chapters, beginning with a literature review that situates the thesis within current scholarship on group and individual identities in relation to definitions of the folk and folklore. Chapter two moves on to closer examinations of identity, folklore and literature within the specific context of its role for African-American writers negotiating a history of trauma. Chapter three is dedicated to Toni Morrison's trilogy and consists of three sections, each providing close textual analysis of the novels and an examination of Morrison's reconstructions of African folklore in articulating an African-American identity that draws on African heritages of the ancestor, religion and folk practice. Chapter four is dedicated to textual analysis of Alice Walker's trilogy and again there are three sections, each concerned with a particular novel. The focus is on how Walker reveals the complexities of tribal customs and traditions in relation W.E.B. Du Bois's understanding of double consciousness as expressive of the conflict engendered in identities that are both African and American. The chapter ends with an analysis of the development of Walker's approach to African custom and tradition across the novels in her trilogy.

Introduction

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq many social changes took place in the country that had profound psychological, social and political consequences for the social fabric of the nation. The collapse of a coherent national identity, due to the rise of various ethnic and religious identities, led to internal division, sectarianism and conflict. As a literature specialist researching the way in which writers approach issues of identity from psychological, social and individual perspectives, an examination of African-American literature would prove productive for the investigation of the ways a nation, a group, or an individual can maintain an identity in literary form. As an Iraqi MA student in India I noticed how other international students maintained their heritage and culture for themselves and their children while they were away from home. The motives for diasporic expressions of belonging to the original culture became an area of interest to me and subsequently informed my choice of doctoral research.

I understand that culture is fluid and that locating an original, authentic source is fraught with difficulties, including risk of the inculcation of religious, ethnic and national fundamentalisms and absolutes. I have, however, undertaken the research in this thesis in light of my personal understanding of the need to sustain a nourishing culture in periods of national upheaval. The originality of the research lies in its argument that there is something of universal value to be found in examining the African roots of Morrison and Walker's African-American fiction. Such an examination can open the way for scholars, globally, to gain profound insight into their own different cultures and traditions. It offers a strategy, for those who have most recently experienced the collapse of the nation state and known identities, for the re-construction of identities. This reconstruction, I argue, is to be informed by knowledge of the past, trauma, the ancestor and folklore. In making a claim for the universality of African-American fiction I do not wish to imply that culture and identity are

homogeneous experiences. I consider Morrison's and Walker's work as universal because of, rather than in spite of, its cultural specificity. For Morrison, indeed, desire for the universal has, because it derives largely from an impulse to explain black lives for white readers, become a literary burden; any universality must, for Morrison, arise paradoxically from the local and the specific: 'Faulkner wrote what I suppose could be called regional literature and had it published all over the world. It is good - and universal - because it is specifically about a particular world. That's what I wish to do'.¹ Morrison's conception of universality encompasses both the very personal and, importantly, history; the universal condition is made manifest through complex personal histories drawn against very particular historical junctures.

The role of the ancestor is central to Morrison's wider concerns about what constitutes excellence for black literary writers. Against Harold Bloom's model of the anxiety of influence, Morrison, in 'Rootedness: the Ancestor as Foundation', refigures the ancestor as nourisher and comforter in a discussion of the African-American novel's role as a replacement for traditional forms of black expressivity.² Black male writers such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin revealed their ambivalence towards the ancestor figure in their own novels and as contributors to a black literary tradition that had, for Morrison, an adverse effect on African-American literature written by men.³ Ralph Ellison, for example, rejected Richard Wright and Langston Hughes as literary ancestors, choosing instead William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway; James Baldwin's difficult relationship with his own father permeates much of his literary output and Wright's *Native Son* (1940) derives much of its bleakness from the absence of filial love and a sustaining ancestor figure. As we shall see, the trilogies of Morrison and Walker embrace the ancestor figure as a defining and

¹ Thomas LeClair, 'The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison', in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. by Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 1994), pp. 119–29 (p. 124).

² Toni Morrison, 'Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation', in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*, ed. by Mari Evans (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), pp. 339–45.

³ Morrison, 'Rootedness', p. 343.

balancing presence that takes on mythical proportions and contributes to the development of a positive African-American identity.

The roots of this identity can be found in the decades between the American Revolution (1765-1783) and the American Civil War (1861-1865). The interest of my thesis research is in how Toni Morrison and Alice Walker sustain an African heritage in their literary expressions of African-American identity. My focus is on the role of religion, social codes, history and tradition, as manifested in folklore, in the formation of identity. The quest for identity, as Leela Kapaï states, is:

a perennial theme in literature. There is no age when a sensitive soul has not been troubled by questions about the meaning of his very own existence and his relation to the world around. The identity crisis assumes even more gravity for the minority groups who were either brought to this land or who came of their own accord in search of greener pastures. Lost in a new cultural environment, such people (African-Americans) need more than an ordinary effort to recognize and keep their identity alive.⁴

In this context, Africa has had a significant place in the African-American imagination for more than two centuries, through its representation in poetry, prose, drama, art, and latterly, film. Many African-American writers have discussed the significance of an African heritage in their literary works, focussing on the impact that this heritage has had upon their identity. Nonsasa Nako states: 'The exploration of their [African-Americans'] African ancestry is always linked to their location in American culture'.⁵ Constructing an African-American identity is one of the strategies used to resist the dominance of white American culture and involves the development of an alternative culture that carries a 'value system for African

⁴ Leela Kapaï, 'Dominant Themes and Technique in Paule Marshall's Fiction', *CLA Journal*, 16.1 (1972), 49–59 (p. 49).

⁵ Nontsasa Nako, 'Possessing the Secret of Black Womanhood: Reading African Women in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *The Color Purple*, and *Warrior Marks*' (Claremont, SA: University of Cape Town Press, 2004), p. 7 <<http://hdl.handle.net/11427/6747>>.

Americans or investigating a possibility of one'.⁶ The representation of Africa in African-American literary works is not always positive, as is discussed further in chapter five, in an analysis of Alice Walker's trilogy. African Americans have been either ambivalent about their relationship to the continent, Africa, or sometimes even negative about it and the practices of its people, for instance the practices of the Olinka as delineated in *The Color Purple* (1982). This aspect of representation is a reflection of the image of Africans in Western culture, and African-American internalisation of Western propaganda and its misinterpretations, especially during the eighteenth centuries and nineteenth centuries, of Africa as a place of barbarism, paganism, and savagery; enslaving its people was considered an act of saving them from this misery.⁷ Negative representations of Africans are evident in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), a novella that serves as an example of the attitudes that European writers have had towards the continent. A consistent view of Africa, however, cannot be traced from one author to another because views differ according to writers' experiences and the historical context in which they are writing. The representation of Africa in African-American writing is individualised and often relates to a specific era or place as slaves brought to America were originally from different parts of Africa. Marion Berghahn, in a history of African-American literature, states that 'The idealisation of Africa stood side by side with exoticism, the notion of Africa as a "dark continent" and a sense of alienation from both Africa and America'.⁸ Attempting to develop an objective view of the continent, because of its stigmatised past, is difficult. Some of the most significant representations of Africa occurred during the Harlem Renaissance (1920-1939).⁹ George Hutchinson states:

⁶ Nako, p. 7.

⁷ Marion Berghahn, *Images of Africa in Black American Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 34.

⁸ Berghahn, p. 150.

⁹ It is an intellectual, artistic, and social movement which took place in Harlem, New York between the end of the First World War (1914-18) and the beginning of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. For further information please refer to: Kelly King Howes and Christine Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance* (Detroit: U.X.L, 2001), p. ix.

More important than the idea of the traditional Africanness of African American culture to the Harlem Renaissance was the idea that black Americans, unlike any other group, had been almost completely stripped of their ancestral cultural identity, and precisely because of this had developed the most authentically *American* folk culture.¹⁰

An interesting aspect of African-American culture and tradition at this time was the belief that the trauma of the Middle Passage had destroyed specifically African cultural elements and that a link between an American present and an African past was an imagined one. A well-known Harlem Renaissance poem, Countee Cullen's 'Heritage', shows a spiritual, romanticised relationship with Africa as home, and yet Cullen remains ambivalent about it as a place of belonging, asking 'What is Africa to me?':

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?¹¹

One important feature of literature is that it provides a way of documenting history and a means to immortalise pioneer figures at a time when minority groups lack sustaining publications. In 1997 Maya Angelou referred to the importance of literature for the sustenance of filial and communal identity:

Their art, like all art, means to delight the eye, console the troubled mind,
appease the highest authority and educate the children in the ways of the world.

¹⁰ George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 76.

¹¹ David K. Kirby, 'Countee Cullen's "Heritage": A Black "Waste Land"', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 36.4 (1971), 14–20 (p. 14) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3196596>>.

The aim also, whether or not articulated, is to infuse and sustain the family in an appreciation for life and the expectation of beauty.¹²

Contemporary African-American authors, in general, have developed an aesthetic that blends folklore motifs with the theme of racial conflict, a combination that has led to the search for identity as one of the main quests in their literature. In their novels, as we shall see, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker also include a consideration of the relationship between race and gender in their affirmations of their African-American ancestors' folklore, tradition and heritage. Maria Lauret notes:

Her [Toni Morrison] and Alice Walker's shared institutional status as favoured black women novelists, prizewinners and bestsellers has nevertheless produced a very different kind of reception both in the critical industry and in educational practice.¹³

The reasons for choosing Morrison's and Walker's trilogies for analysis in this thesis include an understanding of their status in African-American literary tradition. Also, Morrison and Walker's writings show their attempts to resolve the identity crisis of African Americans in the United States, through presenting the concept of Du Boisian double consciousness and discussing the subject of belonging. They resist the oppression of black women in particular and African Americans in general. Moreover, Morrison and Walker incorporate an understanding of African folklore and traditions in the structure, imagery and philosophies of their novels.

Madhu Dubey points out that African Americans obtained a unique position in the discourse of modernity's racial capitalism because of their experience of enslavement. This experience informed African-American critical reflection on the dominant western

¹² Maya Angelou, *Even the Stars Look Lonesome* (New York: Random House LLC, 1997), p. 67.

¹³ Maria Lauret, *Alice Walker* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 204.

narrative.¹⁴ An awareness of an obscured position in American literature is considered to be one of the supporting factors for the establishment of an African-American identity. In American society different races, especially Native Americans and African Americans, are still subjected to negative treatment in political, literary and social contexts. Although racism, in the United States of America, is less dependent on the pseudo-science of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, minorities continue to suffer its consequences. As Carl Plasa states:

Even as America came into being as a post-colonial nation by liberating itself from British rule in 1776, it was constituted out of and remained spectacularly implicated in forms of colonial oppression – from the attempted genocide of the indigenous people to the enslavement of Africans - which, *inter alia*, continue to exert their effects today.¹⁵

It could be said that most contemporary African-American feminist writers work within a well-established African-American literary tradition - including Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Maya Angelou and others - which is consistently concerned with the way African Americans survive in the United States, whether as individuals or as members of a minority group. The search for identity and exploring the means for self and group development arises as a social and artistic concern.

In this thesis I examine Afrocentric perspectives that are useful for a consideration of the way folklore is deployed in literature to affirm the African roots of African-American people. Such perspectives reveal the psychological impact of conscious and unconscious decisions authors make in attempting to strengthen an African-American readership's positive sense of identity and belonging. This thesis tries to answer two main questions: the first is to consider the extent to which African folklore has been used as a method to forge

¹⁴ Madhu Dubey, 'Contemporary African American Fiction and the Politics of Postmodernism', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 35.2/3 (2002), 151–68 (p. 151).

¹⁵ Carl Plasa, *Toni Morrison: Beloved: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2000), p. 117.

African-American identity. The second question is to consider whether there are any notable developments in Toni Morrison and Alice Walker's writing across the decades, 1987-1997 and 1982-1992 respectively, in which each wrote their trilogies.

In referring to cultural and psychological perspectives this thesis will address how folklore features in literary works in order to instil a feeling of belonging that inspires creative and progressive pride in identity. It also focuses on the way that African folklore in contemporary African-American fiction functions as a means to maintain and sustain African heritage. In addition to documenting suffering during slavery, Maya Angelou notes:

The movements of the human tribes are traceable through the folktales, songs, detritus left by wars and the triumphal display of enemy totems captured by the victors, and it is possible to follow demographic shifts of families, clans and tribes by assessing their search for food, water, safety and arable land.¹⁶

Therefore, folklore as a whole is formed by a reservoir of stories about historical and cultural change, stories that help in sustaining tribes' understanding of their heritages over time.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter includes a literature review which gives a broad overview of previous studies that relate to the study of groups and group identity. Referring to Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams, this survey situates this thesis in the field that can be broadly understood as the study of group identities. The section on group identity concludes with a discussion of the politics of minority group assimilation versus separatism. I then move on to examine definitions of folklore and the role folklore has in the development of group identity.

The second chapter moves on to a closer analysis of identity and folklore. The first section is concerned with definitions of identity and how trauma can be considered to be a primary sources in identity formation. I then move on to discuss expressions of identity in African-American fiction. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of

¹⁶ Angelou, p. 66.

folklore in specifically literary contexts. Chapter two provides the theoretical context that informs close analysis analysis of the novels in chapters three and four.

Chapter three is an analysis of African folkloric elements in Toni Morrison's trilogy. The chapter is divided into three sections, each one concerned with one of the novels in the trilogy. The first section discusses folkloric elements in *Beloved* (1987) and how they are deployed to sustain African-American identity. As Harris notes, '*Beloved* also extends Morrison's use of folkloristic techniques in the shaping of her tale'.¹⁷ The method of analysis used in the first section of chapter three is applied, in subsequent sections, to *Jazz* (1992) and to *Paradise* (1997). The chapter concludes with observations on the changes in Morrison's style, and use of folklore, across all three novels of her trilogy.

Chapter four is dedicated to Alice Walker's trilogy. Again, consisting of three sections, the first examining folklore and its relationship with identity in *The Color Purple*. The second section is on *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), and the third section is about *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). In the three novels, African folklore is discussed in light of its literary context and then analysed in relation to the development of African-American identity. This chapter also tracks changes in Walker's approaches to folklore across the trilogy and ends with a comparison of Morrison and Walker's aesthetic strategies.

The choice to focus on Morrison and Walker's trilogies is informed by their canonical status as works that depict the African-American experience in the twentieth century. The two trilogies share thematic concerns and these will be discussed in chapters three and four. Through close textual analysis I reveal Toni Morrison and Alice Walker's contribution to the maintenance of an African heritage, a heritage that sustains a positive sense of identity. The deployment of folklore in African-American writing raises consciousness of the past and contributes to diasporic survival in the new world. Although Morrison and Walker's focus is on the lower- and middle-class African American's experience, black women have significant

¹⁷ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), p. 13.

representation through the presentation of their struggles, survival, and development, and final achievement of a positive sense of identity. My analysis also incorporates a discussion of W.E.B Du Bois's¹⁸ theory of the 'two-ness' of double consciousness of African-American experience,¹⁹ or what Lucius Outlaw called 'the existential crisis of divided self-consciousness'²⁰ and how this affects literary production. In the last two chapters, then, I examine the use of folklore, whether it is custom, social activity, language, or religion, in Morrison and Walker's trilogies. Trudier Harris states that African-American folklore is 'arguably' the basis of almost all African-American literary works, as it was generated and maintained, since the teaching of slaves was prohibited until the late 1830s.²¹ Therefore, literature seems to be one of the best methods to save cultural values and heritage, and to aid their transfer them from one generation to the other.

¹⁸ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was an American Sociologist, philosopher, historian, Pan Africanist, civil rights activist and editor. In his famous study, *The Souls of Black Folk*, he discusses African-American identity and its formation. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publication, 1994) vii.

¹⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of double consciousness includes a discussion of 'the sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others'. The theory focuses on the psychological conflict engendered by the African-American experience, the 'twoness' of being American and African at the same time. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 8.

²⁰ Referred to in Theophus Harold Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 112.

²¹ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, p. 2.

Chapter One

Literature Review: Literary Theories of Folklore and Identity

It could be said that folklore and identity are interrelated topics that have influenced each other in different ways. Therefore, it is essential to clarify their meanings and how they affect each other within a literary context. Stuart Hall defines cultural identity as ‘one, shared culture, a sort of collective “one true self”, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves”, that people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common’.¹ According to this definition, cultural identity reflects cultural experience and social codes, which may bring about stability and consistency for groups inhabiting a diverse society. For Stuart Hall, the development of a coherent cultural identity has a significant role to play in post-colonial struggles to form independent nation states after the end of colonialism. He also refers to the main purpose of identity and culture formation as not merely being a recovery of the past, which is a goal to achieve, but also to secure the ‘sense of ourselves into eternity’ when it is established.² Identity, in this case, is formed consciously or unconsciously, through the maintenance of traditions and heritage. Inner extrapolations of identity change and reform individuals in ways that they are not always aware of consciously. The ‘silence of identity’ may, according to Frantz Fanon,³ result in uncontrolled individuals with no horizon and who are rootless and colourless, if such ‘silence’ is not overcome. Therefore, folklore, with all that it incorporates, fantasy, myth, memory and narrative,

¹ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 2003), pp. 222–37 (p. 226).

² Hall, p. 225.

³ Frantz Fanon is a psychiatrist, philosopher, and a writer, whose works have a significant influence on post-colonial studies and critical theories. For further information, please refer to: Irene L. Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), p. 4.

represents cultural identities that are consciously made within the discourses of history and culture.⁴

Mary Herring and others refer to scholars, such as Appiah, Murray, Schlesinger, and West, who argue that a group identity encourages a group's understanding of itself as the victimised, excluded 'other' and fosters hatred towards the mainstream that increases societal conflict. However, others, such as Fox and Lears, Thelen and Hoxie, claim that positive identification with specific ethnicities empowers minorities. Holt, Spencer *et al*, believe that the provision of effective psychological resources in tandem with positive ethnic identity construction will 'fulfil civic obligations and connect group members to the larger political community'.⁵ In order to enhance cultural identity theory Holt, Spencer *et al* draw on Marxist theory, arguing that the basis for establishing any group lies is in its members and how they interact to shape their group. Social identity theory, on the other hand, differs from Marxist theory as it takes into account the cognitive process involved in the social categories' translation into groups and therefore makes a psychological reality out of a social reality.⁶

There are three schools of thinkers and activists concerned with cultural groups' identities. Each school differs according to what kind of intergroup relations they advocate:

- 1- The nationalist or separatist school.
- 2 - Radical multicultural democracy.
- 3 - Inclusion or radical integrationist.

According to some theorists of social identities, such as the French writer Gustave Le Bon, individuals tend to honour in-group members while they penalise members of an out-group

⁴ Hall, p. 226.

⁵ Mary Herring, Thomas B. Jankowski, and Ronald E. Brown, 'Pro-Black Doesn't Mean Anti-White: The Structure of African-American Group Identity', *The Journal of Politics*, 61.2 (1999), 363–86 (p. 363).

⁶ Marxism sees social identity as originating in involvement in particular cultures or subcultures, therefore, people who live in certain places are expected to have a feeling of belonging to the identity of that place. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), p. 176.

due to perceived differences between their respective cultures. Those members will work on fixing their identity roots by having a common interest and common folklore, found stories, songs, customs, a way of life, and a common belief.

After conducting several surveys, Herring concluded that the orientations of the in-group and out-group are different from each other. Therefore, we can see that the in-group identity contains both 'effective and cognitive' dimensions, while the second concludes that the cognitive element is stronger than the effective one as it is more reliable in measuring group identity.⁷ This outcome helps in clarifying the view of belonging and the formation of different identities, through the cultures they share. The groups of Bluestone Road in *Beloved* (1987), Ruby in *Paradise* (1997), Olinka in *The Color Purple* (1982) and other places in the novels discussed in chapters three and four show how identity is formed in both in-groups and out-groups.

Reginald Martin refers to separatists as those who claim that black criticism must be different from that of white critics, and that black literary works should be analysed and examined using alternative critical theory. This movement, which is concerned with the work of black writers, was 'ironic' in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.⁸ The reason for this is that some of the important black authors, such as Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) and James Baldwin (1934-1987), proclaimed the universality of their work but, at the same time, insisted on the 'Uniquely black messages' in their publications.⁹ Also, they saw no need to make comparisons between themselves and other writers. Henry Louis Gates Jr, the author of *The Signifying Monkey* (1989), is considered to be one of the early separatists as Gates insists that 'signification is an original African-based trope'¹⁰ which assures the uniqueness of African literature. Gates refers to the supporters of a separate critical theory of black

⁷ Herring, Jankowski, and Brown, p. 375.

⁸ Reginald Martin, 'Current Thought in African-American Literary Criticism: An Introduction', *College English*, 52.7 (1990), 727-31 (p. 727).

⁹ Martin, p. 727.

¹⁰ Martin, p. 728.

literature and their view that even if the origin of literary theory is European, this body of theory provides an opportunity for African writings to be read, criticised and taught. Since literature is an interpretation of culture, a consideration of its use of folklore will give us a better understanding of African-American expressions of culture through literature. This understanding of culture will lead to one of the primary sources of African-American identity, the focus of this thesis.

Satya Mohanty raises a question about identity in diverse cultures, arguing that if political and cultural institutions seek multiculturalism we need to understand how to unify groups that share the same culture as well as identify the main cultural differences between groups.¹¹ This argument shows the importance of knowing about identity, whether it is deliberately created by cultures or simply inherited, and this gives rise to the problem of definition. Can we determine whether there will be distrust among group members? Who is going to represent the group and be trusted to act in the group's interest without the risk of betrayal? Mohanty's opinion regarding the controversial debate surrounding the linking of experience with cultural identity is that this debate can be considered as a part of the broader suspicion towards 'foundationalism in contemporary thought'.¹² The simplest way to comprehend the link between experience and culture is to consider it to be the original foundation of group identity. Referring to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Mohanty concludes that identity and experience form 'social reality'.¹³ The realist theory states that we can evaluate identity and experience comparatively by explaining how accurately they can clarify social structure. Realist theorists note that theories of personal experience and identity are merely political, and they must be evaluated in this way. In a society where different cultures and

¹¹ Satya Mohanty, 'The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition', *Cultural Critique*, 24, 1993, 41–80 (p. 41).

¹² Mohanty, p. 43.

¹³ Mohanty, p. 71.

identities exist, we should understand how they act and react so that we will not make the mistake of using empty and confusing terms like ‘cultural differences’.

To understand social identity theory and identity theory, Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke discuss the similarities and differences between social identity theory and identity theory, referring to the fact that these theories have more intersecting points of agreement than differences. Therefore, Stets and Burke seek a way to unify them in order to eliminate any possible confusion. These theories seek to understand the self and the nature of identity according to the base, outcomes, and processes in culture.¹⁴ Stets and Burke sum up by stating that formulating a theory that joins identity theory with social identity theory would allow us to overcome any obstacles facing individual theories. They applied the method to two experiments and showed a strong psychological and motivational result.

Stets and Burke also show how social identity theory and identity theory negotiate the processes of self-categorisation and depersonalization. This is considered a point shared by both social and identity theories, although identity theory places more emphasis on behaviour than social theory does. However, identity theory has the same interest in the precognitive, such as reflected evaluation, which means if individuals evaluate their role as positive, it will reflect upon their self-esteem positively, and vice versa. Stets and Burke also state that social identity theory has excessive influence on self-esteem, as it has an extreme impact on the outcomes.¹⁵ Although not referred to directly, Stets and Burke indicate that the main source of self-esteem is group belonging. This idea is applicable, not only to those who consider themselves as group members, but to others who must recognise them as group members as well. Stets and Burke refer to John C. Turner’s explanation, that in both social and identity theories there is flexibility in the self which makes it observe itself as a classification and

¹⁴ Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, ‘Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory’, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63.3 (2000), 224–37 (p. 225).

¹⁵ Jan E. Stets and Burke, p. 230.

object. A social category that has a name, one which differentiates it from other social categories or classifications, is referred to as 'self-Categorization'.¹⁶

In turning to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award, Mohanty writes that Morrison provides a 'vision of the continuity between experience and identity', and it is in this regard that *Beloved* is remarkable as a representative post-colonial literary work.¹⁷ Morrison dedicates her novel to the 'Sixty Million and more' slaves and their descendants who experienced trauma emanating from The Middle Passage,¹⁸ in order to establish a cultural bridge to the ancestors as their trauma is linked to the present in the continuation of the effects of the past.¹⁹ In the epigraph, Morrison quotes from the Bible: 'I will call them my people/ which were not my people; / and her beloved/ which was not beloved'.²⁰ In *Beloved* she forges significant links between religion, traditions, folklore in ways that continue to characterise African-American contemporary fiction.

Folklore and the Literary Theory

According to Anand Prahlad, the study of folklore has been omitted from African-American literary criticism for several reasons. The first is that African-American criticism came out of 'an academic tradition' that neglected folklore. The second reason is that the inferior socioeconomic conditions experienced by African Americans negatively affected levels of interest in folklore in African-American literary criticism. Critics now have to admit, however, that folklore represents one of the focal points or essences of African-American

¹⁶ Jan E. Stets and Burke, p. 224.

¹⁷ Mohanty, p. 55.

¹⁸ It is a trade route that most of the slaves from Africa to the New World were brought through, for further information, please refer to: Margrét Gunnarsdóttir Champion and Irina Rasmussen Goloubeva, *Ethics and Poetics: Ethical Recognitions and Social Reconfigurations in Modern Narratives* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), p. 195.

¹⁹ Mohanty, p. 55.

²⁰ Mohanty, p. 55.

literature. This admission is difficult to make given the existence of the reasons previously mentioned.²¹ This is also clear from the lack of folkloric references in literary studies, including in studies purporting to be about folklore in literature itself, for example in the works of Blake, De Weever and Gary. Anand Prahlad refers to Henry Louis Gates who, in his famous book *The Signifying Monkey*, is specifically concerned with articulating a theory of African-American writing based on African-American linguistic practice, but who does not fully acknowledge the field of folklore. Even when Gates mentions Roger Abraham, a famous folklorist, he notes him as ‘a well-known and highly regarded literary critic, linguist, and anthropologist’,²² but not a folklorist. Folklore was not recognised as a legitimate aspect of literary criticism until recently.

As analysis of folklore is a significant element of this thesis a consideration of its various meanings and types is due, bearing in mind that ‘[t]he definition of folklore varies as widely as the versions of a well-known tale’.²³ Folklore is defined according to the field of study. The definition of folklore supplied by literary critics, for example, differs from that given by anthropologists as literary critics define folklore as culture, while anthropologists regard it as literature.²⁴ For many scholars, therefore, providing a definitive definition of folklore becomes a difficult task. Folklore, for example, includes jokes, gestures, myths, legends, music and customs, and its variety is what makes finding a consistent definition difficult. In chapter two I will explain the meanings of folklore in detail, in addition examining its types and relationship with identity.

²¹ Sw. Anand Prahlad, ‘Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner: Folklore, Folkloristics, and African American Literary Criticism’, *African American Review*, 33.4 (1999), 565–75 (p. 565).

²² Prahlad, p. 566.

²³ Dan Ben-Amos, ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 84.331 (1971), 3–15 (p. 566).

²⁴ Ben-Amos, ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context’, p. 3.

Richard Bauman defines folklore as ‘a function of shared identity’, a means by which common factors of experience can be shared.²⁵ Folklore is derived from shared traditions which distinguish a particular group from others, leading to a shared group identity on the part of its members. Therefore, one of the constructive ways of sustaining identity is through the sharing of folklore. Bauman supplies a further definition when he writes, ‘folklore is the product through creation or re-creation of the whole group and its forebears, and an expression of their common character’.²⁶ It is not only the sharing of a particular topic that constitutes folklore, but also the time and place in which it is shared, and this is what makes finding a specific definition that covers all its aspects problematic. Though integral to culture, folklore is an organic phenomenon. Moreover, in working out connections between folklore and literature, we must bear in mind that the classification of prose narrative into various genres depends on cultural receptions of narratives in relation to the folkloric origins of the culture.

To understand folklore better, it is sensible to consider its facets. According to Dan Ben-Amos, folklore can be classified into three categories, ‘body of knowledge, mode of thought, or a kind of art’.²⁷ Nevertheless, each of these categories contains a varied range of hypotheses that, consequently, lead to a separate research direction. Ben-Amos discusses, and contrasts, different definitions of folklore. First, folklore can be classified as the total knowledge of society since no single person can represent all aspects of the community. In this sense, it must be an abstract concept based on collective knowledge as it is stored by many individuals, ‘the whole body of people's traditional belief and customs’ as it is referred to by James G. Frazer, quoted in Ben-Amos.²⁸ Folklore is knowledge shared by every member of the group, while its featuring in the studies of social science, anthropology,

²⁵ Richard Bauman, ‘Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 84.331 (1971), 31–41 (p. 32).

²⁶ Bauman, ‘Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore’, p. 33.

²⁷ Ben-Amos, ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context’, p. 5.

²⁸ Ben-Amos, ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context’, p. 6.

sociology, and psychology is merely a reflection of other phenomena. In these sciences, folklore is a reflection of culture but not ‘a dynamic factor in it, a projection of basic personality, but not personality in action, a personality projection but not in action’.²⁹ However, when it is viewed in process, folklore does not have to be a static reflection; it can be a field of dynamic interaction.

Furthermore, Dan Ben-Amos points out the form of folklore, which is represented by in African societies by rituals and songs.³⁰ How folklore is reflected in these forms may carry a more significant and profound meaning than the verbal meaning a word may hold, since the deeper meaning is hidden behind the ‘literary’ language of song or ritual. In other words, folklore expressions include the capacity for the transformation of meaning. In addition, Ben-Amos illustrates the structure of folklore by pointing out that folklore’s thematic scope, in every society, is defined according to that society’s culture and creativity. Therefore, the formulation of stories and rituals are based on the principles of creativity that include conceptualisations of form, narrative structure and poetical methods. The transfer of a theme, derived from a combination of social events, into a tale requires commitment to putting the events in order and to clarifying the relationship between the characters and actions, all of which should complement the system of folklore in question.

After discussing definitions of folklore, it is essential to show the importance of folklore in the formulation of literature and its impact on readers and critics. Trudier Harris referred to the importance of folklore in carrying on a history by referring to one of the slaves’ rhymes:

The big bee flies high,
The little bee make the honey;
The black folks makes the cotton

²⁹ Ben-Amos, ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context’, p. 15.

³⁰ Ben-Amos, ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context’, p. 4.

And the white folks gets the money.

This Folk rhyme [one of the slave's rhymes] perhaps capsulizes the history of black/ white interactions in the United States and is the epitome of sentiments expressed in protest literature.³¹

Harris refers to the laws which prohibited the teaching of literacy to slaves in the 1830s and which therefore necessitated the oral transmission of values, tradition and folklore. 'Oral literature tends to be popular literature because it is truly of the people, for the people, by the people'.³² Furthermore, by analysing and highlighting folklore in Toni Morrison's works, Harris focuses on the creative way in which Morrison used folklore in fiction, which consisted of developing it beyond its original orality. This thesis takes folkloric materials in literature and interprets them as material to sustain African-American identity.

John W. Roberts, in his article 'African American Diversity and the Study of Folklore', states that scholars from different disciplines, such as Michael Awkward, Barbara Christian, Tricia Rose and others, are concerned with the writers' accurate portrayal of the African-American tradition rather than their literary merits. These scholars assert that African-American cultural diversity became a 'conscious dimension of praxis'.³³ Roberts adds to discussions of the importance of folklore, when he indicates that, although tradition and folklore serve as an artistic cultural tradition, they also served, historically, as the basis for evaluating vernacular creativity.³⁴

Roberts highlights the issue, which arose in American society, that American folklorists inherited a European perception of 'folk' that denied others the status of 'folk'. One of the inequities of this tendency is that Native Americans were denied 'folk' status

³¹ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, p. 2.

³² Gene Andrew Jarrett, *A Companion to African American Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 45.

³³ John W. Roberts, 'African American Diversity and the Study of Folklore', *Western Folklore*, 52.2/4 (1993), 157-71 (p. 157).

³⁴ Roberts, p. 158.

because they are non-European. Historically, African folklorists have emulated the approach expounded in European discourses by considering the ‘folk’ as a homogeneous category of cultural creators. Similarly, American folklorists adopt a method by which they consider any vernacular tradition, which is not related historically or culturally, in terms of Eurocentric discourse.³⁵

The move to preserve African heritage and folklore was an important step for African Americans to make in their attempts to identify their role and place in the future. Roberts states that the motivation for the importation of African-American vernacular creativity into tradition is related to the process of identity formation, specifically for black people bound by the institutional structures of the United States. Although forms of folklore vary according to place, gender and social conditions, including discrimination that African Americans were subjected to from outside their communities, folklore became a way in which African Americans expressed their diversity and difference from other cultures.³⁶ Bauman also declared that folklore might move to, or be exchanged with, other groups and social classes. Such exchange takes place at the meeting points of folklore in areas such as religion, ethnicity or language. Also, folklore structures understandings of, and respect for, other groups.³⁷

So, what are the sources of folklore, if it is not simply the sharing of the thoughts and the imitations of other cultures? Dan Ben-Amos divides the sources of folklore in any society and culture into three categories - its cognitive, expressive and social features. Furthermore, he explains each source and how to derive folklore from it.³⁸ Moreover, Ben-Amos refers to an important point as he indicates that nowadays it is impossible to even try to establish any clear taxonomy through which we can understand the source of African folklore. Therefore,

³⁵ Roberts, p. 160.

³⁶ Roberts, p. 162.

³⁷ Bauman, ‘Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore’, p. 38.

³⁸ Ben-Amos, ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context’, p. 168.

in many cases, folklore is defined as undocumented tradition, because it used to be transferred through practice or by word of mouth. Ben-Amos also refers to the forms of folklore, and how they vary according to the place and manner in which they are expressed. He argues that the sources of folklore can be found in its origins as a genre in which tales and songs are performed. For Ben-Amos each group in Africa may have a preferred performance genre that may not be adopted by other groups.³⁹ However, most of the forms, broadly speaking, do represent Africa and its people and came to find reflection in African-American communities in the United States.

Ben-Amos concludes that the folklore African Americans chose to adopt was based on the cultural symbolic value they attached to particular folkloric subjects. These subjects, religion and politics, are represented in a social and verbal context by close observance of rituals, hymns, and epic tales. In this sense, African and African-American folk material does not differ from folklores across the world. Throughout human history we find folklore that is based on human interactions with natural and supernatural creatures, and celebrations of special powers in songs, tales, myths, and proverbs. Folklore can be both educational, in relaying history, and entertaining, in its expression in myths, songs, dance, and stories. Prahlad states that folklore is extremely important to African-American literature, and this importance is documented and acknowledged. In addition, he refers to Trudier Harris's statement by saying that folklore is arguably considered as the basis of most African-American literary works.⁴⁰

In his article, 'The Influence of Diversity on Folklore Studies in the Decades of the 1980s and '90s', Stephen Stern notes that the confusion and misdirection of some folklorists is derived from the influence of diversity, more than being just an inherited problem in the field of folklore. Postmodernism is the source of diversity which reflects a changing social

³⁹ Ben-Amos, 'Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context', p. 10.

⁴⁰ Prahlad, p. 565.

reality and a ‘fermenting’ of traditions of philosophy, which brought a significant confusion in folkloric disciplines.⁴¹ He also refers to the changes and diversities that took place in society and how they modified individuals, and moved to change the whole society. He added that folklore benefited from the expansion of subject interest and the recruitment of minorities in the educational field and societies more generally.⁴²

Diversity, in academia brought validity and offered new perspectives that have not been adopted more widely. Therefore, approaches such as ‘historic-geographic, functionalism, structuralism and performance studies are no longer viewed as mutually exclusive, but as merely contributing towards an understanding of the phenomenon of folklore’.⁴³ However, we cannot comprehend these concepts fully unless they are applied to literature, as a way of revealing their meaning. One of the applications is the use of folklore in fiction, as is noted in Harris’s *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*. Harris examines Toni Morrison’s novelistic style, which includes her aim to write novels that can be heard as well as read, through the inclusion of oral folktales. Also, the mixing of orality and the written form, for Harris, is what made her writings popular.⁴⁴ Nancy J. Peterson also comments on *Beloved*. Morrison, in ‘*Beloved* weaves a story on a singular frame: interpretation represents an integral part of black cultural and social identity’.⁴⁵ This involves an African specificity, which includes folklore and African identity as a source of pride and diversity. However, according to Peterson, *Beloved* went both against and with postmodernism as it represents the culture and the history of African Americans. More details about the text will be given in the textual analysis in chapter four.

⁴¹ Stephen Stern, ‘The Influence of Diversity on Folklore Studies in the Decades of the 1980s and ’90s’, *Western Folklore*, 50.1 (1991), 21–27 (p. 22).

⁴² Stern, p. 23.

⁴³ Stern, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Nancy J Peterson, *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 91.

John W. Roberts showed the importance of folklore in shaping and maintaining identities by saying that ‘the prize or, at least a prize, in the contest is identity conceived as a fluid and ever-changing sense of who we are in relation to others’.⁴⁶ Therefore, in this sense, this thesis is going to trace the ways in which folklore may relate to African-American identity. To be more precise, the promulgation of folklore as a source of identity has not obtained support from all critics and has received negative criticism from some of them. For instance, Richard Bauman gives a negative assessment of the influence of folklore on society, arguing that although it might bring awareness to society, it can be an instrument of conflict instead of solidarity.⁴⁷ Although folklore integrates societies and maintains their social cohesion, its misuse may bring about the opposite. Therefore, Bauman concentrates on aspects of folklore and its derivation, along with its impact on society and social codes. However, he did consider, to an extent, its remarkable ability to foster awareness and the natural feeling of belonging in those who actively search for folklore.

To illustrate the cultural features, Dan Ben-Amos stated that since folklore is a pragmatic system, it identifies the limits of possibilities for understanding folklore codes in society. A way of understanding the songs, tales and puzzles is by examining the cultural use of them, and what they refer to, since folklore is used within its social context, so it is important to carry the codes which can be understood in the society from which it is derived.⁴⁸ Prahlad refers to many critical approaches and theories, which deal with folkloric literary works but neglect their folkloric aspects. With this in mind, he seeks an accurate way to test his views. For example, the focus on Zora Neale Hurston⁴⁹ is on the political dimensions of her work, such as what can be said about the liberation of women, and the

⁴⁶ Roberts, p. 169.

⁴⁷ Bauman, ‘Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore’, p. 38.

⁴⁸ Dan Ben-Amos, ‘Folklore in African Society’, *Research in African Literatures*, 6.2 (1975), 165–98 (p. 169).

⁴⁹ Hurston was one of the influential authors of the African-American literature and an anthropologist, she stood against racial discrimination in America. Her writing about African folklore was a main source of inspiration for Alice Walker and many other contemporary African-American novelists. For further information, please refer to: Philip Bryant, *Zora Neale Hurston: African American Biographies* (Illinois: Raintree, 2003), p. 5.

seeking of the African-American ancestors. Prahlad refers to Harris's statement about the use of folklore by Toni Morrison when he writes that the process she created was what he termed 'literary folklore'.⁵⁰ This was not to continue the argument of some purists who said that folklore should no longer be considered as folklore if it is included in literature. Indeed, he goes against their views by arguing that it is possible to collect and record folklore without negating its authenticity, and that there is no problem with including it in literature since folklore is part of behaviour and a way of life, and literature is a depiction of life.⁵¹

Anand Prahlad refers to critics who ignore folklore in literature in his argument that neglecting the elements of 'African, European, African-American and European American folklore leads to an inability to conceptualize African-American literature in its broadest context'.⁵² Moreover, sidestepping the significance of folklore hinders the establishment of African-American models of literary theory, which could be highly illuminating. He provides, as an example of misinterpretation, Sherley Anne William's essay *The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry* as she considers the blues, a form of singing, as a verbal form that distinguishes it from other musical genres, neglecting its cultural and traditional source.⁵³

However, a statement by Harris referring to the source of folklore and how it is generated, is of note, 'frequently in her works, Morrison replicates the dynamic of folk communities by showing how people interact with each other to shape tales, legends, rumors, and folk beliefs'.⁵⁴ This interaction has its impact on the formulation of identity, which is depicted in Morrison's fiction. Anand Prahlad also adds that if we consider art forms that belong to any group, as interrelated or existing in one more than the other, it makes complete sense that we should study these differences and adopt an approach which does not render

⁵⁰ Prahlad, p. 567.

⁵¹ Prahlad, p. 567.

⁵² Prahlad, p. 567.

⁵³ Prahlad, p. 569.

⁵⁴ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, p. 11.

one culture as superior to another, but instead focusses on the particular characteristics which highlight the aesthetic qualities of the forms.⁵⁵ In suggesting a theoretical method with which to examine African-American folklore, Prahlad does not mean it should focus on literature alone. Many aspects of life, such as songs, music, and spirits should also be considered. Although, Prahlad is clear that he does not want to discuss the matter of American racial injustice, he refers to the issue of inequality while explaining folkloric characteristics and their origins.⁵⁶ Dan Ben-Amos insists that general knowledge of the blues, as a folkloric expression, is not enough; the critics should be aware of all the sources and historical origins of the blues, the tone and the lyrics of its different modes, in addition to the philosophical systems that inform performers and innovators. This thesis provides some information about the blues in section one of chapter four and its importance in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Moreover, scholars who argue for the study of African-American folklore in Higher Education should also argue for 'the blues and other African-American communicative practices'⁵⁷ because of their cultural importance.

Kimberly W. Benston maintains that African-American critics move beyond a 'whites-only' perspective and surpass its dominance through literary criticism.⁵⁸ Benston quotes Richard Wright's⁵⁹ view that all the past and heritage of Africans should be reflected in our present and actions. Benston added that Africans and the motherland Africa share the sense that the past exists in the present.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Prahlad, p. 572.

⁵⁶ Prahlad, p. 572.

⁵⁷ Prahlad, p. 572.

⁵⁸ Kimberly W. Benston, 'Facing Tradition: Revisionary Scenes in African American Literature', *PMLA*, 105.1, Special Topic: African and African American Literature (1990), 98–109 (p. 99).

⁵⁹ Richard Wright was an African-American author of novels, short stories, poems, and also famous for his non-fiction books of literary criticism. For further information, please refer to: Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power, The Color Curtain and White Man, Listen!* (New York: Harper Perennial modern classics, 2008), p. VII.

⁶⁰ Benston, p. 100.

Identity and African Americans

The primary aim of this study is to examine the use of folklore in literature as a means to maintain a sense of belonging and identity in the minds and lives of African Americans.

According to Brian Thomas in, 'Struggling with the Past: Some Views of African-American Identity', the roots of African identity are found in the forcible removal of Africans from the continent to North America and the consequent ancestral struggle to defend place and identity.⁶¹ Many debates took place among scholars, religious leaders, and social institutions about the importance of Africa in the process of understanding African-American identity. The significance of Africa for the construction of African-American identities has been consistently over-looked by various social and political factions within America.⁶²

Thomas clarifies that identity is an outcome of ethnicity, which fades through time due to the forgetting of its traces. Thomas also adds that when individuals are 'acculturated', according to what each one may choose as a way of life, their original identity is dissipated. However, for African Americans, identity is more than ethnicity; it is heritage, memories and history.⁶³ There are different perspectives on identity that range from the ways it is presented and received, along with the effect it has on people and community. For instance, identity is determined according to the type of identity and whether it is a social or racial identity. Thompson refers to White and Burke's definition of racial group identity in his article 'The complexity of African American Identification', writing:

Racial group identification refers to a psychological attachment to one of the several social categories available to individuals when the category selected is

⁶¹ Brian W. Thomas, 'Struggling with the Past: Some Views of African-American Identity', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 6.2 (2002), 143–51 (p. 143).

⁶² Brian W. Thomas, p. 143.

⁶³ Brian W. Thomas, p. 144.

based on race or skin color and/or a common history, particularly as it relates to oppression and discrimination due to skin color.⁶⁴

This definition establishes the base whereupon we can distinguish between social and racial identity, which will reveal that folklore in literature is one of its sources as this thesis argues.

Religion has a vital role in shaping identities; for example, Christianity worked as a tool to preserve African identity. It worked because the promulgation of tradition was not merely through songs and customs, but also through the inclusion of various African pagan traditions in the Christianity practised by those who were moved to the States.⁶⁵ This hybridity is seen in all the texts selected for this study but especially in Morrison's novels *Beloved* and *Paradise*. For Morrison, whatever happens or changes in African-American communities, a strong link to the homeland, through evolving practices of tradition and religion, is maintained.⁶⁶ The original African religions overlap, either with the Christianity encouraged by missionaries in Africa or with the forced conversion during African-American enslavement. Some keen observers, as stated by Tinyiko S. Maluleke, suggest that the impulse to involve African traditions in New World religious practices originates in African theologians' attempts to simplify the Christian religion for tribal Africans. Theologians compared Christian terminologies with local indigenous religions, which caused confusion about the rituals of Christianity and helped in the creation of an African religious identity.⁶⁷ However, the origin of religious identity is subject to debate, as referred to in Brian W. Thomas' article 'Struggling with the Past: Some Views of African-American Identity'. Thomas refers to those Africans who converted to Christianity, and how the new religion framed their identity and sense of belonging, as they debated with other African Americans

⁶⁴ Vetta L. Sanders Thompson, 'The Complexity of African American Racial Identification', *Journal of Black Studies*, 32.2 (2001), 155–65 (p. 155).

⁶⁵ Tinyiko S. Maluleke, 'Identity and Integrity in African Theology: A Critical Analysis', *Religion and Theology*, 8.1–2 (2001), 27–41 (p. 27).

⁶⁶ Theophus Harold Smith, p. 115.

⁶⁷ Maluleke, p. 28.

who kept their pagan religion, which they brought to America.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, when the Civil War took place African Americans restored many of their roots, and the real and actual elements of their pagan identity, which originated in Africa. African-American leaders of the Northern States struggled with belonging and whether they defined themselves as African or American. The war highlighted the real problem of establishing a sense of belonging of when African Americans were brought to the point of fighting against members of their own race.⁶⁹ The struggle for a secure identity and its recognition influences our understanding of the original story behind *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. It is a pre-civil war novel, set at a crucial moment in the formation of African-American identity.

There is also what is called an African-American social identity that has five dimensions, as Lindsey Smith presents it. The first one consists of the racial dimension, which is derived from those who share ‘genetic characteristics and continental origins of human groups’.⁷⁰ The second one is related to the dimension of ethnicity. Thirdly, there is the dimension of nationality. Fourth is the dimension of culture. Finally, there is the political dimension. These dimensions work as identifiers of social identity, whether it is for African Americans or any other group in a society. Referring to these dimensions provides a way to classify any identity and Smith’s system of classification will help in clarifying identity formation through folklore in the analysis of the novels in chapters three and four.

Furthermore, according to Lionel K. McPherson and Tommie Shelby, each model parameter of race is ‘vague and greatly contested’, so this matter creates disagreement about the labelling of “African-American” and to whom it may apply.⁷¹ McPherson and Shelby added that so-called racial classification in America is arbitrary and misleading from a

⁶⁸ Brian W. Thomas, p. 143.

⁶⁹ Roberts, p. 162.

⁷⁰ Lindsey Claire Smith, *Indians, Environment, and Identity on the Borders of American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 176.

⁷¹ Lionel K. McPherson and Tommie Shelby, ‘Blackness and Blood: Interpreting African American Identity’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 32.2 (2004), 171–92 (p. 177).

biological point of view.⁷² Identity has a significant affect on our lives because it is involved in almost all its parts since it shapes our way of dealing with others. In commenting on this, Lindsey Smith refers to Kwame Anthony Appiah's lecture *The State and the Shaping of Identity* (2001), in which he stated that identity shapes our lives and enables coherent communication and understanding.⁷³ Inconsistency in understanding social identity may lead to an unstable life for individuals, which might lead to ignorance on the part of those with other identities. This is a point that I address in this thesis - how having an identity binds a community together in constructive ways if accompanied by understanding and acceptance of other identities. If not, racial identity may lead to hatred and negligence of others. Furthermore, McPherson and Shelby add, citing Appiah's argument about the disadvantaged African-American social identity, an inflexible social identity exacerbates racial issues for those who rely on it, since it is, in the end, inconsistent. The problems are outlined, but no solutions useful for reformation of African-American identity are proposed.⁷⁴

According to the US census of 2000, considered to be the first census in which Americans had a chance to indicate various personal descriptors, including racial categories, 12% of the population identified themselves as African-American or African solely.⁷⁵ The results of this census suggested that many African Americans identify their racial status as black, although they were historically tied to multiracialism. The reason behind this is complicated, and it has dimensions of social and cultural 'blackness' within the history of the United States.⁷⁶ So, this is a very serious matter as it is rooted in the minds of people. This led some scholars to try reinventing identity and thinking of a way of changing any differences

⁷² McPherson and Shelby, p. 179.

⁷³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'The State and the Shaping of Identity' (presented at the Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Cambridge, 2001), p. 236 <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/a/Appiah_02.pdf>.

⁷⁴ McPherson and Shelby, p. 172.

⁷⁵ Candice Marie Jenkins, 'Pure Black: Class, Color, and Intraracial Politics in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 52.2 (2006), 270–96 (p. 271).

⁷⁶ Jenkins, p. 272.

which may lead to tearing the society apart. A survey conducted by Brian Wright, outlined in his article ‘Racial-Ethnic Identity, Academic Achievement, and African-American Males: A Review of Literature’, aims to check the reaction to, and impact of, racial theory according to four parameters: psychological, physical, cultural, and socio-political.⁷⁷ The results were as follows; the participants registered a high racial identification on the cultural parameter while the lowest was in the socio-political one. His results show a general understanding of how people can be driven by their social identity rather than their racial identity. The statistics answered those who have negative feelings towards social identity, as some of them implied, that it was not a social movement but merely a political one used to control people.

In relation to reinventing identity, Carol E. Henderson refers to Page’s consideration of literary works where the protagonists turn back in time in order to learn more about their cultural history, such as the protagonist in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, who will be discussed in chapter four. For Page, the journey through time takes literary characters beyond the trauma of their origins, away from their ancestors’ slave lives to better ones. With the aid of specific figures like Andrew Hawkins and Rutherford Calhoun there is the re-invention of identity and formation of a new one. Henderson summed up the vision of both Page and Butler through outlining their implication that African-American identity is an ‘open journey’ for African-American writers affirming communal and spiritual ties, which cause ‘individuals to reconcile their past’.⁷⁸ This view goes against the goal of the thesis here because Page and Butler counted on visions and hopes of changing the present and tried to modify or change the past. However, this research consists of tracing identity formation through folklore in the fiction of Morrison and Walker. Also, the later chapters discuss the approaches of both Toni Morrison and Alice Walker with regard to the past and present.

⁷⁷ Brian L. Wright, ‘Racial-Ethnic Identity, Academic Achievement, and African American Males: A Review of Literature’, *The Journal of Negro Education*, 78.2 (2009), 123–34 (p. 129).

⁷⁸ Carol E. Henderson, ‘Freedom to Self-Create: Identity and the Politics of Movement in Contemporary African American Fiction’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46.4 (2000), 998–1003 (pp. 999; 1003).

To discuss identity from a psychological point of view, we can refer to trauma and the way African Americans were treated at the time of slavery, and how that history affects the shaping of contemporary African-American identity within such a multicultural society as the United States of America. Ron Eyerman, in his article ‘The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory’, illustrates the link between trauma and memory in regard to social identity. He refers to the idea from a psychological point of view. Usually ‘trauma is conceptualized on the individual level through the psychological and psychoanalytical framework’ but cultural trauma, which refers to a tragic loss of identity and meaning, affects groups, not just individuals, since it harms the social harmony.⁷⁹ Therefore, according to this concept, it is not necessary that every member of the group should be harmed by the tragic event, but since it is directed at their group, so it affects them all.

Modernity is characterised by the orientation towards the new and the future rather than on the past; it consists of progress, not only in the future but also by freeing individuals and society from particular problems of the past.⁸⁰ However, according to Marx, memory in the context of tradition is central to forming society and all social interactions. Memory is, however, an individual experience, and according to theories of identity and sociality memory is part of developing the self and personality. Memory, communal and individual, plays a crucial role in the novels of Morrison and Walker as they both refer to the memory of slavery, a dark past that casts a shadow over the present.

Eyerman refers to Antze and Lambek’s discussions about how to recall the past and make it present. They said it could be present through ‘symbolic interactions, narrative and discourse, with memory itself being a product of both’.⁸¹ The past is transmitted, interpreted and understood as narrated. It is structured through discourse and the myths we tell about

⁷⁹ Ron Eyerman, ‘The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory’, *Acta Sociologica*, 47.2 (2004), 159–69 (p. 160).

⁸⁰ Eyerman, ‘The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory’, p. 161.

⁸¹ Eyerman, ‘The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory’, p. 162.

who we are, where we came from as well as how we identify our future through the traditions, rituals and performances which connect groups.⁸²

Henderson clarifies the insistence that the use of African folklore in literature promotes literature as a free space, in which African Americans can forget any social nihilism along with their political and social disenfranchisement.⁸³ In this way, African Americans live in their universe where nothing can be forced on them by a repressive society, and they will be living in a place that is rich in possibilities and can, therefore, provide the freedom of creativity. In other words, literature offers Africans Americans an alternative reality to the racism that they experience. This justifies Morrison's manipulation of the true story of Margaret Garner⁸⁴ in *Beloved*. This idea was not in agreement with Eyerman when he said that after the Civil War in 1865, the black people thought they would be an equal part of the society, and fully-fledged Americans. However, they were forced to reconsider themselves as a marginalised group. Yet, after several alternatives, the notion of African Americans emerged as a result of the hard effort of a generation of African-American intellectuals.⁸⁵ It moved from a collective subject to a national concept and finally to an international level. Du Bois created the idea that one could be African and American at the same time; American and loyal to the nation, and African by standing against a racist culture.⁸⁶

Lindsey Smith highlights the belief among educated people that all humanity originated in Africa. Therefore, one should not claim any African race as different, since we all belong to its ancestry. However, this belief is considered irrelevant among the contemporary social standard of racial classification in the United States, as it is a remarkably diverse society and each community tries to maintain its position. She concludes that

⁸² Eyerman, 'The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory', p. 162.

⁸³ Henderson, p. 1001.

⁸⁴ The story of Margaret Garner was an inspiration to Toni Morrison in writing her novel *Beloved*. For further information, please refer to: Mark Reinhardt, 'Who Speaks for Margaret Garner?: Slavery, Silence, and the Politics of Ventriloquism', *Critical Inquiry*, 2002, 81–119 (p. 83).

⁸⁵ Eyerman, 'The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory', p. 162.

⁸⁶ Eyerman, 'The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory', p. 164.

conceptual confusion surrounding race, as a natural feeling, does not necessarily lead to an incoherent African-American identity. Therefore, most African Americans are confused about the idea of race.⁸⁷ However, they show solidarity with other ‘non-passing’⁸⁸ African Americans to create their own views and theories.

The concept of identity, according to some critics, has effects not merely at the social level but also at the level of education. There are different views on these aspects of identity starting with Brian Wright’s claim that showing specific actions, customs and even poses in some schools is viewed with negative suspicion, and this negativity is internalised by young African Americans. This operates as an additional obstacle to the more general instability they may encounter in their educational careers. Schools with knowledgeable and sensitive staff with an understanding of African-American culture and the ability to incorporate this understanding within academic process reveal students who show satisfactory progress positivity.⁸⁹ The educational aspect of identity is presented through the adventures of Celie⁹⁰ in Africa and the way she knew about her African roots and heritage. For instance, the African Biblical stories as well as the great civilisations of Egypt.

However, Wright supports a view that claims that positive awareness of race and identity increases academic achievement. He gives, as an example, O’Connor’s observation that development of a positive black identity may inspire academic progress rather than limit it, as Fordham and Ogbu suggested.⁹¹ Demonstrating a healthy REI (racial-ethnic identity), then, increases levels of confidence and motivation for successful academic progress and this in turn results in positive signs of belonging in young people. He added that, for young

⁸⁷ Lindsey Claire Smith, p. 110.

⁸⁸ ‘Passing means the cross of an individual from racial line or boundary in order to escape the suppression that the original identity entails’. For further information, please refer to: Sandra Radtke, ‘Racial Passing: A Comparative Reading of Jessie Fauset’s “Plum Bun” and Nella Larsen’s “Passing” and “Quicksand”’ (Technische Universität Dresden, 2006), p. 3 <<https://www.grin.com/document/75941>> [accessed 17 June 2018].

⁸⁹ Brian L. Wright, p. 124.

⁹⁰ The protagonist and narrator of *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker.

⁹¹ Brian L. Wright, p. 127.

African-American students at independent schools, the main desire to succeed academically is coterminous with the goal of belonging. Wright finds that some types of social identity may reduce the feeling of students' disengagement. However, if social identity is negative, the risk of alienation increases, and students focus on their identity rather than their society. In relation to African Americans, the study found that those who have no problem being black in America made notable achievements in school, even when they saw that a significant part of the society is likely to be against them and be racist.

According to psychology, the importance of racial identity is built upon its capability to give information about African-American psychological orientation. It is considered as a way in which individuals may act and respond to their surroundings. However, E. M. Smith suggests that racial identity is derived from a sense of belonging and peoplehood. The final psychological parameter to be verified is cultural and racial identification, and it refers to the awareness of individuals towards the contribution of African Americans to society, culture, literature, language, and tradition of the African-American group.⁹² An alternative view is offered by Jenkins when she argues that Fletcher's assumptions⁹³ are wrong, and she gives the example of *Paradise* by Morrison as evidence. She points out that in this novel, African Americans find that Black Nationalism's strict notions provide the solace of social authenticity.⁹⁴ African Americans prove their identity and existence with all the characteristics they have, but rather than this being symptomatic of a distancing from society, they, in fact, want to be considered as a part of the society and a compelling presence in it.⁹⁵

⁹² Vetta L. Sanders Thompson, p. 156.

⁹³ Fletcher assumes that if African-Americans have a choice, they would run towards any self-identification other than black. For further information, please refer to: Jenkins, p. 271.

⁹⁴ Black Nationalism is a type of political belief that considers black people are a nation, therefore, it seeks to develop and maintain a black identity. It also stood opposed to integration-assimilation. For further information, please refer to: Dean E Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 71.

⁹⁵ Jenkins, p. 287.

In the meantime, there are many writers, thinkers and activists, such as Lindsey Smith, who attempt to find a way to deal with the concept of identity. She concludes that if African-American racial identity theory really exists, it will ensure that African Americans should reform their identities in order to fit the scientific facts about it.⁹⁶ However, if they want to make it against all the calls of the United States' constitution for equality, and the movement which took place in the United States, then they will be accused of racism.⁹⁷ Yet, if identity is simply a social, and not a racial, construction, then it is their right in such a democratic country to call for it. The confusion about identity can be resolved through creating and maintaining cultural and communal ties. The works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are regarded as depicting a 'genuine variety of African American experience in America',⁹⁸ which is presented through representing the historical realities of segregation, survival, and injustice. Folklore in literature forms a passage for the characters' to travel through in order to gain their 'rememory' of the African-American experience and its cultural legacy.

The suggestion for resolving identity issues is based on creating a 'weblike strand' that connects people to their community and builds relationships among community members, and then forms the basis for further possibilities in the renewal of communal affirmation and the strengthening of links between individuals.⁹⁹ However, Eyerman refers to a statement by Richard Wright, referred to earlier, claiming that all the past and heritage of Africans would be reflected in our present and actions. He added that the Africans and the motherland Africa share the feeling of the past and present, which is one of the main features of the six novels by Morrison and Walker studied in this thesis. Richard Wright states, in relation to the formulation of African-American identity:

⁹⁶ Lindsey Claire Smith, p. 107.

⁹⁷ Lindsey Claire Smith, p. 107.

⁹⁸ Lindsey Claire Smith, p. 107.

⁹⁹ Henderson, p. 1001.

We black folk, our history and our present being, are a mirror of all the manifold experiences of America. What we want, what we represent, what we endure is what America is [...] If America has forgotten her past, then let her look into the mirror of our consciousness and she will see the *living* past living in the present [...] Look at us and know us, and you will know yourselves for we are you, looking back at you from the dark mirror of our lives!¹⁰⁰

The way that Americans will see African Americans and their history is through their arts and their pride in their cultural heritage and folklore. The novels selected for discussion in this thesis show the significance of historical and cultural awareness in relation to African-American identity, heritage and folklore.

Philip Page suggests, as a method to solve the issue of identity, re-evaluation of the past so that individuals can move forward to their future.¹⁰¹ Although it is not an easy thing to accomplish, as it will be accompanied by the violence of those who are acting strictly in accordance with an identity considered sacred because of its relationship to the past, it will also require very hard work, since it is a history and lifestyle change and will exceed the limits imposed by previous identity constructions. This means that identity is flexible, and people may be able to create it for themselves. This notion neglects the origin and source of identity, as not every part of it can be modified, since it consists of facts and history that contains all of the misery, hard life, and torture with regards to the slave era. In addition to the part, which is related to Africa, it cannot be changed since it is an essential part of their lifestyle, religion, and culture.

So changing the past will lead African Americans to move beyond their present. Therefore, when Page predicted a 'future of alternative possibilities',¹⁰² he envisaged this as a

¹⁰⁰ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Philip Page, *Reclaiming Community in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), p. 13.

¹⁰² Henderson, p. 1003.

healthier, integrated identity with connections to other cultures, such as those in native American Indian, Asian, and Latino communities. This vision sums up what ‘we all strive for in our literary and critical endeavors’.¹⁰³ It is a way to understand and to be understood.

Tinyiko Maluleke stated, when he referred to Bitek, that theologians went too far in expressing concern about the negative aspect of African theology’s interest in traditional religions of Africa and claims we have failed to value theology’s attempts to construct a coherent, self-respecting and consistent identity.¹⁰⁴ Josiah Young quotes Gorman stating that the African heritage united black people around the world. The ‘black consciousness’ in Africa set itself as a very creative movement to get people together.¹⁰⁵ This aspect of identity brought society members together and directed them towards a better mutual understanding, whether it was a cultural concept or a religious one. In addition, Maluleke related his point about Americanism to Alexander Crummell’s belief in a united black race, wherever they are, as he compared racial belonging to familial belonging and organisation, with an indication that racial feeling is like familial feeling and it has a divine origin.¹⁰⁶

Another aspect of identity is the geographical one as was stated by Jeffrey Stout, when he made a geographical distinction during his discussion of the term Black Nationalism. He argued that the ideology mainly concerns African-American culture and society. Jenkins followed up by saying that this distinction is not fair, as it might be understood as a global phenomenon. Jenkins added that he believes that the subjects of Morrison's novel were specifically about the United States.¹⁰⁷ However, this thesis believes in the universality of Morrison’s novels and that her themes and subjects have transnational merits that do not make these novels exclusively American.

¹⁰³ Henderson, p. 1003.

¹⁰⁴ Maluleke, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Josiah U Young, *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), p. X.

¹⁰⁶ Maluleke, p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Jenkins, p. 274.

Jenkins points out that Morrison has had her representation of characters in *Paradise* criticised as they represent the desire of the Black Nationalist for a true African-American identity.¹⁰⁸ He continued by saying that it is crucial to have a biological purity as a focus for the African-American community. Therefore, according to this indication, Morrison wanted to see the theme of life and unity rather than focusing on a specific identity that may raise the spectre of racism. This idea could be applicable to Walker's selected novels too, yet she went beyond the African-American community and brought in the specifically African example of the Olinka. Moreover, she argued that most of the African Americans adopted an understanding of race which 'inherently acknowledges' its conditional nature, which means that they always knew that race is a construction of society. So, the United States is not an exception, but the basis of these principles was rarely linked to a biological absolute. She also refers to the issue by saying that it is often forgotten that hybridity is causing discomfort to both, so-called, white and black people in the United States in particular, although the discomfort of black is expressed through culture.

Finally, Maluleke asked some questions, starting with whether we have the ability to put out the fire of racial identity, not only in the African's soul but all human souls? Do we have to attempt that? Being Christian is not necessary to be the same at all times and everywhere, so why should the African be an exception? Yet, there is no actual test to show how strong the feeling of belonging and identity is.¹⁰⁹

From what has been presented, we can see the interaction between folklore and identity along with all the theories that link them together in social and literary works. The goal of this thesis is to show, with the support of literary theories, of identity theory and social identity theory, that the purpose of folklore was to sustain the heritage of belonging during the slavery era. However, in the modern era, it is used in literature to maintain

¹⁰⁸ Jenkins, p. 288.

¹⁰⁹ Maluleke, p. 39.

African-American identity, history and culture with all its different shapes and aspects, whether in music, customs, religion or tradition.

Chapter Two: Identity and Folklore in Literature

Section One: Identity

What is identity? What are the features by which its meaning can be identified? Before attempting to give a definition that will inform the next two chapters, other researchers' definitions are going to be discussed. This chapter, as a whole, focuses on how identity and folklore are interrelated and operate within literary frameworks.

The topic of identity can be considered to be a contentious subject, especially when it is related to the matter of race in the United States. The subject of identity is often taboo when discussed from a racial standpoint and when the loss of American identity is considered. The topic of identity concerns more than any single group of people and involves every individual in the sense that national, political and racial identities have informed colonial, patriarchal and hostile acts of colonialism, empire in history and in modern times. However, what type of identity is being referred to here? Is it only one type, or does identity have several facets? In this section I discuss the meaning of identity from different perspectives and investigate the motives for the interest in this topic. I also define identity and present its types; whether it be personal, for example gender or psychological identity, or social, for example national, religious and ethnic identity. This section also illustrates the two main perspectives, along with their negative and positive sides, in order to reach a solid conclusion. These steps help to clarify the aims of this thesis in order to give a clear context for subsequent textual analysis.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines identity as 'the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality'.¹ In other words, identity is the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, and properties; or particular qualities under

¹ John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, 'The Oxford English Dictionary' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 620.

consideration, an absolute or essential sameness, oneness. Moreover, according to the *Collins Dictionary* website, it means ‘the state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing’.² This definition is almost identical to the OED’s, in that it concentrates on the characteristics that distinguish any person from the other. However, the OED definition focuses on the individual and for the purposes of this thesis a concept of identity is required that understands individual identity as having its roots in groups and their beliefs and customs.

In order to arrive at a viable definition of identity, one which clarifies the aim of this study, it is necessary to look at identity from several perspectives. From this point of view, the term ‘identity’ has two connected senses to be examined, which are the social and personal. The social aspect refers to a particular social category and the rules of a group that identify its members accordingly. The other type, which is the personal aspect, identifies one’s consideration of a particular character or characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, and gender that s/he feels proud of socially. However, these characteristics are usually regarded as unchangeable.

James Fearon defines personal identity as ‘a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways’.³ This definition classifies people according to their feelings about their identity. An individual may or may not feel proud of his or her identity, but feelings about identity are at least orientated and absence of them could lead to debilitating confusion. In addition, a person may feel an inability to change even if s/he wants to. However, in this sense, personal identity is clearly used in ordinary language, but it is mainly concerned with individual self-respect and has an indirect relationship with pride, respect, and dignity, which does not match precisely the

² ‘Collins Dictionary’ <<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/identity>>.

³ James D. Fearon, ‘What Is Identity: As We Now Use the Word’ (Stanford University, 1999), p. 11 <<https://www.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf>> [accessed 3 July 2017].

meaning ascribed to personal identity. Personal identity is composed of elements such as race and gender. Samira Kawash states: 'In the fully racialized society of the United States, racial identity is an integral part of personal identity, as inextricable and powerful as gender identity'.⁴ This level of understanding helps clarify the argument of this thesis concerning identity in general, and African-American identity in particular, in the trilogies of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

We come now to the question of the effect of national identity on individuals and whether its impact bears resemblance to the effects of personal concerns on identity. The meaning of national identity is not always expressed in terms of people from a particular nation being different from those of other nations. When difference is recognised it does not always lead to conflict and there can be mutual understanding of, and respect for, national differences. So, what is meant by difference here?

The term personal identity has different meanings according to different points of view, so there is no easy way to establish a definite meaning, or definition of it, without overlapping with other terms and types of identity. However, some examples will help to clarify the definition and meaning of the term. For instance, a philosophical view considers identity as a collection of properties and virtues of a person. If this person changes them, then he/she is going to be a different person, so they are essential for him/her to maintain in order to be a particular person rather than merely a contingent being.⁵ For instance, if a person loses a limb, we will keep considering this person as the same, while if the same person loses his/her memory, he/she might not be considered as the same person anymore. However, this definition might not be the most accurate one, because in a case where a person may change his interests or a particular set of characteristics, this does not mean that he loses his identity. This might be applied to national identity. For example, if I changed my nationality, I would

⁴ Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 138.

⁵ Fearon, p. 12.

not lose my identity because it is a matter of feeling and belonging. Therefore, in order to give a final definition, one must concentrate on one particular aspect rather than a general definition for all. People express their personal identity as aspects of their personality which they cannot change or, according to their experience, they cannot even choose, for instance, sexual orientation or social category membership.

There are many types of personal identity but this thesis will discuss two types, which are gendered and psychological identities. Choosing these two types will lead to a better understanding of the novels discussed in this thesis as they were written by female authors. The choice of the second type, which is the psychological identity, has its application in both real and fictional life. The term gender gets its meaning from femininity or masculinity, as it was termed in Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke's 'Femininity and Masculinity'. Gender identity refers to the degree to which individuals see themselves, as either masculine or feminine, within their society. It is more of a social concept than a biological one. For instance, 'dominant or passive / brave or emotional' are the criteria most often used to identify gender identity. It is commonly known that males are masculine, and females define themselves as feminine but not in all cases as these are social classifications as stated above.⁶ It is possible that a female considers, and feels, herself to be masculine and *vice versa*.⁷

According to what has been stated, one should be able to differentiate between gender identity and any other concept related to gender, such as gender roles for instance. From a sociological perspective, as stated by Peter Burke, gender identity consists of all the characteristics that describe a person according to his/her gender identification.⁸ The formation of this identity is initiated at birth, and then the awareness of it comes from social

⁶ Jan Stets and Peter Burke, 'Femininity/Masculinity', in *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. by Edgar Borgatta and Rhonda Montgomery, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 997–1005 (p. 997).

⁷ Jan Stets and Burke, p. 1.

⁸ Jan Stets and Burke, p. 2.

interaction and other influences, such as that of parents and educational institutions, as stated by Phyllis Katz.⁹

The psychological identity of an individual has a great role in forming the personal one. This was first stated in Erik Erikson's works of the 1950s when he illustrated it from the psychosocial perspective.¹⁰ Erikson classified the presence of identity formation into two criteria. The first is exploration, where an individual seeks his/her origins, and where he belongs as a category in the society, according to what he thinks would fit. The second is a commitment, where an individual protects and follows the roles of his identity and the group s/he belongs to.¹¹ This way of understanding identity helps in clarifying the stages of structuring African-American identity. It also shows how identity is transferred to the level of commitment. There are several ways of showing that commitment, and fiction is one of them.

The second main category is social identity. There is a simple answer to the question "what is your identity?", which is derived from the question "who are you?". Therefore, to find an accurate answer for one's identity, one should just answer it right away. What will come first to one's mind is usually the prior identity category for that person. For instance, if I have been asked "what is your identity?", personally, I would say Iraqi because my national identity is my prior one. However, I am a Muslim, which is my religious identity, and an Arab as an ethnic identity, but what came to my mind first is considered as the main identity which I consider myself to be. The answer may differ from one person to another according to how others might define themselves. Moreover, in terms of persons, 'what would have to be different about me for me to be no longer who I am?'¹²

⁹ Phyllis A. Katz, 'Gender Identity: Development and Consequences', in *The Social Psychology of Female-Male Relations: A Critical Analysis of Central Concepts* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1986), pp. 21–67 (p. 59).

¹⁰ Erik H. Erikson, *Life History and the Historical Moment: Diverse Presentations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), p. 19.

¹¹ Jane Kroger and James E. Marcia, 'The Identity Statuses: Origins, Meanings, and Interpretations', in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, ed. by Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, and Vivian Vignoles (New York: Springer, 2011), pp. 31–53 (p. 33).

¹² Fearon, p. 12.

Since we consider personal identity as a part of a social category, we must understand its meaning and sources so that we can have a clear view towards the definition of personal identity and social identity as well. The social category is 'a set of people designated by a label (or labels) commonly given to, or used by, a set of people'.¹³ However, this label must be counted on by these people in sufficient situations so they can modify their behaviour accordingly. To be more specific and to illustrate this side of identity, there are two characteristics of the social category: first, it is designated according to implicit and explicit rules that, should a person follows them, then s/he will be placed in a particular category, while the second states that a social category is a set of characteristics such as beliefs, moral commitments, physical attributes, nation, gender, and sexuality.

The social category is socially constructed, which means that it is changeable over time, according to human action and discourse 'it cannot be surprising that people view identity-as-social-categories as objective features of their social worlds which they confront as unchangeable constraints'.¹⁴ A particular case can be examined in United States society, where no individual can exclude himself from a situation of being addressed as white, black, Hispanic, Arab, or Asian and this often comes with significant consequences. However, African Americans, who are the focus of this literary study, want to retain their African identity without denying their American identity, which means that one cannot be denied one's ethnic identity because of the existence of the national identity:

Therefore, while often serviceable for uses like "national identity," "ethnic identity," and the like, the short definition "an identity is a social category" misses an unelaborated argument implicit in the contemporary concept of identity. The argument holds that social categories enter into our sense of ourselves as individuals (a temporary gloss for personal identity) in complex

¹³ Fearon, p. 13.

¹⁴ Fearon, p. 15.

and possibly nefarious or coercive ways. Thus, “identity” can invoke not just a social category (content plus membership rules) but also the unarticulated ways that social identity constitutes personal identity.¹⁵

In this section, three types of social identity are going to be discussed: the national, religious and ethnic identities, as they are likely to be considered as the main criteria for assessing social identity. The concept of national identity has been used in political philosophy primarily by those who argue for the accuracy of using the term as a means towards ‘political self-determination’. The primary reason behind the existence of national identity is that any national group required a state in order to survive and live in prosperity in such a hostile international environment.¹⁶ In addition, this aspect of identity shows that a nation represents a group identity, so we need an account of the nature of one, to avoid a political replacement.¹⁷ Daniel Philpott states that ‘it simply does not matter which traits define a seceding group; we know one when it announces, campaigns, or takes up arms for its dream of self-determination’.¹⁸

Another facet of social identity is religious identity, and it refers to the way people relate to religion. It represents those who are born into it and those who choose to belong to a religious group or community. This type of identity stands for the way the followers feel about their beliefs. It also refers to how they practise these beliefs in their daily lives. These ideas make statements about how people want, or mean, to be socially.¹⁹ For instance, in the *vodou* religion of the African Caribbeans, their African traditional religion was mixed with their new religion of Christianity.²⁰ Therefore, it became one of the methods to preserve their

¹⁵ Fearon, p. 16.

¹⁶ Omar Dahbour, ‘National Identity: An Argument for the Strict Definition’, *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 16.1 (2002), 17–37 (p. 17).

¹⁷ Dahbour, p. 18.

¹⁸ Dahbour, p. 18.

¹⁹ Matthew Browne, Diana Carbonell, and Justin Merrill, ‘Intercultural Inquiry of Religion and Identity-Making at Carnegie Mellon University’, *Carnegie Mellon University*, 2003, p. 2.

²⁰ Donald Henry Matthews, *Honoring the Ancestors: An African Cultural Interpretation of Black Religion and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 34.

culture over time.²¹ Some of the events and characters in the novels studied in ext two chapters are analysed from a biblical perspective in addition to an African folkloric perspective. This thesis discusses some of these views. The main focus of analysis is to examine these elements from an Afrocentric perspective. For instance, although there are views where African-American slaves' diasporic experiences can be compared to that of the Israelites and their journey, this thesis examines African heritage rather than biblical interpretations or comparisons. The Haggadah states, 'In every generation, each of us should feel as though we ourselves had gone forth from Egypt, as it is written: "And you shall explain to your child"'.²²

However, the idea of religious identity is a debatable issue as Brian W. Thomas states in his article 'Struggling with the Past: Some Views of African-American Identity' where he discusses the case of African Americans who converted to Christianity and how the new religion framed their sense of identity and belonging. They even started debating with other African Americans who kept the pagan religion which they brought to America. Therefore, the new African converts added some of their paganist rituals to their new religion of Christianity. In other words, they "Africanized" their Christianity.²³ This probably comes as a result of embracing the religion of one group and the other. This idea is highlighted in the novels examined in this thesis, especially *Beloved* and *Pardise* and Toni Morrison's depiction of Baby Suggs and Consolata's religious practices. Also, this idea is presented in the religion of the Olinka in *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker.

The third part of social identity is ethnic identity. According to Kanchan Chandra, the concept can be defined as 'any social category in which an individual is eligible to be a

²¹ Robert Yeates, "'The Unshriven Dead, Zombies on the Loose': African and Caribbean Religious Heritage in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 61.3 (2015), 515–37 (p. 517).

²² The Haggadah, referred to in: Nancy Bate, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Psalm and Sacrament', in *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities*, ed. by Shirley A. Stave (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 26–71 (p. 31).

²³ Brian W. Thomas, p. 42.

member. Ethnic identity categories, I propose, are a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by descent-based attributes'.²⁴ There are several definitions of the term but it could be simplified as the feeling of belonging to a race where it makes a community in which every member has duties towards other members individually and to the group as a whole. In an interview with Sheldon Hackney, Morrison replied to a question regarding the use of community in her novels and whether it is consciously used:

Being one of "them" [children of poor people] for the first twenty years of my life, I'm very, very conscious of all—not upward mobility, but gestures of separation in terms of class. Community, for me, is extremely important, not in the sense of there is a community that has to be maintained at all costs the way it is or was, but that communities offer some very positive things and they offer negative things. The tension is between the community and the individual always. It seems to me that one builds a community, also.²⁵

This type of identity is very important, and it is very close in meaning to national identity. However, it is likely to be less significant as most countries have more than one ethnicity; for example, in my country, Iraq, there are two major ethnicities Arabic and Kurdish. However, according to the demographic distribution of Arabia, there are thirty-three countries sharing one dominant ethnicity. These countries are likely to be descended from one tribal root, sharing the same language and history, which is an essential aspect of ethnic identity, besides sharing a religion in more than ninety per cent of the area.²⁶ Finally, in order to explain the concept of an ethnic group, Fearon and Laitin define an ethnic group as 'a group larger than a

²⁴ Kanchan Chandra, 'What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9 (2006), 397–424 (p. 398).

²⁵ Carolyn C. Denard, *Toni Morrison: Conversations* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), pp. 133–34.

²⁶ Drew DeSilver and David Masci, 'World's Muslim Population More Widespread than You Might Think', *Pew Research Center*, 2017 <<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/31/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/>> [accessed 18 September 2017].

family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous, and has a conventionally recognized “natural history” as a group’.²⁷

In addition to the previous classification of identity as personal and social, there is another way of understanding it, which is by dividing identity into role identities and type identities. The first refers to labelling people who are assigned to do specific actions, for example routine behaviour in certain situations like mother, father, and doctor. However, the second, which is type identities, labels individuals who share some characteristics in appearance, behavioural traits, beliefs, values, or skills; for example, sharing a language or history. Therefore, with these types as parameters, all of the types and branches of identity can be identified and classified accordingly. However, some identities may involve both role and type at the same time, for example, the role of the mother, where she exhibits both duties and a commitment to her identity. Therefore, understanding these types and how they function helps to analyse the novels under study.

There are two questions which might be raised in accordance with the norms, of having an action as a motivation of identity. The first question is, what is the reason or the motive which can lead a person to act according to criteria with a link to social identity? The second question is, why we may consider this specific action as a norm and not something else as a different motivator. For instance, why is this specific person wearing clothes differently? Why does a Muslim woman wear a veil?

These questions have different answers, and there is not a single specific answer for them. Firstly, one may think that it is the right thing to follow and depict this norm, and also that going against it would make him/her lose self-respect or cause disharmony in the society. New merits may come due to personal experience or personal judgment, in addition to the thought that if a person goes against it, he/she might be isolated, or will be poorly thought of,

²⁷ Chandra, p. 6.

as will be seen later in the novels, especially *Paradise* by Morrison. The second is that one might be motivated to follow a specific norm, seeking approval, despite any action that one might do. Alternatively, it might be a reason for a person who desires to be rewarded.

Thirdly, one might act accordingly to gain the trust of a group of people or a community that he/she wants to communicate with or to live among. Finally, one may follow a specific norm because it is the only way that he/she can act accordingly, otherwise the person might not know how to act properly with so many choices available.

To sum up, identity may consist of a personal style, occupation, ethnicity or culture, which someone may belong to (such as country, region, and gender) religion or sector, colour, a way of living, and sharing goals in life. These aspects might be taken as a personal identity which one could consider as essential and feel proud of, and be happy to be distinguished by, because 'Identity is essentially the basis of one's dignity and self-respect, it became less mysterious how this ambiguous construct can powerfully motivate actions'.²⁸ These actions might differ according to the situation, as one can sustain and defend his/ her identity with knowledge, literature, art, media and in other peaceful ways. However, there might also be violence and wars which will depend on the situation and conditions.

During the 1970s, identity was frequently used in everyday language and many disciplines. However, the term was mostly explored by historians and anthropologists, in addition to humanitarian and social scholars, due to the relation of their work to the field of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and other social aspects.²⁹ The term 'identity' was not much used by political scientists as they treated the concept, and the researchers in humanities who had been using it, with scepticism. However, a correlation between recent research on identity and postmodernism, seem to reject the social sciences and consider it as

²⁸ Fearon, p. 26.

²⁹ Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Identities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 36.

an empirical enterprise with no value.³⁰ As the concept illustrated above, political scientists have been left with no reason to avoid the term; on the contrary, social categories and the individual's sense of dignity and self-respect are both highly relevant to the understanding of modern politics.

Therefore, we could say that actions can be understood and explained returning to the two main types of identity and the understanding of this concept. Therefore, we have a personal and social classification, and we understand that personal identity is what an individual believes and chooses to be identified with, which forms the basis of his/her self-respect. According to this, actions can be understood either in the sense of one's membership of a group or through the self-respect and dignity of the individual. Moreover, one of the main goals of this research is to show the reactions of group identity, and how its members act towards the struggles necessary in order to keep their heritage and identity alive. The thesis focuses on African-American identity and how group members managed to sustain it through folklore, where identity and folklore are interrelated topics in many cases.

Trauma and Identity

Due to the engagement of the novels analysed by this thesis with traumatic events, such as slavery, rape and genital mutilation, the impact of trauma on identity needs some consideration. Trauma is considered as one of the main elements that has a direct effect on creating and shaping identities. Trauma and identity are related to the emotional part of the human being. They help in identifying people in groups and classifying them according to the circumstances they have been exposed to, such as psychological effects, whether they are direct, of the first generation, or indirect, where trauma is being transferred to later generations.

³⁰ Appiah and Gates Jr., p. 36.

To understand the way trauma is linked to identity, this section is divided into three parts. The first deals with the lexical, psychological and literary definitions of trauma and its types. The second part deals with the link between trauma and literature and how it helps in clarifying ideas in earlier studies, where trauma and its theory were not used to interpret literary works. Then the third part shows the link between trauma and identity, and how critics dealt with it in different periods. Finally, the section will conclude with a consideration of the importance of literary trauma theory, and how it helps to answer the research question of this thesis regarding the use of literature to sustain an African-American identity.

The word “Trauma” is an ancient Greek word which means “wound.” Although the meaning in English has generally been the same, modern meaning varies according to the discipline and the context in which the word is used.³¹ For instance, the concept has been defined by *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary*, where the first defines trauma as ‘A mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time [...] unpleasant experience that makes you feel upset and/ or anxious’,³² while the second defines the term as a psychological injury that might happen due to an emotional shock whose effects may remain unhealed.³³ These definitions differ from the social or psychological points of view. However, they all result in identifying and understanding the concept fully from different aspects. From the lexical definition, derived from the above-mentioned dictionaries, I can conclude that trauma emanates from exposure to an emotional or physical hurt which causes a psychological reaction to the original hurt, and which determines a person’s behaviour and responses.

However, from the psychological and social perspective, trauma could be defined as emanating from a stressful pressure, or a life-threatening experience. Such experience might

³¹ Elissa Marder, ‘Trauma and Literary Studies: Some “Enabling Questions.”’, *Reading On: A Journal of Theory and Criticism*, 1.1 (2006), 1–6 (p. 1).

³² Albert Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, ed. by Sally Wehmeier, 6th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1384.

³³ Simpson and Weiner, p. 414.

be natural or human-made violence such as the witnessing of a killing, rape, or racial degradation. Experience of traumatic events has a lasting impact that can be physical or psychological, and exceeds one's ability to handle or to cope with it. Trauma is not a result of very serious events alone, but might result from less dramatic ones, and it is measured by the negative impact it has on the individual. This aspect can be noticed in both of the trilogies under study and will be highlighted in detail throughout the analysis.

There are two types of people who suffer from trauma. The first type is the person who is directly exposed to, and suffers from, a traumatic event. For instance, as in the novels in this thesis, the slaves who were brought from Africa to the United States, along with those who were born in captivity as slaves. This type suffered traumatic events in the past when they were tortured and witnessed the lynching of slaves. The other type includes those who were told, and knew of the history of their relatives, and 'saw' their suffering through written documents or storytelling.³⁴

Types of Trauma

Psychological trauma has four main types, which are classified by researchers and communities according to their causes and results. These types are classified as historical, intergenerational, cultural, and race-based trauma.³⁵ They have a direct or indirect impact on the lives of the people under their influence. These types lead, in one way or another, to the formation of identity and how people classify themselves in groups. They also affect the unconscious mind of writers and artists who articulate their creative work in a specific framework. This helps to sustain their heritage and history in order to make them feel the

³⁴ Michael Soutis, 'Ancient Greek Terminology in Pediatric Surgery: About the Word Meaning', *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*, 41.7 (2006), 1302–8 (p. 1302).

³⁵ Elizabeth Fast and Delphine Collin-Vezina, 'Historical Trauma, Race-Based Trauma and Resilience of Indigenous People: A Literature Review', *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 5.1 (2010), 126–36 (p. 129).

commitment to educate the groups about them, and also to transfer knowledge to the next generation. This feeling supports their idea of belonging and promotes respect for roots.

Historical Trauma

Historical Trauma, according to Maria Brave Heart, refers to the ‘cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over a lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma’.³⁶ Elsewhere, she defines it as cumulative exposure to the hard situation that an individual experiences which affects him/her and continues to affect subsequent generations. Such results usually come from extreme experiences, such as genocides.³⁷ Although the work of Brave Heart concentrates on Native Americans, she does refer to others who are likely to have suffered historical trauma, mentioning the experience of African Americans during the period of slavery and post-slavery, (such as in the novels in chapter three and four), which is another type of trauma that is going to be discussed in this section. Moreover, there is another classification of historical trauma, known as multigenerational trauma, which is an experience in one generation of a family that can affect the generations to come. Thus historical trauma can be explained as the experience of ‘anyone living in families at one time marked by severe levels of trauma, poverty, dislocation, war, and who are still suffering as a result’.³⁸ This type of trauma could be represented by the state of a person who lives with people who experienced a traumatic event in the past and who thereby make him or her experience their past.³⁹ In addition, historical trauma could be applied to colonised and

³⁶ Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, ‘The Historical Trauma Response among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration’, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35.1 (2003), 7–13 (p. 7).

³⁷ Mike Cutler, ‘Multigenerational Trauma: Behavior Patterns in Cultures’, 2010, p. 4
<<http://ssc.bibalex.org/viewer/detail.jsf?lid=90AA12E7BFB5DEA078C8947372E9241D>> [accessed 2 August 2017].

³⁸ Cutler, p. 10.

³⁹ Brave Heart and Maria Yellow Horse, ‘Wakiksuyapi: Carrying the Historical Trauma of the Lakota’, *Tulane Studies in Social Welfare*, 21.22 (2000), 245–66 (p. 248).

indigenous people as suggested by Evans Campbell.⁴⁰ This aspect of trauma can be traced throughout the trilogies under study.

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma usually follows historical trauma. To differentiate between these two types, we can say that historical trauma takes place in the memory of a person who suffered from a traumatic event, such as the slavery of the African Americans. However, what follows these events, from the historical document or storytelling of the second generation, is what makes the trauma intergenerational. The second generation sees the suffering of their parents and what happened to them and becomes affected by the transferred feelings and torture. In other words, it is the traumatic experience of the earlier generation that ‘continues to affect the subsequent generations’.⁴¹

Brave Hart refers to the continuity of intergenerational trauma, ‘the historical legacy and the current psychological conditions contribute to ongoing intergenerational trauma’.⁴² From this perspective, a clear link can be seen between what the new generation of African Americans is facing in American society, especially the young people, and the past that the previous generation lived through.⁴³ The trauma of the new generations is classified under the category of rememory. Intergenerational trauma affects the identity, personal behaviour, relationship skills, attitudes and beliefs, of past and future generations.⁴⁴ The link here is rather apparent, as this thesis is about folklore in the writing of contemporary African-

⁴⁰ Fast and Collin-Vezina, p. 131.

⁴¹ Iva Grey Wolf, ‘Out of the Darkness’ (presented at the Section VI: Alaska Native/American Indian/Indigenous Women, Seattle, Washington, 2011) <www.apadivisions.org/division-35/sections/section-six>.

⁴² Heart, p. 4.

⁴³ A study conducted by Mullan-Gonzalez shows how the past affects the new generations, although they have not experienced any of the past sufferings that their parents or grandparents did. For further information, please refer to: Jennifer Mullan-Gonzalez, ‘Slavery and the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma in Inner City African American Male Youth: A Model Program-from the Cotton Fields to the Concrete Jungle’ (California Institute of Integral Studies, 2012), p. 148.

⁴⁴ Grey Wolf, p. 3.

American novels. This aspect is illustrated throughout the analysis of the literary texts in chapters three and four, for instance, the case of Denver and her mother Sethe in *Beloved*.

The memory of the mother and the rememory of the daughter brings about intergenerational trauma.

Cultural Trauma

Cultural trauma represents the suffering of a particular people who have been under cultural pressure. Cultural trauma is spread widely around the world as it mainly affects people who live in a diverse society such as the United States of America. There are several groups of people in US society who were, and continue to be, oppressed, such as the Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics. However, this chapter discusses its effects on African Americans and how they were treated in different periods, such as in the eras of slavery, discrimination, and civil rights.

Jeffrey C. Alexander defines cultural trauma as ‘a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative effects, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions’.⁴⁵

Alexander states that cultural trauma occurs when members of a group feel exposed to a traumatic event which leaves a mark on their memory and which may reform their future identity fundamentally and irrevocably. An understanding of this type of trauma enables an understanding of its tragic impact upon African-Americans’ interactions in society, a feature which is presented in the novels selected in this thesis.

With respect to the case of the United States of America, the issue of slavery and colour inequality is part of the historical heritage of democracy in the country. Ron Eyerman

⁴⁵ Jeffrey C. Alexander and others, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (California: University of California Press, 2004), p. 44.

highlights in his book, *Cultural Trauma*, how the collective memory of slavery is constructed. He concentrated on African Americans only and neglected, or did not refer to, the other combinations of American society, but was aiming at one of the elements that this research is exploring. The African-American trauma, as Eyerman argues, is derived from the memory of slavery and not direct experience of the period of slavery. The suffering of the later generations, due to the stories, documents, and collective memory, contributed much in forming African-American social identity.⁴⁶ For instance, the collective trauma that Denver, one of the main characters in *Beloved*, expresses is derived from the stories she heard from her mother and grandmother.

Cultural trauma is also derived from the feeling of ‘double consciousness’ as W. E. B. Du Bois describes it. Double consciousness brings instability to the self and makes one feel as if caught between two cultures, and at the same time having the feeling of not belonging to either of them.⁴⁷ The concept of double consciousness creates the feeling of being marginalised and leads to the motivation for an identity quest. This helps in explaining the case of African-American people with problems of identity and feelings of belonging.

Race-Based Trauma

The other type of trauma that has a strong impact on African Americans is race-based trauma, which has also been termed insidious trauma, intergenerational trauma, psychological trauma, racism and racist incident-based trauma.⁴⁸ It can be defined as an emotional injury that is motivated by hate or fear of a person or group of people as a result of their race. The injury is likely to be such that it affects a person’s ability to cope with it. This trauma is not only connected to groups, but sometimes even to institutional induced stress, which is motivated

⁴⁶ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Thema Bryant-Davis, ‘Healing Requires Recognition: The Case for Race-Based Traumatic Stress’, *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35.1 (2007), 135–43 (p. 135).

by racism and which causes fear and hopelessness.⁴⁹ Such suffering has an enormous impact on individuals or groups as it forces them to attend cultural gatherings, which leads to the creation of a new identity that is likely to be a cultural one.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

This type is under research and has garnered a great deal of academic interest over the past three decades in different fields of study such as psychology, sociology, and public health. PTSD gained the attention of trauma studies academics desirous of a cure for certain traumas such as those emanating from sexual abuse, natural disasters and, especially, armed combat.⁵⁰ In what follows, I show how groups can overcome pain and come to live normally among other groups even if those other groups were past oppressors.

Psychologically, the most common method to treat the effects of trauma, although there is no definite cure, is to challenge its most common symptoms, such as isolation that brings depression, leading to disruption of the harmony of society and the community. The best way to overcome the feeling of isolation is to be open and to socialise with people nearby and to talk about the experience, rather than keeping it inside, which can be psychologically detrimental. Cathy Caruth states that the reason for reflecting on trauma is due to its importance as one of the main contributors to the understanding of history, culture, and ethnic identity. As stated earlier, the treatment of trauma is to tell the story behind it, and fiction is one of the ways to do this. By expressing feelings, one can become emotionally attached and feel a sense of belonging to one's group.⁵¹ Therefore, this type of identity is created when the victim must tell the story to be cured or to feel better, and they usually do it in fiction and story writing. For instance, the stories that are told by Paul D, and Sethe, in

⁴⁹ Bryant-Davis, p. 135.

⁵⁰ Eliana Barrios Suarez, 'Trauma in Global Contexts: Integrating Local Practices and Socio-Cultural Meanings into New Explanatory Frameworks of Trauma', *International Social Work*, 59.1 (2016), 141–53 (p. 141).

⁵¹ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 63.

Beloved, and Celie, and her sister Nettie, in *The Color Purple*. The last two chapters of this thesis reflect on the importance of storytelling as part of identity formation. We will see that the elements of belonging and identity can assist in curing traumatic effects.

Literature and Trauma

With reference to talking, testimony, and socialisation, the idea of narrative arises. Narrative and trauma have a logical link due to the stories told by those who experienced traumatic events. The purpose of story telling is to express the feelings of the narrator, to give a chance to others to know about it and finally to cure or provide relief to those who share a similar experience. It has been stated by one of the Holocaust survivors in Fortunoff,⁵² referenced by Caruth, that ‘we wanted to survive so as to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell our story’.⁵³ The language of literature and the literary ways of communicating trauma are significantly stronger than the language of law, as stated by Shoshana Felman, and it can convey the truth even if it cannot be expressed in legal way.⁵⁴ Therefore, storytelling is considered as a treatment method due to its connection to the feeling of the narrators and makes a strong link to the victims’ roots and current group.

Theorisations of trauma, in relation to literature, have been articulated by Kali Tal and Cathy Caruth. Their works broadened the scope of literary analysis to fully understand literature and culture by referring to trauma and its elements. Although trauma can cause disintegration, the great value that accompanies the experience is the influence it may exert upon many individuals, and it can bring about cultural change. The inclusion of trauma in

⁵² ‘In 1979, a grassroots organization, the Holocaust Survivors Film Project, began videotaping Holocaust survivors and witnesses in New Haven, Connecticut. In 1981, the original collection of testimonies was deposited at Yale University, and the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies opened its doors to the public the following year’, for more information, please refer to: ‘About the Fortunoff Video Archive | Yale University Library’ <<https://web.library.yale.edu/testimonies/about>> [accessed 16 July 2018].

⁵³ Caruth, p. 63.

⁵⁴ Marder, p. 5.

literature adds an interesting subject to be studied using theoretical pluralism, which helps to understand the various forms of trauma.⁵⁵ Moreover, being a field not available to earlier criticism, trauma theory provides more recent critics with the flexibility to understand historical events and the way writers approach them. In addition, considering the relationship that individuals have with their groups and societies, in relation to trauma, provides a way of thinking about the way trauma of an individual is linked to the trauma of others.⁵⁶

There are usually three changes in the development of the literatures of colonised people: the colonised are first convinced that the colonisers' culture is superior to their own, therefore early writers depicted European culture. Then they find themselves experiencing, what is called by Du Bois, a 'double consciousness', a negotiation of African culture and American culture, a debilitating 'twoness', resulting eventually in reclamation of the past and the ancestor's culture.⁵⁷ In order to understand trauma in literary texts we need to find a literary theory that explains the signs of trauma. So, literary trauma theory was used to link the psychological concept with literature. Contemporary pluralistic approaches are used so that readers and critics can understand the contexts, responses, and narratives since they link neurobiological and social contexts.⁵⁸

African-American Trauma and Identity

As Martin Luther King Jr.⁵⁹ argued,

Being a Negro in America means trying to smile when you want to cry, it
means trying to hold on to physical life amid psychological death: It means the

⁵⁵ Michelle Belave, *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 5.

⁵⁶ Belave, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 200.

⁵⁸ Fanon, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister and a civil rights movement activist, leader, and spokesperson from 1954 until the last day of his life in 1968. For further information, please refer to: Peter J. Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (London: Routledge, 2015).

pain of watching your children grow up with clouds of inferiority in their mental skies: It means having your legs cut off and then being condemned for being a cripple: It means seeing your mother and father spiritually murdered by the slings and arrows of daily exploitation, and then being hated for being an orphan.⁶⁰

King's speech shows how trauma has a significant impact on the formation of American identity in general. As has been mentioned earlier, the US has arguably experienced two major traumas, the time of slavery and 9/11.⁶¹ Both of these events created contemporary traumas that have national affects, on Americans themselves, and international affects, in the countries where the war against terrorism took place. In addition, the brutality of slavery, which has left its marks on the history of African Americans in particular, has had its effects on many generations. Literary works, which took slavery as their main theme, are evident proof that authors still think about slavery, and that readers are still interested in reading further about it.

Memories and collective identities are so deeply connected that most ethnic minorities link their collective identities with a remembrance of the past that includes valorisation of ancestors as a source of empowerment and positive identity formation.⁶² This idea was supported by Du Bois's definition of African-American identity as a merging of old and new cultural identities.⁶³ Therefore, it is essential to consider the ancestor's cultural identity when dealing with cultural trauma, as it leads to the formation of new cultural identities. This

⁶⁰ Martin Luther King Jr. cited in Robert McMillian Jr., *The Mentality of Racist White America Is the Mentality of Black America: And the Mentality of Men Is the Mentality of Women - Sexually* (Bloomington, Ind: Xlibris Corporation, 2010), p. 42.

⁶¹ Anna Lisa Tota, 'Public Memory and Cultural Trauma', *Javnost - The Public*, 13.3 (2006), 81–94 (p. 87) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2006.11008921>>.

⁶² Pier Larson, 'Reconsidering Trauma, Identity, and the African Diaspora: Enslavement and Historical Memory in Nineteenth-Century Highland Madagascar', *African and American Atlantic Worlds*, 56.2 (1999), 335–62 (p. 335).

⁶³ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 10.

explains the insertion of ancestral stories in the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, as discussed in the last two chapters of this thesis.

The celebration of United States democracy hides a long, ongoing history of inequality based on colour discrimination against many groups and ethnicities who live on American soil. For Ron Eyerman, collective memory aids creation of a specifically African-American social identity.⁶⁴ African-American people were considered as ‘Other’ by the ‘white’ and were excluded from society and that leads to social trauma. This exclusion leads African-American society to reconsider its past, helping in the formation of identity. The situation was even worse for African-American women as they suffered in two ways; being black and female, they suffered at the hands of both white and black men. This idea forms a major theme in the literary works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. They also delineate the African-American experience of slavery and its impact on following generations and show how the characters often rely on the principle of ‘Home’ to survive racial trauma.⁶⁵

The reason for the importance of the relationship between identity and trauma is that the trauma experienced by African Americans initiated a racist reaction on their part, which forced them into a self-defensive community that excluded other colour minorities.⁶⁶ This gathering together of members of an ethnicity or a race brought its heritage and culture back and made its members respect and show commitment to their original identity which led to the positive double consciousness outlined by Du Bois as the experience of being both African and American, or the ‘unhomely’⁶⁷ of Homi Bhabha.⁶⁸ The idea of home and

⁶⁴ Robert Washington, ‘Review of Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity, by Ron Eyerman’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 108 (2002), 3 (p. 689).

⁶⁵ Ulrika Persson, ‘Cultural Trauma and Cultural Identity: A Study of Pilate in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*’ (Halmstad University, 2014), p. 1 <urn:nbn:se:hh:diva-24445>.

⁶⁶ Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, p. 59.

⁶⁷ Bhabha defines it as ‘the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world’, please refer to: Homi Bhabha, ‘The World and the Home’, *Social Text*, 31/32, 1992, 141–53 (p. 141).

⁶⁸ Lucy Karanja, ‘“Homeless” at Home: Linguistic, Cultural, and Identity Hybridity and Third Space Positioning of Kenyan Urban Youth’, *Comparative and International Education/Éducation Comparée et Internationale*, 39.2 (2010), 1–19 (p. 3).

belonging, which has a direct impact on identity, is referred to by Morrison when she writes in the preface to her penultimate novel, *Home*:

Whose house is this? Whose night keeps out the light in here? Say who owns this house? It is not mine. I had another sweeter ... The house is strange. Its shadows lie. Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?⁶⁹

Home represents the peace of soul and mind, where a person can feel safe and in control of his/her life. This feeling was missing for the African slaves in the United States and the loss transferred to the later generations of African Americans.

It could be said that there is a significant link between remembering the traumatic past of and identity because they have a psychological and social impact on each other. This relationship was explored in narrative form and then presented in literary texts to operate as a historical record, despite being formed in a literary way. For example, such a relationship can be seen in the representation of Margaret Garner in *Beloved* and the migration of African Americans in *Paradise*, and the genital mutilation in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Literary critics and neuropsychology scientists agree on the importance of therapy to reduce the impact of the sufferings of the past on victims. It is through telling stories about traumatic events, for the tellers' and the listeners' benefit, as mentioned earlier, that trauma can be overcome. The 'unspeakable' should be spoken so that others understand that suffering is driven by silence and isolation. In other words, remembering the slave past and recalling folklore and culture strengthen feelings of belonging in the creation of a spiritual home, maintain the identity of minority groups and provide the cohesion necessary for demanding civil rights. This aspect of remembering can be seen in both trilogies, however, Morrison's novels have a deeper focus on memory and rememory than Walker's as all Morrison's

⁶⁹ Toni Morrison, *Home* (London: Vintage, 2016) Preface.

characters reflect on the past and how it influences the present and determines future decisions.

Section Two: African Identity and Contemporary Fiction

One of the main types of identity, and the feeling of belonging, comes from the concept of race. Du Bois stated in *The Conservation of Race* that race is ‘a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, tradition and impulse’.⁷⁰ He also added that these groups would strive together, voluntarily and involuntarily, in order to achieve ‘vividly conceived ideals of life’.⁷¹ These groups are connected to each other not just by appearance but also through culture and art, and African-Americans are not just a race, according to Du Bois, but an ethnicity.

Identity and Literature

Literary writers are considered as being among the most sensitive, intellectual, representative, and probing of artists, as described by Morrison.⁷² The basis of all these characteristics is their ability to imagine ‘what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, and is the test of their power’.⁷³ In addition to the language they use, the way they situate their art, within social and historical contexts, is significant. Through understanding the language of writers, the advantages and disadvantages of an author’s perspective can be determined, whether directly or indirectly. Therefore, Morrison believes that the writer should clarify the use of Africanism, and what it stands for as an identity and its effects in American literature.⁷⁴

Literature is considered one of the main tools to preserve people’s culture and traditions, since it consists of proverbs, tales, songs, myths, and many other aspects.

⁷⁰ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Conservation of Races* (Washington, DC: American Negro Academy, 1897), p. 7.

⁷¹ Du Bois, *The Conservation of Races*, p. 7.

⁷² Toni Morrison, ‘Playing in the Dark’, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Michael Ryan (Boston: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), p. 1010.

⁷³ Morrison, ‘Playing in the Dark’, p. 1010.

⁷⁴ Morrison, ‘Playing in the Dark’, p. 1010.

Literature proves to be an effective tool due to all the evidence that we have from legends and mythologies in which the writer's name is unknown in many cases, but the literary work is preserved for generations as it reaches us and future generations to come. Those who live through difficult periods, like the period of slavery and its aftermath, integrate experience with their culture and identity.⁷⁵ African Americans usually strive through their writing to empower their self-identity and to strengthen their roots to have their voices heard and respected.

African-American Identity in Literature

The Negro has been a man without a history because he has been considered a man without a worthy culture.⁷⁶

This statement shows the importance of culture and traditions to any nation in general, and to African Americans in particular. Black peoples' heritage shapes their position in such a diverse society as the American one. The increased interest in heritage started during 'the wake of the failures of Reconstruction' and the increase in violence against African Americans. By the time of the Harlem Renaissance,⁷⁷ there was a call for the restoration of history, heritage and cultural roots as a base to build identity upon. One of the major callers for this campaign was Arthur Schomburg, who is considered as the founder of the largest cultural reservoir of African-American heritage. He believed that an African American 'must remake his past in order to make his future [...] a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice'.⁷⁸ Schomburg also believed that it was the duty of African-American authors to restore, celebrate, and sustain their culture. It is necessary for history to restore the heritage and culture of which they were dispossessed,

⁷⁵ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, p. 738.

⁷⁶ Arthur Schomburg and Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'The Negro Digs Up His Past', in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 937–42 (p. 939).

⁷⁷ Schomburg and Gates Jr., pp. 937–38.

⁷⁸ Schomburg and Gates Jr., p. 937.

during the time of slavery. This duty will be left for the present generations to undertake as they continue to play a part in restoring and offsetting a history of racism and discrimination.

From the time of their arrival in America, Africans were enslaved, and denied their freedom and culture, because they faced the dominant culture of the European immigrants, who brought their culture and traditions with them, and neglected any other cultures. This was a challenge to African Americans, as they were threatened with losing their identity and heritage. Werner Sollors and Maria Diedrich state that, ‘for the European the encounter with America represented human progress in history, but for the slaves it meant their expulsion from history’.⁷⁹ Many African-American authors between the 1880s and the 1940s shared the same vision as Schomburg, and they countered ‘the hegemonically imposed break with the past’⁸⁰ by creating a link with the past to preserve it. Therefore, they faced the oppression of the present with the strength of the past, in order to create a better present and future. Du Bois referred to this point by stating that African-American art is ‘as new as it is old and as old as new’.⁸¹

One of the reasons that African-American authors wrote about slavery is to offer the readers of the twenty-first century a window through time to look back at the situation of the African Americans from the nineteenth century.⁸² Such authors were telling the untold, and speaking the unspoken things, that time and the dominant culture tried to eliminate from the memory and the history of the African Americans. The topic of slavery also allows writers, the female ones in particular, to tackle several themes such as power, family, identity and even authenticity. The black female writers’ voices offer a corrective to the ideology of the black male writers, by putting more focus on black female suffering, throughout their

⁷⁹ Werner Sollors and Maria Diedrich, *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in African American Literature and Culture*, Harvard English Studies, 19 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 50.

⁸⁰ Alicia A Kent, *African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 27.

⁸¹ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, ‘Criteria of Negro Art’, *Crisis*, 32.6 (1926), 290–97 (p. 297).

⁸² Amy K. Levin, *Africanism and Authenticity in African-American Women’s Novels*, 1st edition (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003), pp. 115–16.

experience in the United States of America. These aspects or themes have a distinct influence on the readers through the characterisation and language used. In addition, the slave narrative reflects a political opinion not only on former times, but also of the current one where discrimination and racism still have an impact on American society. Elizabeth Beaulieu states that the slave narrative of the twentieth century is ‘the inevitable literary outgrowth of both the civil rights movement and the feminist movement’.⁸³ Therefore, it is these two movements that have played a major and influential role in the authors, and readers, understanding of the past. With regard to the importance of literature for African Americans, Pauline Hopkins states that:

Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs – religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation.⁸⁴

She also adds that African-American men and women should develop themselves and ‘will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history’⁸⁵ because no one will do this for them. Hopkins also believes that there should be a firm connection between African-American fiction and history, due to its effectiveness and the role that fiction plays in making the past familiar to new generations. Moreover, history has powerful material for writers, filled with ‘fire and romance’, which is adaptable for achieving social and political aims. Both Morrison and Walker, feature historical events such as escaping slavery, migration, and the American Civil War in their novels.

Generally, writing from a place remote from the centre, either through immigration, exile, or slavery, can result in the use of literature as a method of resistance. This matter

⁸³ Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 4.

⁸⁴ Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 14–15.

⁸⁵ Hopkins, pp. 13–14.

reframes the style of African-American writing in the West, and adds uniqueness to the writing method. It also works as a process ‘through which women can become aware of their *potentia*⁸⁶ that enhances empowerment and community cohesion.⁸⁷ The references to Africa in the literary texts of contemporary writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison require us to read further about Africa, and more deeply, in the way that African Americans themselves may understand Africa, and what Africa stands for as an ethnicity or a cultural symbol. This reading will help to understand female blackness in these texts and how it functions.

In his article, ‘Culture as Identity: An Anthropologist’s View’, Cohen defines ethnicity as a fluid term due to its changeability according to its application to a range of changing contexts. In this regard, ethnicity is likely to be the central pillar of African-American identity since it became their mode of action and representation. Ethnicity also refers to ‘a decision people make to depict themselves or others symbolically as the bearers of a certain cultural identity’.⁸⁸ Therefore, Africa in the literature of the African Americans has a significant role in shaping identity in many different ways since it is, as described by Cohen, ‘much more than race. It is also traditions, rituals, values, and the belief system of African American people’.⁸⁹ At this point, where the link between folklore and identity becomes clear and effective, the correlation between the two is likely to be the motive for African-American authors to go deep into the realm of folklore, since it leads to strengthening and sustaining their identity. In this way of understanding African-American identity and its elements we can

⁸⁶ ‘*Potentia* is the way outside the imposed system, to what has often been described as post-structuralist identity, which means constructing subjectivity, and not identity, according to multiple positioning and around the gap imposed by structural imposition’ in Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Writing against the Grain: African Women’s Texts on Female Infibulation as Literature of Resistance’, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 7.2 (2000), 303–18 (p. 361).

⁸⁷ Ponzanesi, p. 303.

⁸⁸ Anthony P. Cohen, ‘Culture as Identity: An Anthropologist’s View’, *New Literary History*, 24.1 (1993), 195–209 (pp. 196–97).

⁸⁹ Manning Marable, ‘Race, Identity, and Political Culture’, in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michelle Wallace*, ed. by Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), p. 295.

say that Africa, as a symbol in their literature, is a place where all these elements come to meet, and it is used in order to aggregate, rather than integrate, the people who share it.

Some of the authors may declare the ways they use, and the reasons for the use, traditions in their literature. However, others leave it to the judgement of their readers to find out the hidden clues and the real intention of the authors. This tends to be one of the styles of writing, and it seems to be one of the differences between the writing of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. For instance, Morrison presents a dilemma and then leaves its solution for the readers to find and to interpret the meaning according to their own understanding, for example, the mystery in *Beloved*. Morrison herself declared this by saying that ‘I am not explaining anything to anybody. My work bears witness’.⁹⁰ However, with Walker, the matter is slightly different, where the author solves almost all the riddles in her writing and focuses on the message she wants the reader to receive in a clear and straightforward way; for instance, the issues of female genital mutilation (FGM). These points are presented in detail in both chapter four and chapter five of this thesis. This is not a diversion from the main topic here, which is identity and literature, since it has been explained earlier how the symbolism and metaphor of Africa stands for African-American identity and unity. As Toni Morrison states:

I cannot rely on these metaphorical shortcuts because I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive “othering” of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Marc C Conner, *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), p. xxiv.

⁹¹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. x.

Morrison's literary work, as the author herself declares, taught her how to transform the social aspects of African-American experience in its expression in literary language. Morrison mentioned, in a later introduction to her first novel *The Bluest Eye*⁹², that if there were no books to keep a record of the people they would lose their existence and their representation. Morrison states that 'there were no books about me, I didn't exist in the literature I had read [...] this person, this female, this black did not exist'.⁹³ By using the pronoun 'me' she meant her people, the African Americans and their identity. She also indicates how African Americans can preserve their heritage and history in literature, in order to be remembered for this generation and for generations to come.

Literature does not need to only contain traditional stories and traces of folklore to bear a group, race, or ethnic identity; sometimes its language may play a remarkable role too. The first person who wrote about the functionality of language, in determining the speaker or the writer's, view of the world, was a linguist called Wilhelm von Humboldt in the nineteenth century. However, later in the modern era, the proponents of the Whorfian hypothesis of Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf insist that, 'language determines culture'.⁹⁴ Therefore, language plays a dominant part in 'the formation of ideology, consciousness, and class relations' as asserted by the sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman.⁹⁵ As a result, the consciousness and ideology of African Americans, if not the whole world, are produced by and through language.

Finally, art in its different aspects and types has significant power to affect a society and its people, save their heritage, and strengthen their identity. It works as a safe repository for memories and a record of the history of African Americans during slavery and different

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⁹³ Sandi Russell, It's OK to say OK. In: Nellie Y McKay, *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison* (Boston, Mass: G.K. Hall, 1988), p. 45.

⁹⁴ Bernard W. Bell, *The Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), p. 44.

⁹⁵ Geneva Smitherman, "'What Is Africa to Me?': Language, Ideology, and African American", *American Speech*, 66.2 (1991), 115–32 (p. 117) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/455881>>.

eras; art can be, as stated by Maya Angelou, ‘traced directly to the art of literature, music, dance and philosophy that, despite significant attempts to eradicate them, remain in our communities today’.⁹⁶ Angelou adds that African Americans should show their appreciation of the artists, whether they are actors, sculptures, painters, writers or poets, because their work ‘puts starch in our backbones’. She also asserts that art should live and grow healthy because without it, we are ‘dry husks drifting aimlessly on every ill wind’⁹⁷ and that our future is not promising and the present will be without grace. The support should reflect a social identity and power, which as stated by Foucault, operates through:

A system of cultural unconsciousnesses the totality of formal structures which render mythical discourse [...] and provide the norms of life with foundation other than that to be found in nature, or in pure biological functions.⁹⁸

Foucault and Bakhtin were among the pioneers who use non-traditional theories of the sociolinguistic and discursive process of how identity comes to be formed in life, along with its function in literature, which has been developed by readers and critics to interpret some examples of contemporary African-American fiction.

African-American novelists deploy three categories of characters, which are African Americans, African descendants and individual artists as a way to deconstruct and reconstruct ‘sacred and secular master narrative’.⁹⁹ This ensures their competence and enables them to cross boundaries in their quest for self-definition and self-determination. One of the main influences on African-American writers seeking to establish their identity in literature is the celebration of the ancestor’s experience in the United States, helping them to stand against the racism they themselves experience. Calling for identity also represents an act against their distinctive hybrid culture drawn from various parts of Africa, and their double consciousness.

⁹⁶ Angelou, p. 125.

⁹⁷ Angelou, p. 133.

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. by Pantheon Books, Routledge Classics (Florida: Taylor & Francis, 2005), p. 414.

⁹⁹ Bell, *The Contemporary African American Novel*, p. 192.

The forms and the means of expression which the African Americans perform, whether they are sorrow songs, blues, religious hymns, quilting, or writing folkloric fiction, all stand for culture and a social system. They belong to them, and only a person who belongs to that specific ethnic group or race would understand that culture thoroughly, and be affected by it spiritually and emotionally since they invented and practised it.

According to what has been presented in this section and the one before, we can say that African-American novelists are the heirs of the narrative tradition of the Africans. Chapters three and four, which contain the textual analysis of the trilogies, will demonstrate the roots of folk tales and myths that tend to take their readers on an imaginative journey to Africa. African-American novelists' narrative style tends to have some shared points with modern African literature.¹⁰⁰ The former borrowed, as asserted by Isidore Okpewho, some techniques and forms from African oral tradition and uses them in 'constructing works dealing essentially with modern life'¹⁰¹ although it is commonly known that a novel does not have the same restrictions as oral narrative does.

The use of such cultural and traditional norms has some outcomes and effects on the people who understand, and it means something for them. It is a process of transmitting knowledge, values, and attitudes. It also enforces conformity to social norms and becomes a reference to validate ritual and myths, but mainly it provides those who are connected to a specific group with a psychological release from the pressure exerted by society. It might even give the group members self-empowerment and more respect for their identity and for where they, originally, belonged.

The case is slightly different in Africa as African people regard these elements differently since they are not significantly threatened with losing their identity, unlike African

¹⁰⁰ Akin Adesokan, 'New African Writing and the Question of Audience', *Research in African Literatures*, 43.3 (2012), 1 (p. 5).

¹⁰¹ Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 18.

Americans. Most of the West African societies took the mentioning of rituals in two different ways; the first considers the traditions that are related to sacred rituals as true, while a less serious view sees it as entertaining with some educational functions.¹⁰²

After discussing the aspects of identity in fiction, and how it is articulated, the next section will demonstrate the use of folklore in fiction to provide a basis for the analysis to come.

¹⁰² Bell, *The Contemporary African American Novel*, p. 73.

Section Three: African and African-American Folklore

Definitions of Folklore

Folklore studies the cultural traditions of a nation or a society from many perspectives: their contents, forms, styles and transmitting processes and methods. Literature, as one of the most important means to reflect one nation's spiritual civilization and national mentality, is closely related to folklore.²³³

The term folklore was coined by British antiquarian William J. Thomas, around 1846.²³⁴

What it describes, however, is highly specific to the practitioners' way of life that they have chosen and followed for generations. The concept of folklore later emerged in the late-nineteenth century as a combination of language, literature, culture and ideology in favour of romantic nationalism.²³⁵ First of all, it is not wise to write about North American folklore as a whole, since it is a combination of diverse elements derived from the art and culture of peoples from diverse races and backgrounds. Folklore is a vast topic because it is related to many different groups and the variety of styles that they inherited or chose for themselves. Therefore, this research is concentrating on one aspect of American folklore, which is that of the African Americans. Although it is still broad, this thesis is an attempt to use examples from Morrison and Walker's trilogies to provide a sufficient definition of folklore in order to show a better understanding of what it is, how we can recognise it, and illustrate the various methods of studying it, and the importance of folklore in preserving identity.

To understand this concept in an American context, we need first to break the term down. The term was firstly used in the United States in 1888, when the American Folklore

²³³ Liang Yonghua, 'African Folklore in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*' (Henan University, 2009), p. 1 <<http://mt.china-papers.com/2/?p=133849>> [accessed 14 February 2017].

²³⁴ What we in England designate as Popular Antiquities, or Popular Literature (though..it..would be most aptly described by a good Saxon compound, Folk-Lore,—the Lore of the People) in 'Folklore, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/72546>> [accessed 2 July 2018].

²³⁵ Richard Bauman, *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 29.

Society (AFS) was founded, it consists of two words ‘Folk’ and ‘Lore’. It was used to express the idea of the folk materials which pass from generation to generation. An article by William Wells Newell, published in *The Journal of American Folklore*, was the first to discuss folklore in the first issue of this journal, entitled ‘On the Field and Work of a Journal of American Folk-lore’.²³⁶ Archer Taylor defines folklore as ‘[t]he material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other materials preserved in words’.²³⁷ It takes several forms according to the classification made by folklorists and researchers. However, the meaning of folklore, as Newell defines it, is a way to describe the unwritten traditions of ‘civilized countries’.²³⁸ Therefore, by this classification, African-American folklore was not counted because, in 1888, African Americans were considered ‘savages’ and uncivilised, or as Barbara Christian states there was a ‘pervasive belief within American cultural institutions that Africa does not have a philosophical tradition’.²³⁹

To solve the issue of having an unclassified tradition, Newell described folklore as ‘mythology’, by which he meant ‘the living system of tales and beliefs that, in primitive peoples, serves to explain existence’.²⁴⁰ Therefore, for Newell, civilised people had folklore whilst uncivilised people had mythology. This explanation proved convincing in the late nineteenth century, to the extent that the title of the journal was changed to the *Journal of American Folklore and Mythology*.²⁴¹

²³⁶ William Newell, ‘On the Field and Work of a Journal of American Folk-Lore’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 1.1 (1888), 3–7.

²³⁷ Archer Taylor, ‘Folklore and the Student of Literature’, in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 34–42 (p. 34).

²³⁸ William Newell, ‘Folk-Lore and Mythology’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 1.2 (1888), 163 (p. 163).

²³⁹ Barbara Christian, ‘Fixing Methodologies: *Beloved*’, *Cultural Critique*, 24, 1993, 5–15 (p. 9) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1354127>>.

²⁴⁰ Newell, ‘Folk-Lore and Mythology’, p. 163.

²⁴¹ Alan Dundes, ‘The American Concept of Folklore’, *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 3.3 (1966), 226–49 (p. 228).

Two years later, in 1890, Newell published a paper with the title *The Study of Folklore* in which he changed his mind regarding the separation between folklore and mythology. He also admitted that what he had stated earlier was wrong. The justification that he employed was that the source of folklore, of the civilized people, was considered to be a survival from primitive times. Therefore, if we say that primitives have no folklore, how can it be transferred to the civilized people, and become folklore? He also added that folklore is ‘oral tradition, information, and beliefs handed down from generation to generation without the use of writing’.²⁴² This definition is very popular because it is relatively close to the way that many contemporary American folklorists understand the concept. According to this understanding, folklore is related to the roots of the primitive life of its people, and it was sustained through practice and also through the narrative form, where beliefs and habits are implicated for both aesthetic and heritage sustainability.

Dundes states that the definition of ‘folk’ supplied by folklorists during the 1960s would relate to ‘any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor’²⁴³ no matter for what reason, for example religion or language. What matters is that those people form their group, and they have traditions that will be considered as theirs. This group and its traditions will lead to the formation of a strong, binding emotional link between the members; they feel responsible for each other, and this is what leads to the creation of identity. A member in one of these groups may not know other members; however, s/he knows the main core that brings them together. This kind of tradition creates the sense of identity among the members, since there is a remarkable variety of experience for each one, they form national, regional, and village traditions which lead to folklore. This idea concluded Newell’s concept

²⁴² William Newell, ‘The Study of Folklore’, *Transaction of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 9.6–7 (1890), 134–37 (p. 134).

²⁴³ Alan Dundes, ‘Defining Identity through Folklore’, *Journal of Folklore Research*, 21.2/3 (1984), 149–52 (p. 150).

of the folk, which stated that a folk is a unit of national, or ethnic, identity that has been broadened out to become a host of folk groups, according to the factors that they share.

Therefore, it seems that there is no single definition of folklore, which gives it a precise meaning. However, there is a way to make it as close in meaning as possible to the main point of the research, which is through its relationship to identity and fiction. In this case, folklore could be defined as the life and values of a specific group that are expressed through art, literature, songs, music, traditions, clothes, parenting methods and even family interaction. These morals and aspects were used by the African-American ancestors and transferred from one generation to another as a heritage, as is demonstrated in the novels under study. In other words, we can conclude by saying that folklore is the unrecorded traditions that have their form and content, in addition to the style of communication. Therefore, the way of understanding it differs from one person to another.

Types of folklore

Many aspects of literary genres are considered as folklore; however, this thesis discusses one of them which is fiction. The types of folklore depend upon the considerations of its researchers as to whether it is a scientific or a literary form, and it can also be classified according to its implications. According to Barre Toelken, folklore, as a genre, has three types which are designated by researchers and theorists according to specific criteria: the first type is atomistic folklore, which consists of fairy tales and legends. The second type is ideal and typological, where the generic categories are resident; it is defined as a pure type. While the third is the item-oriented, which clarifies the base that the classification system is built upon, and is the superior conception of folklore because it consists of certain classes of cultural subjects such as folktales, proverbs, ballads, and riddles. Folklore is made of

informal expressions on a scale of a long period that became ‘recurrent in form and context, but changeable in performance’.²⁴⁴

Moreover, there are subdivisions of folklore that consist of six types: firstly, a material culture that includes folk art, textiles, vernacular architecture, and mass-produced objects. The second is music with most of its types such as traditional music, world music, and folk music. The third type is narrative, the primary focus of this study, which consists of folktales, legends, personal experience, tales. The fourth is verbal, which includes proverbs, jokes, and word games. Then we have beliefs and religion, such as ritual and mythology. The last one is the foodways²⁴⁵ that includes customs, traditional cooking, food, and cultural relationships. These types are not the only types of folklore, but they are its main categories and it is possible to classify most of folklore into one of the types mentioned above.

Zora Neale Hurston argued that even the dialect that is used in literature must be examined for its authenticity as a type of folklore. This is because, like every aspect of African-American creative art and folklore, it is not an exception as it has also been exploited and even commodified for money or cultural gain.²⁴⁶ This characteristic is noticeable in Morrison and Walker’s selected novels. When a folklorist uses literary versions, he/she must realise that he/she is not studying folklore by itself but the relationship between oral and written literature. This study includes the lifestyle, traditions, language and every other aspect relating to the people who adopt this folklore, in order to understand the relationship between the concepts, when it comes to textual analysis.

²⁴⁴ Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), p. 37.

²⁴⁵ ‘Foodways are the cultural, social, and economic practices relating to the production and consumption of food that intersect with tradition, culture, and history’. For further information, please refer to: Chris Dockery, ‘Heirloom Seed and Story Keepers: Arts-Based Research as Community Discourse in Southern Appalachia’, *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 20.2 (2014), 207–23 (p. 212).

²⁴⁶ Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* (Berkeley, CA: Turtle Island Foundation, 1981), p. 67.

African-American Folklore

In order to examine the relevance of folklore to the novels in this thesis, one must turn back to the establishment of immigrant groups. These groups lived together either formally or informally in a geographic gathering. Eventually, they formed communities where they shared specific characterisations such as religion, for instance, or a sector. Such groups were represented not only as religious institutions, but also as civic centres to preserve the ethnic identity of their members. The gathering of these groups usually consists of speaking the native language and sharing folklore, whether in the form of music, food, or clothes. Sometimes, immigrant members of these groups become more nationalist than when they were in their native country. Such gatherings eventually change the second and the third generation, where they are likely to feel more attached to their history and heritage, which represents a significant part of an identity. The new generations tend to learn their ancestors' native language, and even visit their parents' native country.²⁴⁷ As a result, the study of different folklore becomes a demand for the disclosure of the similarities and the differences among the immigrant groups. This idea can be seen in the novels of Toni Morrison, especially *Paradise* and *Beloved*, and Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, which are examined in detail in chapters three and four.

African-American folklore is significantly evident in the southern part of the United States. Most folklorists consider African-American folklore as a tradition of plantation culture that included songs, music, colours, accents, and other aspects of folklore. However, the Northern African-American folklore was only collected and recognised in 1964 by Dorson. He stated that the African-American people, who moved to the free land of the north, had lost many of their traditions and they lived the folklore of their own, which was affected

²⁴⁷ Dundes, 'The American Concept of Folklore', p. 232.

by the dominant inhabitants' folklore.²⁴⁸ Bernard Bell also supported this idea in his book *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* by stating that by digging into the slave history of the African ancestry in the United States, we find the roots of African-American folklore. It has a unique blending of African traditions, with some effects of the white culture embodied in the south. This folklore consists of music, verbal and ritual traditions.²⁴⁹

African-American folklore is an essential source to examine in any study of the history of African Americans because it includes ballads, songs, rap, and story collections, which have been transmitted orally. However, it has been written down in the novels of artists such as Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), Charles Chesnutt (1858-1932), Paul Lawrence (1922-2011), Toni Morrison (1931-2019), and Alice Walker (1944-). Moreover, whatever the form or genre used for transmission, folklore is part of a more than three-hundred-year old African-American oral tradition, '*Orature*'.²⁵⁰ It is a reflection of ancient African life, and the past, that Africans who were 'forcibly' brought to America carried with them. Later it was maintained by the use of an expressive sense of literary forms, such as fiction, songwriting, or poetry.

There is a tendency to study folklore in a culture, separately from its literature. Literary folklore is generally defined as a traditional art that consists of literature and a lifestyle. It is implied in different aspects of practices, whether behavioural or verbal. Folklore, as a practice, is a shared tradition among any group considering their identity as central to their gathering. This concept includes what the group believes, does, knows, makes, and says; for example, dancing, the way of cooking, art and architecture, stories, and songs. Therefore, according to these categories, there is a strong binding connection among all the

²⁴⁸ Roger Dorson, *Deep down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), p. 42.

²⁴⁹ Bernard W. Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 27.

²⁵⁰ '*Orature* represents the total body of oral discourses, style, and traditions of a people'. Please refer to: Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), p. 25.

categories that cannot be separated. What I mean by tradition here is that it is not a fixed force derived from the past, but consists of pre-existing culturally specific materials that have been performed and are respected even more than the personal taste of the performer. Moreover, it is noticeable how tradition is being used with many of its aspects intact in fiction for the building of the story and characters.

Some American folklorists consider folklore as a combination of survivals, as they describe it as a dying form since it represents mythology and an old tradition. However, as late as 1931, an article on folklore in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, by Ruth Benedict, claims that there was an exception in the cases of folktales still told in some rural groups. Subsequently, however, many still consider folklore as dead in the modern civilised world. However, this proved to be wrong because folklore is still alive in our current time, even eighty-five years after the publication of Benedict's article. Since folklore is considered as a heritage and a tradition, most ethnic groups feel proud of it. A proof of this can be seen through the use of folklore in literary works, where it seizes the attention of the readers and raises their curiosity to know the source and who was practising such folklore.

From what has been already presented, it can be suggested that what is more important than the history of the 'black' experience, and the marching towards the north, is the social discrimination African Americans experienced. This discrimination prevented them from participating in the common culture of the United States. Therefore, the formation of an ethnic subculture filled their need for symbols and values that led them to retain and interpret their African folklore such as hoodoo, dance, magic folktales, and work songs.²⁵¹ This retaining of folklore enabled African Americans to cope with the demands of the new life and

²⁵¹ Hoodoo is a ritual, folk, herbal-based medical system used by the African Americans who do not have access to modern medical care. For further information, please refer to Katrina Hazzard-Donald, *Mojo Workin': The Old African American Hoodoo System* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 1.

to fulfil the will of the group to survive with its social identity and thereby ‘increase the in-group cohesion and cultural solidarity’.²⁵²

The Importance of Folklore

After what has been written above about the definition of folklore, and how it varies in regard to its types, the critical question now is not what folklore means, how it was created, or who used it, but what does the lore do for the folk? What is performed or told, why do people sing folk songs, and why do people listen to them? In addition to this, when and where do they do so? The importance of folklore lies in its effect of linking us to the cultural heritage of a specific historical era of a specific place. It also includes the interrelation of expressions of different cultures. In addition, folklore is related to discovering the basis of cultures that are common to all humanity. These points and concerns place folklore at the centre of humanitarian studies.²⁵³ Due to the importance of folklore, modern American folklorists did not limit their attention to rural, quaint, or backward elements of culture. They expanded their views to include any expressive phenomenon, whether it is urban or rural. This increased focus on the field brought some important questions, such as, how broad is the field? As a field it has no fixed definition, due to its significant engagement with different aspects of life.²⁵⁴

Franz Boas referred to folklore as a mirror of culture, where it is possible to consider folklore as a great tool to see a culture from the inside rather than the opposite way. We can use folklore as a logical method to examine the source of native categories. Each nation or a group of people uses folklore as a way to record their native classifications. This means that by examining folklore, we have an excellent opportunity to encounter these crucial

²⁵² Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, p. 18.

²⁵³ William A. Wilson, ‘The Deeper Necessity: Folklore and the Humanities’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 101.400 (1988), 156–67 (p. 158).

²⁵⁴ Glassie Henry, *The Spirit of Folk Art* (New York: Abrams, 1989), p. 231.

categories. Moreover, by understanding these elements, people would know the nature of their ancestors' lives in their native countries, and this is a very important tool to sustain identity. Asante Molefi stated that 'no art form reflects the tremendous impact of our presence in America more powerfully or eloquently than does folk poetry in the storytelling tradition'.²⁵⁵

Zora Neale Hurston referred to African-American folklore as being the 'boiled-down juice of human living'.²⁵⁶ She stated that folklore is the art of 'self-discovery'. Hurston also described it as the first creative art that people make out of their life experience and what they observe around them. In addition, she asserted that the prose and genre of black literary art, in addition to the form, are derived from African-American folklore, and it is characterised by a 'long and complicated story with a smashing climax'.²⁵⁷ In support, Molefi claims that expressive art, such as folklore, predated prose and theories. Therefore, folklore is considered as a source of inspiration for novelists and artists, and is used with double benefits; it is also entertaining and informative. Nowadays, the concept of folklore seems to receive more attention from researchers, because it acts as the main structure for several fields of research, such as the humanities and branches of general history, and the history of literature, linguistics, and ethnography. Folklore seems to have the solution to the diversity of spiritual cultures.²⁵⁸

One more aspect of the importance of folklore is that it works as a bridge across many African languages and is used as a form of resistance, often coded, against the slave masters. The African Americans combined physical gesture with some aspects of English grammar such as syntax, semantics, rhythm and pitch; this blending was called 'creolization'.²⁵⁹ African Americans used the values of folklore in order to survive in American culture and to resist the

²⁵⁵ Asante Molefi, 'Folk Poetry in the Storytelling Tradition', in *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African American Storytelling*, ed. by Linda Goss and Marian E Barnes (New York: Touchstone, 1989), p. 491.

²⁵⁶ Zora Neale Hurston, 'Folklore and Music', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 12.1 (1991), 183–98 (p. 183) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3346585>>.

²⁵⁷ Hurston, 'Folklore and Music', p. 188.

²⁵⁸ Vladimir Propp, Ariadna Martin, and Anatoly Liberman, *Theory and History of Folklore* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 3.

²⁵⁹ Charles Stewart, *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), p. 1.

class, colour and gender domination of the oppressor, which shaped the theme, the characters, and the form of the African-American novel.

The possession of a common code of understanding makes a people distinctive and makes them feel their social entity as one, unique and separate from other groups. Language consists of characters and the cultural code of the folk. It also consists of traditions of the folk, transmitted from one generation to the other and this is what is likely to be a source of social identity. Bauman asserted that folklore makes the base or the foundation of an authentic national culture that keeps the spiritual impact and the historical integrity of the group or the people. Therefore, to give meaning to our present, we should link it to a meaningful past.²⁶⁰ Martha Sims states that ‘Folklore helps us to form and express identity in the midst of an always complex, sometimes confusing, social context, in which our sense of who we are is frequently questioned and challenged’.²⁶¹ Moreover, this proves a significant link between folklore and identity in any social group.

Folklore in Literature, Study Methods

Folklore is usually studied in literary or anthropological fields. This classification depends on the method used to study each type on its own, and the aspect that the researcher would like to examine. What is considered a crucial implication for the methodology of folklore is to distinguish between the folklore used as a means of past production, and the one reflected in the present. The method which literary folklorists follow is the life-history and the practice of a piece of folklore, but not the history of the people who were making and living it. This is a way to distinguish the work of literary folklorists from the anthropological one. In other words, the literary study follows the natural style of telling the folktale without

²⁶⁰ Bauman, ‘Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore’, p. 32.

²⁶¹ Martha C Sims and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2011), p. 155.

paying attention to the narrator. Therefore, folklore is a ‘superorganic phenomenon’ where it can be studied as a lore without referring to the psychology of the folk.

There are two ways to study folklore in literature and culture: the first is an objective and empirical way, whilst the second is subjective and speculative. The first way deals with identifying the folkloric elements, while the second interprets their meaning. In other words, if we have an item that we want to study using both ways, the first will examine how much it is similar to the previous item, while the second will examine how it is different from the other, and why.²⁶² There are a relatively convenient number of studies of folklore in literature, which mainly consist of a bit more than reading a piece of literary work, and looking up the elements of folklore that have been used by their author. However, as stated by Alan Dundes, there is not a clear attempt to examine the way folkloric elements are being used in fiction, or how these elements function in works as a whole.²⁶³

Literary folklore refers to materials such as tales, music, song and literature combined with a theoretical meaning. For instance, if a folklorist studied a piece of folklore, he would define the term, and the applications of its elements, differently from other folklorists. Therefore, according to such an interrelation of folklore in our lives and how it forms identities, some writers, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, borrowed original folklore materials ‘consciously’ and reshaped and wrote them in their fiction. The employment of folklore in their trilogies was not simply to serve a literary purpose; sometimes it is used to demonstrate the validity of a political point of view or for a social purpose.

In studying folklore, there is a point where American anthropological folklorists have a different perspective than that of the American literary folklorists. The first consider folklore as just one aspect of many within the culture, where music is seen differently, not as

²⁶² Alan Dundes, ‘The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 78.308 (1965), 136–42 (p. 136).

²⁶³ Dundes, ‘The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation’, p. 136.

art. However, literary folklorists have a contrasting perspective because they follow the European concept that categorises folklore as custom, crafts, art, and music.

One of the main genres of literary folklore is the folk narrative that cannot be easily distinguished from other types of narratives. The other main subgenre is folk poetry and folksong, which have their own criteria. Moreover, there are traditional tales that are considered the written form of folklore. However, they were circulated orally without a known author. For instance, a later generation of young black novelists educated in England involved the proverbs of their native language and land in their fictional works.²⁶⁴ This involvement helped to spread folklore throughout fiction, not only through proverbs, but also through magic, superstitions, and religion in the modern and contemporary novels. It is also noticed in the works of Morrison and Walker when they involve folklore, such as rituals, superstitions, and other folkloric elements. Therefore, the method that this research is using, is to identify the literary elements of folklore in the works of Morrison and Walker, and explore their relevance to identity.

The Autopoietic Theory

The link between art and identity can be traced through the use of the autopoietic theory of Niklas Luhmann.²⁶⁵ He illustrated the relationship between art and identity, whether it is an individual or a collective one. Art represents the shared knowledge, which can create material for mutual understanding. The demand for a system, such as the autopoietic one, could bring boundaries of meaning and stability to the inner differences. Such stability is very necessary, especially at present, to establish the shared knowledge and the certitude of identity. As Joana Quental states:

²⁶⁴ Richard Dorson, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 2.

²⁶⁵ 'Niklas Luhmann is a major German social theorist who has synthesized the tradition of systems theory with an autoptic understanding of systems' for further information, please refer to: Peter Stewart, 'Complexity Theories, Social Theory, and the Question of Social Complexity', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 31.3 (2001), 323–60 (p. 336).

Autopoietic systems are to Luhmann dynamic principles for determining identities and consequently, illustrations having popular culture as a starting point behave as autopoietic systems, being able to contribute to and to define a collective identity through these artefacts.²⁶⁶

An autopoietic system is defined as a living system, which reproduces itself throughout itself. In other words, it can clarify the meaning and the intention of the artist in an artistic way that keeps it alive due to its position at the centre of experience and action. Also, it reproduces and renews itself through the generations. Production and reproduction, like terminology, ‘refers to the use of an element in the network of elements’.²⁶⁷ This system determines when, what, and how, energy and matter exchange with the environment. The system encompasses the points that this research is aiming to prove, which are: the living system, psychic system, and social system. These branches work as a dynamic process, which helps to clarify the meaning and the link between folklore and identity in a systematic way.

The first level of the autopoietic system is the living system. According to this level, life and cognition are one and alike, and everything which applies to life shall apply to cognition too. As a result, we can extend our awareness further to the connection between system and environment. This helps us realise the impact that the environment of the living system can have, in forming a society, and how it determines its actions and way of living.

The second level of this theory is the psychic one, which is concerned with particular and specific parts of a system according to consciousness.²⁶⁸ The psychic level has a distinguished relation to the social system, which is the third level because they both complete each other. This system does not deal with the language itself, but the process of its

²⁶⁶ Joana Quental, ‘Searching for a Common Identity: The Folklore Interpreted through Illustration’, *Journal of Illustration*, 1.1 (2014), 9–27 (p. 19).

²⁶⁷ David Seidl, *Organisational Identity and Self-Transformation: An Autopoietic Perspective* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2005), p. 14.

²⁶⁸ David Seidl, ‘Luhmann’s Theory of Autopoietic Social Systems’, *Munich School of Management*, 2004, 36–37 (p. 5).

code and how it is structured, along with what happens while sending and receiving the message. According to this point, we can break down the process of understanding art as a language with all its stories and myths. The part of the language, whether it is written or oral, has to deal with social understanding. However, the meaning and the message that this knowledge is intended to deliver is related to the psychological level of this theory. As a result, the mission and the goal of sustaining a nation's identity have to be accomplished through the psychological level of this theory. However, the entertainment side of it has to be achieved via the social level, to be more general and to excite the audience of the same social group, for instance, through music and art.

The third and last level is the social level that, in more detail, has three parts that clarify meaning: societies, organisations, and interactions. These types are considered as the basic elements of this system. In order to make the system clear, we should understand the meaning of Luhmann's concept of communication. The idea of communication here differs from what may come to mind when considering the concept, as it does not mean the message which goes from the sender to the receiver with the information required. However, communication to Luhmann is a combination of three things: information, utterance, and understanding.²⁶⁹ Information means the selection of a range of possibilities because we select what we want to communicate from different topics and this means that there is a specific aim before we choose the materials. The other part is utterance, which is the form of communication and its reason. In other words, it is an answer to what and why something is being said. The last part is understanding, which refers to the selection of information and understanding.²⁷⁰ Moreover, according to autopoiesis, a social system without a psychic system is impossible and probably *vice versa*. By applying this method to folklore, tracing its roots and identifying the reason for writing, drawing, choosing or telling; folklore will be in a

²⁶⁹ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 140.

²⁷⁰ Seidl, 'Luhmann's Theory of Autopoietic Social Systems', p. 7.

form which enables it to be transferred to the next generation. It will carry all the information required to achieve a goal or to fulfil an aim in the future whether it is intended consciously or unconsciously. The objective would be sustaining identity and keeping the heritage alive for future generations and their social groups.

African folklore not only helps awaken African-Americans' national consciousness, but it also plays a major role in building pride in their identity, and the confidence they need to fight the trauma of slavery, as 'external events may trigger internal processes, but they cannot determine those processes'.²⁷¹ With such a statement David Seidl points to oppression of African-Americans as the trigger which unleashed the spirit and the feeling of belonging to the place where they had power and were not slaves. Such a trigger, which yielded no other option for the slaves, meant that they tried to create a new home with the qualities of the old. Such a home has the traditions and folklore that they enjoyed in their motherland. This idea and practice brought them together as one, to stand against their oppressors and to maintain their identity in their souls, and this can be seen throughout the novels under study.

African-American folklore provides a precious opportunity for researchers to discover and track the history and life of African Americans. Folklore, as stated earlier, includes myths, ballads, music, rap, and storytelling, besides other oral lore, which has been transferred from generation to generation, and with all its importance, forms a cultural and historical record of the ancestors. It holds the spirit of traditions and identity that the bearers carry with pride because it is the light that will guide them to the future. It is a tool to socialise and harmonise with those who share the same roots and the same traditions, and it is the feeling of belonging that every person holds in both their conscious and unconscious minds and their dealings with life. It represents, according to Tolagbe Ogunleye, a line to a vast linked network of values, meaning and cognition. Ogunleye also added that folklore

²⁷¹ Seidl, 'Luhmann's Theory of Autopoietic Social Systems', p. 3.

stands for problem solving, wisdom, and prophecy through stories of rebellion, moralising, reasoning, and satire.²⁷²

As mentioned earlier, folklore and traditions are transferred from one generation to another. Evidently, this process has many effects, for instance, the creation of social groups, such as African-American, Native-American, and others, which leads to the creation of social identity. This implies a continuation of the legacies of groups and thoughts from one generation to another. Although this idea was not always the view of folklorists and myth scholars, it is a hypothesis that a language, as well as tradition, influences thoughts.²⁷³

Finally, the simplicity of experience and traditional knowledge exist side by side with the awareness that brings people together. These elements also help to reduce the gap in people's knowledge of the expressive sources of their traditions. People tend to be even more attached to their culture and traditions, especially when they feel intimidated and fear losing their relationship with their roots.²⁷⁴ Therefore, the outside pressure, usually, gives reversed results, for instance, what Hurston stated about the religion of the African slaves, who were brought to America. Those people did not give up their religious beliefs, but they just changed the names of the old Gods: 'In fact, the Negro has not been christianised as extensively as is generally believed. The great masses are still standing before their pagan altars calling old gods by new names'.²⁷⁵ This view is also supported by Castells when he says 'in the world of confused and uncontrolled changes, people tend to regroup around primary identities: religious, ethnic, regional, national. [...] increasingly, people organize

²⁷² Tolagbe Ogunleye, 'African American Folklore: Its Role in Reconstructing African American History', *Journal of Black Studies*, 27.4 (1997), 435–55 (p. 436).

²⁷³ Jesse D. Chariton, 'Identity Construction Through the Use of Folklore: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America', *Northeastern Illinois University*, 2012, p. 3 <<https://www.academia.edu/1895084>> [accessed 3 August 2017].

²⁷⁴ Sonia Gsir and Elsa Mescoli, *Maintaining National Culture Abroad: Countries of Origin, Culture and Diaspora* (Liège: European University Institute, 2015), p. 11 <<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/maintaining-national-culture-abroad-countries-of-origin-culture-and-diaspora>>.

²⁷⁵ Zora Neale Hurston cited in Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown, *Crossing Borders Through Folklore: African American Women's Fiction and Art* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 33.

their meaning not around what they do, but based on what they are or believe they are'.²⁷⁶ As a result, with all the racism and hatred around the world, the call of the past and sense of belonging is helping to group people together and make them unite against their oppressors. The next step is attempting to link every folkloric element in the selected novels to its origin. Then the last step is to explain the relationship between African folklore and African-American identity, and discuss the link between folklore and identity and how they work together to fulfil each other's goal.

Section Four: Folklore and African-American Identity

In order to understand the link between folklore and identity, in general, we should start with various applications of folklore in order to get a clearer image. The second stage shows the connection between these two concepts. Thirdly, this section covers the related part of the autopoietic theory of the use of folklore in sustaining identity and specifically the African-American one.

Applications of Folklore to Literature

Folklorists, or the folklore bearers, are considered to be compulsive teachers. Teaching is a fundamental process for folklore, in which tradition cannot exist without those bearers, whether consciously or unconsciously. Teaching here means the transfer process of knowledge from members of one generation to the next. The focus here is not on the teacher alone as the bearer of this process, but it consists of two sides, where the learner and the receiver of the folklore have the same importance.²⁷⁷ The receiver uses the traditions that

²⁷⁶ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 69.

²⁷⁷ Sylvia Grider, 'Passed down from Generation to Generation: Folklore and Teaching', *Journal of American Folklore*, 108.428 (1995), 178–85 (p. 179).

he/she learns to use over different times for either the same or a different goal. The main goal that this research is focusing on is to show that the use of folklore, as a tool, is to sustain African-American identity.

Folklore usually transfers from the orally transmitted form to a written form. However, the process can happen the other way around, by being transmitted from a written form to the oral one, such as the epic of Gilgamesh.²⁷⁸ For instance, well known English ballad poetry is usually traditional, relatively old, and anonymous; yet it has been transferred from the oral form to the written form over time. However, literary works that were written by individuals find their way back to the people, and have been sustained and transmitted in an oral form by being passed from one generation to another. Therefore, there is no fixed pattern for the inheritance of folklore. Due to these different methods, folklore has become changeable, viable, and universal. John Flanagan states that, ‘As long as the folk — the people — exist there will be folklore’.²⁷⁹

One of the important aspects of folklore lies in establishing social relationships and its use in the communicative interaction among the members of a group where it is practised, such as the gatherings of Baby Suggs in *Beloved*. However, this does not mean that it is not an effective method of communication with other groups of different identities, and different folklore. For instance, we can see that some of the stories of the Native Americans were close to those of the African Americans, and this would have created a bridge of communication and understanding of the social impact of folklore. In addition, there is an example where tradition or folklore was shared as a way of communication and caused tribes to get together in social activities. For instance, Bauman mentioned that two north-western tribes from Canada, the Tahltan and the Tlingit, held a gathering where one tribe had to tell its stories in

²⁷⁸ “The Epic of Gilgamesh is an epic poem from Mesopotamia and is among the earliest known works of literature”. For further reading, please refer to: Chenoy Ceil, *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 29 March 2012) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2030863>> [accessed 6 October 2017].

²⁷⁹ John T. Flanagan, ‘The Impact of Folklore on American Literature’, *Jahrbuch Für Amerikastudien*, 7 (1962), 67–76 (p. 67).

one day to the other tribe, and then the next day the other tribe told its stories too. At the end, they counted their stories, and they found that they had shared stories, and the Tahltan took some from the Tlingit and *vice versa*.²⁸⁰ Folklore here is used as a mechanism that facilitates connections across tribal lines. Therefore, it could also assist in forging connections across generations, as seen in African-American communities.

Folklore is used to deepen the meaning of ideas employed by authors in their writings. It also focuses their intentions to deliver a specific message or messages through their literary works. For instance, Nathaniel Hawthorne, an American novelist and short story writer, used folklore to add colour to his works and deepen the meaning of the stories. The goal of this thesis is to explore a deep emotional aspect of folklore and its effect on the selected works of Morrison and Walker and its impact on their readers at the same time. There are several uses and applications of folklore, since it has a significant impact on people and their feelings. One of these applications is to be a historical record of ancestors and their lives. It describes their wars and times of peace, traditions, way of life, and religious rituals. It also describes their understanding of their surroundings, their relationship with others, and their language. All these elements combine to create group identity and the feeling of belonging among members. It is a space of relief from the stresses of life that also provides an opportunity people to socialise and know each other's common merits as Denver, in *Beloved*, comes to recognise strengths of community belonging.

Donald Brenneis states that the past is a 'text-mediated' form for all the people, and folklore is the tool that helps us to understand these particular historical events.²⁸¹ Hurston argued that by studying folklore, we could understand relevant information about those who died in the Holocaust of enslavement, the Ma'afa, because it is a living record of the past.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Bauman, 'Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore', p. 34.

²⁸¹ Donald L. Brenneis, 'Some Contributions of Folklore to Social Theory: Aesthetics and Politics in a Translocal World', *Western Folklore*, 52.2 (1993), 291–302 (p. 299) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1500091>>.

²⁸² Zora Neale Hurston, *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 905.

However, folklore is not merely about the past and its events, which are presented by texts, but it is also about the future, when its messages are received and comprehended well and can bring about change.

Folklore and Identity

Since the start of the consideration of folklore as a scientific discipline in the nineteenth century, it has been considered an important political component due to its relation to the construction of national and regional identity. Furthermore, folklore is a legitimate area of study for scholars working in ethnography.²⁸³ As Benjamin A. Botkin states:

Every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore. Into these traditions enter many elements, individual, popular, and even “literary”, but all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern which has value and continuity for the group as a whole.²⁸⁴

Therefore, by reaching a level of understanding of folklore and its elements, the images of identity become very clear and act to determine the people who follow it.

From the beginning of the modern study, the idea of identity and nationalism has emphasised a distinctive position of folklore in a cultural perspective. This interest helped to direct the attention of folklorists to the traditions of national cultures, linguistically ethnic units, and regional traditions. A second interest was the view of folklore as a ‘collective representation’ since it is produced or reproduced from homogeneous social groups along

²⁸³ Albert van der Zeijden, ‘A Regional Identity in Newly Reclaimed Dutch Polders’, in *Reframing Dutch Culture: Between Otherness and Authenticity*, ed. by P.J Margry and H. W. Roodenburg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 59.

²⁸⁴ Benjamin A. Botkin, ‘The Folk and the Individual: Their Creative Reciprocity’, *English Journal*, 27 (1938), 121–35 (p. 123).

with being an expression of their collective identity.²⁸⁵ Folklore is a production of a whole group, and its bearers, and it represents their common characters. The members of a group are the tradition bearers because they transfer it through time and space.²⁸⁶ People and generations come and go, however; the group identity survives, and the traditions and folklore live on.

Superstition as a type of folktale is likely to be considered as one of the leading characteristics of Victorian literature,²⁸⁷ and yet it is still being used in some of the contemporary stories and literature. Such folkloric elements reveal, as stated by Jason Harris, 'an underlying matrix of communal and contagious folk beliefs and motifs that are fundamental to a deeper understanding of the hybrid cultural continuousness'²⁸⁸ of the authors and the readers. By understanding the reason, we can realise the feeling of the bearers and the receivers when they tell or perform folklore in the modern age. The use of folklore tends to be judged according to reason and scientific justification, due to its impact socially and psychologically. This judgment can be interpreted accordingly, even in fiction, which is mainly written for entertainment. The aspect of folklore, which 'refers to spiritual events erupting into the everyday world'²⁸⁹ and contains superstitions, ghosts, magic tales and even fairies, became the framework, especially after the end of the Victorian age. Therefore, to write about these supernatural events in the modern age, the author must have a very particular reason for using folkloric techniques. For instance, the writings of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, an English novelist, and his use of the supernatural elements was justified by the desire to see the church 'reconcile its teaching concerning the supernatural phenomena of the

²⁸⁵ Bauman, 'Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore', p. 33.

²⁸⁶ Bauman, 'Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore', p. 33.

²⁸⁷ Jason Marc Harris, 'Folklore, Fantasy, and Fiction: The Function of Supernatural Folklore in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century British Prose Narratives of the Literary Fantastic' (unpublished Thesis, University of Washington, 2001), p. 60 <<http://hdl.handle.net/1773/9456>> [accessed 3 January 2018].

²⁸⁸ Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008), p. 1.

²⁸⁹ Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, p. 34.

universe with the revelations of science'.²⁹⁰ However, in the texts that this thesis discusses, the reason behind using folklore is to sustain African-American identity by using folktales and supernatural stories. For instance, the ghost in *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, originated in Africa, which was the ancestral homeland of the authors and many of the readers to whom they want to deliver the message. She represents the soul of a murdered child and also represents the transported slaves to the United States in her narrative. Therefore, the rationale of an author who uses superstitions, folktales, and the supernatural elements is a very important matter because it justifies his/her intention. This intention, I believe, in the case of Morrison and Walker, is to keep the idea of homeland and identity in the minds of 'their' people. In addition, their heritage, way of life, and thinking are maintained in order to sustain their original identity whether social or personal.

Manuel Castells illustrates his understanding of identity in relation to folklore by saying that 'the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning'.²⁹¹ According to this way of understanding, he refers to folklore and tradition in an indirect way. Cultural attributes cover a vast ground of tradition, arts, and many other aspects which affect the changing nature of society. While William Bausch wrote in his book, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, that 'Every people, nation, and community has stories and myths that preserve and prolong the traditions that give them their identity'.²⁹² As a conclusion, we can confirm that folklore is a very interesting and essential source of identity. It works as a preserver of the heritage and the tradition of a group and passes it to later generations. As Kunzang Choden states:

²⁹⁰ Katherine H. Porter, *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1958), p. 83.

²⁹¹ Castells, p. 6.

²⁹² William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1999), p. 26.

As I realize the importance of the stories as a link to who I am and where I come from, I also realize how important they will be to my children. [...] They [stories] will be of some value in their lives to link up with their cultural base so that in knowing their base they may better understand and appreciate their own lives.²⁹³

According to the quotation, the link between folklore and identity is significantly clear. Also, it shows the goal that an author may have in his or her mind as a duty to preserve the tradition for the next generations.

Personal identity is essential in our lives, while collective identity is considered as a way to assign a new pattern to individuals and communities, through affiliation to a new group, which may affect the characteristics of personal identity. The common experience of life might lead to an imminent destabilisation of meaning, which results in the establishment of the individual, as well as collective identities. One of the aspects of identity and folklore is the signs which communities use to express themselves, whether it is a code or a language. Africans have symbolically used language in order to either express deeper meanings or to camouflage important messages. The symbolic systems of a community, such as religion, language, and myth, form continual processes, which enable human communities to constitute themselves and sustain their existence. Symbolic systems are processed by individuals in 'social trends' and cultural projects, including language development.²⁹⁴ One example of these languages is the one used by the Yoruba people.²⁹⁵ They used coded methods of communication so that only the two groups who are communicating, understand the meaning of what they are telling each other. According to Ogunleye, this method of

²⁹³ Kunzang Choden, *Folktales of Bhutan* (Bangkok: White Lotus Co. Ltd., 1994), p. xiii.

²⁹⁴ Castells, p. 68.

²⁹⁵ 'The Yoruba people are an ethnic group of southwest and north central Nigeria as well as southern and central Benin in West Africa. For further details see: Scott E. Hendrix and Uchenna Okeja, *The World's Greatest Religious Leaders: How Religious Figures Helped Shape World History* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2018), p. 530.

communication is still used in Africa, and it was used by African Americans during the time of slavery among those who were brought to America.²⁹⁶

To illustrate the relationship between identity and folklore, Boaventura Santos stated that there is an equation, which determines the social construction of identity. This equation consists of roots and options, and the thoughts about them. The first concerns the uniqueness and singularity, permanency and the depth that brings consistency and assurance. The thought about options concerns all that is changeable, fugacious, replaceable and undefined from the root viewpoint.²⁹⁷ The main difference between the two thoughts is the time where the root is a large scale entity, while it is the opposite with thought of option. According to this, we can assume that the identity of a community can come from two causes. The first is static, which means that it is institutional, and the second is dynamic, which means that it moves and transforms. Therefore, identity is an outcome of tradition, since it fulfils both characteristics.

What relates the tradition with the existence of people and their place is illustrated in a question by Boaventura de Sousa Santos: 'If this is your land, where are your stories?'²⁹⁸ This question implies a sense of belonging to the land through stories and shows the responsibility of people to sustain their identity and community. Stories and folklore represent the history and heritage of the people who tell it. It shows how important this is for sustaining their past, to build their present. Moreover, folktales are alive in the mind of those who tell them, along with those who listen to them, because they are a reminder of roots and belonging to nations.

African-American folklore is considered as a historical thread that keeps the cultural heritage tied to the diaspora, and those whose souls remain in the continent of Africa. Therefore, it has a strong link to African-American identity, which motivates African

²⁹⁶ Ogunleye, p. 453.

²⁹⁷ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'The Fall of the Angelus Novus Beyond the Modern Game of Roots and Options', *Current Sociology*, 46.2 (1998), 81–118 (p. 86).

²⁹⁸ Timothy Chesters, *Land Rights: Oxford Amnesty Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 124.

Americans to teach this legacy to their children and ensure that their culture is preserved. An ‘earnest means of weaving’ that means that unities, including the experience of suffering, are woven together. The literary work and the highlighting of African-American tradition has been falsified. Walt Disney, for example, earned millions from a movie, *Song of the South* (1946), which distorted African-American folklore. Many folkloric aspects were treated sceptically, even the dialect, which is used in African-American literary works, has been scrutinised for its authenticity. Hurston commented on this point by saying that ‘the white writers’ tried to convince their readers that the language and mode of speaking by African Americans are ‘weird’ and lack grammatical rules which govern its use.²⁹⁹

As mentioned in the previous section, Dundes defines folklore as stemming from ‘Any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor’.³⁰⁰ Focusing on the groups and their formation, Jan Brunvand recommended a strategy for students and collectors of folklore, saying that:

A more functional concept that has grown out of recent collecting is that of the theory of recognizing "folk groups." Rather than defining such groups in terms of social, political, or geographic factors, they may be identified for folklore purposes first by their distinctive folk speech and other traditions—the lingo and lore which set one group apart from others.³⁰¹

Later he added that ‘the first test of a folk group is the existence of shared folklore; then the background of this conformity can be investigated’.³⁰² Dundes also suggested that the groups in America, who carry folklore, could be classified according to specific criteria such as occupation, region, age, and ethnicity or nationality. However, sometimes folk groups could be distinguished by education, religion, neighbourhood, hobbies and even according to the

²⁹⁹ Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, p. 67.

³⁰⁰ Dundes, ‘Defining Identity through Folklore’, p. 150.

³⁰¹ Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & company, 1997), p. 21.

³⁰² Brunvand, pp. 21–22.

family.³⁰³ Both of the mentioned methods, of recognising groups, work in finding the answer and tracking the use of folklore and the formation of groups in any society. This view supports the concept that folklore is a within-group phenomenon and it accumulates a shared social identity. Identity features, which classify folk groups, divide the 'social universe' into several kinds of segments, and that within these segments lies the principle of ordering of folklore as well. The basic formula which links both of the methods mentioned above is that 'folklore is a function of a shared identity'.³⁰⁴ Following any of the previous methods in identifying folklore, the situation of sharing identity features among group members is considered as shared folklore. Therefore, folklore is considered to be the creation or recreation of a group and its ancestors, to be an expression of their linking characters. It is represented in the form of tradition, which is, according to Bauman, conceived as a 'superorganic temporal continuum'.³⁰⁵

There is a general assumption, as stated by Mazharul Islam, that the folklore of groups has specific 'inherent qualities', since it belongs to, or has been shaped by, the members of that group.³⁰⁶ This assumption reflects the goal that a group would be set to achieve by involving folklore as an identity to distinguish themselves, their attitudes, virtues, religion, and what they stand for. According to what has been presented, it seems that there is a strong link between language and folklore on one side, and between folklore and identity on the other. One of the aspects of a language is proverbs, which are mainly folklore and it helps giving a community its identity. This identity gives strength to its members to be strong leaders, and to be able to stand up for their origin and where they belong.³⁰⁷ This is considered to be one of the significant relations between folklore and identity.

³⁰³ Brunvand, pp. 21–22.

³⁰⁴ Bauman, 'Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore', p. 32.

³⁰⁵ Bauman, 'Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore', p. 33.

³⁰⁶ Mayahārula Isalāma, *Folklore, the Pulse of the People: In the Context of Indic Folklore* (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co., 1985), p. 27.

³⁰⁷ Chariton, p. 3.

The core of most of the contemporary folkloric studies, such as anthropology, history, and literature is resistance and transformation. In these moments of art and courage, the oppressed groups find their voice; the unspeakable managed to speak and act against their oppressor. Resistance is, relatively, easy to relay in story form and its heroic stories are enjoyable to tell. However, there are other aspects of folklore with the telling and describing of accommodation and the practice of domination, which are less attractive, such as seen in the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Walker's trilogy. Therefore, if we want to bring the virtues of history and perspective, in order to deal with the ethical issues, then it has to be told as a whole and not be limited to the entertaining part only. Being willing to examine people's participation in this field is likely to be the only way to prove themselves, and to illuminate the complexity and the ambiguity of such historical events, which helps in constituting the power of identity.³⁰⁸

The ultimate effect of folklore is located in its power to communicate with the social and cultural identities of the era. This makes people a highly effective medium to teach their folklore to the new generations, in order to make them aware of their legacy and the hard times that their ancestors experienced, through the recording times and places.

I conclude this part of the relations between folklore and identity with a statement by William Bausch, who says that, 'When a nation is in trouble, it often returns to its traditional stories to look for direction and healing, to regain a sense of what made it great in the past and what will return it into the future'.³⁰⁹ This statement illustrates the direct relationship between the two concepts and how they depend on each other to achieve the goal of transferring knowledge.

³⁰⁸ Brenneis, p. 301.

³⁰⁹ Bausch, p. 26.

Section Five: Folklore and Fiction

This section seeks to answer a fundamental question for this thesis, which is how the literary authors of the twentieth century transformed African folkloric materials into the literary narrative? It also shows how the folkloric elements, such as superstitions, highlight the differences among social classes, education, faith, and national identity. At the same time, this section reveals the motifs of the author, and goes deeper in clarifying the cultural and consciousness of belonging of both the writer and the readers. What makes it hard to distinguish one field from the other is that they complete each other. For instance, how could we classify the Bible? It could be said that it is a book of traditions, but at the same time, it could also be identified as ‘the literature of the ancient Hebrews’.³¹⁰ The main difference between the two is that folklore uses ‘conventional themes and stylistic devices’,³¹¹ yet it makes no effort to distinguish its conventional quality. We also have an opposite image of a literary artist, who divests his work of stereotypes for the sake of current quality. Artists could achieve their goal by avoiding the clichés of either the matter or the form of work.

Folklore in American Literature

In the United States the study of folklore has been going on for some time and has attracted the attention of a good many people. In 1888 Franz Boas [...] founded the *Journal of American Literature*. [...] it has indeed become an interdisciplinary medium.³¹²

It is generally believed, by many folklorists and literary critics, that there is a connection between literary form and folklore. They tend to complement each other in the study of literature. This is because literary material is being considered as a popular form of reading

³¹⁰ Alan Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 37.

³¹¹ Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, p. 40.

³¹² Flanagan, p. 67.

among a wide range of readers, where educational materials can be noticed. For instance, the issue of (FGM) that features in Walker's trilogy, and specifically in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), is considered to be a fundamental part of her fictional tribe *Olinka* and their tradition. It is called 'initiation' by the tribe members. This aspect of the culture that Walker showed, although it is a negative one, gives the reader educational material and the need for further reading.

Ernest Hemingway is quoted as saying '[a]ll modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*'.³¹³ When Hemingway, who was an acclaimed author, attributes all modern American literature to one person, it makes us think about the reason behind such a statement. Mark Twain lived on a plantation, near a small town in Missouri, three decades before the American Civil War. He was a companion of slaves and worked with them in different settings. He learned rituals, traditions, slang, beliefs, and even their habits. These elements later found their way into his writings, although the slaves were considered as transmitters of these folkloric elements and not the generators of them. Twain also gained from the backwoods of Missouri the knowledge of spells, omens, and weather lore. His works, such as *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), presented folkloric material which reflects the intimate, if exploitative, experience that the author had with the slaves which enabled him to collect their folklore.

Literature is commonly viewed as a potential record of many aspects of folklore. This can be confirmed in several literary works, which are an authentic source for folklore. For instance, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) by Cotton Mather, is considered to be a significant source for colonial legends. There are also the works of Edward Eggleston, where numerous American proverbs have been saved, in addition to the use of colours by Nathaniel Hawthorne which had a deep meaning in relation to folklore. These works have also been

³¹³ Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 22.

used as the main sources for later books about folklore. In addition, folklore is being noticeably used in the works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker as contemporary African-American authors. Therefore, we can say that such literary texts work in favour of folklorists. However, sometimes a folklorist is called upon to explain the use of folklore in literary works, which might be particularly useful for the literary interpretation of the text. Such interpretation could be presented in the form of a glossary of literary terms. Haldeen Braddy states that:

The major role folklore not infrequently had in the older literature of perhaps nearly all languages is seen with clarity in such literary forms as the popular ballad and the popular epic.³¹⁴

In the process of understanding the relationship between the two disciplines, folklore and literature, one could look into the way that the literary author uses folkloric material. Meanwhile, the researchers of other disciplines look differently at the folklore that has been influenced by literature, for example, the Native American ballads *The Jealous Lover*.³¹⁵ However, the major interest goes to literature and the role of folklore in its creation and interpretation. Therefore, this relationship has generally been considered as the core of folklore studies in American literature.³¹⁶ However, how can one prove that what has been mentioned in a literary work is an authentic reference to folklore? Richard M. Dorson proposed a tripartite scheme³¹⁷ that seeks internal evidence in order to prove the authenticity of folkloric elements in literature.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Haldeen Braddy, 'Folklore in Literature', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 59.232 (1946), 202–202 (p. 202).

³¹⁵ 'This work has attracted to itself two stanzas from a printed song text popular during the late 1800' as it has been mentioned in: Sandra K. D. Stahl, 'Studying Folklore and American Literature', in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. by Richard M Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 422–23.

³¹⁶ Richard Dorson, *Handbook of American Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 423.

³¹⁷ This scheme focuses on the three aspects of folklore in analysis: folk types, folk narrative, and folk imagery.

³¹⁸ Richard Dorson, 'Editor's Comment: Folklore and Literature', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 13.3 (1976), 327–29 (p. 327).

Referring to the importance of folklore in the United States, Flanagan stated that folklore had been used in many forms since the works of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) up to contemporary writings. The works were enriched by themes and materials derived folklore, which are incorporated with drama, fiction, and poetry. Moreover, apart from the rich folklore of African Americans and Native Americans, American society is filled with folklore, which was altered and modified by many generations, who came from Europe or different parts of the world to settle in the New World.³¹⁹

Therefore, folklore has not only been used in American earlier writing traditions, but it has also been used, in a noticeable way, in the modern and contemporary ones. The major contemporary literature concern is directed towards the technique, formal experimentation, science and its impact and tension; and folklore still has a significant position in American writings, whether it is in the form of fiction or verse. For instance, consider the importance of the works of William Faulkner, such as *The Hamlet* (1940), in which he uses proverbs to characterise its main figure. This work is also enriched by many other folkloric elements such as fertility goddess, and tricksters. *The Hamlet* also reveals the importance of folklore in constructing the characters and the type of theme.

This illustration of a few examples does not mean that folklore has affected all major American works of literature, or that all of the writers were using it as a guideline for their literary work. Yet there are many significant authors who used folklore in their works in some ways, such as Eugene O'Neill, Elizabeth Roberts, and John Steinbeck. The folklore 'has added charm and color and variety to many a page of fiction, to many a poem and drama'.³²⁰ It meant a lot to so many people since it touches upon their beliefs, customs, speech, and traditions.

³¹⁹ Flanagan, p. 68.

³²⁰ Flanagan, p. 76.

African-American Folklore and Fiction

African-American writers have been fully aware of the significance of folklore to the process of their development as writers. This heritage influences many aspects of their writings, such as subject, theme, symbolism, language, style, the value of their ideas, and even their characters. This influence has been asserted by Ralph Ellison when he wrote that the ‘Negro American folk tradition constitutes a valuable source for literature’³²¹ and he also commented on his use of folklore in his own works. Moreover, we have a beautiful statement by Alice Walker describing her experience with folklore. She said that her first attempts at writing were based on a story that had been narrated orally by her grandmother. This story motivated her to go further and to have a great interest in rituals and voodoo. She expressed her feeling as wonderful ‘of being with a great many people, ancient spirits, all very happy to see me consulting and acknowledging them, and eager to let me know [...] that, indeed, I am not alone’.³²² This experience and the feeling of the author have been interpreted into her works, especially her trilogy: *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), which are explained in detail in chapter five of this thesis.

African-American folklore has had a significant impact on the United States. For instance, the slaves, who were brought from Congo and Nigeria, brought their mythology to the southern states, where they were forced to work on plantations. The forms of folklore such as superstitions, stories of tricksters, animal tales, and fables were imported to the United States of America. Some of them were merged with equivalent aspects of the folklore of the Native Americans. African Americans also contributed in a spiritual way to American culture, with the songs of captivity and stories of misery. Their works reflected their desire

³²¹ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), p. 693.

³²² Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London: Phoenix, 2005), p. 13.

for freedom, and escaping to the north from the incarceration of slavery. They wanted to make a fresh start, such as seen in Sethe's escape in *Beloved* from Kentucky to Ohio. In *The Impact of Folklore on the American Literature*, Flanagan supplies a succinct description that encapsulates African-American cosmology:

Egyptland was figuratively the South, the region of bondage; the Jordan River was the Ohio, the stream dividing slave territory from free; and the Promised Land was the North where slavery did not exist.³²³

Flanagan also added that the spiritual impact produced, or helped to produce, the Blues that has an emotional outburst other than being represented as misery, pain, bitterness, or jealousy. This way of looking into the symbolism in the novels selected opened the door to biblical interpretations to take place and to explain the events and characters in the novel. However, as it has been explained earlier, the novels are going to be analysed from an Afrocentric perspective.

With regard to implementing folklore in literature, Haldeen Braddy stated that 'for almost a century one American author after another has found a road to popularity by depicting representative of various alien racial or national groups that were not fully absorbed into the new-world pattern'.³²⁴ As has been discussed earlier, folklore commonly moved in a sequence from a simple practice of its people to a sophisticated level, in other words, from the oral form to the written one, being preserved for generations. However, sometimes this is not the case because it also goes the other way. The popular ballad, for instance, is usually anonymous, old, and traditional and yet the ones that have been written have an odd way of returning to the people, being transmitted from one generation to the next and being preserved for a significantly long time. Therefore, we can say that there is no fixed pattern for folklore to be preserved, but the different ways it happens are worthy of study.

³²³ Flanagan, p. 69.

³²⁴ Braddy, p. 202.

African-American heritage and tradition are used as a method of resistance, and a means to tie African Americans to their history, identity, and Africa. Richard Wright commented on the point of resistance by saying that ‘Negro Folklore is the Negro writer’s most powerful weapon’.³²⁵ For instance, the African-American writers incorporated these aspects into their literary works to save their culture, which has been distorted by the dominant culture in the United States. The African-American authors ‘presented an alternative reality in opposition to the hegemonic myth-making of Eurocentric white, western culture’.³²⁶ One of the myths which represent the way of resistance is the flying Africans, which is a belief that slaves who have been brought to America can fly back, Gay Wilentz states that, ‘Captured Africans who arrived on slave ships realized their position in the New World, so they flew back to Africa rather than submit to slavery’.³²⁷ This legend was mentioned in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977) and Paula Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) in an explicit way: ‘If you surrender to the air, you could *ride* it’.³²⁸ However, in other African-American literary works such as: Ralph Ellison’s *Flying Home* (1996), Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada* (1984), and Richard Perry’s *Montgomery’s Children* (1984), it had been used as a way of remembering the slaves, who died during the voyage from Africa to America and also as a motivation for resisting oppression. In regard to this, Morrison reminds her readers that if the women were not left behind no one would tell the story of the men who flew back to their homeland, and their story would be forgotten forever.

In accordance with what has been presented, we can say that folklore and literature have their own constructed methodologies. However, they use each other as material to build

³²⁵ Richard Wright, ‘Blueprint for Negro Literature’, in *Amistad 2: Writings on Black History and Culture*, ed. by John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 81.

³²⁶ Gay Wilentz, ‘If You Surrender to the Air: Folk Legends of Flight and Resistance in African American Literature’, *Melus*, 16.1 (1989), 21–32 (p. 21).

³²⁷ Wilentz, pp. 21–22.

³²⁸ Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Random House, 2014), p. 420.

their structure, yet as a secondary source. Also, the literary works operate as a record saving the heritage of the Africans in the United States of America. Folklore has been saved to guide future generations and to give them a spark of resistance. Morrison showed in her novels the cultural conflict of perception between the Africans and the Westerners, who also revealed the importance of African heritage to African Americans. The literary works of the African-American writers, from Charles Chesnutt to Paul Dunbar, from Sterling Brown and Hurston to Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ishmael Reed and other African-American writers, have declared that they were inspired, and their works shaped, by African folklore.

Some authors, such as Hubert Nigel Thomas, see that the use of folklore in literature is not a 'compensatory mechanism' or even a reaction to racism, but it is a philosophy. He considered those writers as the most daring and interesting authors among the African-American novelists, because they promote the level of using folklore in literature to another level.³²⁹ In *From Folklore to Fiction*, Nigel Thomas describes the earliest writers' manner of integration of folklore into literature as 'somewhat clumsy'. He justified his description by saying that folklore, in these writings, tended to be discrete or 'predominated at the expense of characterization or theme'.³³⁰ Yet, he was not only blaming the writers for this issue, but also the level of pressure that the publishers put onto the writers, in addition to the expectations of the readers of that time. These factors forced the authors to write in this particular way. However, the quality of the writing started to change from the thirties onwards, when the writers became selective about the materials they integrated into their writing. Also, as Daryl Dance points out, folklore became an 'integral part of the quest of the characters and the revelation of the plot'.³³¹

³²⁹ H. Nigel Thomas, *From Folklore to Fiction: A Study of Folk Heroes and Rituals in the Black American Novel* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 178–79.

³³⁰ H. Nigel Thomas, p. 175.

³³¹ Daryl Dance, "'Learn It to the Younguns": Passing on Folk Wisdom', in *From Folklore to Fiction: A Study of Folk Heroes and Rituals in the Black American Novel*, ed. by H. Nigel Thomas (New York: Greenwood, 1988), pp. ix–xii (p. xi).

Finally, we can say that African folklore is considered essential material for many African-American writers. They consider involving it in their literary works as part of their duty towards their culture and their identity. In this regards, Toni Morrison states that:

What struck me in looking at some of the contemporary fiction was that whether the novel took place in the city or in the country, the presence or absence of that figure [the ancestor] determined the success or the happiness of the character. It was the absence of an ancestor that was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray in the work itself.³³²

This shows how important it is to discuss folklore in African-American literature; not merely entertaining, folklore provides forms of education and motivation. It is a reminder them that the past informs the present. In the next chapter I apply the theories and scholarship discussed here to an interpretation of Morrison's trilogy.

³³² Morrison, 'Rootedness', p. 343.

Chapter Three: Folklore and Identity in Toni Morrison's Fiction

My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world.¹

Toni Morrison was born in Ohio on 18th February, 1931 and died in August 2019. During her life she was a distinguished novelist, author, editor, professor, Nobel Prize winner (1993), and Pulitzer Prize winner for literature. Her given name is Chloe Wofford, her *nom de plume* Toni Morrison is derived from her Catholic confirmation name Anthony and her former husband's family name.² Morrison talked about her role as a writer:

What we do as writers and critics is not just important, it is crucial: it is not just informative, it is formative: it is not just interesting, it profoundly shapes the perception of the world as we, and others, come to 'Know' it. [...] the choices we make are not gratuitous; they are most often political, emerging from an ideology that we are not even, not necessarily anyway, aware of.³

This reveals the political importance of Morrison's works, and how they modify the thinking of society and change its view. Her statement also supports the argument of this thesis concerning the importance of folklore, in her works, in sustaining the African-American identity.

Apart from non-fiction publications, Morrison published eleven novels, beginning with *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and ending with *God Help the Child* (2015). She stated to *The New York Times* that she always knew she would be a writer, adding, 'I do not think that I would have happily stayed here in this world, if I did not have a way of thinking about it,

¹ Toni Morrison, 'Playing in the Dark', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Michael Ryan (Boston: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), p. 4.

² Carmen Gillespie, *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), p. 3.

³ Justine Tally, *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1.

which is what writing is for me'.⁴ Morrison addressed, in her novels, universal themes through the eyes of an African-American author. Her works have a variety of themes including love, racial politics, community survival, and equality. She has had a significant role to play in re-writing American history and deconstructing stereotypes, as part of a project to understand what it means to be both black and a woman in American society. Since her first novel, the author has dealt with 'the complexity of the African American identity in relation to its historical and social context',⁵ which is the main theme which this thesis discusses.

Toni Morrison's novels can be examined as connecting various periods and events in African-American history, starting with *The Bluest Eye*, where the author shows the struggles of a black girl to gain acceptance in a society which judges her according to the colour of her skin. The second novel, *Sula* (1973),⁶ works as a commentary on the life of African Americans in the context of racism and gender politics; such as the relationship between mothers, daughter, and also the relationship between men and women. However, *Song of Solomon* (1977)⁷ is about the journey that the main character, Milkman, embarks on to find himself. The fourth novel, *Tar Baby* (1981),⁸ explores sexual, racial and social tension in the protagonists' relationships. Later, Morrison discusses the living dead in our lives and imagination, with an emphasis placed upon the transcendence of the grave and the extension of these ideas. In 1987 she published *Beloved*, which is the first novel that this thesis discusses. Later in 1992, she published *Jazz* to be followed by *Paradise* (1997), which are the

⁴ The New York Times, *Why Toni Morrison Keeps Writing* / *The New York Times* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjdyX2wnwdY>> [accessed 17 October 2017].

⁵ Vida De Voss, 'The Identity Challenge in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*' (Iowa State University, 2010), p. 2 <<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2648&context=etd>>.

⁶ Toni Morrison, *Sula*, 2016.

⁷ Morrison, *Song of Solomon*.

⁸ Toni Morrison, *Tar Baby* (New York: Paw Prints, 2008).

second and the third novels discussed in this chapter. These publications were followed by *Love* (2003),⁹ *A Mercy* (2008),¹⁰ *Home* (2012),¹¹ and *God Help the Child* (2015).¹²

Morrison's main aim, as she states in her article 'Memory, Creation, and Writing', is to be intentionally black: 'I simply wanted to write literature that was irrevocably, indisputably Black, not because its characters were, or because I was, but because it took as its creative task and sought as its credentials those recognized and verifiable principles of Black art'.¹³ However, her readers are of all races, and she has gained the respect and admiration of scholars and many public figures.¹⁴

Since her first novel, Toni Morrison has dealt with the dimensions of African-American identity in a historical and social framework by peppering her stories with African traditions and folklore. Asked at a conference about her use of myth and folklore in her fiction, she answered:

I try to incorporate those mythic characteristics which for me are very strong characteristics of black art everywhere, whether it was in music or stories or paintings or what have you. It just seemed to me that those characteristics ought to be incorporated into black literature if it was to remain that. It wasn't enough just to write about black people, because anybody can do that. But it was important to me as a writer to try finally to reach a point where they could say "it's all right. It's okay," The community says it's okay.¹⁵

⁹ Toni Morrison, *Love* (London: Vintage, 2016).

¹⁰ Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*, 2017.

¹¹ Morrison, *Home*.

¹² Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*, Isis Large Print (Leicester: Thorpe, 2016).

¹³ Toni Morrison, 'Memory, Creation, and Writing', *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly*, 59.4 (1984), 385–90 (p. 389) <<https://doi.org/10.5840/thought198459430>>.

¹⁴ James E. Smethurst, 'The Black Arts Movement', in *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. by Gene Andrew Jarrett (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 302–15 (p. 311).

¹⁵ Denard, p. 28.

Through her writing, Morrison concentrates upon the past, rather than the present or the future. She justifies this by saying that ‘all mine were in the past,[...] there were things that were already there that had either been buried, discredited, or never looked at and I feel it particularly strongly with black literature because it really is new’.¹⁶ The next section of this thesis discusses the use of folklore in the most popular novel by Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. It also clarifies the link between the use of folklore and its relation to African-American identity.

Section One: *Beloved* (1987)

I will call them my people,
which were not my people;
and her beloved,
which was not beloved.¹⁷

Beloved is considered to be one of the most important literary works to emerge from within the African-American literary tradition. It is also a ‘part of a long tradition in African American culture of signifying through the use of African and Caribbean heritage’.¹⁸ Originally published in September 1987, Morrison’s fifth novel, *Beloved* is an act of remembrance for the millions of African-Americans who suffered slavery, as mentioned in the dedication of the novel to the ‘Sixty Million and more’.¹⁹ *Beloved* was criticised in an early review by Stanley Crouch as being a ‘Blackface Holocaust novel,’ because it was likely to have been written in order to promote African-American martyrdom.²⁰ It certainly bears comparison with Jewish testimonies of experience in the Second World, relating brutal transport, imprisonment and successful and failed escapes. Many slaves died during the journey from Africa to America and both Jews and African Americans understand the way

¹⁶ Denard, p. 40.

¹⁷ This passage is a quotation from the OT prophet Hosea in Romans 9:25 cited in Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York City: Random House, 2014).

¹⁸ ‘[signifying] meant practices in accordance with the dominant culture could be followed while still retaining personal beliefs’. see: Yeates, pp. 515–16.

¹⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, Dedication.

²⁰ Plasa, p. 26.

the trauma of the past maybe transferred from one generation to the next. *Beloved* took two years for Morrison to think about (its plot and characters), in addition to the three years it took to write it. She thought, as she stated in an interview with Bonnie Angelo, that this novel would be the least read among her novels, because of the ‘national amnesia’ surrounding the history of the slaves in the United States.²¹

Toni Morrison worked as an editor in Random House where she was first exposed to the story of a fugitive slave called Margaret Garner.²² Writing a revisionary slave fiction set in the nineteenth century was the challenge that Toni Morrison then undertook. She felt she had to be cautious in her expression of the real event of slavery in a fictional framework.²³ In this novel, Morrison manipulates historical events in the creation of a literary work that aims to provide an alternative truth to that found in archival accounts. The historical incident that the novel is based on concerns a former slave woman, Margaret Garner, who managed to escape from the misery of slavery in Kentucky to the free state of Cincinnati in 1856 (before the American Civil War). Garner and other fugitives crossed the frozen Ohio River with a plan to follow the Underground Railroad²⁴ in an escape to Canada. Unfortunately, they were captured before they could even commence the escape. However, before the slave catchers managed to capture them, Margaret killed one of her children, believing that her child’s death was preferable to its future life in slavery.²⁵ An article in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, on the second of February 1856, reported the incident under the headline ‘A Slave Mother Murders Her Child Rather Than See It Returned to Slavery’. The media attention surrounding the incident generated a lot of horror, and some sympathy for Garner, with some commentators

²¹ James Haskins, *Toni Morrison: The Magic of Words* (Brookfield, Conn.: Millbrook Press, 2001), p. 42.

²² A fugitive slave whose story inspired Toni Morrison to write *Beloved*.

²³ Henry Louis Gates, *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 92.

²⁴ ‘A loosely organized, clandestine antebellum network of Abolitionists, free blacks, and antislavery sympathizers that aided escaped slaves in their journeys to the Northern states or Canada’. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, ed. by Paul Arnett and William Arnett (Atlanta: Tinwood, 2000), I, p. 586.

²⁵ ‘Who Is Margaret Garner?’ <<http://www.ohiohistoryhost.org/ohiomemory/archives/876>> Accessed on 1st March 2016.

considering Garner to be a heroine. ‘Robert and Margaret fought bravely and desperately to protect themselves, their parents and their children in their right to liberty’.²⁶ There were also people who were against her actions. With all the positions and reactions, whether against or in support of Garner, remembering her is considered an act of ‘rememory’ and has helped to keep her story alive.

Regarding this case, the hearing of the court was the longest of this era, lasting almost a month. The reason for the delay was because the judge was confused about whether to consider Garner as a person and charge her with murder, or to consider her as property and charge her under the Fugitive Slave Law.²⁷ Her defence team preferred the first option, to charge her with murder. It sounds confusing, but if she was accused of murder then she could be tried in a free state and could have been discharged and thus gain her freedom. However, the judge decided to consider her as property, and she was returned to her master with two children. Later, the Ohio authorities decided to arrest Garner for murder, but they could not find her because her master kept relocating her from one city to another, until she died in 1858.²⁸

Although the structure of the actual story is tragic, and Margaret Garner was sentenced to return to her slave master, Morrison added a note of hope in her delineation of events. She changed the setting from that of a southern plantation to a Kentucky farm, Sweetwater, a less dark and tragic place for the slave mother, Sethe. The novel tells how Sethe, based on Garner, manages to escape while pregnant and alone. In reality, however, Garner attempted escape to the North with twelve other slaves.

Sethe has two sons who live with Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law. The other fact, which was manipulated, is that Margaret Garner killed her youngest daughter, and tried to kill

²⁶ Marius R. Robinson, ‘Anti-Slavery Bugle’ (New-Lisbon, Ohio, 1856), 19 edition, pp. 1–4 (p. 2).

²⁷ ‘Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made the aiding or abetting of runaway slaves as a federal crime. Fugitive slaves could and did settled in free states, but their safety was never completely assured’. In Kawash, p. 43.

²⁸ ‘Who Is Margaret Garner?’ Access date 02/03/2016.

all of her children but was captured before she managed to do so, while Sethe killed her second youngest daughter, Beloved. There is no apparent reason justifying the change to the real story. Why did Morrison make such a change? Separating a child from his mother is very hard and leaves a negative psychological impact, yet we are left to imagine a mother killing her baby girl.²⁹ Baby Suggs describes the loss of her children, saying ‘A man ain’t nothing but a man [...] but a son? Well now, that’s *somebody*’.³⁰ This thesis is not concerned with tracing all the changes that Morrison made, however, it presents some related incidents and modifications that have to do with traditions and folklore. For instance, Garner’s facial scar has been modified into Sethe’s dorsal, chokecherry tree. The image of a tree usually represents hope, and fertility. However, the narrator has a different opinion, when describing the thoughts of Paul D:

Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did since way back when he took the mid-day meal in the fields of Sweet Home.³¹

The changes that Toni Morrison made to the original story were intended to give hope. Also, to indicate that the effort involved in striving for a better future will be rewarded. Besides, there is hope for a future beyond the dark past that haunted the society of the United States for years, just like the ghost of Beloved, who seeks revenge against Sethe.

Beloved has several themes, which have been thoroughly discussed by many critics, such as the theme of motherhood, revenge, mother-daughter relationship, the trauma of the past and many others. *Beloved* is about a dark era in the history of the United States. Sethe, the main character, is a mother of two boys and two girls. She manages to escape from

²⁹ Kimberly Howard and others, ‘Early Mother-Child Separation, Parenting, and Child Well-Being in Early Head Start Families’, *Attachment & Human Development*, 13.1 (2011), 1–26 (p. 3) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2010.488119>>.

³⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 23.

³¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 21.

Kentucky to the free state of Ohio while pregnant with her daughter Denver. She had left her two sons with her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Slave catchers and Marshals follow Sethe, and they manage to catch her and attempt to bring her and her children back to her master, but she prefers to die and kill her children rather than be returned into slavery. She manages to kill her daughter, Beloved, but is prevented from killing the rest. Her house is then haunted by the ghost of her baby, whose spirit seeks revenge on her killer. The ghost also stands for gothic's blackness, which is discussed by Teresa Goddu, when she states that the Gothic aspect has a 'strong historical connection to slavery' and that the rise of the gothic novel took place in the period when people were debating slavery in England.³² Therefore, there is a clear connection, showing superstitious figures and events in the novels that have slavery as their main theme.

This section discusses the use of folklore in *Beloved*, and the link between the events and characters in it that involve African folklore. Morrison presented African folklore throughout the characters, events, and even objects. Therefore, this section is going to discuss the main aspects and how they are relate to African folklore and traditions. It is divided into two categories which are related to folklore: lifestyle and actions. The first category discusses the representation of characters and their relation to African folklore through characters' names, actions, and even their individual stories. The second category deals with the traditional rituals and some folkloric symbols and objects. As a result of Morrison's research in Brazil, she gained a comprehensive knowledge of Candomblé, an Afro religion found in Brazil, and Oya, African goddess.³³ In addition, her trip to Brazil gave her the necessary knowledge as well as the inspiration to write about the religion's philosophy of

³² Teresa Goddu, 'The Ghost of Race: Edgar Allan Poe and the Southern Gothic', in *Criticism and the Color Line: Desegregating American Literary Studies*, ed. by Henry B. Wonham (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 230.

³³ Oyá is the powerful goddess of the winds, storms and lightning. See: Kokahvah Zauditu-Selassie, *African Spiritual Traditions in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), p. 52.

transformation and relate it to the idea of the communities of women, which she used in *Paradise*.³⁴

The female body, according to African oral tradition, has two aspects where it is a source of fear, but it also a source of attraction. The body can please and attract, yet it can also destroy. The representation of African and African-American women in writing, in many instances, represents the queens, goddesses, custodians of the four elements, and fertility. However, in other cases women are related to demonic rituals. Depending on the point of view, they could be considered as witches, Obeah practitioners, or healers.³⁵ Therefore, in *Beloved*, women have a wide range of characteristics; Morrison presents her female characters as being related to violence, magic, and ghosts. This aspect can be discussed by introducing some characters and their actions and role in the novel.

The ancestral figure of the novel is Baby Suggs, used as the central focus to unite the major elements of a story relayed in a non-sequential order. She is Sethe's mother-in-law and the spiritual leader of the African-American community. When Sethe arrives at 124 Bluestone Road, Baby Suggs provides her with the spiritual guidance and physical support she needs. Sethe considers Baby Suggs to be the mother she lost and is therefore emotionally attached to her. Baby Suggs teaches Sethe African tradition and knowledge of the ancestors which provides her with a sense of cultural and spiritual continuity. When Sethe kills her daughter, Baby Suggs disappears to her bedroom to 'think about the colors of things'³⁶ until she dies. So, as the novel starts, this character is dead. Morrison mentions her in the novel as being 'living dead'. According to John S. Mbiti, in African tradition, the ancestors are classified into three categories: long dead, recently dead or living dead.³⁷ Long dead stands

³⁴ Shaun Myers, 'Transnationally Rooted Practices of Candomblé in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*', *Souls*, 16.1–2 (2014), 110–18 (p. 112) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2014.935243>>.

³⁵ James Tar Tsaiior, *African Literature and the Politics of Culture* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), p. 139.

³⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 177.

³⁷ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1990), p. 69.

for the spirits of the ancestors who are not in the personal memory anymore, or who have been forgotten. The recently dead are those who recently left through physical death, while the living dead represents the spirits of those who are still in the memory of their families and their conscious memory. Mbiti adds that as long as these spirits are still in mind, and their identity is still there, they will assist in the personal continuity of life.³⁸

Baby Suggs also breaks through psychological barriers as she guides her people to deliverance in the Clearing. The clearing has a powerful position in African rituals and their spiritual performance. Through her spiritual help and guidance and supplication in that place, her people manage to break through the barriers that kept them from living normally and their mental balance is restored. Baby Suggs's significant position is derived from the fact that she was born in Africa, and she has experienced the feeling of being in her land and among her people. Morrison states, in an interview with Walter Clemons, that 'A few people in my novel remember it ...Baby Suggs came here out of one of those ships, but mostly it's not remembered at all.'³⁹ Therefore, she is the source of remembrance in addition to her position as an ancestral figure.

In this novel, Baby Suggs seems to be the closest character to Christianity, due to her holiness and method of preaching. In presenting this character Morrison gives an impression that she dislikes the idea of having this character get closer to the main storyline, because this might cause a loosening in the connection of this character to Africa and African traditions. She gives Baby Suggs the role of guardian or preserver of African tradition for and that is what differentiates Baby Suggs from her fellow townspeople. The religious characteristic of Baby Suggs's 'holy' is that she usually issues a call to her preaching, a calling related to an African tradition, to gather people in a Clearing. Her preaching is usually held on Saturday afternoon and not Sunday morning. Baby Suggs calls the children, the men and then the

³⁸ Mbiti, p. 125.

³⁹ Walter Clemons, 'The Ghosts of 'Sixty Million and More', in *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*, ed. by Barbara Solomon (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998), p. 75.

women. They exchange the roles of dancing, laughing, and crying, ‘She [Baby Suggs] did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more’.⁴⁰ Baby Suggs points more, in her anointing, to the folk imagination than to the biblical traditions, in the way she guides her people to pray.⁴¹ She anoints herself with the blessing of her community and the experience of suffering and torture she has endured. In addition because of the freedom that she has gained from owning her body, and the ability that she has to call it hers, she is called ‘Baby Suggs, holy’.⁴² She uses religious rituals, such as the rituals of the Clearing, to transfer her knowledge and gives advice to her people. The people with her, dance, cry and laugh according to how Baby Suggs instructs them. Children, women, and men laugh for life and shed tears for those who died, and for the living as well. At the end of the rituals she does not tell them that they are blessed now, and does not ask them to abandon their sins. She tells them that they only have the grace that they can imagine. They will not have what they cannot see.⁴³ Yeates comments on the practice by saying ‘the fragmented and aggregated construction of Beloved in this way [of mixing Christian and African religions] evokes African American identity as fragmented in its composition’.⁴⁴ Baby Suggs is a woman of words, who affects everyone around her, and manages to blend, in her speech and actions, the best of the secular and the sacred world.

Baby Suggs does not maintain a physical presence in the novel because she dies and leaves Sethe and Denver alone, yet her spiritual presence remains evident as she continues to guide the occupants of 124 Bluestone Road. She quits due to the actions of the people of her community. She has sacrificed everything for them, sixty years of her life in slavery and five years of her freedom. She wanted to be an inspiration for her people and wanted to:

⁴⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 87.

⁴¹ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, p. 173.

⁴² Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 87.

⁴³ Morrison, *Beloved*, pp. 87–88.

⁴⁴ Yeates, p. 516.

[B]elong to a community of other Negroes—to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counselled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed—and to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance —well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy.⁴⁵

Baby Suggs ends the rituals, and in doing undercuts her role of ancestral figure, then died at the end with the feeling of betrayal. This feeling came to her after the people of the community did not warn Sethe about the coming of the master to take her back into slavery.

The other representative of African folklore is Sethe, who represents the heroic character and the ancestors, in the form of memory. Her character works in consonance with the Orisa of Yoruba,⁴⁶ and its rituals to engender psychic wholeness.⁴⁷ The Yoruba are an ethnic group of southwestern and north-central Nigeria and southern and central Benin, with a population of over forty million people, that made them among the largest ethnic groups of Africa.⁴⁸ In this part, we can examine the memory of the past, and its importance in giving the characters the sense that the past is crucial to the future. Although, ironically, this novel ends with the repetition of the sentence, ‘it was not a story to pass on’ three times.⁴⁹ This sentence intercuts the last five paragraphs of the novel and is followed by the community forgetting about Beloved, to the extent that they no longer know her name. Her name is hidden, just like the sixty million and more in the dedication. African folklore seems to be embodied in Sethe, as a person, in her actions, and her surroundings, and the changes in her life, but mainly in her remembrance of the suffering of being a slave ‘the ax forgets, the tree remembers’.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 177.

⁴⁶ African iconography that represents the gods with all their different powers and abilities.

⁴⁷ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 1st edn (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 274.

⁵⁰ African-American proverb.

Many things are taken away from Sethe, her freedom and her daughter, although she herself murdered Beloved to save her from the torture of slavery. She also loses her sons and her life in the community where she lives. She is also robbed of her was her life force which resembled, according to the spiritual traditions of West Africa, the white fluids which are her breast milk and the semen of those who raped her.⁵¹ Sethe's childhood was taken from her at an early stage of her life because she was prevented from experiencing the love of her mother. She refers to this state as a 'homeless' mind, which is a physical and psychological state. Another thing that Sethe remembers about her mother, which also links her to Africa, is the *dikenga dia Kongo* cosmogram (a circle and a cross) on her mother's skin.⁵² Her mother taught her how to recognise her from the other women in the field, by looking for the cosmogram on her. This sign links the memory back to Africa spiritually. Slaves are branded in order to enable identification and to denote the slaves' original African national identity.⁵³ It also reflects the sign of guidance from the ancestral figure who shows African Americans their way when they feel lost in the distractions of the new world.

Sethe is significantly attached to her African ancestors of Africa. This is made clear during the rituals of Baby Suggs while she was alive, and later when she used to go to the Clearing to get blessed, even after the death of Baby Suggs. She sells stories in different parts of the novel because they give lessons to her daughters, Denver and Beloved. Sethe told Denver stories of her mother, and languages that they used, which have 'different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now'.⁵⁴ She forgot the language that Nan and her ma'am spoke; it had gone and never returned. Another type of story was her tale of escaping slavery while she was pregnant with Denver, although it hurts

⁵¹ Lamont Lindstrom, 'History, Folklore, Traditional and Current Uses of Kava', in *Kava: From Ethnology to Pharmacology*, ed. by Yadhu N. Singh, 1st edn (London: CRC Press, 2004), pp. 10–28 (p. 13).

⁵² Joseph K. Adjaye, *Time in the Black Experience* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994), p. 23.

⁵³ Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 62.

her to remember: 'every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost'.⁵⁵ This aspect of the novel concludes the part of the 'rememory' of slavery and how it has its effect on African-Americans. The message of unity and belonging, her heritage and homeland, her freedom and her children's freedom, and the guidance of her ancestors who light the way for her, is embodied in this novel. Goddu asserts this point by saying that through the representations of the ghost in *Beloved*, 'Morrison shows that the American gothic's "blackness" needs to be historicized not only in terms of slavery but, more importantly, in terms of the racial fantasies that haunt it'.⁵⁶ Yeates refers to the origin of the character of Beloved, the ghost, as being constructed and influenced from fragments of different aspects such as the living-dead of African cultures, and the Caribbean's zombie and the American adaptation of it.⁵⁷ This use of the gothic mode is present in Morrison's *Jazz* too, but is relayed from a different perspective.

Sethe embodies the characteristics of the African ancestors in her life, actions, beliefs, and even in her sorrow and memory. The keloid skin, acquired from the torture inflicted by the schoolteacher and his nephews, which resembles a chokecherry tree, is one feature. Trees in most African mythology represent the link between the dead and the living.⁵⁸ Trees also relate to Sethe's motherhood memory, since we had the image of her mother hanged from a tree. The chokecherry tree also provides a mythical story, within the main story of *Beloved*.⁵⁹ The keloid skin represents an 'overhealing' of the past and an external memory. It is different from a scar because it is permanent and looks more attached, rather than being a part of the skin. Scars assimilate the memory of the slaves, where they might have been healed, but their traces are still there and will never go. Despite all the pain and tragedy that this tree stands

⁵⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 58.

⁵⁶ Goddu, p. 231.

⁵⁷ Yeates, p. 516.

⁵⁸ Leslie M Alexander and Walter C Rucker, *Encyclopedia of African American History* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2010), p. 183.

⁵⁹ Alexis Brooks De Vita, *Mythatypes: Signatures and Signs of African/Diaspora and Black Goddesses* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 38.

for, it might also stand for the tree of life and the tree of knowledge which created the dawn of the African civilization.⁶⁰

Beloved, who is the main character of the novel, represents, in one case, the myth of the *vagina dentata*.⁶¹ This myth represents the strength of women and it is thought to be one of the reasons to justify female genital mutilation in Africa, which will be discussed in depth in reference to the works of Alice Walker in the next chapter. This idea of *vagina dentata* was shown through the actions of Beloved and how she was dealing with her mother and sister on the one hand, and Paul D on the other. When she felt threatened by Paul D, she faced him in the flesh and took his strength away using her powers. She made him recall every sad moment of his life to break him down and force him to leave ‘when he reached the inside part he was saying, “Red heart. Red heart,” over and over again. [...] so loud it woke Denver’.⁶² Beloved has one of the greatest parts of this novel, and she has the attention of the readers and critics. Her character is also represented as Oya or Yansan, who is also known as the mother of nine.⁶³ Beloved is the suspicious woman who came to 124 Bluestone Road. She is the ghost of the murdered child of Sethe. Actually, Beloved is not her real name, but she gained the name as the only word engraved on the gravestone that her mother, Sethe, bought. Being nameless in the living world would leave her without a name in the spirit world too, according to West African mythology.⁶⁴ The unnamed Beloved was not the only case that Morrison referred to, in this novel; she dedicated it to the ‘Sixty Million or more’ who are unnamed too. Some of those sixty million might have died during the voyage from their

⁶⁰ Justine Tally, *Toni Morrison's Beloved: Origins* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 107.

⁶¹ Jane Caputi, *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power, and Popular Culture* (Madison: Popular Press, 2004), p. 70.

⁶² Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 117.

⁶³ Oya is a Great Yoruban Orisha. She is the goddess of Storms and Winds, and Her realm ranges from rainbows to thunder. She can manifest as winds ranging from the gentlest breeze to the raging hurricane or cyclone. Oya is known as a fierce Warrior goddess and a strong protectress of women, who call upon Her. For more information, please see: Harold Scheub, *A Dictionary of African Mythology: The Mythmaker as Storyteller* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), p. 225.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth T. Hayes, ‘The Named and the Nameless: Morrison’s 124 and Naylor’s “the Other Place” as Semiotic Chora’, *African American Review*, 38.4 (2004), 669–81 (p. 675) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/4134424>>.

homeland to the new world.⁶⁵ They might have drowned without any indication of who they are, and where they belong. Their fate is just like Beloved's where their souls might still be away from the land where they belong. They also represent the 'rememory' of the past for African Americans. Beloved goes from one stage to another throughout the novel, starting with being an infant, a sister, and a lover. She grows to the age that she would have been, had she lived. She represents the past, the memory, and the pain. There are several places in the novel where she stands for, or represents, African traditions and folklore, beginning with her name.

The resemblance between Beloved and Oya comes from some powers that they share, such as the power of wind. Oya is associated with the power of wind. She is described as the wind that blows before the storms. The power of wind manifested in the human lungs is similar to the state of Beloved when she came to 124 Bluestone Road. Beloved breathes heavily, 'she was breathing like a steam engine', a feature also also related to her throat having been cut.⁶⁶ Moreover, Oya is determined, and when she gazes at something, that she will never let her attention waver. We can notice this when Beloved watches Sethe and studies her moves and words, and follows her wherever she goes. Another resemblance is that the narrator describes Beloved as homeless and without people, while Paul D interrogates her. Oya does not have a home, and she is described as lonely and without people near to her.⁶⁷

Having the name Beloved, engraved on her grave headstone, does not necessarily mean that she is Sethe's daughter. We can understand that Beloved represents many things and people in this novel. She resembles Sethe's mother, her daughter, the memory of slavery,

⁶⁵ In an interview by Angelo with Toni Morrison 'The Pain of Being Black', Morrison stated that this number is a conservative estimate of the people who have been lost in the Middle Passage. Bonnie Angelo, *TONI MORRISON: The Pain Of Being Black* - *TIME*, 8/26/, MMXIII
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,957724,00.html>>.

⁶⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 53.

⁶⁷ Judith Illsley Gleason, *Oya: In Praise of the Goddess* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 9.

the sixty million and more, the ancestors and myth, and even Sethe herself: 'I AM BELOVED and she is mine'.⁶⁸ She is the mysterious character who came from water and disappears at the end of the novel to appear again as a ghost in *Jazz*.

Beloved lives in two worlds, the actual and the spiritual. She is a member of Sethe's family, or becomes a member. She also represents all women and children who were taken forcibly from Africa into slavery. She is the spirit of the ancestors, and the myth of wood and water, which they considered to be a gateway between the realms of the living and the dead. Moreover, she is the baby born in captivity or from the labours of the plantations. According to the Yoruba's tradition, there is a concept that matches this character that is called *Abiku*. It is derived from two words, *Abi* and *Iku*; the first means 'possesses' and the second means 'death'. As a phrase, it means predestined to death. The Yoruba people used to address the spirit of a child, who dies before puberty (which is under twelve years old), as *Abiku*. The *Abiku* has the power to prevent the parents from having other children, and this leaves them in frustration.⁶⁹ This is not the case with Sethe as she physically has another child, Denver. However, her two boys left the house in fear of the spirit that haunts their home, and Denver chose a new path for her life. So, with the powers of the *Abiku*, Sethe's children run away and leave their mother alone facing the misery of both the past and the present time.

In the African myth, Oya is the guardian of the cemetery gate and therefore maintains access to the abandoned souls across the river. This resembles the appearance of Beloved in the novel during the carnival. It is the carnival that Paul D invited Sethe and Denver to go to and socialise at after eighteen years of being away from society: 'There's a carnival in town. Thursday, tomorrow, is for coloreds and I got two dollars. Me and you and Denver gonna

⁶⁸ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 210.

⁶⁹ Timothy Mobolade, 'The Concept of Abiku', *African Arts*, 7.1 (1973), 62–64 (p. 62).

spend every penny of it'.⁷⁰ Beloved appears from the water fully dressed in black, coming back from the world of spirits to the world of the living.

Generally, in West African tradition there is a belief that the dead can come from the world of the spirits to the world of the living. This might happen for several reasons; to guide the living such as Baby Suggs, to seek revenge such as Beloved, to check the well-being of their loved ones, or to show them a way to a buried treasure. The reasons may vary, but in all of the cases there is a link that keeps the spirits connected to the living world until they accomplish their mission. A story in *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958), which is mainly about the Gullah people,⁷¹ describes the state of a spirit coming back to the living world. Aaron's spirit was chasing his wife because she had the intention to have a suitor. Later, his wife managed to get rid of him by making him dance to death.⁷² Although this story is about male-female conflict, it also shows the link between this story and the story of Beloved in how both of their spirits stayed in the living world to fulfil their goal. The purpose of Beloved was to regain the life and love that she missed and to seek revenge on her mother, Sethe. She has done so by hindering Sethe in her independent life. Beloved ate Sethe's food, and ate as much as she could, which, as she showed, was not only due to hunger but to increase the burden upon Sethe. She was attached to Sethe's spirit and made her suffer, and she caused pain to Paul D too. Beloved did not stop until Sethe became her victim and could not defend herself anymore. The leaving of Beloved can be considered as permanent because the family dog returned to the house, although some theories suggest that she returns as a ghost in *Jazz*. According to the African traditions some animals, such as dogs, sense the existence of ghosts. Therefore, the return of the dog means that the spirit of Beloved is not in the house anymore

⁷⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 46.

⁷¹ They are a distinctive group of enslaved Africans descendants of various ethnic groups. They live in the Lowcountry region of the U.S. states of Georgia and South Carolina. For further information, please refer to: <http://www.africanamericancharleston.com/gullah.html>.

⁷² Langston Hughes and Arna Wendell Bontemps, *The Book of Negro Folklore* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1958), pp. 175–78.

and will not return, 'when Paul D sees the ancient dog, eighteen years if a day, he is certain 124 is clear of her [Beloved]'.⁷³

The concept of ghosts is rooted in the African tradition through folk tales and myths. Apart from the ghost of Beloved, Baby Suggs says that the ghosts are in the houses of the slaves all over the land 'Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief'.⁷⁴ This belief is derived from the West African tradition, which states that the dead keep contact with the living because life is a cycle of past which is the dead, the present which stands for the living, and the future which is the unborn, and they all coexist.⁷⁵

The relationships between characters, and the way they are articulated, finds echo in the African traditions too. For instance, the relationship between Beloved and Denver represents a bridge between North America and Africa; it also stands for life and death, the past and the present, and flesh and spirit. They are associated with their characteristics and what they resemble in African myth. The blood exchange between these two characters forges a strong relationship and they become spiritually connected in a way that 'matches the way a blood offering would link a devotee to the Orisa to whom the offering was made'.⁷⁶ Denver is a character representing the second generation who has just heard about the history and the past of her family. Although her mother, Sethe, forbids her to know about the misery of the past, her birth is a legendary story. She is the seeker of her roots and the one who loves to find her place in the life of her family. Denver suffers a lot, due to the isolation, but she managed to stand with the support of Baby Suggs and the ancestors. What she knew from the stories of her birth, made a good base to build her adulthood upon, which reflects a positive side of stories from the past, where memory and rememory are put in action. However, the base that Beloved built her short life upon was destructive and make her seek revenge from

⁷³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 263.

⁷⁴ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Gurleen Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), p. 106.

⁷⁶ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 160.

those who took her life away, which made a gap in the history that she was so thirsty to fill. The character of Denver is a very important one because she stands for the generation who has not experienced the torture of slavery but experienced its aftermath of discrimination and racism. She also stands for those who wanted to create their own identity in the new world, due to her progress from isolation to the open world around her, 'Denver could care for Sethe in the day and earn a little something at night'.⁷⁷ Therefore, what this character represents is an example of a specific African-American identity, one engaging with the wider world, but with the assistance of the ancestors and their folklore.

Female characters in Morrison's novels are presented as spiritual, but they are presented as victimised too, due to the physical and sexual exploitation they were subjected to. In *Beloved* we can see independent and strong female characters fighting alone and taking critical decisions. This progression in presenting female characters might come from the effect of the African-American folklore transmitted by oral tradition. Therefore, we can see Denver views her mother as a 'queenly woman' who can control her actions and reactions, 'The one who never looked away, who when a man got stomped to death by a mare right in front of Sawyer's restaurant did not look away; and when a sow began eating her own litter did not look away then either'.⁷⁸ This shows the strength of the female characters of Morrison's *Beloved* who despite the suffering, discrimination, and racism, learn how to stand up to the difficulties of their own lives.

On the other hand, male characters were also presented as a reflection of African folktale characters. We have Stamp Paid, Paul D, and Sixo. This part of the novel shows their actions, rituals, and what they represent in the African-American folklore. Stamp Paid is one of the mysterious characters, yet he is a very interesting one due to his role in the novel. As a ferryman he helps escaped slaves to cross the river to the free land, where he resumbles

⁷⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 299.

⁷⁸ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 12.

Aganju of the Orisa.⁷⁹ Aganju, represents land, and also helps people and souls to overcome their obstacles spiritually in walking toward their destiny. He is also the god of volcano, river, and wildness. The actions and rituals of Stamp Paid form an identical match with those of Aganju. In linking Stamp Paid to water, Morrison said that ‘He knew the secrets of the Ohio river and its banks’.⁸⁰ Aganju and Stamp Paid share the power of identifying the feeling in their surroundings and can reduce their inner pain and anger. The other common merit is that they both share a feeling for nature and their connection to it. The fruit that Stamp Paid used to bring, from an unknown place, to give to others gave the recipient a feeling of peace and calmness, as if the fruit was blessed by him.⁸¹ The gathering of fruit is part of the rituals the African-American slaves perform, such as *Kwanzaa*, which is rooted back to the ancient Africa and the harvest festival.⁸² He is also the same person who told Paul D about Sethe’s murder of her daughter, which caused the outrage of Paul D and made him leave 124, ‘Suddenly he [Paul D] saw what Stamp Paid wanted him to see: more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him’.⁸³

Sixo, on the other hand, is one of the most mysterious characters in *Beloved* due to his rituals and religious practices at Sweet Home. He is an ‘Indigo with a flame-red tongue’ and a nature lover who prefers nature over humans.⁸⁴ Some of the people of Sweet Home call him ‘the wild man’. He was like a hero of legend stories.⁸⁵ Sixo also has a special connection to trees and nature, and he used to go there to dance among the trees alone. He never lost his African roots. He justified his actions by saying that the dancing keeps his bloodline with his ancestors. Nancy Bate discusses Morrison’s references to dancing, ‘she [Morrison] reminds

⁷⁹ R.O. Rom Kalilu, ‘Between Tradition and Record: A Search for the Legendary Woodcarvers of Old Oyo’, *Ufahamu: Journal of the African Activist Association Ufahamu*, 20.2 (1992), 49–63 (p. 50).

⁸⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 170.

⁸¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 170.

⁸² Elizabeth Pleck, ‘Kwanzaa: The Making of a Black Nationalist Tradition, 1966-1990’, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 20.4 (2001), 3–28 (p. 3).

⁸³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 165.

⁸⁴ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 21.

⁸⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 11.

the reader that dance, like prayer, is a potent avenue for the expression of religious ecstasy'.⁸⁶ Sixo has established a special relationship with nature and has respect for the spirit world; when he wants to have a place to perform his rituals, he asks for permission from the Native Americans' spirit, 'A deserted stone structure that Redmen used way back when they thought the land was theirs. Sixo discovered it on one of his night creeps, and asked its permission to enter'.⁸⁷ He proves to be a man of determination and strength by travelling thirty-miles in order to meet Patsy, the woman he loves. Therefore, she becomes known as the 'Thirty Mile Woman'.⁸⁸ Sixo's great strength of character is revealed when he faces schoolteacher and, when he is burned as part of his lynching, continues to laugh and never screams, 'He laughs. A rippling sound like Sethe's sons make [...] He laughs. Something is funny. [...] smoky, stubborn fire. They shoot him to shut him up'.⁸⁹ This shows his determination to announce his victory against the oppression of the slave masters. He was happy to know that his beloved Patsy was pregnant by him. Finally, he yelled with 'Seven O' before his death to insist on showing that his offspring will not be enslaved and there will not be a system called slavery after that. Also, his laughing indicates that he is going to a better place. This idea was emphasised by Morrison to defend and justify Sethe's action of killing her daughter, because she did not want her children to experience slavery and its torture.

Paul D is one of the faces of rebellion against slavery and a seeker of identity. He is also one of the Sweet Home men. He is the trigger which arouses the wrath of the baby ghost. He stands by Sethe and Denver by confronting the supernatural feminine ghost with his masculine will and attempting to defeat it, at least at the beginning of his interaction with the ghost. His voice is stronger than the ghost's silence. Paul D represents a traditional African hero who gives Sethe and Denver what they could not get for a long time. He brought quiet

⁸⁶ Bate, p. 28.

⁸⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 24.

⁸⁸ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 25.

⁸⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 226.

and balance to the house, made Sethe feel at rest, and they became lovers. Sethe has a significant change in her life and reaches a point where she can leave the house and go to the carnival to socialise again with her community. Then the story takes on another dimension by presenting the shift of the baby ghost from the world of the spirits to the real world. Beloved then makes Paul D feel an overwhelming grief with her unearthly powers so that she could dominate the house and its occupiers once more.

Although Paul D leaves Sethe when he knows about the incident of her murdering the baby girl, he finally returns, at the end of the story, to join Sethe again. He stands to support the community despite all the memory of torture and suffering. His return was at the time Beloved left. This concept of exits and entrances, according to the novel, is not an action that happens only in the spirit world, but it also happens in the living world too.

African folkloric aspects are not linked to the characters only, but they are also a lifestyle, a way of dressing, objects, and decorations. For instance, the element of memory, which is a significant step in order to make African Americans imagine the future through regaining the sense of the past, has a significant reflection in the plot of *Beloved*. Memory includes repetition that indicates continuity with the past. In addition, it has a triadic structure of time, space, and of being a function of a specific cosmology. The need of memorising coexists in African-American culture, and it is implied in *Beloved* through the plot, structure, and rituals. The actions and rituals, such as calling African gods, deities, community, and individual ancestors from the past, is to secure the future for the upcoming generations. It is possible that African-Americans will not try to remember, and that they will want to forget such memories; as mentioned by Toni Morrison in an interview with Bonnie Angelo:

I thought this has got to be the least read of all the books I'd written

because it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, I

don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember. I mean, it's national amnesia.⁹⁰

According to Pierre Nora, collective memory works as a bridge of healing from the dreadful past to a better future.⁹¹ Toni Morrison thought that the past was forgotten and that no one is trying to remember, even her characters. However, forgetting the past is not something that you just decide to do. Controlling the conscious mind does not mean that we handle the unconscious. Morrison wrote this novel without an in-depth study of the historical incident, as she claimed, but her unconscious mind and imagination led her to write about it, 'I really don't know anything about her [Margaret Garner]. What I knew came from reading two interviews with her. They said, isn't this extraordinary ... she was very calm; she said, I'd do it again. That was more than enough to fire my imagination'.⁹² Furthermore, Barbara Christian, in an experiment involving 'emotionally disturbed' blacks examined their reactions to reading the novel. She stated that 'these patients felt it to be a healing experience, one that mirrored their sense of their own personal and communal history and returned them to a point [...] where they were willing to remember what they had decided they did not want to remember'.⁹³ This illustrates the power of remembering and its healing effect on traumatised people.

Morrison tackled the old days, and the traumatic history of African Americans and the 'whites'. She said that 'I am writing for black people', but her message reached the oppressors' ancestors too.⁹⁴ In this perspective, memory is a vital element in the oral tradition, and it became a cultural and spiritual statement in *Beloved* since Toni Morrison

⁹⁰ Haskins, p. 42 This quotation had already been referred to on page 117.

⁹¹ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Me'moire', in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. by Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 284–301 (p. 285).

⁹² Philip Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2007), p. 393.

⁹³ Christian, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Hermione Hoby, Toni Morrison: 'I'm writing for black people ... I don't have to apologise', 2015 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/25/toni-morrison-books-interview-god-help-the-child>> [accessed 14 February 2016].

combined myth and remembered history in it. This remembrance is recognised as historical and cultural knowledge that is transmitted from one generation to another through the medium of oral narrative. This shared history and memory assures the cultural and spiritual continuity of a group or a nation that is, indeed, related to the continuity of a shared identity.

Another impact of African folklore on *Beloved* is the dual signification of rebirth and circularity, which is derived from the African ancestors, through the death of Beloved and her rebirth out of the river water, to disappear later. It has been used as part of the circular language of Toni Morrison, such as 'I am Beloved and she is mine'.⁹⁵ Paradox has found its way into this novel too, for example 'I'll protect her while I'm live and I'll protect her when I ain't'.⁹⁶ In addition, through the use of oxymoron when she says 'drove him crazy so he would not lose his mind',⁹⁷ Morrison shows Sethe's belief in the continuity of the life after death, and that the dead have the means to interact with the living and affect them. The historical experience of African Americans, during slavery, forms a significant historical and spiritual statement. In addition, the form of narration, which consists of direct exposition through flash-forwards and flashbacks, also creates a sense of circularity. This circularity represents the African epic and the ancestors' cyclical idea from a Bantu cultural perspective.⁹⁸

Morrison states 'there are a lot of people who talk about the position that men hold as of primary importance, but actually it is if we don't keep in touch with the ancestor that we are, in fact, lost'.⁹⁹ Therefore, the ancestors are guides in society and inform its social fabric. In addition to providing guidance, they are considered as guardians of morals, so that every person in a community has his or her place and a right to wellbeing. Morrison asserts this

⁹⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 214.

⁹⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 45.

⁹⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 41.

⁹⁸ "The Bantu of central Africa possessed the largest homogeneous culture among the captured Africans and had been the most influence on African American culture and language". See: Zauditu-Selassie, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Morrison, 'Rootedness', p. 344.

idea by writing, ‘if anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn’t about the village or community or about you, then it is not about anything’.¹⁰⁰ So, we can understand from this statement that there is a moral purpose in involving African folklore in her novels. This purpose is to sustain her people’s identity, their position in the community and defence of rights.

Memory is significant in *Beloved*, indeed it is the backbone of the novel. Every character has a memory that affects his or her life, judgement and actions. This is not applicable to the main characters only, but even the minor ones too. The aspect of remembering and memory is best known as *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, collective memory. It indicates that certain objects, places or events can have a significant link related to a group remembrance.¹⁰¹ This theme, of memory and rememory and collective memory, is applicable and discussed in all the novels of Morrison, and of Walker in this chapter and the next. The application of this concept is traced in this novel ‘I would have seen my fingernail prints right there on your forehead for all the world to see’.¹⁰² We can see that the fingernail mark would last and will keep telling the story of torture and suffering that the African-Americans were exposed to.

In addition to ritual practices, names, and actions, figures and numbers have folkloric representation in this novel too. The novel itself is divided into three main parts; Part one consists of eight chapters, part two of seven chapters, and finally part three contains three chapters. This order of the triadic structure was missing from the home number, 124 Bluestone Road. The missing number indicates an irregularity in normal order, which is consistent with the displacement of slaves from Africa, it also refers to the lost connection with their families because of the slave trade. However, the missing number is not an actual omission because the unconscious mind insists on inserting this number, which symbolises

¹⁰⁰ Morrison, ‘Rootedness’, p. 344.

¹⁰¹ Marija Wakounig, *From Collective Memories to Intercultural Exchanges* (Zürich: LIT, 2012), p. 72.

¹⁰² Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 202.

the adjustments that have been made by African people to survive the new world. They had to fill any gap such as memories, family, and cultural elements so that they could stay united.¹⁰³

Staying with numbers, number nine has a distinguished representation in the African tradition and folklore in relation to memory and water. According to the theology of Yoruba the number nine is associated with Oya, who is called the mother of the nine.¹⁰⁴ The Orisa of the Joluba River is also linked to the ancestral maskers, who is known as *engungun* by the Yoruba. This secret group is addressed with bringing the ancestors back to life by wearing masks, and this is clearly related to memory and its impact.¹⁰⁵ Number nine is also linked to *Beloved*, as it is mentioned in the part that discusses how her character can be recognised as Oya or Yansan. Moreover, *Beloved* consists of eighteen chapters, nine times two.

Additionally, the appearance of *Beloved* took place nine years after the death of Baby Suggs, and eighteen years after the death of Sethe's baby. Moreover, the food that Baby Suggs made for the people '124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety'.¹⁰⁶ The number nine has been mentioned, along with its derivations, on several occasions so that it cannot be denied that it was used on purpose.

The representation of water, dancing, singing, and numbers is so interrelated that it is difficult to discuss each element individually without relating it to the other. Dancing and singing have deep roots in every culture and folklore, and the African's tradition is not an exception. In this novel, dancing and singing were referred to when Sethe was about to

¹⁰³ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 153.

¹⁰⁴ Oya is the powerful Yorùbá Orisha of the winds and tempests. She is considered either the sister of the Orisha of storms Shango, or one of His three wives, with Oshun and Oba. As the Orisha of change, she brings down the dead wood to make room for the new, and She uses Her machete or sword to clear a path for new growth. She is believed to watch over the newly dead and assist them as they make the transition from life. She is equated with the Vodou Lwa Maman Brijit, Who, like Oya, guards' graveyards. Please refer to: Eugene V Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft, *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), p. 96.

¹⁰⁵ P. S. O. Aremu and Yaya Olanipekun, 'Egungun Tradition in Trado-Modern Society in South-Western Nigeria', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3.1 (2012), 283 (p. 284).

¹⁰⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 137.

deliver Denver, and she was trying to remember the place, ‘of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? Or was it Louisiana?) She remembered only song and dance.’¹⁰⁷ However, the memory of a song and dance dominate her mind and liberate her thoughts. Dance is originally sacred, according to Mircea Eliade, rooted in myths inherited from the ancestors and it is an ‘extrahuman model’.¹⁰⁸ The memorising of the song and dance by Sethe is a way to express how memory can transcend time and space. At the same time she referred to her daughter and symbolised her as an antelope, which is an image from a very remote time and space ‘when she did the little antelope rammed her with horns and pawed the ground of her womb with impatient hooves’.¹⁰⁹ The antelope, according to the Bambara people of Mali, is called *chi wara* or *tji wara*, where *tji* means work and *wara* mean animal, so it is the working animal. The antelope represents the abundance of fertility and agriculture, and it is also associated with encouraging cooperation among all the community members to ensure a successful crop.¹¹⁰ In this part of the novel the antelope stands for the fertility of having a new generation and the continuity of their race, besides the unity of Sethe with her free community, to work together for their social identity.

Dancing is also considered an apt medium to preserve memory and culture, which can be traced over and over in this novel. It is a depiction of the real life of African-Americans during slavery, and even in the present time. Morrison emphasises the importance of dancing in presenting the resistance of Sixo and showed how we could link dancing with the ancestors. Morrison said ‘Sixo went among trees at night. For dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open, he said’.¹¹¹ In this quotation the bloodline stands for two things, the actual bloodline which is the physical representation, and the preserving of his identity and race.

¹⁰⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 28.

¹⁰⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 155.

¹¹¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 25.

Dancing is represented as part of the culture that can accommodate other generations. Singing has a significant role in this novel too, it helps Paul D and Sixo to keep going and sustains their manhood. Songs manipulate meaning, stories, and depict pain and joy. In addition, since they could not write, or were not allowed to, they sing to memorise their heritage and pass it on:

They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood: tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animal they had tamed themselves or seen others tame.¹¹²

Moreover, when we approach the end of the novel, a song is used to exorcise the spirit of Beloved by the women of Cincinnati. Morrison refers to it as 'Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees'.¹¹³ It sounds as if the women's collective voice became a way to show their regret of being silent when the slave owner came to take Sethe.

Rituals are one of the main components of any folklore. The way they are performed in this novel is highly figurative and effective. There are several incidents in the novel where these rituals made a dramatic change in the characters' lives, such as Stamp Paid, Baby Suggs, and Sethe. Rituals can be divided into three categories: initiating, mediating, and culminating, all of which helped Sethe to overcome her issues and were the source of emotional supported to her.

One of the first rituals, performed by Stamp Paid, is the gathering of blackberries for the community feast of the full moon. This ritual ends with a sacrifice of blood that Stamp conducts. Since the berries are inaccessible, he has to go through brambles, which contain thorns that are described as 'knives' that cut his clothes. In addition, insects make his mission

¹¹² Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 108.

¹¹³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 261.

even more difficult: 'All the while suffering mosquitoes, bees, hornets, wasps and the meanest lady spiders in the state'.¹¹⁴ The journey represents life and how difficulties endured and sacrifices made will be rewarded generously, but patience and determination are required. This ritual takes place twenty-eight days after Sethe's arrival at Sweet Home. It is considered as the peak of spirituality during the new and the full moon, in the tradition of several parts of Africa, because it has a significant effect on people, tides of water (river or ocean), and food. That is why it has a special position in the rituals of many different nations, and not only Africans. The feast took place as part of the rituals but the sacrifice does not happen at the event. However, Sethe's killing of her baby was as if she presented a sacrifice and completed the ritual of the moon. As a result of the pain that Stamp Paid has to get the berries to demonstrate his love, Baby Suggs decided to increase the ritual in order to help him and reduce his suffering.

The other aspect of rituals is mediating as practiced by Paul D. He goes through different aspects of suffering and escapes from slavery. These types of ritual took place when he invited Sethe and Denver to the carnival to reconnect them to the community and to take them out of the psychological stress of isolation and the feeling of guilt. He helps Sethe to reconcile her pain by showing her an image from his past that reduces her horror.

The third and the last ritual relates to regeneration or rebirth. It takes place when Denver realises that her mother was being used, and that her essence of life is being taken from her by the greedy love of Beloved. At this time the ancestors, represented by the spirit of Baby Suggs, advised Denver to go out and leave this place for a new and clear life. The guidance was commanding her to leave 124 Bluestone road, 'go on out the yard. Go on'.¹¹⁵ The ancestors may take different ways to guide people and those who are under their protection. They may whisper or show signs, or they may visit in their dreams to show them

¹¹⁴ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 136.

¹¹⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 244.

the right way and their choices. In addition, Baby Suggs was connected to Denver and guided her to the right way because Denver believed in Baby Suggs's wisdom. Therefore, the leaving of Denver and her requests for help from the community reunited the family with them. She effects the reconciliation of the community and those who live in 124 Bluestone. This is called *adimu* which means to support in different ways, and one of them is food giving.¹¹⁶ This action of help with food was followed by help with the power of words, with the voices of those who answered the request of help from Denver. The voices are raised to protect the occupiers of 124, which recalls Baby Suggs and the help she once gave every one of them; they return favour by supporting Sethe and Denver. The remembrance of the traumatic events of the past enable the community members to forgive themselves and, as a result, to forgive Sethe and her family. The remembrance of the horror of the past brought them together because they realised that they should stand by each other and support each other. This recall, of the past, creates a social and racial identity for the victims.

Therefore, remembrance of trauma contributes to identity construction, as explained in section two of chapter two of this thesis. The rites of the women work in two ways. The first is to exorcise the evil spirit, which is personified by Beloved. The second way is to help those who live in 124, Sethe and Denver. By doing so, they knew the importance of keeping the community united. This message is sent to the readers to show how issues and struggles could be dealt with. Such messages make a call for unity and to gather around their African-American identity.

Another image of unity is the call for a proper burial for a member of the community. Had they done so, the spirits of the dead would not harm the living and would rest in peace. Otherwise, the spirit of the dead will be restless and make trouble for those who are in charge of their interment. The group of women here represent the power of *Minkisi*, who belongs to

¹¹⁶ David O. Ogunbible, *African Indigenous Religious Traditions in Local and Global Contexts: Perspectives on Nigeria*, illustrated (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2015), p. 460,395.

a set of religious forces, which includes the power of the ancestors and magic too, ‘the empowering spirits of the *minkisi* come from the land of the dead (*nsi a bafwa*) where the four classes of the dead include ancestors (*bakulu*), local spirits (*bisimbi*, *bankita*), ghosts (*minkuyu*) and those which voluntarily or otherwise are present in *nkisi* objects’.¹¹⁷

The group of community women assembles like an African council, by the village tree, to deal with the issue that threatens their society and community, because what troubles one member is considered as harmful to the whole community, and they should stand against it as one. Unity is achieved through communal action against threats to identity and social cohesion. This is another indirect message that the only way to survive any racism against the community and social identity is through unity, and to remember the past and learn from its lessons. In addition to the power that the ancestors will provide them when they support each other, they represent ‘the sound that broke the back of words’.¹¹⁸ Morrison described this ritual, during an interview with Silverblatt by saying:

When the women are in front of Sethe’s house, having been persuaded that enough is enough. And when they go there they come with what they’ve got, whatever faith they have got, whatever superstition they’ve got, whatever religious iconography they have using all the symbolic world... the only thing that works is to go very, very far back before language, when there was only the sound. The sound is a kind of choral singing in this case which works, I think in terms of the folklore, in terms of who those people were.¹¹⁹

This quotation shows Morrison’s interest in folklore and how it works, and what it means to her. It is so fascinating to see her make a link between the voices of the community women and how they help to eliminate the danger that Sethe was under.

¹¹⁷ Wyatt MacGaffey, ‘The Personhood of Ritual Objects: Kongo “Minkisi”’, *Stichting Etnofoor*, 3.1 (1990), 45–61 (p. 49).

¹¹⁸ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 261.

¹¹⁹ Denard, p. 174.

Objects in this novel also have their share of linkage to Africa and African folklore. Foremost, these objects are water and trees. Starting with water, it has a vivid image and a distinguished part in *Beloved* because of what it represents and stands for. The word water is used one hundred and three times in this novel, which makes it very important to the author and the novel. First of all, it is a metaphor for remembrance. The reflective image of Baby Suggs in the water that Sethe saw also assures the representation of water as a remembrance. From a traditional African point of view the reflective image in water depicts the idea of the ancestors' spirits that dwell under its surface, and act as a way of remembrance and manifestation which is called *bakulu*. According to Yoruba and Egyptian folklore the dead 'reside in an afterlife beneath river bottoms' whose duty is to direct the course of the living and link them with their bloodline.¹²⁰ This part represents the appearance of Beloved from water, and also the slave ships of the Middle Passage. In addition to this matter, water is associated with healing and regeneration. The river also has a significant relation to memory and ancestors in the African-American culture. It has a symbolic paradigm for spiritual initiation, rituals, and is a major metaphor. Judith Gleason writes that 'river is the matrix of memory'.¹²¹ This statement gives a similar understanding of the plot of *Beloved* such as memory, ancestors, and motherhood. The river resembles the circularity that Morrison used in her diction, narration, and elements of the plot.

Beloved first appears was from the river during a festival, 'A fully dressed woman walked out of the water'¹²² as if it is a rebirth or resurrection. 'She barely gained the dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against a mulberry tree'.¹²³ The dropping of the folds of Beloved's skirt in the river that darkened the water, resemble the African mythology when Oya tore the black cloth which formed the river. With this action, Oya ruled the

¹²⁰ Simon J. Bronner, *Encyclopedia of American Folklife* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 534.

¹²¹ Gleason, p. 55.

¹²² Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 50.

¹²³ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 50.

kingdom of Nupe, which is her homeland.¹²⁴ Another feature that relates water to African tradition and folklore is found in what it represents in the Kongo cosmology. The BaKongo believe that the universe is divided into two worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead.¹²⁵ These two worlds are separated by water. Therefore, any water is considered as a passage between the two worlds. In addition, the perspective of death is a continuous process of life, yet in another world which is shared between the BaKongo and the Yoruba, 'I believe that this baby's ma'am is gonna die in wild onions on the bloody side of the Ohio River'.¹²⁶

In a broader sense, we can notice that some objects are interfering with each other, and they also have a meeting point where they complete each other. For instance, dancing and the river are interrelated in a traditional perspective. So, this relation is noticeable when we look at the part of the novel when Sethe needs guidance; she searches the reflection in the water and goes to the Clearing, where Baby Suggs used to gather the people and perform the ring dance during the day, to seek a fixing ceremony. Beloved is described by Paul D as 'a water-drinking woman', and with this image she was not thirsty for the real water as much as she was thirsty for the memory of the time she missed.¹²⁷ She was thirsty to listen to stories from Denver and Sethe. The fluidity is represented by the African ancestors of the past, and the present, mainly through the medium of memory. We can see in the late parts of the novel that Paul D remembers when Beloved accompanied him to the ocean-deep place where he belonged.¹²⁸ This ocean-deep place stands for the *bakulu* which connects him with Beloved beyond the living world.

¹²⁴ Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah, 'The Origin of Egungun: A Critical Literary Appraisal', *African Study Monographs*, 2.17 (1996), 59–68 (p. 60).

¹²⁵ The Bakongo people (aka. the Kongo) dwell along the Atlantic coast of Africa from Pointe-Noire, Congo (Brazzaville) to Luanda, Angola. In the east, their territory is limited by the Kwango River and in the northeast by Malebo (Stanley) Pool, in the Congo River. The Bakongo thus live in Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), and Angola. See: Theophus Harold Smith, p. 42.

¹²⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 31.

¹²⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 66.

¹²⁸ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 264.

Trees also have a high symbolism and derivation in African traditions. It was mentioned in several parts of this novel, whether during the flashbacks of Sweet Home memories, or as a physical scar on the back of Sethe. The Kongo elders plant trees on the graves because they consider it as a sign of a spirit to the dead path to the other world.¹²⁹ Myth and the relation of the trees with the ancestors and memory can be shown in the myth of Oya:

A big tree was uprooted, literally and figuratively: the head of the household the one in whose shade we felt secure, suddenly perished. She tore, and a river overflowed its banks. Whole cloth was ripped into shreds. Barriers were broken down.¹³⁰

The main resemblance that we can see here is between Baby Suggs and the myth, because she was the big tree and a spiritual leader to the community and Sethe, who were living in her shade and security. Yet she was uprooted and left Sethe and Denver alone and unprotected. Moreover, the wood is a sacred space where Baby Suggs used to gather the people for spiritual rituals. There was a Clearing, which is an open place deep in the forest ‘When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman, and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing—a wide-open place cut deep in the woods’.¹³¹ The wood represents a place where the ancestors’ spirits settle, which is charged with their invisible powers. This is traditionally believed in West and Central Africa, because the powers of the other world move through various spirits and ancestors. In addition, it provides Africans with organic materials, hunting, in addition to collecting healing materials. The spiritual importance of the space comes from the existence of all the living powers such

¹²⁹ Brooks De Vita, p. 37.

¹³⁰ Gleason, p. 50.

¹³¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 87.

as ‘flora, fauna, earth, and water’.¹³² The tree on the back of Sethe shows a timeline of torture and a source of memory. It stands for pain and an image of memory.

The West-central African had a considerable interest in the relationship between human beings and nature, especially the forest with its living and spiritual inhabitants. As Ras Brown states, the enslaved Africans, along with their dependents, of South Carolina and Georgia, also knew the forest and interacted with it on a daily basis.¹³³ It represents several things to them and as such it became a place that was distinct from the plantation and its depravations. They inhabited it on a wide scale as hunters, herders, woodmen and the fugitive slaves. The slaves realised that it was a safe shelter and a decent supplier of powerful substances, objects for health and prosperity, which is explicitly known by Africans and their descendants.¹³⁴ This aspect of health supplies and spiritual guidance was very clear and well-practised in *Beloved* by Baby Suggs. She was a spiritual leader to the community, and also to Sethe when she suffers the memory of the past and the challenges of her present ‘in the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the Clearing while the people waited among the trees’.¹³⁵ Therefore, spiritual satisfaction was the only method that she can survive by.

One of the trees in Sweet Home was addressed as ‘brother’ and it was not only providing shade for the Pauls, Sixo and Halle, but it was also personified as one of them. When Paul D is taken into captivity, the only thing he is gazing at is Brother. It was not just a tree but a friend and a way of communing with a greater force. He also refers to Brother and Sixo at one point by saying, ‘Now *there* was a man and *that* was a tree’, indicating how precious the tree is to him.¹³⁶ These can also stand for a dark image; for example, when it

¹³² Linda M. Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 290.

¹³³ Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 13.

¹³⁴ Heywood, p. 290.

¹³⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 87.

¹³⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 22.

comes to lynching. The slaves who stood against their master or disobeyed were lynched on the trees.

Trees provide a special location for gatherings at Sweet Home. As has been discussed earlier, Sixo has a great respect to the spirit of the wood and its relation to the ancestors. Trees represent the steadiness of roots in its ground and the connection with each other as a group. Therefore, it makes a clear resemblance of how the African-Americans can keep their bloodline, which is by becoming like trees. It has a strong and connected root and stands by each other in groups, which is another message of how to sustain their identity.

By presenting all these tragic memories and the suffering of the African-American slaves along with the interference of the ancestors' spirits and beliefs, Morrison stated that this was a way of healing for the readers as well. The healing is not through the memory of 124 only, but also it is listening to the ancestors continuously. However, they have to listen to 'lower frequencies'. This idea is expressed through the characters of Paul D and Denver, where both of them realised that to heal they should first face the painful memory of their past. By healing himself, Paul D managed to help Sethe through the sharing of their memories. Moreover, through rituals Sethe is able to recover her life by reconnecting with the ancestors, after all the pain she endured in her relationship with Beloved. The idea of Sethe's pain is presented through a few sentences of Morrison's in an interview,

It was a conversation. I can tell, because I said something I didn't know I know. About the "dead girl." That bit by bit I had been rescuing her from the grave of time and inattention. Her fingernails maybe in the first book; face and legs, perhaps, the second time. Little by little bringing her back into living life. So that now she comes running when called- walks freely around

the house, sits down in a chair; looks at me She is here now, alive. I have seen, named and claimed her and oh what company she keeps.¹³⁷

According to this, Toni Morrison wants to heal her people by representing the past. Memories, even those painful ones, can contribute to healing in the present, and communal memory provides a medium to bring people together. Presenting a collective memory can lead to creation, or renewal, of African-American identity. Morrison used more than memory for this purpose, but it shows an example of what happened to her characters, and how they managed to regain a normal life. By presenting this story, she brought the remembrance of this incident from out of the past and made it breathe again so that it can cure the pain and wounds of the past. Afterwards, this memory was transmitted as a lesson to the generations: a lesson of being united and standing by each other, by respecting and remembering their ancestors and roots. Therefore, for *Sethe*, *Denver*, and *Beloved*, the art of storytelling is an effective art because it has the power, literally to either heal or kill its receivers. It healed Paul D and was about to kill Sethe if not she was healed with it too. The grief that Sethe was living in, due to the past, was healed with the stories of Paul D.

Unless there are stories to be told and carried, from one generation to another, all of these incidents and traditions would be lost in time, 'that past can be kept at bay if the stories are untold, the memories sheathed'.¹³⁸ That is why the author employs all these incidents and characters to tell the past of 'her people' traditions, 'Nothing better than that to start the day's serious work of beating back the past'.¹³⁹

Writing this novel was more than just writing a novel for the purpose of fiction. It was a duty for Morrison, who writes, 'nothing came down orally to my generation of that

¹³⁷ Gloria Naylor, 'A Conversation: Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison', in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. by Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), p. 37.

¹³⁸ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, p. 167.

¹³⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 73.

experience on the slave ship'.¹⁴⁰ Therefore her art is the ship for the stories and dreams. Morrison stated in an interview that in her reference to slavery she wanted to achieve something profound and effective, and not merely reveal history. Therefore, she introduces mystery, magic, and traditions because she considers this as an act of loyalty to her people, those she writes for, and where the ancestors lived. This focus was heading towards sustaining African-American identity and its heritage.

The audience usually gets the idea and the message through listening which is faster and easier to comprehend than the written form. However, Toni Morrison, through implementing folklore, managed to decrease the gap between reading/ listening which is usually evident in written works. The method she used, as Trudier Harris states, was to write 'a story that insists upon a response from readers'.¹⁴¹ Morrison, through this method, challenges our acceptance, as readers, of specific cultural norms. She started by challenging our beliefs about morality, and the concept of good and evil. The absoluteness of these concepts has been shaken in the mind of the readers when killing becomes salvation. *Beloved* raises questions about the relationship between the mother and her children. It is common knowledge that a mother would do anything for the sake of her children's safety, good life, and freedom. However, it is odd when we find that the only choice left to her is to end the life of her child. This is a crime, when we look at it from a reasoned perspective, but we have to ask ourselves is there a situation and a condition where death becomes much better than life? Morrison's approach makes the reader think about and investigate the situation and experience of slaves. How hard it is, that a mother would prefer death over such life for her baby girl? The other aspect of gap reduction between listening and reading is by writing for specific people, her people, and through her literary work, Morrison shows African Americans their heritage and their culture. In other words, it is to remind and tell her

¹⁴⁰ Toni Morrison cited in: Grewal, p. 102.

¹⁴¹ Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, p. 171.

people about their folklore and how she is proud of it, and they should be too, because it will show them their position in life and their purpose and role among their community. This takes place through storytelling, as storytelling worked for Denver. It helped her to know her roots and to build upon her present and future.

Barbara Christian states that in *Beloved* Morrison not only explores the horror of those who cannot call their ancestors' names but also discusses the dilemma of the mother who knows that her offspring will not be able to call the ancestors' names too. The hard decision that Sethe had to take, which is killing her baby, was not a killing of an individual one but it is the 'collective anguish' that African-American women must have felt when they realised that 'their children are cut off forever from their "living dead" who would never be called upon, remembered, or fed'.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Christian, p. 14.

Section Two: *Jazz* (1992)

Once when I was tree
 flesh came to sacrifice at my foot,
 flesh came to preserve my voice,
 flesh came honoring my limbs
 as drums, as canoes, as masks
 as cathedrals and temples of the ancestor-gods.¹⁴³

After analysing *Beloved* and discussing the relationship between folklore and identity, this section analyses the sixth novel of Morrison's fiction, and the second novel of her trilogy which is *Jazz*. Morrison's inspiration for the novel came from the *Harlem Book of the Dead*, where an image of a dead girl is described:

She was the one I think was shot by her sweetheart at a party with a noiseless gun. She complained of being sick at the party and friends said, "Well, why don't you lay down?" and they taken her in the room and laid her down.

After they undressed her and loosened her clothes, they saw the blood on her dress. They asked her about it and she said, "I'll tell you tomorrow, yes, I'll tell you tomorrow." She was just trying to give him a chance to get away.

For the picture, I placed the flowers on her chest.¹⁴⁴

In this novel, as in *Beloved*, Morrison uses the concept of spirituality as a backbone to the text, in addition to the ritual of performance and the theme of history. Writing *Jazz* revealed the author's belief that the twenties was the moment for the black culture to shine not only in the United States but also in the Western world as a whole. This period produced overwhelming developments due to the excitement and the glamour that accompanied it. Therefore, according to Morrison, she used the term 'Jazz' to sum the period up. However, no one in the novel mentioned jazz, the characters were always calling it music, because 'In

¹⁴³ Henry Dumas, *Knees of a Natural Man: The Selected Poetry of Henry Dumas*, ed. by Eugene Redmond (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989), p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ James Van Der Zee, Owen Dodson, and Camille Billops, *The Harlem Book of the Dead*, 1st Edition (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y: Morgan & Morgan, 1978), p. 84.

the States, it's always associated with something vulgar, which is part of its anarchy. It has implications of sex, violence, and chaos',¹⁴⁵ which the author wanted in her work.

The primary focus of this novel can be seen as a description of the lives of the African Americans during the migration. However, there is another angle that this novel can be viewed from, which is the transmigration of their soul and spirit. For example, the quest of Joe Trace for fulfilment, and the spiritual sacrifice of Dorcas and the consequences of this. The spiritual aspect works in two directions: first, it explains the action of the main characters and the direction of the events. The second is the healing aspect, which applies not only to the main characters, but it also works on the communal scale.

In the interview with Carabi, Toni Morrison was asked about the significance of *Wild* because this character puzzled the interviewer. Morrison's answer reveals the reason why *Jazz* should be considered as the second part of a trilogy, with *Beloved* as the first novel and *Paradise* the third. She stated that 'Wild is a kind of Beloved',¹⁴⁶ then she explained why by stating that *Beloved* ends with a scene of a pregnant black woman, Beloved, after her affair with Paul D, who then disappeared. The author says that 'You see a pregnant black woman naked at the end of *Beloved*. It's at the same time, you know back in the Golden Gray section of *Jazz*, there is a crazy woman out in the woods. The woman [...] could be Sethe's daughter, Beloved.'¹⁴⁷ Morrison also added that at the end of the novel, one may get confused about Beloved, whether she is a normal person or a ghost that has been castaway. Since, geographically, Virginia is next to Ohio, Beloved might end up there. Then Morrison ended her answer by saying 'but I do not want to make all these connections'¹⁴⁸. By such an answer, the author made a clear and intended connection between *Beloved* and *Jazz*, yet she, as usual, dropped in a clue to make the readers think further about the way the events are linked.

¹⁴⁵ Angels Carabi, 'Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison Speaks about Her Novel *Jazz*', in *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. by Carolyn C. Denard (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p. 94.

¹⁴⁶ Carabi, p. 96.

¹⁴⁷ Carabi, p. 96.

¹⁴⁸ Carabi, p. 96.

Jazz has a fascinating visual layout, such as the division of the chapters, the separation between chapters with a two-line gap, the blank pages, which fade as soon as word sounds begin to move. Rodrigues stated that, in *Jazz*, the author produces, ‘a textual continuum by using transitional slurs and glides across sections’.¹⁴⁹ Some of the sections end with a word or a phrase that the next section starts with, for instance, chapter three ends with ‘in a hat in the morning’¹⁵⁰ then the beginning of chapter four is ‘the hat pushed back on her forehead’.¹⁵¹ Also, the ending of chapter nine which is ‘It eased the pain’,¹⁵² then chapter ten starts with the word ‘Pain’.¹⁵³

Reading through the beginning of the book, the events get confusing due to the back and forth in stories of people which lead to stories of other people. The events and stories continue in this way until halfway through the novel, where the threads lead the reader in a particular direction so that the images and links become clearer. For instance, it is noticeable that the speed of the events and the presentation of characters in section one is fast paced. The events move quickly from the killing of an eighteen years old girl to Joe’s change of mood from happiness to anger, then grief; an angry wife who runs toward the dead girl to cut her face with a knife. The speed with which Violet rushes towards her flat to release the parrot, to either fly away or freeze to death due to the cold weather is evident. This part of section one is very symbolic and links back to African folkloric stories of treason, revenge, and especially the bird and its freedom in death.

Therefore, the combination of repetitions and punctuation create a rhythm of motion which escalates the significance of the narration. The effect of these tools is noticeably clear

¹⁴⁹ Eusebio L. Rodrigues, ‘Experiencing *Jazz*’, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 39.3/4 (1993), 733–54 (p. 740) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.0277>>.

¹⁵⁰ Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), p. 87.

¹⁵¹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 89.

¹⁵² Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 216.

¹⁵³ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 219.

in the following paragraph that shows the feeling of ‘nothingness’ in the characters of Joe and Dorcas due to being abandoned by their mothers.

Maybe her nothing was worse since she knew her mother, and had even been slapped in the face by her for some sass she could not remember. But she did remember, and told him so, about the slap across her face, the pop and sting of it and how it burned. How it burned, she told him. And of all the slaps she got, that one was the one she remembered best because it was the last. She leaned out the window of her best girlfriend's house because the shouts were not part of what she was dreaming. They were outside her head, across the street. Like the running. Everybody running. For water? Buckets?¹⁵⁴

This paragraph from *Jazz* shows Morrison’s creativity and ability to produce a remarkably interesting text. The first sentence shows how it contains an easy and casual presentation by including the colloquial “sass” within the flow of the language. Also, how the two words of nothingness and mother, show how these two words lead to the same meaning of loss to both Dorcas and Joe, where they both suffered abandonment by their mothers. The word “slap” also comes in the context of an indirect trauma, when Dorcas mentioned her mother by the slap she got from her rather than anything else. Therefore it indicates that Dorcas misses not the character of her mother but the mother figure with all the love and care that comes with it. The musical touch of some words, such as told, remember and slap, is impressive and gives the tone that creates an imaginative feeling and sense which radiate out of these sentences to complete the meaning. In addition, commas and periods were intentionally placed in a pattern after the repeated words to add a subtle variation of the rhythmic pitch. This method even helped the shifting of narration from the first sentence to the second, third, and fourth.

¹⁵⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 38.

Morrison provides more hints about the mystery of the novel, throughout her presentation of the first three chapters. In these three chapters, Morrison leads the reader to an understanding of the inner being of the three main characters: Joe, Dorcas, and Felice.

Eusebio L. Rodrigues stated that Morrison did not follow the Joycean stream-of-consciousness in *Jazz*, and this might be due to her intention of going deeper than consciousness and to tackle the psyche itself. The author made use of the first-person narrator to talk directly to the unpolluted self of the reader.¹⁵⁵ For instance, Joe talks to himself, then when we reach the end of the chapter, he talks to Dorcas, who he considers as other self of him. This self-talking narration gives the reader an idea about the changes that this character experienced when he moved to the city.

Important narrative techniques that Morrison uses can be seen in the shifting in time and events, such as in flashbacks in the characters' history that could also be considered as part of African folklore. It allows different pieces to be recollected and the emotions and action justifications to resurrect the unseen, yet known, spiritual forces. Time, and individuals' relationship to it, is considered as one of the surviving characteristics of the Kongo culture. The Ba Kongo considers time as a cycle that has neither beginning nor end, in other words 'it is like a river, it flows [...] when a person's energy diminishes, they perish and begin a new cycle of existence'.¹⁵⁶ Morrison interpreted this concept in this novel through Violet's mother, Rose Dear, before she committed suicide by throwing herself into a well. The narrator says, 'Rose Dear was free of time that no longer flowed, but stood stock-still when they tipped her from her kitchen chair. So she dropped herself down the well and missed all the fun'.¹⁵⁷

The narrator tries to divert the attention of the readers from the misery of the past and the struggles of the present to pass into a prediction of a brighter future. This point can be

¹⁵⁵ Rodrigues, p. 746.

¹⁵⁶ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 169.

¹⁵⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*.

illustrated in the following statement, where the narrator states ‘Forget that. History is over, you all, and everything’s ahead at last’.¹⁵⁸ However, at the same time, the reader can notice how the narrator used some words, such as tracking, tracing, and recording, which are all a metaphor for history, memory and rememory, time, and also the ancestors.

In this context, the reader should think twice about the information provided by the narrator and track the storyline through the characters and their actions and reactions to find the link personally. Looking for clues is not the mission of the characters in this work only, but it is also the objective of the readers too; the narrator commented on this point by saying that ‘thoughtful people looked at the signs (the weather, the number, their own dreams)’.¹⁵⁹ This means that readers should draw conclusions to understand the direction in which the events are heading. For instance, the narrator states that ‘in no time at all he forgets little pebbly creeks and apple trees so old they lay their little branches along the ground and you have to reach down or stoop to pick up the fruit’.¹⁶⁰ This shows the nature-loving personality of Joe, whose voice is described as a ‘woody voice’, an aspect of his character he can only express when he is in the South, but is evident as a vocal trace. The narrator describes Southern speech as having ‘a pitch, a note they heard only when they visited southern old folk’.¹⁶¹

Morrison presents the murder Joe commits as a logical outcome of his long search for Wild, reincarnated in Dorcas, as his prey. When he shoots her, a bond is established with her because they have been linked by blood. This is a metaphor for Joe’s relation to his mother, Wild. Omosade Awolah states that the bond occurs ‘for the purpose of maintaining or restoring a right relationship of man to the sacred order’.¹⁶² Therefore the concept of sacrifice to the Yoruba has a direct reference to religion more than any metaphor or general sense. It

¹⁵⁸ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 35.

¹⁶¹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 71.

¹⁶² Joseph A. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 135.

works toward maintaining the relationship of a person to the sacred world, and assures the satisfaction of the spirits and deities about the person who does so.

Considering the text, and its layout, we can observe that the chapter numbers are missing as well as the titles, which would work as a guide. *Jazz* has fifteen unequal sections, ten being divided by blank pages. The pauses, due to the blank pages, would force even fast readers to slow down. In addition, each section has a number of uneven subsections. The way the structure of the novel has been presented gives an indication that it follows the rhythmic tone of jazz music. Eusebio L. Rodrigues stated that,

Jazz is made up of a number of such rhythmic paragraphs, subsections and sections that together compose a musical score. [...] Toni Morrison oralises print. She also uses her language instrument to try out some daring modes and techniques of play and to create the informal, improvisatory patterning of jazz.¹⁶³

The musical touch is one of the main aspects of this novel that Morrison deliberately cultivates. She managed, as I have mentioned earlier, to turn visual text into musical sound. Morrison commented on this point in several interviews. For instance, in an interview with Michael Saur, Morrison was asked about what she would like to give her readers through her book? She answered by saying:

I want as an author to be like a jazz musician. To make music that impresses people who really know something about music, and that all those who see music as pure entertainment can dance to it.¹⁶⁴

According to Morrison, Harlem is considered as a black area of New York and a ‘mecca for generations of Blacks’.¹⁶⁵ It is a place for black quality literature and arts; she also added that

¹⁶³ Rodrigues, pp. 739–40.

¹⁶⁴ Denard, p. 227.

everything in this place, hospitals, schools, and other buildings, were not constructed or built by their people, but the type of relationship was more a clan-like style, where they feel joy and the protection of the clan.

The author created a narrator who could survey and also present Harlem's impact on the storyline, and also maintain the rhythm of jazz during the events. A narrator who has some characteristics such as not being objective, not being omniscient, not one of the characters, however, Morrison used an overarching narrator who can look at the events being both detached and involved in the events at the same time. Such a narrator differs from other storytellers by attempting to realise the significance of the African-Americans' story and their history. The narrator's sound is presented in the first line, it is "Sth" who sounds like a female person; reading through, we try to recognise and know who the character of the narrator is. However, when this voice describes her feeling of being 'crazy about this City',¹⁶⁶ the confusion starts to deepen, and the track is lost. The narrator also added:

I haven't got any muscles, so I can't really be expected to defend myself. But
I do know how to take precaution. Mostly its making sure no one knows all
there is to know about me. Second, I watch everything and everyone and try
to figure out their plans, their reasoning, long before they do.¹⁶⁷

This shows the ability to be everywhere and nowhere. It also made the reader think over and over about the statements and the events and look everywhere for clues to identify the storyteller. Another reference in chapter ten, the narrator says that its presence is through "thunder" and "storm" and also added, 'I break lives to prove I can mend them back again. And although the pain is theirs, I share it, don't I? Of course. Of course. I wouldn't have it

¹⁶⁵ Toni Morrison, 'City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction', in *Literature and the American Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature*, ed. by Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 38.

¹⁶⁶ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 8.

any other way. But it is another way'.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, I can assume that the narrator is a female deity, however, although she is powerful, she cannot penetrate human hearts and cannot know what they hide. She was surprised by the story ending of Joe, Violet, Dorcas, and Felice. The narrator overestimated the impact that Harlem left on them and then underestimated the human ability to overcome their issues. Her expectation was that 'I was sure one would kill the other'¹⁶⁹ instead they were helping each other to heal, such as when Felice told Joe about the sacrifice that Dorcas made to protect him because she loved him so much. Justine Tally states:

Apart from the questionable reliability of the narrator, it is clear that s/he is claiming centre stage for herself in the story and to do so s/he resorts to various storytelling strategies: (1) the slow, teasing divulging of information, (2) the continuous repetition of terms and phrases, (3) the interruption into the narrative of personal observation, and (4) a narrative line based on free association and circularity that brings the narrative back to where it started. What it has in common with many other chapters is (5) a penchant for pseudodiegesis and (6) a vibrant intertextuality.¹⁷⁰

The choice of the narrator has a folkloric aspect too, Morrison said that she was having trouble figuring who was going to narrate the story, the idea of owning jazz. Then she decided that the narrator should have several characteristics, including knowing jazz, starting with having assumed knowledge. Also it should have the position of ownership that allows the narrator to say 'I know everything'. It should be without sex, gender, or even age. The reason the author wants such a narrator is that she wanted the voice to imagine the story it is telling and to use the art of imagination. However, if this voice gives a space to other characters to be part of telling the story, then it will be in trouble because the events will not

¹⁶⁸ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 220.

¹⁷⁰ Justine Tally, *The Story of Jazz: Toni Morrison's Dialogic Imagination* (Hamburg: Lit, 2001), p. 85.

be as predicted by the narrator because ‘the characters will be evolving within the story within the book’.¹⁷¹

Since the voice is unidentified, some critics and readers think that the narrator is a female, because the voice uses the pronoun ‘I’ and the author, Morrison, is a female. However, this claim was denied by the author when she said that ‘for me it was very important that the “I” would say what a typical book would limit itself to, what a typical book would say’.¹⁷² Therefore, when there is “I think, I believe, I know” it never moves or walks because it is simply a book talking to the reader, and ‘the voice is the voice of a talking book’.¹⁷³ In this sense, the reader is left confused about getting the idea and staying connected with the events, the text urges the reader to listen again, then realise that he/she is not in control, neither is the book, rather the book creates the illusion of control. Actually, ‘all of these had to be displaced, so no one’s in control’.¹⁷⁴

In *Jazz*, Morrison presents a narrative that combines the music movement, jazz, and the tragedy of the African Americans during the migration, ‘she uses the improvisational quality of music to deconstruct the form of tragedy, allowing a reconstruction of identity to emerge that is not determined, but fluid and improvisational’.¹⁷⁵

It is unknown exactly where jazz comes from, or where it is originated, however, the term appeared around 1910. Since jazz is associated with black folklore, its roots are assumed to be linked to Africa. Eileen Southern suggested that the term jazz is derived from the name of a black musician named Jazbo Brown, his fans used to chant ‘More, Jazbo! More. Jaz, more!’.¹⁷⁶ Also, jazz used to be associated with moral anarchy in addition to cultural

¹⁷¹ Carabi, p. 94.

¹⁷² Carabi, pp. 94–95.

¹⁷³ Carabi, p. 95.

¹⁷⁴ Carabi, p. 95.

¹⁷⁵ Carolyn M. Jones, ‘Traces and Cracks: Identity and Narrative in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*’, *African American Review*, 31.3 (1997), 481–95 (p. 481) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3042574>>.

¹⁷⁶ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, Third Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 362.

backwardness and illicit sexuality, specifically black female sexuality. However, even if this assumption is right, and jazz is derived from older cultural forms, it is still an original cultural phenomenon. To comment on this point, Johann Gottfried von Herder¹⁷⁷ stated that ‘the highest cultural values can be derived from what cultivated classes often describe condescendingly as the vulgar, lowest levels of society’.¹⁷⁸ He then added that the lower classes of society are not devoid of cultural significance, on the contrary, in several cases they are the source of literary expression materials. In addition, these materials are mostly considered as aesthetic and valid according to their terms.

There is a significant link between the art of fiction, storytelling, and jazz, which is constructed upon metaphors of language and storytelling. This link can be clearly shown through the adaptation of jazz musicians to the metaphor of storytelling to present the meaning of jazz oratory.

Within the loose framework of European tradition, the American Negro was able to preserve a significant nucleus of his African heritage. And it is that nucleus that has made jazz the uniquely captivating language that it is.¹⁷⁹

Therefore, jazz music, mixed with stories and metaphors, and history, became a chest that keeps the heritage and preserves it, to sustain their identity and roots. Bluestein stated that:

Jazz carried clear associations with a level of culture decidedly outside the stream of middle-class white morality and rooted essentially in the attitude and expression of the Negro. For the writers of the twenties and thirties jazz carried strong connotations and was associated with stereotypes of the Negro as fantastically virile and barbarously effective in his sexual life.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Johann Gottfried von Herder is a German philosopher, historian, and folklorist.

¹⁷⁸ Gene Bluestein, *The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. Introduction.

¹⁷⁹ Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 62.

¹⁸⁰ Bluestein, p. 120.

The link between the title and the music is not arbitrary. The setting of the novel took place around the time of the Harlem Renaissance, which was the time of glory for jazz music. Jazz music does not play by the rules, which is similar to this novel where the events are being moved through time and place, it slows and then speeds up and even changes directions. The novel is also like jazz because both are unique and charming. The author uses syncopated and improvisational language, which imitates jazz music, in order to recodify spiritual knowledge from several African traditions. This aspect of imitation leads to the core of the quest of this study. Therefore, in *Jazz*, the tradition, sounds, music, and rhythm are in every part of this story, which helps give meaning to the readers and the characters in the literary environment.

Toni Morrison created a very rhythmic novel by producing music out of prose. This music resembles jazz and its features. For instance, James Baldwin mentioned in his book *The Price of the Ticket*, that jazz resembles a very specific sexual term, such as ‘jazz me baby’.¹⁸¹ The text of jazz became alive so that the words move and the syntax goes smooth. The sounds of jazz arise from the rhythm of the words as they affect the ears and souls of the readers.

This novel differs from *Beloved*, as Morrison, in *Jazz*, emerges from a different medium, one that is rhythmic in its expression of the African-Americans experience - their happiness, their sorrow, and even their beliefs. Morrison realised that music, such as jazz and blues, are no more exclusively African American; they have their impact internationally. Therefore, she wanted her fiction to have the same function that music once had and use the novel form to tell the story of her people. In *Beloved*, Morrison used ‘the blues mode of fiction to conjure up and exercise, to expiate and to pass on, the “disremembered” dark world of slaves and slavery’.¹⁸² Yet the story that *Jazz* tells is that of the African Americans who

¹⁸¹ James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985), p. 650.

¹⁸² Rodrigues, p. 736.

were born after the Emancipation¹⁸³ and who migrated from the farms of the South to the cities of the North seeking a better life. Morrison referred to this point, in an interview with Angels Carabi, by saying that:

So where were the areas where you could claim freedom? You got into a big city. There was the thrill of seeing yourself in large numbers, again developing a sort of black town, Harlem, there was a very successful black middle class in Brooklyn, but for everyday people, one of the most interesting things was a freedom to fall in love, to own your body, to be immoral.¹⁸⁴

Jazz presents a historical lesson too, as is usual with the novels of Morrison, where the story of Joe and Violet depicts the conditions of African Americans in the South after emancipation. It also shows how they were segregated and being used, paid miserably and lived in very hard and low conditions, and were brutally evicted from their lands and houses. Although this story is firmly rooted in a particular socio-political context, this context is not presented in a detached sociological language, it is presented within a dynamic environment and through a chronological method. Also, it was mixed with light irony and mockery to reduce the painful aspects of this era.

One tool that Morrison uses to produce music is repetition. She uses it to intensify the beat that helps to deepen the meaning of the idea presented. For instance, the statement about the Beast, she said ‘slaughtered children because it yearned to be slaughtered children’.¹⁸⁵ It seems as if the reader needs to realise the meaning and the sound at the same time by reading it visually and audibly. In addition to the musical aspect of the repetition, it has a distinctive

¹⁸³ Emancipation Proclamation is an executive order issued by Abraham Lincoln on the 1st of January 1863 which changed the life of over four million African-American slaves in designated states of the South and set them free. For further information please refer to: Earl Schenk Miers and Gerald Andrea, *The Emancipation Proclamation* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969), pp. 53–54.

¹⁸⁴ Carabi, p. 91.

¹⁸⁵ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 78.

reference to the trauma that Dorcas had been through. The first “slaughtered” which is a verb, received the beat while the second, the adjective, does not. The focus moved to put more attention onto the eight-years-old Dorcas and what she must have seen of the flames destroying her house and burning her mother. The narrator commented on this occasion by saying that, ‘She never said. Never said anything about it. She went to two funerals in five days, and never said a word’.¹⁸⁶

Repetition is not the only method that Morrison uses to express the musicality of the text - she uses punctuation to indicate it too. For instance, using punctuation and italicised words to give emphasis to vocabulary and its rhythmic sound within the text. Rodrigues stated that, ‘Morrison’s use of the art of pointing (that’s what punctuation is) enables the listening reader to descend into a deeper mode of knowing’.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, music itself is a form of culture and folklore. Morrison said, in an interview with Charles Ruas, that mythologies exist in different forms of black culture, such as music, gospels, jazz, spirituals. She also added, that they also exist in what people say and even their relationship with each other, in what she called “village lore”.¹⁸⁸

In this literary context, jazz has a direct impact on the attitude and the feelings of the character encountered. Such impact can be seen in relation to Alice Manfred when she expressed her feeling about this type of music by saying that:

It was the music. The dirty, get-on-down music the women sang and the men played and both danced to, close and shameless or apart and wild. Alice was convinced and so were the Miller sisters as they blew into cups of Postum in

¹⁸⁶ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 57.

¹⁸⁷ Rodrigues, p. 738.

¹⁸⁸ Ruas Charles, ‘Toni Morrison’, in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. by Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 93–118 (p. 112).

the kitchen. It made you do unwise disorderly things. Just hearing it was like violating the law.¹⁸⁹

This part of the novel reflects Alice Manfred's opinion on jazz, which she sees as vulgar and representative of the lower class, as she wants to distance herself from. It is noticeable that Manfred is an advocate of the white middle class, and she sees that other classes should aspire to follow white middle-class values. The novel *Jazz* 'predicts its own story' and contains, like jazz music, a melodic line that the narrator returns to time after time, 'seeing it afresh each time, playing it back and forth' she continues, 'the jazz-like structure wasn't a secondary thing for me — it was the *raison d'être* of the book'.¹⁹⁰ Also, in order to understand Morrison's reason for constructing *Jazz* as jazz music; the author stated in an interview with Angels Carabi that:

When I was thinking who was going to tell this story, the idea of "who owns jazz" or who knows about it, came up [...] I decided that the voice would be one of the assumed knowledge, the voice that says "I know everything". [...] because the voice has to actually imagine, the story it's telling [...] the story [...] turns out to be entirely different from what is predicted because the characters are evolving [...] it reminded me of a jazz performance [...] somebody takes off from a basic pattern then the others have to accommodate themselves.¹⁹¹

Therefore, it can be understood from this context that the way Morrison chose her narrator was by taking the risk of responding spontaneously to every incident throughout the process of creating the plot, which is also the way that the text approximates jazz.

Usually, the common reaction of a literary author is to avoid direct answers to questions about their intention in writing a particular piece of writing, thinking that their

¹⁸⁹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 58.

¹⁹⁰ Toni Morrison, 'The Art of Fiction', *Paris Review*, 35.128 (1993), 82–125 (p. 110).

¹⁹¹ Carribi, 42

answer would limit the possibilities of various interpretations, and would make their works seem limited. David Lodge stated that it is in the nature of texts in general, and fiction in particular, to have gaps waiting to be filled by readers and critics according to their perspective. Also, the codes and clues that are involved in the works ‘may generate patterns of significance’¹⁹² which were embodied by the unconscious mind of the author. These unconscious intentions do not require the authorisation of the author to evaluate and validate their interpretations because they were produced beyond the conscious control of their author. Finally, to sum up the music and the language aspect, Justine Tally stated that, in *Jazz*, music is ‘the perfect metaphor for language and its development in literature’.¹⁹³

Due to all the suffering African Americans were experiencing, they had to migrate to the North. At this point, the rhythm of the novel is changed to express the state of their leaving with a hope of a better place and life. The narration was accompanied by a quick beat to show the excitement of moving to the North where its cities are joined to make one big city, which is Harlem. One more aspect of the music expressed by words is the description of Morrison of the train and its movement mixed with the feelings of the riders. The following paragraph from the novel shows clearly this idea:

When the train trembled approaching the water surrounding the City, they thought it was like them: nervous at having gotten there at last, but terrified of what was on the other side. Eager, a little scared, they did not even nap during the fourteen hours of a ride smoother than a rocking cradle. The quick darkness in the carriage cars when they shot through a tunnel made them wonder if maybe there was a wall ahead to crash into or a cliff hanging over nothing, the train shivered with them at the thought but went on and sure enough there was ground up ahead and the trembling became the baggage

¹⁹² David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 159.

¹⁹³ Tally, *The Story of Jazz*, p. 65.

rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way, and told Violet to do the same.¹⁹⁴

The train transports African Americans from their place in the South to an unknown northern city that could be better, or worse, than where they have come from. The anxiety and fear of the unknown future is reminiscent of the ancestors' trip from Africa to America. This trip is accompanied by the fear of the past trauma of slavery and chains. The music and the rhythm can be spotted in the ten times of using 'ing' endings which create the sense of continuous moving. Furthermore, the commas at the beginning and the end of the passage show the slow movement of the train throughout the moving and the stop at the end. The movement of carriages and the shaking of its body resembles the fear and anxiety of the passengers and the beating of their hearts reveals a joy that is mixed with anxieties about the future.

The remembering of the journey is included in several places, starting as I have stated earlier, with the migration of African Americans from the South to the North. However, the main incident which Morrison mentioned, that this remembering was during the part where Violet was watching Alice Manfred ironing. It reminded her of True Belle; Violet said 'You iron like my grandmother. Yoke last'.¹⁹⁵ Later, Alice forgot to remove the iron from the board. Therefore it left a scorch mark that reminded them of the slave ships and the middle passage. The culture of the south and later the societies settled in New York reflects, through its association, lodges, and benevolent societies, what the African-American maintained of their culture, to demonstrate a living example of the community cohesion of their culture and heritage.

The opening of the novel presented two main characters, Joe and Violet. In the first instance, I thought that all the events would be around them, and that their story would be at the centre and core of all the other characters. This assumption, probably, came to most of the

¹⁹⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁵ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 112.

readers, right after finishing the first section. However, as is always the case, Morrison would not present her story in a simple predictable way. It is the power of a style that puzzles the reader, providing clues and hints, rather than a direct presentation. Morrison stated in the opening sentence of the foreword of this novel, 'She stood there licking snowflakes from her top lip, her body shaking everywhere except the left hand which held the knife ...'.¹⁹⁶ The author said that it did not work because what followed would seem mechanical and predictable. Therefore, Morrison always gives the reader a chance to look at the events and characters from his/her personal point of view.

Despite the development of the main characters and the meeting of their time lines and stories, there is a mysterious disappearance of some characters so that readers could not know the end of their stories. For instance, neither the story of Hunters Hunter is complete, nor Joe's.

Violet, just like Denver in *Beloved*, could neither stay nor leave; the drowning in the water well disturbs her life and prevents peaceful sleep, yet she is frightened to leave the place too: 'The well sucked her sleep, but the notion of leaving frightened her'.¹⁹⁷ To enforce the concept of time, True Belle comes to take care of Violet after the death of her mother, whose belief in time also reflects the Kongo's tradition when she stays 'thank God for life [...] and thank life for death'.¹⁹⁸ This indicates that life is part of a journey and death is too, where the soul that leaves the body will return again. The same thought was presented through the character of Beloved where she was murdered by her mother, then her soul found a way to return, then disappeared not forever but to return as a soul haunting the wood in *Jazz*.

One of the mythical aspects that this novel has concerns Golden Gray's story. Being a son of an African-American father and a white mother, Golden Gray represents the struggle

¹⁹⁶ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. xvi.

¹⁹⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 102.

¹⁹⁸ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 101.

of identity within him. Also, being abandoned by his father, and his quest to find him, add up to the inner conflict in identity conflict. Moreover, there is the strangeness of Joe's birth and the attendance of a stranger, Golden Gray, who forgot his quest for revenge and helped in the delivery of Joe. This sounds like a folk tale with a mythical touch.

In order to understand the characters better, it is important to examine their environment. Everything about this city was empty in the eyes of those who came from the countryside. The life is tough, and the people are absent-minded, living in a city which pumps up desire, while real love fades. 'I love you' can only be uttered by a caged, unnamed parrot in the City. Even old women were affected by the city life in that some were awaiting the wrath of God to come upon the city. At this point, another jazz pattern can be felt in the breaching of the church where repeated words, questions asked, and answer given generate music out of words.¹⁹⁹

He was not just on his way, coming, coming to right the wrong done to them,
he was here. Already. See? See? What the world had done to them it was
now doing to itself. Did the world mess over them? Yes but look where the
mess originated. Were they berated and cursed? Oh yes but look how the
world cursed and berated itself. Were the women fondled in kitchens and the
back of stores? Uh huh.²⁰⁰

Characterisation contributes to the affirmation of the folkloric aspects in *Jazz*. For instance, as we have seen earlier in the previous section, *Beloved* has an ancestral figure who is Baby Suggs. This point is also applicable to *Jazz* which has a tribal figure, True Belle, who has also been a former slave and who saves the family from despair and teaches them, just like Baby Suggs, wise lessons to help to put a smile on their faces and to survive their harsh conditions. Also, Morrison described True Belle as an 'advising benevolent, protective wise Black

¹⁹⁹ Rodrigues, p. 747.

²⁰⁰ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp. 77–78.

ancestor'.²⁰¹ This shows the resemblance between Baby Suggs and True Belle and their role in both novels, and how a wise cultural, and traditional figure may add to the setting and the folkloric aspects of the texts. True Belle represents the tribal mother who possesses the wisdom of the race, and also the saviour who guided Violet to Palestine, the place where she gained inner strength and also the place where she met Joe.

Moreover, we have another wise character, Alice Manfred, who warned her niece to be aware of the dangers in the city, Harlem, by describing it as a city of vice that challenges its people every day with its jazz music. The city calls its people to 'come and do wrong'. She added that even grandmothers who sweep the stairs 'closed their eyes and held their heads back as they celebrated their sweet desolation'.²⁰² The warnings were not out of theory, but Manfred was really afraid for Dorcas because she was traumatised by her father's death, who was, 'pulled off a streetcar and stomped to death' and her mother 'burned crispy'.²⁰³ This point represents a link to a chain of traumas in the life of African Americans in the United States, starting with the Middle Passage and the souls of the slaves who were displaced from their ancestors land, to be released in a foreign one. It also shows the link between trauma and identity formation, as explained in detail in chapter two of this thesis.

Moreover, the older people in *Jazz*, are significant, in showing the impact of the ancestors; the guidance they provide is essential to the society and culture. The message and the guidance of the ancestors is also a significant part of the concept of time, how it flows like a river, with an unknown beginning and an unobserved ending, as well as being an African spiritual act of remembrance.

Jazz also referred to elderly female characters such as True Belle and Alice Manfred as seamstresses. The link here refers to the wisdom of the elders and their resemblance to the ancestors, guiding their children and grandchildren. When Violet visited Alice for the second

²⁰¹ Morrison, 'City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction', p. 38.

²⁰² Morrison, *Jazz*, pp. 67–68.

²⁰³ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 57.

time, Alice was, ‘irritated by the thread running loose from her sleeve, as well as the coat lining ripped in at least three places she could see’.²⁰⁴ After both women exchanged stories and got connected, the fabric stood for their power and the healing that can come from supporting each other and sharing experience. Joe notes the power of healing that women have, ‘it is a way they have of mending you; fixing what they think needs repair’.²⁰⁵ In this part, Morrison uses reciprocal mothering attitudes linked to the power of healing through the character of Violet Trace and Alice Manfred, despite them not being mothers in the first place. However, Morrison employed an alternative method to create different possibilities in order to articulate their thoughts and their life circumstances.²⁰⁶

Therefore, when Dorcas becomes a part of Joe’s life, it becomes a change that he is not ready for. Each stage in Joe’s life marks an emotional attempt to survive and to keep the flow of time moving. Joe says: ‘In order to survive being colored, you had to be new and stay the same every day the sun rose and every night it dropped’,²⁰⁷ a rhythm to maintain the harmony of life and which expresses the African idea of time as a social concept.

Memory and rememory play a significant role in this novel too as Felice reflects upon her relationships with men and decides to change things, to face the world, be independent and build her own personality, ‘nobody’s alibi or hammer or toy’.²⁰⁸ By facing the world despite her fears, Felice resembles Denver of *Beloved* as both develop positive visions of the future. In addition, memory, and its effect on the characters, is explored for most of the major characters, as we have seen concerning Joe, Violet, and Dorcas.

Delineating trauma as the preparation necessary for survival is a characteristic of Morrison’s work and *Jazz* is no exception. She states in an interview with Carabi that African

²⁰⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 82.

²⁰⁵ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 122.

²⁰⁶ Kevileno Sakhrie, ‘Folk Mode of Narration in Toni Morrison’s Fiction’ (North-Eastern Hill University, 2008), p. 152 <dspace.nehu.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/123456789/12377/1/103906.pdf> [accessed 20 August 2018].

²⁰⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 135.

²⁰⁸ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 222.

Americans have to be always on guard and have the ability to adjust. Coping with grief means having ‘the instinct of ‘survival plus “joie de vivre’’.²⁰⁹

Trauma has a noticeable effect on the main characters of this work and determines their actions. Some characters are abandoned by their parents, some by their spouses or were haunted by their violence. For instance, Joe is traumatised, having been abandoned by his parents and also by his murder of his eighteen-year old lover Dorcas, an act for which he cannot not forgive himself. Also, we have his wife Violet who has also been abandoned by her parents, and who suffers as a result of her husband’s infidelity with a skinny young woman. Both of these characters are haunted by trauma and memories that are beyond their control. Their trauma has a significant impact on them that leads them to excavate their pasts to find their identity in order to heal their present.²¹⁰

Morrison expresses in the Foreword to *The Book of the Dead* how remarkable is the harmony among black subjects, poets, photographers, and artists, especially when they focus on the dead, proving the truth of the African saying ‘The Ancestor lives as long as there are those who remember’.²¹¹ Both *Beloved* and *Jazz* feature remembrance as significant tropes. *Jazz* is a brilliant combination of remembering, symbolism, revenge, and also a record of slavery in which African folkloric references permeate the narrative and a distinguished character links folklore with cultural identity.²¹²

The incident involving the baby that Violet finds in the street is insightful for understanding her character. Violet wants a baby, having had three miscarriages and heard the stories her grandmother True Belle told of the golden-skinned baby who made her want to

²⁰⁹ Carabi, p. 93.

²¹⁰ Olfa Drid, ‘Cycles of Violence, Cycles of Trauma in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*’, *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2.3 (2016), 243–54 (p. 248).

²¹¹ Van Der Zee, Dodson, and Billops, p. Forward.

²¹² Carabi, p. 94.

be 'Light. White. Young again'.²¹³ Yet she realises that Joe is not the golden boy she thought he was.

Abandonment by the mother also has representation in African tradition. For instance, the *odi meji* of Yoruba represents shells being thrown twice, and with each throw there are seven cowries facing upwards, yielding. *Odi meji* reflects the severe effect of the maternal wound on people abandoned by their parents and which, if not treated correctly, can lead to destructive depression, and Joe's emptiness defines his life.

Joe's hunt for Wild is a mystical quest. He looks for her everywhere, tracking her down to an isolated rock formation above a river. According to African folklore, wherever these two elements are joined, they form a mysterious place. After finding Wild, Joe begs her to say something, or show him a sign, because he feels her presence everywhere around him. Later he is disappointed when a flock of redwings fly off from a strange looking white-oak tree, the birds signifying Wild's presence. Joe shoots at the birds with an unloaded gun just to release his anger and stress. In the city, Joe shows the characteristics of a real hunter when looking for Dorcas and, finding her with someone else, shoots her. The resemblance between the two incidents is great; the trees and rivers represent a gate between the two realms of the dead and the living. Joe in both cases fires a gun, although the first was merely a reflexive one, not an actual shooting, but a prediction of his future transformation of a living being from one realm to the other. The birds, again, represent the sacrifice that the gods required from Joe, in order to pass into heaven: 'But if this trail speaks, no matter what's in the way, you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it's the heart you can't live without'.²¹⁴

One of the main characteristics of the epic form is identity and naming is of great significance throughout Morrison's trilogy. For instance, in *Jazz*, the reclamation of identity

²¹³ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 208.

²¹⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 130.

as a hunter begins when Joe changes his name to Trace and begins his quest for his past. In this novel, the city affects the characters' way of life and thinking. Joe, for example, resembles one of the main deities of the Yoruba, the hunter *Orisa Ochossi*.²¹⁵ *Ochossi* is described as a man who loves the woods and nature with the ability to kill from a distance with very accurate shooting. The relation of this deity to Joe is that they both trace tracks, and which is a metaphor for memory. This deity, according to African folklore, is the son of *Oshun* who is associated with rivers and streams as the link between the realms of the dead and the living. This will be discussed below in more detail to show the link between the life of Joe and his relation to Dorcas. For instance, being a hunter, he traces his mother's tracks towards a river called Treason, where she lives. Also, his killing of Dorcas echoes the killing by *Ochossi* of his mother when he, accidentally, shoots her with the arrow of truth.

Moreover, Violet describes Joe as a person with razor sharp shoulders and tow-coloured eyes. This description again recalls *Ochossi*, as the latter is described as being a double-eyed god, 'like a tradition of a conjure man or two-headed snake doctor, who uses one eye for spiritual vision and one for physical vision'.²¹⁶ Seeing is an important motif in *Paradise* where we have the visionary Consolata, discussed in the next section.

When Violet refers to Joe as 'full of light' she identifies him as being more like *Ochossi* (*Oshoosi* or *Oshosi*) than *Ogun*, because the first is linked to moral light, which is one of the characteristics of the supreme deity of ethical righteousness, *Obatala*.²¹⁷ *Ochossi* is so exemplary to the point that African people thought that he possessed similar powers to *Obatala*. In addition, *Ochossi* has more characteristics, such as being fair, honest, righteous, and innocent, and is considered to be the ultimate judge and keeper of tradition and custom.²¹⁸ It is hard to distinguish between the two deities since both are committed to

²¹⁵ Robert Farris Thompson, p. 18.

²¹⁶ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 173.

²¹⁷ Robert Farris Thompson, p. 59.

²¹⁸ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 173.

exposing the truth, despite any possible consequences. The similarity of the two deities is not an issue, because Morrison has likely referenced both. However, she makes several references to iron in *Jazz*, such as the railroad tracks, one of the elements linked to *Ogun*,²¹⁹ and the Yoruba say that wherever there are two pieces of iron together, *Ogun* is present - a deity and hunter with control over swords, machetes, and guns. In addition, number seven is mentioned in several parts of the novel, such as 'Seventh Avenue', 'seven icy blocks', 'seven miles away', 'Violet has finished her evening shifts and comes home around seven to find that Joe has already changed the birds' water and covered their cages',²²⁰ 'seven-days cycle', and many other places. Number seven is the number of *Ogun*'s attributes, 'The Ogun that I know are seven in number'.²²¹

The change from one deity to the second is presented through the character of Joe from the beginning of the novel onwards. Morrison's reference to the razor again resembles a divinatory pattern where *Ochossi* speaks in the *omo odu* 'which is described as sitting on the razor's edge; the *odu Ejioco*'.²²² The *odu Ejioco* on the one hand is associated with *Ochossi*, while on the other hand, *Ogunda* is associated with *Ogun*. Therefore, we can note that they were mentioned in an indirect way alongside the character of Joe in several actions and interactions with others and his surroundings. Morrison expresses this relation in several parts of the novel, such as 'A poisoned silence floated through the rooms like a big fishnet that Violet alone slashed through with loud recriminations'.²²³ The razor in 'daylight slants like a razor',²²⁴ and in a reference a few pages later, 'just as wonderful to know that back in one's

²¹⁹ Arnett and Arnett, I, p. 523.

²²⁰ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 40.

²²¹ Sandra T. Barnes, *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 147.

²²² Zauditu-Selassie, p. 174.

²²³ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 5.

²²⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 7.

own building there are lists drawn up by the wives or the husband hunting an open market' link together hunting motifs.²²⁵

One of the main characteristics of *Ochossi* is that he is a master of herbs and medicine, since he is a hunter, therefore the references to poison indicate one of the elements that clearly refer to this deity in this work. It resembles the job that Joe practises in the city, to provide an additional income, as a salesman for a cosmetic company, therefore this point is considered as an additional resemblance since *Ochossi* is a master of camouflage. Joe's job was carrying a case of cosmetic products samples that promise to add beauty to the women he sells his products to, which is a reference to the bag, made of leopard skin, which *Ochossi* carries containing herbal medicines.

The change in time, in addition to death and life, not only manifests itself in the physical state of the body, but also to the relationships between characters. For instance, the death of Dorcas brings Joe and Violet's relationship back to life. Joe indicates that, 'With her I was fresh, new again. Before I met her, I'd changed into new seven times. The first time was when I named my own self, since nobody did it for me, since nobody knew what it could or should have been'.²²⁶ Fu-Kiau comments that, according to the Kongo, there are seven concentric circles, with humans at the centre, which define the universe.²²⁷ Therefore, self-realization can be achieved when a person heads toward the seventh dimension. The concept of time changing and travelling, through the events that the narrator of *Jazz* relates in the characters' experiences, allows different pieces to be recollected and the emotions evoked can resurrect the unseen, yet known, spiritual forces.²²⁸

Furthermore, Joe's changing life and character throughout the novel show a more spiritual metaphysics than the Western notion of migration implies. He names himself, trains

²²⁵ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 11.

²²⁶ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 123.

²²⁷ Kimbwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kôngo: Principles of Life & Living* (Brooklyn: Athelia Henrietta Press, 2001), p. 41.

²²⁸ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 171.

to be a hunter, moves, with his wife, to Rome, and leaves their apartment in Mulberry Street, little Africa to go to town. Joe is changed when almost killed by white men in the mob violence of 1917, and finally changes in 1919 when he walks ‘the way, with the three six nine’.²²⁹ These changes in Joe’s life and character show a type of shapeshifting as a way to survive struggle with the ‘white folks’. One of the important points that Joe makes, about the way he and other people survive tough times, is that they follow the way of the ancestors. Zauditu-Selassie comments on this, ‘here, dissimulation can be read as an earnest attempt to remain culturally whole’.²³⁰

Hunting, as symbolism, reflects the knowledge of the hunter about the movement of the prey and the experience of survival. The first point of movement has to do with migration and changing location, and the second is related to the hunter and how he survives the weather and nature’s harsh conditions. Joe is a nature lover who likes trees, which as Violet notes are ‘full of spirits’. Trees, as has been explained in the previous section on *Beloved*, are very spiritual and could be considered as a form of connection between the realms. When Violet objects to Joe sleeping in the wild, ‘nobody sleeps in trees’, Joe replies, ‘I sleep in them’,²³¹ illustrating the strong connection between his soul and nature. Violet is astonished to know that Joe sleeps in trees, ‘What you doing out here, then, Mr. High and Mighty, sleeping in trees like a bat’.²³² Joe’s visionary qualities are referred to in the bat reference; bats, like trees, have an important role in African folklore.

Joe’s identity as a hunter includes his hobby of catching birds and caging them, which is another connection with *Ochossi*. Parrot, or *odide* as the legend calls the bird, is one of the best sacrifices to be presented to *Ochossi*, yet he accepts all birds sacrifices, such as guineas, doves, roosters, pigeons, and hens. The narrator describes Joe’s wife, Violet, as bird loving

²²⁹ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp. 123–29.

²³⁰ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 170.

²³¹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 103.

²³² Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 104.

and informs us that she used to live with 'a flock of birds' although living in a big city such as New York. By taking care of birds Joe and Violet add a touch of nature to their rigid city environment. At the beginning of the novel, when Violet marks the corpse of Dorcas, she releases the bird (parrot) as a way of presenting a sacrifice to correct the situation and heal the breach that occurred when Joe shot Dorcas.

The bird has spiritual significance for both Joe and Violet, but the effect of its loss is especially difficult for Violet who gained assurance from hearing the bird say, 'I love you'. When she releases all the birds, including the parrot, she feels empty in her soul and develops problems with trust. For Joe, the birds leaving is a sign that he has lost his hunting ability, since the parrot, *odide*, helped him to be a good hunter.

There are many folkloric and traditional aspects that can be related to Africa, but the most important of them is the metaphor that Morrison uses to represent the feeling of nostalgia for home. The character of Joe is very rich in meaning and represents a significant aspect of African-American history and culture. Joe's nostalgia for nature and eagerness to find his mother, though he has no traces or tracks of her, relates to the search for Africa, the mother. Joe is a hunter who feels homesick for the South and like African Americans who have left Africa, is separated by distance and time from the homeland; the traces back are hard to find. Morrison's role, through her art, is to recreate the traces of folklore and traditions, to create a new track that later generations will be able to follow. It is the path that they should follow to find their roots, in addition to gaining the inner peace they seek. On this new journey African Americans will find many spiritual and strong connections with the homeland that will allow them to discover themselves and explore their past to help to create a brighter future. The narrator states, 'Joe is on a quest to find his mother, Wild, and track her down. He has remembered his objective, and this time he will be careful not to be thrown off

the track by time or location'.²³³ He realises that neither time nor place is going to hinder his mission to look for his mother. The symbolic reference to Africa is, itself, traceable.

During his failed search for his mother Joe comes across Dorcas, a person who has the characteristics that he is looking for: 'Somebody called Dorcas with hooves tracing her cheekbones and who knew better than people his own age what that inside nothing was like'.²³⁴ Later, the narrator describes Dorcas as a deer, 'she rears up and, taking his face in her hands, kisses the lids of each of his two-color eyes'.²³⁵ As a deer, Dorcas is linked to several cultural and folkloric traditions, being physically and spiritually connected to nature and woodsmen, while also being prey for the hunter. The cultural aspect, according to the Yoruba, is that a deer is worshipped and has spiritual qualities, because it is related to their myth of creation, the *Oduduwa*.²³⁶ Joe associates Dorcas with his mother and wants to share with her the things that he never shared with his mother, who left him at birth.

The narrator describes Wild and her method of rendering herself invisible to the best hunting eyes of Hunter's Hunter. He can feel her presence but cannot see her or any trace of her. The narrator tells us, 'Hunter's Hunter got tapped on the shoulder by fingertips that couldn't be anybody's but hers',²³⁷ then adds, 'he didn't hear a single crack'.²³⁸ Golden Gray describes her as a 'black liquid female' who has 'leafy hair' and who makes the woods her home. Hunter calls her 'Wild' because she bites him after she has a baby. Wild's resemblance to the baby ghost of *Beloved* is evident, since *Beloved* disappeared right after the town women gathered at her house and was pregnant by then. Thus, a significant link between the novels is made.

²³³ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 175.

²³⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp. 37–38.

²³⁵ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 39.

²³⁶ He is the first king of Ile Ife, who believed that all the royal dynasties are descended from him. Please refer to: R. C. C. Law, 'The Heritage of Oduduwa: Traditional History and Political Propaganda among the Yoruba', *The Journal of African History*, 14.2 (1973), 207–22 (p. 209) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700012524>>.

²³⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 166.

²³⁸ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 166.

The difficulty to find a trace or a trail indicates that Wild is connected to the spiritual realm, and this connection is presented via several characters being in touch with her in one way or another. For instance, Honor describes his encounter with her to his mother by saying that ‘the whole cabin was rainbowed’.²³⁹ According to the *Fon nu*²⁴⁰ tradition and the *Orissa*, a rainbow is a form of communication between deities in heaven, such as *Oshumare* and *Ouido*, who both have an expanded consciousness, and those on earth via the arc from the sky connected to earth. Yet, to the Yoruba, the cosmic realms of earth and heaven, or as they call them *aye* and *orun*, are distinct domains but not separated, because they are connected and influence each other. However the quality of connection depends on the person and the ancestors.²⁴¹ Joe submits to the idea that his mother abandoned him and considers it as incidental, however as soon as he finds out his mother’s identity is Wild, he begins his quest to find her. He makes three attempts to find his mother and thus his quests represent the three stages of ritual.

Morrison’s sophisticated narrative technique includes presenting ‘alternating memories’ in which we see the tracking of Joe’s mother, Wild, in relation to his mental image of her, Dorcas, a relation indicated by space between paragraphs. For example, when Joe is fishing ‘he heard what he first believed was some combination of running water and wind in high trees’.²⁴² He hears a song that sounds like it comes from a feminine throat. The song ends with a sound resembling a breaking twig. He rushes to find its source and asks the voice to reveal itself, but in vain, because he just feels her presence through every movement and every leaf shift, especially the second time when he enters the rock place to look for her, yet again. He says ‘you don’t have to say nothing. Let me see your hand. Just stick it out

²³⁹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 68.

²⁴⁰ The *Fon nu* people are one of the major African ethnic groups who are found in southwest Nigeria and Togo: Please refer to: *Encyclopedia of Africa*, ed. by Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 482.

²⁴¹ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 176.

²⁴² Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 176.

someplace and I'll go; I promise'.²⁴³ The light is fading, and he starts to lose hope, Joe adds 'You my mother? Yes. No. Both. Either. But not this nothing'.²⁴⁴ Joe's request for a response has an African folkloric aspect behind it too. The Yoruba people have a divination ritual called *obi*, which is described by John Mason as a system where a Yoruba person divines with *obi* and asks one question for one time and seeks a yes or no answer.²⁴⁵ Mason writes, 'there are three "yes" and two "no" answer possibilities, each of a different quality'.²⁴⁶

The last time Joe looks for Wild is after he is married. Joe searches for her in a tree, however this time it is not a white-oak tree, but a baobab tree. This type of tree has an unusual method of spreading its roots. The roots climb up towards the sky instead of going deep into the soil. The Baobab is a sacred tree, and is representative of the ancestral impulse, since its roots construct the foundation of the tree, and then at the same time reach towards the sky.

As well as indicating the significance ancestors, African folklore represents certain objects and places as important. The place where Wild lives is carefully described as located in a rock close to the shore. Water, as has been explained in a previous section, plays an important part in African folklore, since it contains water spirits according to the Kongo. Water represents the ancestral domain and has a core of concentrated spiritual power. In addition, Wild's rock consists of:

A circle of stones for cooking. Jars, baskets, pots; a doll, a spindle, earrings, a photograph, a stack of sticks, a set of silver brushes and a silver cigar case.

Also. Also a pair of man's trousers with buttons of bone. Carefully folded, a

²⁴³ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 178.

²⁴⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 178.

²⁴⁵ For example, the three "yes" answers are *alafia*, meaning an emphatic "yes"; next is *ejife*, a more balanced "yes"; and the third *etagua*, an incomplete answer by itself, but combined with another response such as *alafia* or *ejife*, or even another *etagua*, yield a positive affirmation. The answer is yes, but the person will have some difficulty. If pursued, however, with focus and clarity, the results will be sure. The "no" answers are *ocana* or any of the following combinations, *etagua ocana* or *etagua oyekun*. Not having a response to his query, Joe still has unresolved questions. Zauditu-Selassie, p. 177.

²⁴⁶ John Mason, *Four New World Yorùbá Rituals* (Brooklyn, NY: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 2013), p. 83.

silk shirt, faded pale and creamy —except at the seams, there, both thread and fabric were a fresh and sunny yellow. But where is she?²⁴⁷

Many items in this paragraph have folkloric indications and references to traditional metaphors. For instance, the circle of stones represents what the Ba Kongo calls *makuku matatu* which stands for an ancient idea of the three firestones or the way the physical world is linked to the Kongo worldview.²⁴⁸ The doll, stands for the memory of the child that Wild left, or the childhood that Beloved lost. The fabric stands for the memory and its connection to the narration of her story. In addition, the sticks represent the old rituals and culture.

The links between Wild and Dorcas have been identified, and one of these is that Joe's search for Wild is included in the same chapter as the one in which he is searching for Dorcas. Both Wild and Dorcas are well experienced in hiding, for instance, no one manages to hunt Wild down or find her traces. Dorcas is well trained by her aunt in hiding in, and thus surviving, the harshness of the city in which the aunt imagines Dorcas as prey. However, Dorcas has a spiritual connection with Joe that is expressed when he goes to the party to kill her, 'He is coming for me. He is coming for me. Maybe tonight. Maybe here'.²⁴⁹

Furthermore, objects and their interpretations work as milestones in understanding *Jazz*. For instance, the framed photo of Dorcas where the word 'sacred' is spelt backwards, according to Kokahvah, represents the *nkisi*, which is a Kongo concept of the spirit from the land of the dead. This could be justified by Morrison's epigrammatic inscription of a quotation from *The Nag Hammadi*, 'I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name', since the *nkisi* corresponds to both the name and to the actions of the person. In addition, the photo of Dorcas helps in mediating the relationship between Joe and Violet. Therefore, it reflects the power of healing that *nkisi* performed on their relationship. The *nkisi* stands for the thing used to help a person, for instance, a sick person would obtain health. It hunts down

²⁴⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 184.

²⁴⁸ Jack Nelson, *Feminist Interpretations of W. V. Quine* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Press, 2010), p. 251.

²⁴⁹ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 190.

the issue and eliminates it. ‘The picture of Dorcas Manfred sits there in a silver frame waking them up all night long’,²⁵⁰ therefore, although Dorcas is dead, her spirit, *magara*, is still there and has the ability to affect the life of Joe and Violet.

Hairdressing also has a spiritual and cultural background, especially among African Americans, which is codified within the discourse. For instance, the Yoruba people call what is related to the head as *ori*. The details about it in the novel go beyond being just a language but signify spiritual awareness and also maintain the harmony and protection offered by the West African culture. For this culture, the hairdresser ‘is the one who executes a sacred act and participates in the process of body memory, since coiffure is another form of body memory’.²⁵¹ Hair design is a significant method of communication that shows one’s history, personal life, and identity.

Furthermore, the author uses other folklore related references. One of these references is the *Orisa Oshun* along with *Ochossie*. Her presence could be seen through singing, sewing, offering of honey, laughter, and even in the orange offering, as standing for the river-rain deity. For instance, when Dorcas is about to die, she sees a pile of oranges and then hears a song. She says to Felice, ‘listen, I don’t know who is that women singing but I know the words by heart’.²⁵² This closeness to the heart and love, stands for the *Orisan Oshun*. Additionally, laughter is one of the characteristics of *Oshun*, which gives a balance to the pain and sadness by covering it with a mask of happiness. Also, one of *Oshun*’s pastimes is knitting and sewing, which means linking societies and people together. Such linking is further indicated by the river as a source of connection that also represents the birth of civilisations. It also can be seen via Joe’s quest to find his mother and his roots after his parental disconnection. This quest does not mean that Joe is alone, on the contrary, this is a quest for all African Americans who look for their homeland, as Morrison describes them,

²⁵⁰ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 13.

²⁵¹ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 184.

²⁵² Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 139.

‘motherless children a long way from home’.²⁵³ Also, the needle stands for the way that a torn up fabric can be connected again and be useful and strong, which is a reference to the dream of unity connecting memories of the past to create a firm basis for the future.

Parrots and feathers also have an African folkloric aspect as in the Yoruba mythology, gods wanted to find out who is the supreme, under God. The deities made their way to heaven bearing a precious sacrifice offering on their heads. One of the deities, *Eshu-Elegbara*, presents a single parrot feather ‘*ekodide*’ positioned upon his forehead, which signifies that he does not want to carry a burden on his head. Therefore, God provided *Eshu-Elegbara* with the power to make all things happen and even multiply ‘*ashe*’,²⁵⁴ ‘outward signs of submission and material bounty were no match for wisdom and humility’.²⁵⁵ Releasing the parrot could give two explanations to the reader, it is either enabling the power of women in society, because Violet set it free, or it could be the loosing of the sacrifice, which will lead to more chains being put on women. I prefer to go with the first one because it enables Violet to decide what is best for her and how she can control her life. Since the bird dies, we can assume due to coldness, so it was never Dorcas’s gift to God, in order to spare her but it was Violet’s.

Besides the parrot and its representation in African folklore, owls also have a place where they stand for the position and the social rank that a person may represent. The owl is a ‘frequent figure in African American trickster tales [...] it evokes the cultural message underlying the trickster tradition concerning wisdom, a message that is implicit in evocations

²⁵³ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 186.

²⁵⁴ Ashe is a philosophical concept in the West Africa; according to this concept the Yoruba conceive the power of making things happen and also produce changes. For further information, refer to: Will Coleman, “‘Amen’ and ‘Ashe’: African American Protestant Worship and Its West African Ancestor”, *Cross Currents*, 52.2 (2002), 158–64 (p. 159).

²⁵⁵ Robert Farris Thompson, p. 18.

of the owl in the discourse of everyday life in African American communities'.²⁵⁶ However, the owl in this novel represents sorrow over Dorcas's death.

One of the features of the novel, which has a link to *Beloved*, is naming and misnaming. After Dorcas is shot by Joe, the people around try to get the name of the shooter, but she refuses to mention his name. Dorcas says. 'They need me to say his name so they can go after him. Take away his sample case with Rochelle and Bernadine and Faye inside. I know his name, but Mama won't tell. The world rocked from a stick beneath my hand, Felice.'²⁵⁷ By saying mama won't tell, she referred to the purest source of love, mothers' love. Dorcas' love is so generous and pure that she allows herself to bleed to death rather than tell the police the name of her killer. Naming in *Jazz* has further significance, for instance, Dorcas has a biblical meaning, 'gazelle'. She represents the city life and Wild, she stands for the mother who abandoned her newborn baby without giving it the love and care it deserves. This is a shared point with Joe, who was looking for the mother whom he could never find, but finds Dorcas instead.

The narrative method Morrison adopted is related to her belief that art should be connected to African traditions, and it also extends the connection with nature, one of the merits of the South.²⁵⁸ Moreover, using folklore in her fiction is reflected in her readers and characters by allowing them to have meaning in their literary environment. For instance, her narrative technique of describing the Yoruba deity of the hunt, *Ochossi*, and the attributes she ascribes to him. Also, the sermons and traditions, included in this text, serve the same goal of the author.

Morrison's insertion of African folklore, and her restructuring of it, accords with the view of John R. Roberts who states that folklore and traditions are related to building a

²⁵⁶ *Souls Grown Deep: Once That River Starts to Flow*, ed. by Paul Arnett and William Arnett (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2000), p. 81.

²⁵⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 193.

²⁵⁸ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 172.

distinct culture that helps in the creation of the self.²⁵⁹ Both the subject matter of *Jazz* and the ambivalent stories of the narrator correspond with the general characteristics of African epics, which create a history consisting of an overlying structure of a timeline (past, present and future), which leads to the existing characters being judged according to the ancestral standards. Just like epics, the narration of *Jazz* concentrates on the place, migrations, battles, histories, and even genealogies. For instance, due to the detailed narration, the readers became familiar with the genealogy of most of the characters, not only the main characters but even the minor ones too. Folkloric epics in the life of African Americans helped them to adapt to change which leads to being able to cope with double consciousness.

Although *Jazz* does not solve the mystery behind love, it celebrates love and celebrates human life too. It raises questions about the city and the ‘evil’ it represents, as well the conflicts, and above all, the culture and traditions which African Americans present in this work and the impact they had on Harlem to promote this heritage. In addition, it is a call to stop their suffering, through helping each other by providing a ‘hand’, then through love, which has no limits, despite how dark the world is. Finally, through music, jazz and blues, which can render their pain, and then transmute and transcend it.

It [language] is in *Jazz* particularly, self-referential – an exploration of just how language at once constitutes and defines the specificity of black culture and how it is used to tell stories. But the stories contained are not only the ones explicitly set out in the text. It is by means of intertextuality (Julia Kristeva’s term) that the stories are expanded to include a wider cultural arena.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ John William Johnson, ‘Yes, Virginia, There Is an Epic in Africa’, *Research in African Literatures*, 11.3 (1980), 308–26.

²⁶⁰ Tally, *The Story of Jazz*, p. 82.

In the same context, as referred to by Bluestein, Herder's view of the role of folklore and folk songs in nourishing and renewing a higher form of art includes the argument that folklore improves national cohesion and enriches the culture of a specific group:

It will remain eternally true that if we have no *Volk*, we shall have no public, no nationality, no literature of our own which shall live and work in us.

Unless our literature is founded on our *Volk*, we shall write eternally for closet sages and disgusting critics out of whose mouths and stomachs we shall get back what we have given.²⁶¹

This means that the lower level of any society is the core of its traditions and cultural heritage, its guardians. In the meanwhile, this tradition moves from this lower class to the higher one via art, and in the particular case that this thesis discusses, via the form of fiction.

At the end of the novel, the rhythm of jazz music returns to the beginning to re-join the melody line after the story presented the signs and the clues. Later Morrison answered the question of how a woman would leave her baby with a complete stranger to get a record! The answer came within the context that 'yes records are important', well it was not the physical record that she meant, but it is the history, culture, and stories, especially those of African Americans, whose history was written down by the same people who oppressed them in the past. Therefore, this is an invitation for her people to read history and maintain their culture. This seems to be interpreted from the *Ochossi's* song: '*Ko ro Ko ro ko mo demo ro* (teach the traditional customs. Teach the traditional customs) *L'ayel'aye ko mode mo ta* (to have the world)'.²⁶²

It is noticeable that the novel ends with a 'closing ensemble of interludes and breaks and brief solos'²⁶³ the rhythm is in low register with a slow blues tempo, and this can be seen in the seven subsections from page 219 to 229. This ending is meant to purify the experience

²⁶¹ Bluestein, p. 6.

²⁶² Zauditu-Selassie, p. 188.

²⁶³ Rodrigues, p. 751.

which we had previously, which contained pain and joy. The music can be felt through the confident walking of Felice on the streets of Harlem, and also through the life of Joe and Violet, they are back together again, walk together, sleep together under a satin quilt which includes all their memories. This music can be illustrated through the following quotation from the novel:

Lying next to her, his head turned toward the window, he sees through the glass darkness taking the shape of a shoulder with a thin line of blood. Slowly, slowly it forms itself into a bird with a blade of red in the wing. Meanwhile Violet rests her hand on the chest as though it were the sunlit rim of a well and down there someday is gathering gifts (lead pencils, Bull Durham, Jap Rose Soap) to distribute to them all.²⁶⁴

I will conclude with the wisdom of the novel and its moral lesson, which is expressed through the character of Alice Manfred advising Dorcas after she seemed to give up on life and was full of disappointment. Manfred asked her not to accept life as it is but ‘make it, make it’.²⁶⁵ We sense through her words that she understood how short and pitiful life is, and that there is no point of living it in fear. This also reflects the advice of True Belle to Violet and her family on how to live and survive in the city by saying that ‘laughter is serious. More complicated, more serious than tears’.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp. 224–25.

²⁶⁵ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 113.

²⁶⁶ Morrison, *Jazz*, p. 113.

Section Three: *Paradise* (1997)

Remember I was talking about those black towns? Most of them disappeared, but I'm going to project one that moved away from the collapse of an original black town and set up in Oklahoma. They went from being very rebellious, to being progressive, to stability. Then they got compromised and reactionary and were unable to adjust to new things happening. The novel is called *Paradise*.²⁶⁷

After discussing the folkloric elements in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, and how they are related to African-American identity, it is time to discuss the third selected novel, *Paradise* (1997), for the same purpose. *Paradise* was Toni Morrison's seventh novel, and the first to be written after she won the Nobel Prize. Published five years after *Jazz* and ten years after *Beloved*, it is considered as being the last novel of a trilogy of novels with themes in common. Morrison decided to call the novel *War* but was persuaded by her editor to change the title to *Paradise*, as the original title was not marketable.²⁶⁸ Yet, the central theme could be said to be gender conflict, and the word 'raid' is mentioned twice. It is a story that refers to many African traditions, god-like characters and mystical signs. It interrogates racist and sexist ideology within African-American nationalism.

Morrison's spiritual amplifications in this novel are likely to be derived from Yoruba's Orisa. In addition, she draws on the twinning concept employed by the Dogon, which is known as *Nommo*. These are featured across the trilogy. It shows Morrison's interest in this aspect and what it represents to her and 'her people', African-Americans.

Memory and rememory remain one of the dominating themes across the trilogy. Retrieving memory serves as the basis for the construction of all three novels. Starting from being storytelling in *Beloved*, to a dominant motive in *Jazz*, to end up as a historical

²⁶⁷ Carabi, p. 97.

²⁶⁸ Shoko Oki, "'War' in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*: History and Its Discontinuity or Reconstruction", *Osaka Literary Review*, 51 (2013), 37–49 (p. 37) <<https://doi.org/info:doi/10.18910/24622>>.

consciousness in *Paradise*.²⁶⁹ It shows the importance of this topic for Morrison and how it serves the primary purpose of sustaining African-American identity. Therefore, although Morrison had dealt with the theme of rememory in *Beloved*, and the importance of storytelling in *Jazz*, she concluded and emphasised the relationship amongst the two stories to discuss history in *Paradise*.

Paradise is a significant novel due to its recording of the psychological impact of a tragic event, a feature which it shares with *Beloved*. It discusses another side of post-slavery and the contradictory feelings of African Americans towards Africa. This novel consists of two communities; one of a fictional town, Ruby of Oklahoma, and the other of Paradise. Towns such as Ruby were established during the great migration of the African Americans from the south to the north from 1916-1970. The story of Ruby has been told in a very detailed way through the stories of several characters of the Convent. In 1889, a city called Haven, Ruby's predecessor, was established by a group of slaves after they set off on a journey with everything they owned, families and belongings. The route was from Mississippi to Louisiana and finally into Oklahoma. This journey is considered an 'Exodus', in context, because they departed the torture of slavery seeking safety, home, and freedom. The plan was to join other ex-slaves who were fortunate to establish their own cities, but unfortunately, they faced rejection and denial wherever they went:

The one hundred and fifty-eight freedmen were unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith. Turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children, they were nevertheless unprepared for the aggressive discouragement they received from Negro towns already built.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Justine Tally, *Paradise Reconsidered: Toni Morrison's (Hi)Stories and Truths* (Hamburg: LIT, 1999), p. 35.

²⁷⁰ Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Plume Books, 1998), p. 13.

This rejection was a shock for this group of one hundred and fifty-eight people. Therefore, they kept heading further to the west. A point which Morrison focuses on is that the rejection made the people more attached to each other as community members and led them to care about each other because of the circumstance they share. Morrison describes them as ‘becoming stiffer and prouder with each misfortune’.²⁷¹ Those proud people are the ancestors of the people of Ruby.

Morrison opens her novel with ‘They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other’.²⁷² It reflects two aspects of styles that the author uses. Firstly, she uses a western cinematic way to start the story with flashbacks. Secondly, she creates a mystery in the first line as readers think about the white girl and hope that some have survived the massacre. Where is the place, why commit this crime and why did they kill the women! Morrison uses a narrative hook to gain the full attention of her readers so that she can present her case. She admitted, in an interview with Diane McKinney-Whetstone, that she did not know precisely how the events after the start would develop,

I know the architecture (of the novel) ... You’re picking up the past as you move forward. But I didn’t have the ending figured out. I had to really work the novel before I know how the totality of the ending would play out. Would the assault be successful?²⁷³

The Convent is a different community group, consisting only of women living in an old church that used to be a religious school known as Christ the King School for Native Girls:

In white letters on a field of blue, a sign near the access road read CHRIST THE KING SCHOOL FOR NATIVE GIRLS. Maybe that was what everybody meant to call it, but in Consolata’s living memory only the nuns used its proper

²⁷¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 14.

²⁷² Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 3.

²⁷³ Tally, *Paradise Reconsidered: Toni Morrison’s (Hi)Stories and Truths*, p. 66.

name— mostly in prayer. Against all reason, the students, the state officials and those they encountered in town called it the Convent.²⁷⁴

It is located seventeen miles from Ruby, in a mansion that used to be owned by a wealthy man. This community is also known as ‘the Convent’ by the townspeople and was run by the Sisters who devoted their effort and life to teaching and taking care of Native Indians and non-white people. Such female-dominated communities represent a ‘critical aspect of Candomblé’s appeal to Morrison’.²⁷⁵ Sister Mary Magna, who is also known as Mother, was previously the head of the nuns in this school. Although Mother was a white woman, she brought several women of colour with her to the school. All of the women leave, except for Connie, also known as Consolata. After the teaching staff leave, the school has to close, with Mother and Connie remaining as the only residents. Connie establishes a self-sufficient agricultural way of life, using the garden to grow food for herself and Mother. Connie makes and sells to sell peppers and pepper sauce to the townspeople of Ruby, Connie ‘still sold produce, barbecue sauce, good bread and the hottest peppers in the world. For a pricey price you could buy a string of the purply black peppers or a relish made from them’.²⁷⁶ The gathering of single women in a community dominated by them is a feature of Candomblé; the leaders remain single in order not to relinquish freedom to their husbands.²⁷⁷

After Mother’s death, the number of women at the Convent increases, starting with the arrival of Mavis Albright, whose story is included in the second section of *Paradise*. She has fled her marital home after accidentally killing her twin infants by leaving them in the car while shopping. She runs out of fuel close to the Convent and chooses to stay there for the rest of her life. Grace, who is known as Gigi, joins later after running away from her empty life; then Seneca, a young girl abandoned by her mother, arrives after wandering aimlessly.

²⁷⁴ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 224.

²⁷⁵ Myers, p. 113.

²⁷⁶ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 11.

²⁷⁷ Myers, p. 113.

Finally, Divine joins the community after being betrayed by her mother and her lover. Each of the characters mentioned above has a section in the novel that is dedicated to telling the story of her life and its connections with the town life of nearby Ruby. Morrison links the lives of the women in the Convent to those of the townspeople in Ruby. Morrison insists, through characterisation, that in order for her people to be whole, they need to be aware of their stories, an awareness made possible by inquiry into, and study of, their pasts. This idea is repeated by Connie when she says to Mavis, ‘scary things not always outside. Most scary things are inside’.²⁷⁸ To achieve her goal of emphasising the importance of self-knowledge through understanding of the past Morrison refers to the characters’ pasts in turn, embracing any possible disruption to the narration of this story that a straightforward telling would avoid.

Community in African-American Perspective

Africa is our home, Pat, whether you like it or not ... There was a whole lot of life before slavery. And we ought to know what it is. If we’re going to get rid of the slave mentality, that is.²⁷⁹

The community vision has a unique impact on individuals, including as it does, the fostering of a special respect on the part of individuals for their groups. The community is more like a family rather than simply a place to live, as discussed in *Beloved* and *Jazz*. *Paradise* also shows the strength of the African-American community and their social relations and social bindings. Such merit has been inherited from African societies and ways of life. A proverb mentioned by Joseph Boakye Danquah, in his book *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1968), shows the depth in feelings that family represents to Africans, ‘What the Akan take to be the good is

²⁷⁸ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 39.

²⁷⁹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 210.

the family'.²⁸⁰ To the Akan, family represents pure good, and the worst thing a member may do is bring dishonour to his family or his community in general.²⁸¹ Communities value the love among their members; members help and stand by each other in times of prosperity and difficulty. Boakye Danquah searches for an answer to the questions: what is it that links individuals to each other? What is the basis of the connection they have? Also, what constitutes the family? I share, with Boakye, an interest in these questions because discovering an answer to them will lead to answering the research question of this thesis. The source of the answers lie in the community members' beliefs. The Akan believe that the neighbours, the family, and those who share blood are connected by their obligation to their common ancestor. Therefore, members do not simply form an indigenous group, but they also share a bloodline that obliges them to stand by each other. Every member of the Akan has a role in his community, so they live harmoniously. They reflect their harmony by performing a tribal dance. Morrison declared that her focus on communities and neighbourhoods was due to 'this life-giving, very, very strong sustenance that people got from the neighbourhood'.²⁸²

Toni Morrison's novels feature characters as powerful individuals, but importantly their actions are also based on being part of a community. Each community in her novels performs like a 'Greek chorus', which acts as commentator, accuser, and sometimes laughs or mourns, when required, in the flow of the events being narrated. Morrison shows how people in these communities help each other in hard times. This is more than mutual assistance in meeting physical needs and daily activities, but includes the realm of the afterlife. Morrison points to a strong connection between individuals and their community, 'Every woman on the

²⁸⁰ Joseph Buakye Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 266.

²⁸¹ Akan people are a historically important ethnic group of West Africa. With over 20 million members, the Akans are one of the biggest Ethnic groups in West Africa today. The Akan are the largest ethnic group in both Ghana and the Ivory Coast. They speak Kwa languages which are part of the larger Niger-Congo family. See: Patricia Levy, *Ghana* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), p. 23.

²⁸² Charles, p. 11.

street could raise everybody's child, and tell you exactly what to do and you felt that connection with those people and they felt it with you'.²⁸³ This personal understanding of her own Black community informs her novels.

Morrison's perspective on African-American communities is also informed by her recalling of African societies. Many Africans depend upon their neighbours for help and support, such as food gathering and sharing, and taking care of the children. Therefore, neighbours are part of a family even if they are not related in blood, and they act as one interrelated group with a shared identity. For instance, in Zaire, where the Lele live,²⁸⁴ the individual is part of the community, and the community is much more important than the individual.²⁸⁵ To them, a failure in a hunt is not an individual but a communal failure; the same thing is applicable for success, where a hunting success is for the community as a whole. This approach tends to be shared among the tribes of Africans, it mirrors the Akan's actions and attitudes, for example. The communal belief is that the blessing and the curse of a god may be reflected in the community as a whole. For example, if the gods are pleased with an individual, this will be reflected in the community and their food gathering and hunting and vice versa.

Morrison's novels present the community as a mix of her personal experience on the one hand, and African beliefs on the other. This can be noticed throughout her trilogy. The community is presented as a helper, a destroyer, a judge, and even a motivating force for characters to take action. This can be observed in *Beloved* when the community stands by Baby Suggs, but later acts against Sethe and her family, and finally saves Sethe from *Beloved*'s haunting. Denver is motivated to maintain the connection between number 124

²⁸³ Robert Stepto, 'Intimate things in places; a Conversation with Toni Morrison', in Charles, p. 27.

²⁸⁴ The Lele of Zaire is one of the nine ethnic groups that Morrison regarded as an important source for folklore and traditions to be used in her works; La Vinia Delois Jennings, *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 14.

²⁸⁵ Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, 2013), p. 33.

and Bluestone Road society. Also, the individual may fail the community, and the community may fail the individual. However, in all cases, the society in Morrison's novels acts as one and shows the beliefs and the tradition that can be found in many African societies. Morrison states, in a conversation with Sheldon Hackney, what community represents for her:

Community, for me, is extremely important, not in the sense of there is a community that has to be maintained at all costs the way it is or was, but that communities offer some very positive things and they offer negative things. The tension is between the community and the individual always. It seems to me that one builds a community, also.²⁸⁶

Moreover, another example of the African tribes, villages, and beliefs are those that the Abaluyia of present-day Kenya represent. They tend to make their groups and people believe that the majority of them are the descendants of the tribal ancestors, and thus they are all one family. Therefore, they share the same attitude to the way they treat each other with help and support. In addition, the people of Zimbabwe believe in sharing as 'what one has, one shares', and that neighbours help each other with the harvest and building.²⁸⁷ In another word, as it is stated in *Black Power* by Richard Wright, 'it's communism, but without any of the ideas of Marx or Lenin. It has sacred origin'.²⁸⁸

As in most, if not all, of Morrison's novels, community and religion emerge as main themes. However, what is different in *Paradise*, is that religion and community cannot be separated, unlike in the previous novels. Nevertheless, *Paradise* provides its readers with a text enriched with African beliefs and traditions, which is available and seen in most of her other fictional works.

²⁸⁶ Denard, pp. 133–34.

²⁸⁷ Graham Russell Hodges, *Studies in African American History and Culture* (Abingdon: Garland, 1997), p. 121.

²⁸⁸ Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Perennial, 1954), p. 100.

Another common factor in Morrison's trilogy is that the community has a significant position, and it is very important to the descendants of the African slaves. She shows in her novels how the ancient customs of African traditions are manifested in African-American culture. When Haven was thriving in 1932, families shared everything. They helped to share profits with those whose crop was ruined. They split wood for these injured and those who could not do it themselves, 'families shared everything, made sure no one was short. Cotton crop ruined? The sorghum growers split their profit with the cotton growers'.²⁸⁹ The community is not just a gathering, but it is everything because together they would either stand or fall. For instance, in *Paradise*, the people have lost the dream town which they built. However, it has been resurrected by the descendants of the ancestors who had been guided by their god. With the combination of both their god and their ancestors' vision they manage to establish another home which they called Ruby.

Therefore, understanding the concept of family in African society, in addition to the heritage and connection to the ancestors, helps the reader to appreciate the novels of Morrison fully. Moreover, these relations of the individual to the community explain the position of Deek and Steward Morgan, and why they value this concept so much. A message that Morrison wants to deliver is that understanding one's history, and relationship to one's ancestors, will summarise and declare what is at the heart of African cosmologies. Nwankwo has stated that the past is everywhere in Morrison's works.²⁹⁰ The history and family connections were not exclusively with Deek and Steward Morgan and their link to their ancestors of Ruby, but it was the history and connection to Africa. It was noticeable in many places throughout the novel in the characters' words, actions, and thoughts, 'Roy talked about

²⁸⁹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 108.

²⁹⁰ Chimalum Nwankwo, 'I Is': Toni Morrison the Past, and Africa', in *Of Dreams Deferred, Dead or Alive: African Perspectives on African-American Writers*, ed. by Femi Ojo-Ade (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 171–81 (p. 179).

them [Africans] like they were neighbors or, worse, family'.²⁹¹ The idea of home, roots, and belonging was an on-going discussion among the old and the new generations of the citizens of Ruby, and this was one of Morrison's ways of debating ideas whilst leaving final judgment to the readers. However, not all judgement is left to the readers of *Paradise* to make.

Morrison makes it clear distinction which position the reader should take in the debate about the oven. The discussion consists of two views; the first is held by the older people, who want the town of Ruby to remain self-sufficient, an isolated town with safety guaranteed by the way it is organised according to the ancestors' principles. The town men also want a male dominated town, 'nine men decided to meet there, (at the oven) they had to run everybody off the place with shotguns [...] to take matters into their own hands. The proof had been collecting [...] all these catastrophes was in the Convent', the place where only women live.²⁹² The opposing side of the discussion is mainly put forward by the young people of Ruby; they want the town be open to the world and wish to abandon the policy of isolation on which the town was built.

In calling for change, the young people of Ruby, reflect an African-American sensibility found in the Black Power Movement of the 1970s. The youths of Ruby feel isolated by the rules of their town and they want to be part of a wider movement for change. This is an expression of identity and a call for freedom. They understand their position in relation to civil rights and feel a duty to stand in solidarity with others of their race who have been suffering the effects of slavery and discrimination for so long. This sensibility explains their reading of the phrase on the oven. For the town fathers the phrase is 'Beware the Furrow of His Brow', but the young people of Ruby want the sentence to read 'Be the Furrow of his Brow' or 'We are the Furrow of His Brow' because this would encourage a less passive, more pro-active approach to the achievement of the ancestors' original goal in

²⁹¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 104.

²⁹² Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 11.

building Ruby.²⁹³ The young claim that the word ‘beware’ was not there originally. With inspiration and effort, they can change their lives and make a better life for the coming generations. This inspiration is derived from the power of a newfound identity and understanding of what a nation can achieve through its members standing by each other, accepting the guidance of the ancestors and harnessing the power of the young. The elders, such as Misner, want to make the youth of Ruby interested in Africa, rather than America. Africa stands for freedom, while America represents slavery, with all the racism, discrimination and trauma associated with the institution. Misner said, talking to the new young citizens, ‘If you cut yourself off from the roots, you’ll wither. Roots that ignore the branches turn into termite dust’.²⁹⁴ Richard Wright explains this view:

But here in Africa “freedom” was more than a word; An African had no doubt about the meaning of the word “freedom” ... At a time when the western world grew embarrassed at the sound of the word “freedom”, these people knew that it meant the right to shape their own destiny at they wished.²⁹⁵

As her part in the endless debate, Morrison invokes her philosophy, which indicates that one must live one’s life with an eye towards the future. However, at the same time one must keep the roots alive as a life guide. The way to respect roots is through the maintenance of traditions, values, and folklore. As a result of this maintenance, folklore will be transferred to other generations, who will be inspired by knowledge of the great achievements of the ancestors and who will understand how the style of their past life and history had been established.

Misner’s conceptualisation of Ruby as a possible reserve of African traditions is likely to be inspired by observations made by Richard Wright on West Africa. He saw,

²⁹³ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 86.

²⁹⁴ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 209.

²⁹⁵ Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, p. 54.

during his time there, that the Ashanti survived through shared kinship, family connections and love among its people:²⁹⁶

“This is their home; mine too. Home is not a little thing.”

I’m not saying it is. But can’t you even imagine what it must feel like to have a true home? I don’t mean heaven. I mean a real earthly home [...] where if you go back past your great-great grandparents... past pyramids and poison bows, on back to when rain was new, before plants forgot they could sing and birds thought they were fish, back when God said Good! Good!—there, right there where you know your own people were born and lived and died.²⁹⁷

Here Misner aims to affirm and regain, with mind and heart, all the rights that used to have as Africans. This means that those who were born in Africa as nobles should rise again and stand for their people’s rights, of having what once was theirs before being conquered by the West. Also, Misner attempts to recall African culture, which was almost destroyed by the conquerors.

There are some similarities and differences between the inhabitants of the Convent and those of Ruby. Inhabitants of both places want to find a home where they can live in peace. Ruby and the Convent have both been established after a long journey to find a suitable place. Both of the places are self-sufficient places. When it comes to differences between the communities: Ruby consists of male led families which refuse to be open to strangers and which do not accept any outsiders, white or black. The Convent, on the other hand, consists of female residents, and they are open to accepting outsiders to their small community. The Convent women are thus regarded with suspicion and fear by the townspeople of Ruby, a rejection which eventually brings tragedy to the Convent. It is

²⁹⁶ Yoshinobu Hakutani, ‘Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, and the African “Primal Outlook upon Life”’, *Southern Quarterly*, 39.1–2 (2001), 39–53 (p. 41).

²⁹⁷ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 213.

confusing that a group which suffered segregation and experienced being outcast by other cities during their journey could treat others in the same way.

Folklore in this novel is embodied in characters, stories, customs, and actions. It is clear that the main story of *Paradise* and the theme are about a group of women, however, the events start with the leadership of men and the guidance of the ancestors to establish a new town for them. This guidance led them to establish Ruby and the Convent.

One of the effective characters, who reflects the African folklore, is the one which Morrison addresses as 'God'. The appearance of this character helps to develop the events and change Connie's attitude. This mysterious character appears after the death of Mother, and helps to renew Connie's spirit. Afterwards, Connie's attitude changes as she prepares a special meal for the women in the Convent, something she had not done in a very long time. This meal becomes a sort of cleansing meal, which takes place as an introduction to a paganistic ritual in Connie's cellar in the Convent.

The character, God' seems identical to Connie. He has tea coloured hair and wears glasses. When he removes the glasses, his eyes have the same colour as Connie's before they were changed. He might resemble the male side of Connie, or he is, as Morrison stated, god. He claims that Connie knows him, although she denies this. The appearance occurs right after she talks to God, telling him that, 'I'll miss you... I really will'.²⁹⁸ It is the second time that a man appears and guides the people of Ruby and the Convent. The man shows that someone of the male gender can be a potential saviour, having the characteristics of God and the ancestor on the one hand, but of course, on the other hand, it is males, the men of Ruby who murder the women of the Convent.

Two of these men, Deacon and Steward, are twin brothers, and they have significant roles in the novel. The significance of twins in African traditions provides a context for

²⁹⁸ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 251.

discussion of this novel. First, both Deacon and Steward are *abiku* who are destined to die, with no offspring to carry their name or their family name.²⁹⁹ The only person left to carry on the Morgan family line is K.D., although he is not from the Morgan family, but his offspring will ensure the resurrection of the heritage of the late Ruby Morgan. It seems as if the plan is that their offspring will be the host of the twins' souls, who will bring an eternal life to them which will fulfil the African concept of the *abiku*. Therefore, *abiku* works efficiently with twins and, like the *Ibeji*, has the ability to transfer between realms; the *abiku* is timeless, ageless and can cross boundaries and limitations more like a soul.³⁰⁰ In the same sequence, Steward told Anna about the completeness that he feels due to being a twin:

Once, she had asked Steward what it felt like to be a twin. "Can't say," he answered, "since I was never not one. But I guess it feels more complete."

"Like you can never be lonely?" Anna asked.

"Well, yes. Like that. But more like . . . superior."³⁰¹

They feel different and superior, not simply because they are male, but because they are twins: two souls, two bodies with a feeling of one strong person. Vida De Voss comments, 'The stories of 8-rock history... provided the socially available objects of identification for the identity formation of these twins'.³⁰² When they attack the Convent, they experience the 'ultimate power' of being men and twins at the same time.³⁰³

The new fathers and the old fathers are alike, basing a fundamental side of their identity on how they can fulfil their responsibilities towards their women and children. These

²⁹⁹ It is an African concept which refers to a child who is born to die and rest in a place between a realm of the dead and the realm of the living waiting for a chance to return to the world of living in a host body. For further information, please check: Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 368.

³⁰⁰ The name for twins in Yoruba is *ibeji*, meaning "born two times", which also the name of the divinity that protects them. Which bring happiness to their family if they are cared for and treated with respect'. See: Fernand Leroy and others, 'Yoruba Customs and Beliefs Pertaining to Twins', *Twin Research and Human Genetics*, 5.2 (2002), 132–36 (p. 134) <<https://doi.org/10.1375/twin.5.2.132>>.

³⁰¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 116.

³⁰² De Voss, p. 34.

³⁰³ Lucille P. Fultz, *Toni Morrison: Paradise, Love, A Mercy* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), p. 30.

responsibilities are leadership, protection, and advice – seen, for instance, in the incident of Elder Morgan and the black woman who was beaten in front of him. Apart from having a human, natural reaction to protect the weak, there is something more significant in his reaction to save the woman as she is one of his people. Morgan and the woman are the same colour, share the same misery, and the same oppressor is standing there beating her. He feels it is his responsibility to assume the role of protector of the women in his African culture ‘Elder did not know he was running until he got there and pulled the man away’.³⁰⁴ This valorisation of a certain kind of masculinity provides part of the justification for the massacre of the Convent women. According to the townsmen’s justification, they want to protect the women and their town and the women of the Convent, who shelter strangers, jeopardise Ruby and its community.

The Morgan brothers inherit their position in the town of Ruby from their ancestors, who were wandering for a long time and over great distance to find ‘their promised land’.³⁰⁵ The stories and mythology surrounding the ancestors gives the brothers the confidence to lead their people. Having a glorious history, original culture, and folklore with a deep history unites the people of Ruby. It is evident that the same factors that serve to unite the people of Ruby in the making of their home is reflective of a wider goal to achieve African-American unification. Ruby townspeople like other African Americans derive confidence, pride and inspiration came from their ancestors and the ancestral homeland, Africa. Morrison’s depiction of Ruby’s nationalism, however, also contains the warning that rigid adherence to tradition and patriarchal structures leads to fear of the other, the women of the Convent, for example, and results in stasis. It is the Convent women’s more fluid relationship with ritual that is, in the end, valorised as potentially leading to the Paradise of the novel’s title.

³⁰⁴ Fultz, p. 30.

³⁰⁵ Fultz, p. 57.

Female protagonists in Morrison's novels are important in leading or inspiring other characters. Excluding Sula of *Sula*, and Jadine in *Tar Baby*, Morrison created a new pattern in the African-American novel regarding depiction of the hero. She combined the American individual hero with the African communal one in the creation of the African-American hero. This hero can act within the community and be independent. The characteristics of Morrison's hero can be found in Denver in *Beloved* and Richard Misner and Connie in *Paradise*. They set out to discover the world around them whilst keeping their connection to the ancestors.

This section presents each main character; tracking its similarity and differences to the characters in *Beloved*, and their representation from an African folkloric perspective, starting with the construction and the origin of the Convent as an independent community of women. The Ba Kongo has a female community where they gather and learn from each other which is called the Kikombe (womanhood school).³⁰⁶ When the women reach adulthood, after menstruation, they join the school for training as women. This idea resembles the concept of the Convent in *Paradise*. However, there is no age limit to Convent membership. The women learn from each other and share their experiences of emotional distress.

Starting with Mother, Sister Mary Magna, Morrison represents this character with the merits of wisdom, leadership, and unearthly powers. Mother's role has meeting points with the role of Baby Suggs in *Beloved*. Mary Magna matches the concept of the supreme mother in the notion of the Yemonja.³⁰⁷ This supreme mother has a protective role over the children of other women, she provides shelter and security for them. We can notice such action by

³⁰⁶ It is an ethnic group who live along the Atlantic coast of Africa from Pointe-Noire (Republic of Congo) to Luanda, Angola. They are primarily defined by the speaking of Kikongo, a common language. They are also the largest ethnic group in the Republic of Congo. For further information, please refer to: Robert Farris Thompson, p. xiv.

³⁰⁷ It is also spelled Yemoja or Yemaja, Yoruban deity celebrated as the giver of life and as the metaphysical mother of all *orisha* (deities) within the Yoruba spiritual pantheon. For further information, please see: Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (Albany: Suny Press, 2013), p. 216.

Mary Magna when she provides shelter, food, and protection for the women. Mother is not an ordinary woman, and this was witnessed by Mavis when she saw her involved in a ring of light, although there was no electricity in the Convent:

She is my mother. Your mother too. Whose mother you? Mavis did not answer, partly because she couldn't speak of it but also because she was trying to remember where, in a house with no electricity, the light in Mother's room came from.³⁰⁸

Moreover, Mavis is confused when Mother knew about her and her past from the first look. The concept of the ancestral mother was conserved by generation after generation of the Yoruba. It is considered as the oldest and the most respected concept in African spiritual life. It is represented by the *Iyami Osoronga*, which is also known as *Iya Won*, which means the 'mother of all people'. Moreover, it is considered as the foundation of the families and communities in Africa, which is the same outcome of the Yoruba divine deities who represent mother and child, such as mother Orisa, Pieta, Yemonja, and Piedade.

This character also represents the memory of the Middle Passage and the women who were brought to North America. In 1990 Jon Butler stated that the religious systems of West and West Central Africa were 'shattered beyond repair' and this happened due to the Middle Passage, a process which he called a 'holocaust' refuting the supposition that those people abandoned their old religions once they arrived in North America, and they adopted Christianity instead.³⁰⁹ However, Jon Butler ignored the fact that African religions and traditions made a reconciliatory syncretism with Christianity and the two became juxtaposed rather than conflated.

As was mentioned in the discussion of *Beloved*, Sethe remembers her grandmother who was also the embodiment of Sethe's mother. The conversation between Connie and

³⁰⁸ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 48.

³⁰⁹ Jennings, p. 16.

Mavis reflects the belief in the mother of all when Mavis asks Connie about Sister Mary Magna. She was the mother of all girls who came to the Convent and took care of them. In addition to the light and the psychic powers, she stands for a mother-goddess figure in the African beliefs. Such goddess figures have been worshipped in the pagan religions of Africa.

The second most important female character, regarding her connection to African folklore, is Connie. When introducing this character, Morrison refers to her as a figure of ‘otherworldliness’. She was among the first non-white girls whom Mother took care of, and is given a unique role in her small community at the Convent. Connie was saved from a miserable life, was full of desolation and poverty, ‘Each night she sank into sleep determined it would be the final one, and hoped that a great hovering foot would descend and crush her like a garden pest’.³¹⁰ Consolata’s, or Connie’s thoughts, show how miserable her life was, and how she wished to die.

Connie has an extraordinary power, the ability to see during the night, as she has ‘bat vision’. She gains this power after Deek Morgan, who had an affair with her, rejected her. She goes to the chapel to admit her sin and ask for forgiveness, then Mother leads her out of the chapel, ‘a sunshot seared her right eye, announcing the beginning of the bat vision, and she began to see best in the dark’.³¹¹ The eye power that Connie has, and being addressed as a bat eye, has a significant meaning in many cultures and traditions. The bat in many European traditions represent vampires and evil, however, in many African traditions hanging a bat on the door, as in Egyptian culture, keeps the evil spirits away. They also believe that these creatures cure poor eyesight, baldness, fever, and toothache.³¹² When Connie starts curing

³¹⁰ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 221.

³¹¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 241.

³¹² Myths about bats are found in many human cultures. The ancient Egyptians believed that bats could prevent or cure poor eyesight, toothache, fever, and baldness, and a bat hung over the doorway of a home was thought to prevent the entry of demons that carried these “diseases.” Bat gods were important to many pre-Colombian civilizations in central America, and bats have been used in voodoo worship in parts of Africa as well as in many parts of the Caribbean even today. See: Thomas H. Kunz, ‘Bat Facts and Folklore’ <<http://www.bu.edu/cecb/bat-lab-update/bats/bat-facts-and-folklore/>> [accessed 7 March 2017].

patients, including children we see her bat-like abilities. When Seneca brings Pallas to the Convent, she shows her the way to where Connie lives, in the cellar, and the following conversation takes place:

Seneca knocked, got no answer and pushed open the door. Connie was sitting in a wicker rocking chair snoring lightly. When Seneca entered she woke instantly.

“Who's carrying that light?”

“It's me—Seneca. And a friend.”

[...]

Candle flame made it difficult to see, but Seneca recognized the Virgin Mary, the pair of shiny nun shoes, the rosary and, on the dresser, something taking root in a jar of water.

"Who hurt you, little one?" asked Connie.

Seneca sat down on the floor. She had scant hope that Pallas would say much if anything at all. But Connie was magic. She just stretched out her hand and

Pallas went to her, sat on her lap, talk-crying.³¹³

Moreover, the idea of the ‘bat vision’ is also related to the notion of the Iyami Osoronga and their interest in nocturnal animals in general, and specific interest in bats.³¹⁴ Bat vision is not the only kind of vision that Connie has, she also manages to see with the help of her inner vision. This other ability, of inner vision, connects her to *nyama*. This power sets her soul free to understand herself and those around her, ‘Her colorless eyes saw nothing clearly except what took place in the mind of others’.³¹⁵ The light that sears her eyes does not leave

³¹³ Morrison, *Paradise*, pp. 172–73.

³¹⁴ Aina Olomo, ‘Iyami Osoronga: Primordial Mothers of Yoruba Spirituality’, in *Goddesses in World Culture*, ed. by Patricia Monaghan (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2011), p. 51.

³¹⁵ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 248.

her while she is in the dark, it becomes the tool that she can use to see through to the internal space where the spiritual light exists.

Although Connie is not a virgin, she is a very spiritual person and has a touch from the ancestors, which is reflected in her power to cure. This character resembles the characteristics of the Black Madonna, who has been described by Carminha Levy in her article 'The Power of the Black Madonna'. Levy describes her as mother earth, the symbol of wisdom, and the integration of opposites. She represents the Virgin Mary, but is metaphorically virgin because she does not belong to a specific man but all men, 'The female part of God'.³¹⁶ These characteristics are all in Connie and embody her message of achieving balance between physical and spiritual aspects in every person.

Considering the image of the cellar and of Connie's visual ability, all of it contributes to the idea of light and dark which Morrison explores in this novel, in addition to the impact of these two elements in African-American society, and its source back to the ancestral way of life in Africa. This idea is discussed by Carminha Levy in the same article mentioned above, 'Darkness precedes light and she is mother. The first wisdom was dark and feminine, eternal womb'.³¹⁷ This aspect represents the African religious tradition of Candomble which is represented as the 'female ancestral power Iya-mi-Osoronga'.³¹⁸ Moreover, in the same article, Levy mentioned the African goddess of all waters, seas, falls, rivers, and streams whose name is Orixá. Connie resembles this goddess too, with the links to the events in the novel when Mother's body was returned to Lake Superior, 'Far. To a lake named for her. Superior. That's how she wanted it'.³¹⁹ At the end of the novel, Connie sits by a shore with

³¹⁶ Carminha Levy, 'Power of the Black Madonna', *Tranceform* <<https://tranceform.org/index.php/en/articles/contributed/726-power-of-the-black-madonna?showall=&start=4>> [accessed 3 August 2016].

³¹⁷ Carminha Levy, p. 2.

³¹⁸ Carminha Levy, p. 2.

³¹⁹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 73.

Piedade awaiting the newcomers to the Convent. In addition, other goddesses of Africa are called the 'daughters of the sea' and used to be worshipped as water goddesses.

Levy describes, in her article, the significance of the women in the convent and Connie in particular. She discusses the image of the cellar where Connie rests, writing that 'where the cult to Mother Earth is most developed was in the Aegean-Cretean culture, where the Goddess Mother was originally venerated in caves, and whose priests were women'.³²⁰ Furthermore, the article describes the Black Madonna as a Consolata, the person who consoles, and who helps other people when they are in need, 'she appears mysteriously where the people suffer more and need more support'.³²¹ In the course of the novel she cures people in need and helps those who came to the Convent. She does not only help and cure the residents of the Convent, but she helps the people of Ruby and outsiders. She brings a boy back to life after he had a car accident and died. Although he is urged on by a Ruby resident, Lone DuPres, who is herself a healer, it is Connie who steps in by entering his body and saving him. 'Pulling up energy that felt like fear, she stared until it widened. Then more, more, so air could come seeping [...] she concentrated as though the lungs in need were her own'.³²² Therefore, she is the ancestral figure of this novel and has the personality of Candomble, water priestess Yemanjá, who is 'the guardian of women, childbirth, fertility, and witchcraft'.³²³ Consolata also shares the wisdom and guidance of Baby Suggs from *Beloved* and True Belle of *Jazz*.

In the Convent Connie is the mother, while the rest of the women are the priests, providing help and support. In addition they get blessing and guidance from Mother.

Although Connie is horrified by the power she possesses, she uses it to lengthen Mother's life and to stay with her and the other residents of the Convent:

³²⁰ Carminha Levy, p. 2.

³²¹ Carminha Levy, p. 3.

³²² Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 245.

³²³ Jennings, p. 11.

She [Consolata] endured for the Reverend Mother when she became ill. At first she tried it out of the weakness of devotion turned to panic—nothing seemed to relieve the sick woman—then, angered by helplessness, [...] Mary Magna glowed like a lamp till her very last breath in Consolata's arms.³²⁴

Connie uses her power to step into Mother's body and tries to lengthen her life, but she cannot make her survive. She does not tell Mother about her attempts to save her because, as she clarifies, Mother would never allow such attempts because she considers them to be unchristian evils. Connie's desperate attempt to keep mother by her side and to keep her blessing in the Convent fails and She cannot save Mother. When Mother dies, a part of Connie dies too because losing Mother is considered by Connie as contributing to the loss of her identity, 'she had no identification, no insurance, no family, no work. Facing extinction, waiting to be evicted, wary of God, she felt like a curl of paper – nothing written on it – lying in the corner of an empty closet'.³²⁵ Connie considers what she did as an unforgivable sin, 'The happiness that comes of well-done chores, the serenity duty granted us, the blessings of good works? Was what I did for love of you so terrible?'³²⁶ Then she chooses isolation, and does not appear unless to help a suffering soul who seeks her. Connie describes what she has done as evil in the eyes of Mother. This gives a message that there are two different beliefs she carries, one of Christianity and what she was living and experiencing with Mother, and the other was about her ancestors' beliefs, which is the African or pagan beliefs she practised.

Despite Connie's attitude, she reveals what she believes while she is talking to the naked women. She starts with her story, and how she got to know Mother Magna, then she describes an image of a place which has nothing to do with Christianity. She describes a magnificent place, a heaven like place, 'where gods and goddesses sat in the pews with the congregation. Of carnations tall as trees. Dwarfs with diamonds for teeth. Snakes aroused by

³²⁴ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 247.

³²⁵ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 247.

³²⁶ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 251.

poetry and bells. Then she told them of a woman named Piedade who sang but never said a word'.³²⁷

Connie and Mother have unique characteristics, but the Convent is not the only place where powerful women can be found. Ruby has its own powerful female characters, such as Lone DuPres. She is one of the most beloved characters in Morrison's novels. DuPres represents an ancestral figure in Ruby due to her wisdom. She also has the power to enter dying people, in order to heal them. Lone is the one who taught Connie how to reveal her powers of healing. By creating this character, Morrison completed an African-American ancestral women pattern, through her fictional works. These women include Pilate in *Song of Solomon* who guides her people, Eva Peace in *Sula* who creates a shelter for displaced people, and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* who taught her people how to love themselves, and True Belle who is an ancestral figure, as we have seen, in *Jazz*. Lone represents the knowledge and strength of the African-American women. Many of these women acted as healers of their people, whether physically or spiritually. They could identify the wounds and misery of people in their communities, even when some of these people did not know that they had wounds, and heal them. As a universal feature of humanity, and also an African specific element, mothers heal wounds. However, since most African Americans were deprived of their real, biological mothers, Toni Morrison creates an ancestral mother to whom they can return to for advice and wisdom. For instance, the character of Lone, as Morrison describes her in *Paradise*, '... she did know something more profound than Morgan memory or Pat Best's history book. She knew what neither memory nor history can say or record: the "trick" of life and its "reason"'.³²⁸ It became a sort of inheritance of powers and wisdom, which moves from one character to the other, and keeps the guidance and the blessing of the

³²⁷ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 264.

³²⁸ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 272.

ancestors going on. The powers of Lone moved to Connie, who in her turn became a healer and a guide of the women of the Convent.

The twin concept is not used for men only, as with the Morgan family, discussed earlier, but Morrison uses the same concept with the female characters too. For instance, the Convent women; five women are living in the Convent, Connie, Mavis, Pallas, Grace and Seneca. Number five corresponds to the Yoruba Ibeji. The Ibeji concept consists of five persons that include two twins and three other children born to the mother after the delivering of the twins. All the women who live in the Convent come by coincidence, but they remain in order to seek guidance. For instance, Mavis the mother of the twins, and the rest of the characters whose stories were told in different sections named after their names. The fusion of body, mind, and spirit, which is achieved by the women of the Convent, represent Toni Morrison's view that all these elements, in combination, fulfil 'the quest for wholeness'.³²⁹ In *Paradise* Morrison revisits certain themes evident in the first two novels of the trilogy: the relationship between man and god, family and community, and rituals, which have been inherited from Africa.

The first practice of ritual takes place during the journey to find a home after the rejection the community members have experienced in the cities they pass through. Big Papa, the grandfather of Deek and Steward, wakes his son Rector (Deek and Steward's father) one night and tells him to follow his steps. Big Papa, followed by his son Rector, goes into the woods. Big Papa kneels and starts addressing God by saying:

My Father, he said. 'Zechariah here.' Then, after a few seconds of total silence, he began to hum the sweetest, saddest sounds Rector ever heard. Rector joined Big Papa on his knees and stayed that way all night. He dared not touch the old

³²⁹ Fultz, p. 22.

man or interfere with his humming prayer, but he couldn't keep up and sat back on his haunches to relieve the pain in his knees.³³⁰

They stay in this position all night praying until they hear footsteps. The later events are relayed by Deek as he remembers them being told to him:

They saw him at the same time. A small man, seem like, too small for the sound of his steps. He was walking away from them [...] together they watched the man walking away from the palest part of the sky. Once, he lingered to turn around and look at them, but they could not see the features of his face.³³¹

Rector gathers the people, as Papa orders him, to the place where he stood. Once they came to the place, they witness a very peaceful look on the face of Big Papa, and they feel it in themselves too. Big Papa says that 'he is with us ... he is leading the way'.³³² The god-like figure appears only for Big Papa and acts as a guide to a particular place. However, this god-like figure appears again after twenty-nine days, this time to Rector, and he calls his father Zechariah to see him too. They follow the god once more, and he leads them to a spot and stopped, then started spreading things from his bag on the ground. Rector and his father can not find anything on the ground, but they feel as if it is a message to establish their town on this spot and settle. Finally, after a discussion and negotiation with the group, they construct their town, Haven, to be their first home after slavery. It is a home where there is no enslavement and persecution, a home they built with the guidance from their god.

The biblical aspect of this novel occurs in the way the journey was established as a means to depart slavery and torture, to find freedom and to establish a home. There was no specific destination to this journey, but they were guided by a god-like figure who showed them the way and the best location to construct a home for themselves. The new community of Haven was a depiction of an African tribe and villages, where the people take care of each

³³⁰ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 96.

³³¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 97

³³² Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 97.

other and help each other with food and comfort. These are some of the merits of the beliefs of the individual and the community of the *Lele* people, of Zaire, which was discussed earlier in this section. These characteristics are still followed in present day Kenya, where people tend to believe that they are the descendants of those tribes' men, and they are all as one family.³³³

One of the significant rituals which took place in the Convent is when Connie takes the lead, after the death of Mother. She gives the residents a choice, either to stay or leave, but if they choose to stay, they must obey her commands. The women choose to stay, and the first thing they have to do is to prepare for a kind of ritual or a ceremony. The ritual starts with cleaning the cellar floor until it became as clean as a rock on a shore. Then Connie orders them to lie naked on the floor, according to what position they like and prefer:

However you feel [...] When each found the position she could tolerate on the cold, uncompromising floor, Consolata walked around her and painted the body's silhouette. Once the outlines were complete, each was instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight.³³⁴

The poses of the women have a significant implication; it is visually presented as Gigi being in the centre as a cross, while Pallas is situated in a fetal like position in the centre of the cross. Mavis is on her stomach, and Seneca on her back making intersecting lines, making the four-quadrant cross which forms the sign of eight, the sign of the world according to the Dogon. This kind of ritual is a form of confession, in that each woman tells her secret and by sharing pain, can cure it. With this guidance and ritual, Connie becomes the new Mother to the Convent. She teaches the women that there should be a balance between their bodies and souls. This ritual helps Connie re-establish the matriarchal concept as well as the female notion of divinity. She does so by connecting an act to ritual power, as a response to

³³³ Hodges, p. 121.

³³⁴ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 263.

particular aims of individual women, which help them find their spiritual selves. The ritual of being naked and releasing negative stories makes the women feel the experience of being reborn, and this is the same idea that matches the stories of Paul D and Sethe about their past, in addition to Joe Trace and his quest for his past.

The aim of the ritual is not for material gain but for a spiritual lifting. By practising it, they transfer their identity through the dimension of time and space so that it can be renewed. It is known that the body is a conduit for the transfer of messages. Therefore, the marking on the bodies of the women became the site for ritual regeneration, which strengthens each one of them. In addition, it fills the gap in the protection ring that surrounds the soul according to Kongo belief.³³⁵ Therefore, as a way to fulfil this belief, the women shave their heads, as a way to remove their past and its misery and start a new life.

The story of the Convent, a potential Paradise, ends mysteriously. The form of the massacre and what happens after that, has remnants of African folklore. After their murder of the Convent women, the Ruby men leave the bodies where the crime took place and commission an undertaker to remove the bodies. However, when the undertaker arrives, he does not find any of the women. There is no blood, and Mavis' car has disappeared. Later on, in the concluding pages of the novel, Morrison mentions that each of the women has been seen by their loved ones, those who had hurt the women in their past life. This takes us back to the story of Connie and the women when they practise the rituals of confession; the place which Connie described to them, which is between earth and heaven. Such ideas, of life and after death places, are described by the Akan people of Ghana. Richard Wright explained the philosophy of J.B Danquah on Akan views of death,³³⁶ writing 'Death does not round off life; it is not the end; it complements life'.³³⁷

³³⁵ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 136.

³³⁶ A tribe in Ghana, check: Roger Gocking, *The History of Ghana* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), p. 8.

³³⁷ Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, p. 217.

Moreover, this philosophy of life after death is also connected with the Bantu Kongo, as they say ‘we die in order to undergo changes as a process or as a “dam of time” it permits life to flow and regenerate to create a new state of being freeing the spirit’.³³⁸ What proves the usefulness of this philosophy is the resurrection of the women when we approach the end of this novel, in addition to their appearance for their friends and relatives. The other hint of their resurrection is the fresh eggs and flowering of the bush. This idea of resurrection was also discussed in *Jazz* and *Beloved*, in the previous sections of this chapter, where *Beloved* was resurrected from the water and came back home, later to show up again as a ghost in *Jazz*. Morrison has used this philosophy in her novels *Paradise*, *Jazz*, and *Beloved*. Yet it has been left to her readers to decide and think about this idea rather than being provided with a definite answer. By using this method, Morrison showed once again her ability to shed light on what has been ignored or has been considered as devalued. Therefore, she brought the philosophy from Africa back to life in the United States and among her readers. Moreover, by not answering directly, she motivates the readers to start searching for answers, which will be found in the African tradition. In addition, we can see clearly the insistence of Morrison upon the idea of a passage between the two realms, of the living and the dead, by presenting more clues from the African folklore. For instance, while Anna and Misner were collecting peppers they saw a door, and a window, and they were asking ‘what did a door mean? What a window?’³³⁹ These two objects represent *mwela*, a portal between the two realms, according to the spiritual system of the Kongo.

At the end of this novel, Toni Morrison leaves us with an uplifting idea, as she does with most of her novels. There are many tragic events in this novel as people ignore the advice of the wise, and the innocent suffer. However, hope is there and the possibility of a better life still exists. Yet we have to achieve certain conditions, such as standing by each

³³⁸ Fu-Kiau, p. 27.

³³⁹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 305.

other and supporting the weak, in addition, to be open to others without forgetting our roots. As a matter of fact, even the open-ended story is part of African folklore, as stated by the author herself when she said:

I am interested in folklore, black folklore, and the end of *Sula* and most of my novels are very much like folktale endings. It's open-ended folkloric tales, sort of open-ended; they don't close and shut the door, which is in the Western tradition, where the moral is—click!—locked up. But in African folktale, the people often say, "You end it," "What do you think?" It's a more communal response.³⁴⁰

Finally, one of the most valuable objects is the oven, which is implemented to work as a link between African Americans and Africa. The men built it as a place to hold meetings and share their experience, in addition to performing their ceremonies. The stove is located in the centre of the city, it stands for maleness, and it took on a religious connotation as an iron shrine. Although it has been inscribed with a motto 'Beware the furrow of his Brow' which is a religious indication of God's judgment and principles, it also has a traditional and folkloric indication. The oven recodifies the iron deity of Yoruba, who is known as Ogun, he represents both forces of the iron, which are the constructive and destructive ones. It was clear throughout the novel how it was a place to build and construct Ruby, and how afterwards it was the same place where the massacre of the Convent was planned. The slaughter of the Convent women and the way that the men, who committed the crime, were covered with blood was similar to the Yoruba Apataki, where the iron deity, Ogun showed up from the wood with blood all over him after the slaughter.³⁴¹

The town of Ruby has historical and traditional implications too. The way the town is built and structured resonates with African cosmology and specific West African traditions.

³⁴⁰ Denard, p. 116.

³⁴¹ Aloysius Muzzanganda Lugira, *African Traditional Religion* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), p. 94.

The twin concept, which is the main base that the town is built upon, tends to be the method that dominated the Dogon thinking and the architecture of their villages.³⁴² Their cities consist of two sections, the upper area and the lower area. The imagination of Morrison led her to lay out the town according to the principle of Amma's egg, which also known as 'the womb of all world signs'.³⁴³ For instance, Ruby consists of four streets on the east side and other four on the west side. The first four are named after the writers of the gospels: Saint John, Saint Luke, Saint Mark, and Saint Mathew 'From his own house on St. John Street, he turned right at the corner onto Central, passed Luke, Mark, John and Matthew, then parked neatly in front of the bank'.³⁴⁴ The other four streets of the west side are named with secondary names which are: Cross Luke, Cross Mark, Cross John, and Cross Matthew. This way of two axes resembles the way the Dogon construct their villages. The two crossed directions create the number eight that intersects with the four points. Therefore, when multiplying eight by eight by four, we get the number 256 of signs known as the 'signs of the world'. This specific number of signs gives the meaning to many things that exist in the world. At the same time, this figure is considered as sacred to the Yoruba *odu* that defines the narrative phenomena.³⁴⁵

The concept of the 'twins', and the number 'two', have significant implications for interpretations of this novel and are used in relation to both genders. It has been used to show its effectiveness and what it means in African folklore. Apart from its effectiveness with the genders it also has a linkage to society and the communities, which has been one of the main topics of this novel, for instance, the community of Ruby, when first established, depends on the Convent for trade, and this dependence forms a twinning way of the two places.

In addition to what has been mentioned earlier in this section concerning numbers, the number five represents the unity and completion that resembles the supreme deity of the

³⁴² The Dogon are an ethnic group located mainly in the administrative districts of Bandiagara and Douentza in Mali, West Africa'. Please refer to: Arnett and Arnett, 1, p. 110.

³⁴³ Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, *The Pale Fox* (Baltimore: Afrikan World Book, 1986), p. 84.

³⁴⁴ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 107.

³⁴⁵ Zauditu-Selassie, p. 127.

Dogon. This number was implemented in two places, the number of the women who used to live in the Convent and the number of the fresh eggs that Anna gathers from the garden of the Convent, ‘Anna entered the henhouse ... to get five eggs that she thought were probably fresh’.³⁴⁶ This novel has, as I have explained, many significant African folkloric aspects. This shows the importance of its use by Morrison to achieve a goal of firing the eagerness of her people to know their past and heritage. Also, to remember what they have missed in such a diverse society as the United States.

The tradition manifest in *Paradise* suggests that it can be considered as ‘a modern American story with its roots firmly planted in ancient African Soil’.³⁴⁷ In this novel Morrison raises the question of what may happen if the oppressed turned in to the oppressor and it is an interrogation of African-American identity under an African-American leadership. Morrison shows how the blind following of the ‘unexamined Western values of patriarchy and oppression of women’ has tragic consequences for the community.³⁴⁸

Toni Morrison presents the mythical past of the families in *Paradise* in the same natural way as she presents the god-like man, who led the people to their new home. Chimalum Nwanko states that ‘to Morrison and the kind of readers her works seek out, the bizarre is real’.³⁴⁹ We notice in the previous works, *Beloved* and *Jazz*, that neither events nor circumstances are ever unbelievable. Therefore, in order to achieve a full appreciation of Morrison’s works, the development of an African sensibility is required. As in the earlier two novels, individualism in *Paradise* is denied a role within the community of African traditions because the philosophy of community over individuality is of sacred origin.³⁵⁰

We came across the two separate communities of Ruby and the Convent, where the individual gains his/her power from supporters and community members. As a survival

³⁴⁶ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 304.

³⁴⁷ Hodges, p. 122.

³⁴⁸ Fultz, p. 21.

³⁴⁹ Hodges, p. 174.

³⁵⁰ Hodges, p. 123.

strategy the community in *Beloved* save Sethe from her loneliness and the demonic figure of Beloved, and they save Denver too. This aspect is also found in *Paradise*, where the community members stand by each other in the long journey to find home. The destructive aspect of community was shown at the beginning of *Beloved*, when the community abandoned Sethe and her family which brought about the risk that Sethe might be taken back into slavery. In *Jazz* community cohesion has partly been lost in the process of migration from the South to Harlem and the new urban experience privileges the individual. In *Paradise* we see the Convent community massacred by the male members of Ruby's community.

The sharing of pain and the notion of 'rememory' as the means for the alleviation of past trauma are themes running throughout the three novels. In *Beloved*, for example, Sethe and Paul D share their painful memories and in *Paradise* the Convent women, naked, practice a ritual of remembrance and exorcism of past trauma that invokes African tradition as a resource healing.

Rituals of death also appear in Morrison's trilogy. As Mary Magna, Mother and goddess-like figure, is dying Connie comes to her and:

Climbed into the bed behind her and, tossing the pillows on the floor, raised up the feathery body and held it in her arms and between her legs. The small white head nestled between Consolata's breasts, and so the lady had entered death like a birthing.³⁵¹

Death in this life is a birth in another, a reincarnation, according to African tradition that finds further evocation in *Beloved* when Sethe wants to urinate at the sight of Beloved, which signifies the rebirth of her child.³⁵² In *Jazz*, Violet's mother dies and True Belle assures her that her death is not the end but just a passage, a gateway through which everyone must pass and another idea that exists in different mythologies but one deeply rooted in African culture

³⁵¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 73.

³⁵² Morrison, *Beloved*, p. 6.

and tradition. *Beloved* returns back to life through water, while Mother's death is again a birthing, her body released in to Lake Superior as a resting place. As we have seen, water is significant in traditions and cosmologies of Africa as the element dividing life and death.

Naming is central to Morrison's aesthetic since it is related to identity formation and self-affirmation, 'to know one's name is to own it, to insist upon claiming its history'.³⁵³ In *Paradise* the women of Ruby lose their names in marriage as their identities are subsumed by male dominated society. In contrast, the names of the women of the Convent are clearly known to the reader: 'I call myself Consolata Sosa.'³⁵⁴ In this statement, Consolata names herself defiantly in positive affirmation of the self.³⁵⁵

To sum up the similarities and differences among *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*, I would argue that in say that in *Beloved* concentrates on the construction and analysis of the individual as Sethe learns to separate her identity as mother from her sense of self-hood. *Jazz* focuses on 1920s migration and African folklore serves an aesthetic function in its drawing on musical tradition. Morrison, in *Paradise*, juxtaposes the patriarchal society of Ruby with the female Convent community in order to reveal the impact one community has on the other. A tradition of African folklore is evident across the trilogy in Morrison's references to naming, places, events, unearthly powers, ancestral figures, objects and rituals.

Moreover, her concern with identity politics is linked to African folklore as she reveals its importance for the positive construction of self and the community. Representation of African American identity had mainly been achieved through music, such as Jazz but, as stated by Morrison, now it is literature that enables the world to 'see us in our best light'.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ Jan Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction* (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2014), p. 47.

³⁵⁴ Morrison, *Paradise*, p. 262.

³⁵⁵ Tally, *Paradise Reconsidered: Toni Morrison's (Hi)Stories and Truths*, pp. 42–43.

³⁵⁶ Denard, p. 29.

Throughout the trilogy, Morrison focuses on the traumatic effects of history and the best way to heal them is through memory and rememory of the past and the telling and retelling of stories. With exposure and discussion recovery is possible.

The universality of Morrison's works, as pointed out in my introduction, paradoxically, arises out of her concern with the specificity of the African-American past and traditions. She refers to this point by saying 'Anybody who sets out and writes a universal novel has written nothing'.³⁵⁷ She adds 'I suppose there may be black writers who have a large white readership who write for that readership, but I can't imagine it. That only happens on television'.³⁵⁸ In fact Morrison's work has global appeal, not least because of her incorporation of African tradition into the western form of the novel. Frances Foster and Kim D. Green note that 'early African American writers adapted and adopted English literary conventions for African American purposes, including petitions, protesters, and explanation directed to readers who were not necessarily African American'.³⁵⁹

Morrison herself referred to her adaptation of African forms: 'I tend to use everything from African or Afro-American sources. The flying [in *Song of Solomon*] is not about Icarus, it's about the African flying myth' adding that the only case in which she refers to something outside of African or African-American tradition is to refer to something wrong.³⁶⁰ In addition, instead of creating a new myth, as Amira Baraka was calling for during the sixties, Morrison was interested in searching out existing myths 'there already was a Margaret Garner, there already was a myth about flying Africans'.³⁶¹

At the end *Paradise* the word 'paradise' appears with a lowercase 'p', rather than with an upper case 'P', apart from in the misprinted first edition. Morrison explained that the

³⁵⁷ Denard, p. 37.

³⁵⁸ Denard, p. 37.

³⁵⁹ Frances S. Foster and Kim D. Green, 'Ports of Call, Pulpits of Consultation: Rethinking the Origins of African American Literature', in *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. by Gene Andrew Jarrett (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 45–59 (p. 46).

³⁶⁰ Ibid p. 113

³⁶¹ Denard, p. 114.

lowercase ‘p’ refers to the version of paradise she had in mind, a paradise, where salvation accrues in context and history, not in a hierarchical divine order. Morrison adds that ‘the community of Ruby has not developed a language to accommodate the new, the non-hierarchical notions of community emerging at the Convent, so they fear it’.³⁶²

In this African-American story, religion and community are inextricably mingled in ways that link African-American communities to Africa in significant ways. Moreover, in *Paradise*, she combines three elements that are essential for its consideration in this thesis: African history, ancestors, and religion.

The aspect of memory and rememory, as it is presented throughout the three novels, is as important to the author as to the readers. Elizabeth Bethel states that ‘memory – private as well as cultural – is shaped with both historical context and cultural milieu’.³⁶³ Bethel moves on to compare the three works, noting that the first concentrates on the recovery of those who disremembered and this coincides with the rise of the ‘recovered memory’ movement in the US. Although the second and the third novels are published during the end of this movement, they are considered as testimony to factual historical events.

The works of Morrison emphasise the responsibility of the individual to his or her group and community. Her works also insist on the value of the heritage of the ancestors and their effects on the African-American identity. The individual is always connected to his or her group and community and if a member soars or falls, he/she will not be alone and success or failure only has meaning in relation to the group. Michael Holquist states that:

Men define their unique place in existence through the responsibility they enact, the care they exhibit in their deeds for others and the world. Deed is understood as meaning word as well as physical act: the deed is how meaning

³⁶² Denard, p. 198.

³⁶³ Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Antebellum Communities* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), p. 170.

comes into the world. How brute facticity is given significance and form, how the Word becomes flesh.³⁶⁴

Paradise completes a trilogy of historical novels that began with *Beloved* and *Jazz* in which Morrison is concerned with 're-membering' the historical past. Morrison's position in these novels is to revise and reclaim the narratives of African-American history, particularly from a female point of view, by dwelling on a past that the dominant narrative has tried to erase. African-American separateness has often emphasized the absolute importance of African roots in the formation of an African-American ethnic identity as counterpoised to that of the white majority. However, unlike her earlier works in which she has focused on a reclaimed African heritage as the basis for a different and separate identity, *Paradise* examines the way African-Americans are engaged in the construction of a national identity based on a historical master narrative. Morrison is mainly concerned with how specific versions of history become master narratives, and in this context, the novel offers a critique of the traditional American paradigm of nationhood and identity formation with roots in Puritanism that has been the foundational principles of the United States.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Michael Cole, Yrjo Engestrom, and Olga Vasquez, *Mind, Culture, and Activity: Seminal Papers from the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 401.

³⁶⁵ Sakhrie, p. 74.

Chapter Four: Folklore and Identity in Alice Walker's Fiction

Alice Walker was born in 1944, and she is considered to be one of the African-American pioneers in contemporary American Literature.¹ She is a very talented and productive writer who has achieved significant success not only in novel writing, but also in poetry, short stories, children's books, in addition to essay writing. In her writings Walker focuses on several topics such as homosexuality, women's rights, and African-American culture in the African-American experience. She provides evidence in her fiction and literary work to show that African Americans are still proud, and respect their roots and nation, even though they live in a white dominated country. Alice Walker is known worldwide for her fictional masterpiece *The Color Purple* (1982). This novel is very rich in its references to the cultures and lifestyles of Africans and African-Americans. It also shows the love, pride, and passion the author feels for her black culture. This novel, which is the first novel in a trilogy, and the other two, *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), are the primary material for analysis in this chapter.

Walker has a distinguished position in literary and historical tradition, due to her creative use of African-American folk materials. She used these materials for the sake of social commentary, and her literary environment allows her more freedom to use them than many other authors of her time. Walker used folklore to reflect the relationships among her characters, and she believed that 'folk culture is an inseparable part of the black folk at any level of existence — the college bred and the illiterate black are equal in their heritage'.² Therefore, Walker used folklore as a base in many of her literary works. It is important to start with the background of the author which might clarify and justify the use of specific folkloric elements in her works. Like Toni Morrison, Walker won many literary prizes such

¹ Jarrett, p. 311.

² Trudier Harris, 'Folklore in the Fiction of Alice Walker: A Perpetuation of Historical and Literary Traditions', *Black American Literature Forum*, 1977, p. 8 <<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ162075>> [accessed 15 February 2017].

as the Pulitzer Prize in 1983, and the National Book Award in the same year, for her creativity in literature and her humanitarian activities. One of the most important aspects of Alice Walker's fiction is the traditions which link African-Americans with Africans.³

Alice Walker has made a tremendous effort to defend black women's rights. She was writing around the same time as Toni Morrison, and she reflects the struggle of black women, and shows a clearer image of female characters in her writings, whether poetry or fiction. She is also an advocate of black culture through her work and her views. In her trilogy, she depicts many aspects of African folklore; for instance, African oral literature and tradition, folk medicine, beliefs, and some handicrafts such as quilting, customs, and other aspects. This depiction reveals her interest in and appreciation of black culture along with her strong national consciousness. Trudier Harris states that 'Alice Walker does not view the folk culture as something separate from life, but as an integral and useful part of one's existence'.⁴

Alice Walker has a personal story of racism and folk medicine. When she was eight years old she had an incident, which changed her life and the way she saw the world. She used to play with the boys, and she used to spend most of her playing time with her elder brothers. One day, her parents bought air rifles for her brothers. However, since she was a girl, they did not bring her one. During their play, she was shot by her brother and the pellet lodged in the tissue of her eye. Her brothers were terrified of being caught and punished for the incident. Therefore, they convinced their little sister to lie about it, and say that some barbed wire had hurt her. This lie led to a delay in treatment, since her parents did not expect a foreign object to be in her eye. They did not have a car, and white drivers refused to take her to the hospital because of her colour: 'She was treated at home with folk medicine, in an attempt to control her fever and infection, rather than dealing with the injury itself'.⁵ The

³ Levin, p. 97.

⁴ Trudier Harris, 'Folklore in the Fiction of Alice Walker', p. 7.

⁵ Mary Donnelly, *Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Other Works* (Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish, 2009), p. 13.

parents used lily leaves as a traditional medicine to reduce the fever. One week after the incident, Walker lost the sight of her eye. This incident changed the character of Walker, from a girl who did not feel afraid of anything to a shy and introverted person. Walker was traumatised by this incident and her life was changed. She replaced her friends with the reading of books, and also writing, from an early age. Later her brother Bill paid for her treatment in Georgia. However, Walker did not regain her sight, but the doctor removed the white tissue from her eye, which made it look normal:

Almost immediately I become a different person from the girl who does not raise her head. Or so I think. Now that I've raised my head I win the boyfriend of my dreams. Now that I've raised my head I have plenty of friends. Now that I've raised my head classwork comes from my lips as faultlessly as Easter speeches did, and I leave high school as valedictorian, most popular student, and *queen*, hardly believing my luck.⁶

This incident had a significant impact on Walker's writing and way of thinking, which is discussed in different parts of this chapter.

⁶ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 390.

Section One: *The Color Purple* (1982)

Following a discussion of the significance African folklore has in Toni Morrison's fiction, this chapter analyses selected works of Alice Walker, namely *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992).

The Color Purple was published in 1982 and is the most well known novel by Alice Walker. This novel, about the lives of several black women in Georgia at the beginning of the twentieth century, was a popular success and made into a film directed by Steven Spielberg in 1987. Both novel and film received some criticism, from African-American men in particular, arguing that Walker had represented them in ways that reaffirmed racial stereotypes concerning the pathology of African-Americans.⁷ However, some critics argue that the focus on sexism is so great that it overrides Walker's concern with the main issue of racism in America. However, the reaction of black women was more positive, and many consider the novel a feminist masterpiece. The debate is testimony to the novel's impact on cultural and racial discourse in the United States. Christel Temple describes *The Color Purple* as a work concerned with 'African American post-enslavement generations' who 'capture the hopes, dreams, and promise that enslavement denied to their parents and generations that came before'.⁸

To briefly summarise the plot, it is the story of two sisters, Celie and Nettie, who experience much suffering. Celie is Walker's central protagonist and narrator, an uneducated 14-year-old black girl who lives in rural Georgia with her sister, mother, and stepfather Alphonso. It is an epistolary novel, much of it in the form of a letter addressed to God by

⁷ Stereotypes of pathology stereotype are discussed by Trudier Harris, who writes 'The novel [*The Color Purple*] gives validity to all the white racist's notions of pathology in black communities. For these spectator readers, black fathers and father-figures are viewed as being immoral, sexually unrestrained. Black males and females from units without the benefit of marriage, or they easily dissolve marriages in order to form less structured, more promiscuous relationships. Black men beat their wives—or attempt to—and neglect, ignore, or abuse their children. Trudier Harris, 'On the Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence', *Black American Literature Forum*, 18.4 (1984), 155–61 (p. 157).

⁸ Christel N. Temple, 'The Cosmology of Afrocentric Womanism', *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 36.1 (2012), 23–32 (p. 27).

Celie and in which she complains about her father's behaviour and tells God of how she is raped by her stepfather. A dramatic change takes place, discussed further in this section, whereby she moves from addressing her letters to God to writing them instead to her sister Nettie. Celie had given birth to two babies, but her stepfather takes them away and kills them, or at least this is what she believes. Celie's stepfather forces her to marry Albert, whom she used to call Mr._____. Nettie runs away and accompanies a missionary family, Samuel, Corrine, and their adopted children, Olivia and Adam, to Africa, where she encounters, for the first time in her life, African culture. Through the story that Samuel tells Nettie, about how he comes to adopt Olivia and Adam, she realises that she is herself their biological aunt. The novel ends with the sisters meeting again and the children of Celie, now known to be alive, join their mother after the death of her stepfather.

Walker blends reality with fiction and historical events are mediated through fictional tribes and characters. The realities in her fiction are closely connected to Walker's own life: 'I was able to write about things that seemed far removed from my own misery but, in fact, reflected that misery'.⁹ Therefore, understanding Walker's background, especially her experience as a child, her feminism and activism, allows for a better appreciation of the reality that her characters inhabit. In *The Color Purple* Walker uses an epistolary technique, through letters to God in which Celie is able to communicate the abuse her stepfather perpetrates against her in defiance of his warning not to tell anyone. However, her letters to God allow the reader insight into her subjugation:

I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you
couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought

⁹ Alice Walker, *The World Has Changed: Conversations with Alice Walker* (New York: New York Press, 2010), p. 125.

your writing was [...] and whether God will read letter or no, I know you will go on writing them.¹⁰

Walker's narrative technique effectively represents the loneliness of Celie, and yet her letters are not prayers but rather the written witness to her own suffering. Maritta Schwartz comments:

Celie feels guilty and ashamed, because of the alleged incest with her father. She is not allowed to tell anybody (certainly not her mother) but needs to articulate herself somehow to enable herself to cope with her situation. So Celie starts to write her letters to God.¹¹

Recent works by African-American novelists about slavery and identity are concentrated on a two-way approach when referring to violation; representation and rhetoric. They use the methods of the contemporary novelist to re-frame the slave narrative. Walker and Toni Morrison are considered among the pioneers of this type of narrative. Walker refers to race, in domestic settings, in most of her works, but also reveals her interest in African folklore and its significance for African-American literary representation. The use of folk herbs and medicine is not merely the 'rootwork' of Walker's fiction, but is very much related to her characters, their history and their actions, and how these articulate with their African legacy. These aspects of the African and African-American folk tradition are discussed in this section on *The Color Purple*, especially in relation to the yam and its healing powers.

In an interview for BookTV Walker, when asked about where the idea for *The Color Purple* came from, replies: 'It came partly because, I was nine and ten, I lived with my grandparents, and I loved them very much, and I wanted to, as adult, to spend more time with

¹⁰ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1983), p. 122.

¹¹ Maritta Schwartz, *Telling and Writing as Means of Liberation in The Color Purple* (München: GRIN Verlag GmbH, 2010), p. 3.

them and that kind of ambience of peace and experience'.¹² Therefore, her grandparents were one of the main sources of inspiration for her novel, amongst others emanating from Walker's personal experience and family history:

A lot of the things in *The Color Purple* happened to people in my family, before I was born, my grandmother was murdered by a man who wanted to be her lover. It really influenced my imagination... it is not autobiographical in the sense I knew hardly anybody. I listened to people telling stories about the family.¹³

Walker speaks of the purpose of her writing, and of the art of other African-American writers, as being the immortalising of memory. They strive to represent the past and the ancestral heritage that remains central to literary expressions of black identity. Walker writes: '*We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone*'.¹⁴

Walker's concerns include Africanism, feminism, lesbianism, the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, patriarchy and, importantly, the sustaining of African-American identity. This section discusses the way Walker addresses issues of African-American identity and the themes she employs. There are several aspects of identity negotiated by Walker, such as roles, dialect, vernacular, African tribal traditions, gender, traditional medicine, and religion. These are all examined here to trace Walker's evocations of folklore as a means to sustain African-American identity.

¹² 'The Color Purple | Video | C-SPAN.Org' <<https://www.c-span.org/video/?308743-2/color-purple>> [accessed 7 February 2017].

¹³ NJPAC, *The Color Purple: Alice Walker on Her Classic Novel, Spielberg's Film, and the Broadway Adaptation*, 2009 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uALf_v0zxgE> [accessed 7 February 2017].

¹⁴ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 92.

Female Identity and Gender

When I came home, I stood looking at a picture of Frederick Douglass I have on my wall. And I asked myself: Where is your picture of Harriet Tubman, the General? Where is your drawing of Sojourner Truth? And I thought that if black women would only start asking questions like that, they'd soon - all of them - have to begin reclaiming their mothers and grandmothers - and what an enrichment that would be!¹⁵

The Color Purple is the story of an ugly, miserable girl, Celie, who transforms herself, as in the European fairy tale of the ugly duckling, becoming a swan and living happily ever after. African-American women's folk art contains the expressions of healing powers that enable stunning transformation, expressions often employed by writers dealing with issues of racial and gender identity. Eva Boesenberg writes of how 'Black oral verbal art emblemizes African American history and African/African American relations'.¹⁶

Walker calls herself 'a rather ardent feminist' and she considers African-American women the 'most fascinating creations in the world'.¹⁷ She writes about black women as dually oppressed, the victims of both racism and sexism. Walker describes African-American women as 'oppressed almost beyond recognition – oppressed by everyone'.¹⁸

Walker's treatment of gender differs to that of Morrison. Walker reveals multiple layers of oppression which black women suffer and implies that there is a relationship between experience and suffering in both Africa and America. This is different from Morrison's method as Morrison concentrates on an individual experience or the struggle between the two cultures, as discussed earlier. Walker depicts the lives of African women to clarify for her

¹⁵ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 275.

¹⁶ Eva Boesenberg, *Gender - Voice - Vernacular: The Formation of Female Subjectivity in Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1999), p. 249.

¹⁷ Walker, *The World Has Changed*, p. 40.

¹⁸ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 149.

readers the failure of societies they might imagine to be uncorrupted in contrast to American society. Readers are able to compare the similarities between their present life and the culture that many of them consider to be barbaric.¹⁹

As Nettie manages to escape to Africa, Celie, left in America, suffers much more than she does. Celie knew no other man before Pa, the stepfather who abuses her and lies to her mother. She blames him for the death of her mother and Celie describes her state by saying,

He beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got somethin in my eye but I didn't wink. I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them. Maybe cause my mama cuss me you think I kept mad at her. But I ain't. I felt sorry for mama.

Trying to believe his story kilt her.²⁰

This reveals how the legacy of slavery persists in denying women the freedom to choose who to live with. Walker evokes the restrictions under slavery in other ways; through the taking away of children, the erasure of identity, and physical and psychological abuse. Albert, Celie's husband insults her in the Georgian vernacular, saying 'you black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, You ain't nothin' at all', and yet she stands up to him and confronts her fears.²¹ Celie resists the social restrictions on her freedom and finds inspiration in tradition and the glory of African civilisation, which give her belief in her capacity to create a positive future.

Celie faces several issues after leaving her stepfather's house to live with her husband. Raped and abused, she withdraws into isolation, not only from her husband but also from any sense of being a human being with feelings: 'It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree'.²² Trees have a significant representation in world folklore,

¹⁹ Levin, p. 101.

²⁰ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 15.

²¹ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 178.

²² Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 30.

and in African folklore especially, as signifying the link between the glorious heritage of the past and the present. They possess the power of transformation, as death becomes the beginning of new life. In most African mythologies, as we have seen in the analysis of *Beloved*, trees represent the link between the dead and the living, strength and memory. The Kongo elders plant trees on their people's graves, an evocation of the closeness of life and death. The same tradition is followed by the Olinka, Walker's fictional tribe; 'They wrapped the body in barkcloth and buried it under a big tree in the forest' to maintain the connection between ancestors and the living.²³

Despite her physical and psychological oppression, Celie endures and asserts her identity with confidence. Celie and Sofia work together to break the social exchange system of men, under which women are considered as mere goods. What maintains women in such a condition of weakness is their division, to which the solution is unity. From the time Celie lives with her stepfather, who sells her children and forces her into marriage, she realises that salvation is to be found in resisting her oppressors and strengthening her identity and independence.

Walker, as she writes in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, found inspiration in writings about African-American female identity. Reading about their double discrimination, as being black and female, and how it is articulated in society through personal experience, she reflects upon her own father's behaviour. Walker writes about how she could not understand and forgive her father until she became a student of women's liberation ideology:

I needed an ideology that would define his behaviour in context. The black movement had given me an ideology that helped explain his colorism [...] feminism helped explain his sexism. I was relieved to know his sexist

²³ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 153.

behaviour was not something uniquely his own, but, rather an imitation of the behaviour of the society around us.²⁴

Being an activist, then, shaped Walker's way of thinking on the issues faced by African Americans, especially the significant role to be played by women working collectively within and beyond the United States.

We see this through the character of Celie, whose suffering becomes the catalyst for spiritual redemption. Celie manages to be self-reliant and runs her own business. The opportunity is there for African-American and African women, but they must take positive action in resisting the double oppressions of racism and sexism. Lena Ampadu notes how 'African women seem to embrace Walker's womanist tradition and have created fictional characters reflecting this tradition'.²⁵ This aspect of her influence is broadly reflected in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, in which she writes about the experience of travelling to Africa and meeting the people there.

Walker's intention is to provide inspiration to her people in general, and to African-American women in particular. She presents identity formation through the character of Celie by exposing the restrictions on her, whether they originate in religion, gender, or the wider society:

Celie's triumph is a personal one which, if it is to be a symbol for others, can only be followed in terms of one's personal search for identity, an identity that is not necessarily purple, or rooted in the needlework business, or even lesbian. One is likely to support the notion of the heroine's personal construction of her identity.²⁶

²⁴ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 330.

²⁵ Lena Ampadu, 'Black Women Writers as Dynamic Agents of Change: Empowering Women from Africa to America', in *Cultivating Visionary Leadership by Learning for Global Success: Beyond the Language and Literature Classroom*, ed. by Don Pardlow and Mary Alice Trent (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p. 177.

²⁶ Ikenna Dieke, *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 19.

Africa, Tradition and Culture

Walker discusses several aspects of black life in her work. For instance, in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, she writes about issues relating to African people and their lives, referring to them as a community, to their unity, in which men and women are equally important. Although some critics describe her as a separatist, she shows in this book that this is not the case as she discusses issues in the communities of Africa in a fair and unbiased way. The main concerns of the book are women, their lives, and their practices.²⁷

Colours have a significant representation in African tradition. For example, the colour purple, in Ashanti culture, is associated with Mother Earth and is often used in their healing ceremonies and rituals.²⁸ For Egyptians, purple symbolises virtue and faith and is again worn during spiritual ceremonies. In other parts of Africa it represents royalty and prosperity and is worn by royal families and others of high status. The significance of the colour purple is expressed by Celie, who says, 'I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it'.²⁹ We have here a point of transnational connection between Africans and African-Americans.

Although we have seen how some of the knowledge about medication and rituals is partly a reflection of Walker's personal experience, other information proves to be purely fictive. Walker includes some elements in her novel, such as African tribes, names, places, which are purely fictive: 'All of the Africas are fictive representations inflected by Walker's complicated, contradictory, and controversial views of the continent'.³⁰ However, not all the aspects of the Olinka, the African tribe in the novel, are fictional. Walker tends to be realistic in presenting African culture and resists its enhancement by incorporating, for example, the

²⁷ Nako, p. 81.

²⁸ Elisha P Renne, Babatunde Agbaje-Williams, and Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba, *Yoruba Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba* (Ibadan, Nigeria: BookBuilders, 2005), p. 42.

²⁹ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 178.

³⁰ Levin, p. 100.

issue of genital mutilation. Her writing declares, through the events she describes, that African culture is as attractive as American culture and it might, equally, be just as cruel and traumatic. Morrison, by contrast, represents African culture as inspiring and positive in most of its aspects. For instance, as we have seen, in the spiritual guidance of Baby Suggs and the effect of rituals as a source of communality.

The Olinka Tribe

Walker, when asked about her feelings on how, considering all the books that she had already published, she was still mostly known for *The Color Purple* replies:

I credit my ancestors in many ways with the success of this book, because I did it out of the love for them [...] I feel they think, well, she took really good care of us in this book [...] and I think they want to take care of me by being this signal to other people that here is someone who is writing.³¹

Walker uses a fictional tribe of Africa, which she calls the Olinka. Nettie, accompanying the missionaries, travels to Monrovia, Liberia, located on the African West coast. Walker gives few indications about the exact destination of the missionaries' journey to the Olinka, only general directions so that no one would be able to identify their real location:

Once in the boat we were entertained by the songs of our boatmen as they tried to outpaddle each other to the shore. They paid very little attention to us or our cargo. When we reached the shore, they didn't bother to help us alight from the boat and actually set some of our supplies right down in the water.³²

Walker claims that the Olinka is a purely a fictional African tribe. She states in an explanation of her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* that 'I do not know from what part of Africa my African ancestors came, and so I claimed the continent. I suppose I have created

³¹ 'The Color Purple | Video | C-SPAN.Org'.

³² Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. `39.

Olinka as my village and the Olinkas as one of my ancient, ancestral tribal people'.³³ There are though resemblances between Walker's Olinka and the Igbo of Nigeria, which we will see later when discussing African mythology of the roofleaf. Walker reveals on more than one occasion that the stories of her grandmother and family profoundly influence her writing. We can, therefore, assume that some of the traditions and the customs of the Olinka are based on or derived from the stories of her own family. The questions to be considered here are: What are the links between Olinka society and American society? What are the differences? What is the significance of the Olinka for Walker's work? How do these customs affect the character of Nettie and how do her letters change the character of Celie?

Apart from the female dilemma in American culture, that of being black *and* female, the cross-cultural struggle that takes place in this novel occurs not only in America, but in Africa too. This is Walker's focus in her description of Nettie's life in Africa. For instance, although Tashi, Adam's beloved, is African, she also feels she must confront her tribe's rules and practices, as Walker complicates representations of Africa. The Olinka are disturbed by the intrusion of foreigners into their land and lives, intrusion that coincides with and complicates Tashi's experience of the ritual of genital mutilation.

Other traditional cultural practices are described in Nettie's letters to Celie, such as games, stories, and the funeral rites of the Olinka. The funeral involves the African tradition of face colouring, the weeping role of female members of the tribe, and the significance of the grave's location, beneath a tree in the jungle, as representative of the connection between life and death: 'It was my first Olinka funeral. The women paint their faces white and wear white shroud like garments and cry in a high keening voice'.³⁴

Nettie writes to Celie describing the stories of the Olinka and reveals the significance of African folklore for African-Americans:

³³ Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1997), p. 266.

³⁴ Walker, *The Color Purple*, pp. 152–53.

[S]ometimes Tashi comes over and tells stories that are popular among the Olinka children. I am encouraging her and Olivia to write them down in Olinka and English. It will be good practice for them. Olivia feels that, compared to Tashi, she has no good stories to tell. One day she started in on an “Uncle Remus” tale only to discover Tashi has the original version of it! Her little face just fell. But then we got into a discussion of how Tashi’s people’s stories got to America, which fascinated Tashi. She cried when Olivia told how her grandmother had been treated as a slave.³⁵

This is indicative of Walker’s intention to highlight the link between the two cultures and emphasise how oral histories of African-Americans are often derived from their ancestors’ stories, a heritage to be sustained by re-telling.

The Rituals of Scarification

The Olinka have a tradition of the scarification of girls after the age of eleven. Tashi, educated by the missionaries, refuses to have her face scarred. However, when Tashi sees her tribe threatened by white colonisers, she insists on having her face scarred and going through the initiation of genital mutilation as acts of resistance that preserve tradition and identity:

It is a way the Olinka can show they still have their own ways, said Olivia, even though the white man has taken everything else. Tashi didn’t want to do it, but to make her people feel better, she’s resigned. She’s going to have the female initiation ceremony too.³⁶

Tashi is happy the ceremony does not take place in Europe or America, but in her village among her people, which makes it even more valuable to her.³⁷ Adam is angry that she submits to the ritual and she hides from him once it is over. Adam comes to regret his reaction

³⁵ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 152.

³⁶ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 211.

³⁷ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 212.

and he too has his face scarred: 'The next day, our boy came to us with scars identical to Tashi's on his cheeks. And they are so happy. So happy, Celie. Tashi and Adam Omatangu'.³⁸ Adam adopts this African name after his marriage, which has a dual significance; firstly, it is the return to his original identity, and secondly, 'Omatangu', according to African belief, is the name of the first man created on earth. Therefore, both names, Adam and Omatangu, refer to the first man God created: 'It (Omatangu) mean a un-naked man somewhere near the first one God made that knowed what he was'.³⁹ Adam is the first man created according to the Abrahamic religions, Omatangu the first created according to most African religions. By taking on his African name he is representative of an African-American whose name signifies both African religion and Christianity.

The Yam

Yam is a Dioscorea species and cultivated in several parts of the world including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania.⁴⁰ Traditionally the yam has sacred status, as it is believed that the gods sent it to the African people to end their starvation. In Africa the yam had been used to cure diseases, in addition to its nutritional purpose, and this tradition was transported to the United States with African slaves.⁴¹ The yam is mentioned in *The Color Purple* in one of Celie's letters to her sister in which she describes the illness of Henrietta, the daughter of Harpo and Sofia. Celie applies the traditional Olinka treatment in the belief it will help cure Henrietta: 'Us do what you say the peoples do in Africa. Us feed her yams every single

³⁸ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 244.

³⁹ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 241.

⁴⁰ Aliou Diop, 'Storage and Processing of Roots and Tubers in the Tropics', *FAO*, 1998 <<http://www.fao.org/3/x5415e/x5415e01.htm>> [accessed 26 July 2019].

⁴¹ Kalah Vance, 'Culture, Food, and Racism: The Effects on African American Health' (The University of Tennessee, 2018), p. 16 <shorturl.at/abdpP>.

day'.⁴² Everyone offers different dishes and yam recipes, an echo of Morrison's *Beloved* in which the community come to the aid of Sethe.

To understand the reason behind such a firm belief, it is likely that the Olinka seem not to be entirely fictional, and there is a model upon which Walker based her story. The link between the real and the fictional tribe is the yam. In *Things Fall Apart* (1958) Chinua Achebe gives an account of what the yam represents to the Igbo, or Ibo, and which echoes with Walker's description of Olinka mythology of the roofleaf: 'before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani the owner of all land. It is the law of our fathers. I also kill a cock at the shrine of Ifejiku, the god of yams'.⁴³ Achebe also evokes how valuable the yam is, in social and economic terms, to the Igbo people, rich and poor alike. Yam is also a traditional crop for the Olinka, which Nettie advises Celie to use as a cure for Henrietta from what seems to be sickle-cell anaemia. The folkloric story behind the importance of yams starts with a revelation by Chukwu, Igbo's most powerful spirit, to the divine King of Nriland, Eze Nri. The myth begins when Eri and Namaku, the parents of Nri, are sent down by Chukwu. When they go to the Igbo land it is barren. Eri complains to Chukwu and Chukwu supplies them with the Azu Igwe, fish from heaven. After the death of Eri, the food supplies cease. Nri complains to Chukwu, who is willing to help, but on the condition that Nri must kill and bury his eldest son and daughter. When Nri refuses Chukwu promises to send Dioka to carve scarification marks on the foreheads of his children. After the arrival of Dioka, Nri kills his children and buries them in separate graves. Twelve days later shoots appear from the graves and when Nri opens them he finds yam in his son's grave, hence its name, 'the son of Nri'. He finds cocoyam, 'the daughter of Nri', in the grave of his daughter.⁴⁴ The yam, then, has profound sacred significance for the people of the Igbo. It is

⁴² Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 222.

⁴³ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 5.

⁴⁴ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, 'The Sacred Festival of Iri Ji Ohuru in Igboland, Nigeria', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16.2 (2007), 244–60 (p. 250).

considered a divine crop and it is the responsibility of the deity spirit, Ahianjoku the Yam-spirit, to sustain it. It is a taboo to steal yam in the entire Igboland and digging up planted yam is considered as an abomination against the Yam-spirit and Ala the Earth Goddess. Yam is glorified because it is considered to have saved the Igbo from starvation as their protector.⁴⁵

The missionaries considered the yam festival, Iri Ji festival, as incompatible with the doctrines of Christianity. They established western schools, so-called ‘bush schools’, intent on controlling the population through the educational system and yet, instead of destroying their culture education politicised farmers. For instance, ‘Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Mbonu Ojike, Mazi Alvan Ikoku and Dr Michael Okpara emerged from the “bush schools” to join hands with other notable Nigerian freedom fighters [...] the missionaries least expected this occurrence’.⁴⁶

The missionaries established villages around churches and people were forbidden from mixing with their non-Christian relatives to encourage the assimilation of Christian European values that would undermine traditional tribal practices. Again, this strategy failed as ‘these true “sons of the soil” constantly sneaked out into the traditional villages to participate clandestinely in the local ceremonies’.⁴⁷

Most Igbo traditions are still practised every year, not only in Africa but also in the United States. A festival takes place annually in Houston, Texas, which has an Igbo population of more than half a million. It is significant that it is not only the Igbo who practice this festival and its rituals, but is shared by African-Americans of varying African descent.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Manus, p. 252.

⁴⁶ Manus, p. 256.

⁴⁷ Manus, p. 57.

⁴⁸ Manus, p. 257.

The African Roofleaf

Celie stops writing to God, believing eventually that God is not listening to her: 'don't write to God no more'.⁴⁹ Instead, she begins sending letters to her sister, who tells her of how the roofleaf is worshipped by the Olinka people. The Olinka perform a welcoming ceremony for the missionaries, the most significant aspect of which concerns the roofleaf, and Nettie is curious to know about its importance to the tribe.

The Olinka, according to Nettie's letters, believe they have always lived in the exact same place, which has proved prosperous for them. They plant several crops, such as cassava, yam, cotton, and millet but a chief takes over the land where the roofleaf grows and turns it over to crops that profit him. A rainy season destroys the roofs of the houses, and when the men harvest the roofleaf they find that only a dozen remain and have to wait five years before it grows again. Many people die due to coldness and disease and the Olinka pray to their gods for the season to change. When the leaf returns they can re-cover their houses and, from this point on, 'the roofleaf become the thing they worship'.⁵⁰

The Olinka consider as a god that which saves them from death and disease, just as the Igbo consider the yam as their saviour from starvation. Another echo is the schools and new villages built by missionaries for the suppression of 'illogical' or 'irrational' belief systems. Walker represents the failure of such strategies to undermine traditional culture with Tashi, the Olinka girl, despite travelling to the United States with her husband Adam, refusing to reject African culture. Samuel, describing his mission to Africa, says:

It all seems so improbable, he said. Here I am, an aging man whose dreams of helping people have been just that, dreams. How Corrine and I as children would have laughed at ourselves. TWENTY YEARS A FOOL OF THE WEST, OR MOUTH AND ROOFLEAF DISEASE: A TREATISE ON

⁴⁹ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 175.

⁵⁰ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 142.

FUTILITY IN THE TROPICS. Etc. Etc. We failed so utterly, he said. We became as comical as Althea and Theodosia. I think her awareness of this fueled Corrine's sickness. She was far more intuitive than I. Her gift for understanding people much greater. She used to say the Olinka resented us, but I wouldn't see it. But they do, you know.

No, I said, it isn't resentment, exactly. It really is indifference. Sometimes I feel our position is like that of flies on an elephant's hide.⁵¹

The conversation between Adam and Samuel shows two important aspects of the novel. The first is that Samuel sees that he has been a fool, wasting the time he has spent with the Olinka, now realising how they are more attached to their beliefs and customs than he thought. This shows the love and respect of the Olinka people for their identity and land. The second aspect relates to Adam, showing his interest in the Olinka and the feeling of belonging he has while amongst them.

America, Tradition and Culture

The representation of African and African-American folklore in *The Color Purple* finds expression in Walker's use of the Dozens, jokes, the blues, traditional foods, quilting, and proverbs.⁵² These forms not only represent Southern black culture but also promote personal development and interpersonal relations.

Walker adopts a method of writing, the synchronous approach, for her examination of the changes that happen to her characters as they move from rural African values to those of the United States.⁵³ She applies the same examination to characters that move to Africa but

⁵¹ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 209.

⁵² A traditional game of African Americans, rooted in slavery. See: Gerald D. Jaynes, *Encyclopedia of African American Society* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 269.

⁵³ The synchronous approach means placing characters in a different society and in a different environment and then examining their reaction and adaptation in these new surroundings.

does not distinguish between the rural and urban areas of Africa where there are significant cultural differences. For instance, the practice of female genital mutilation has been abandoned in major African cities.⁵⁴

Walker considers the heritage of ancestors as sustaining for African-Americans. In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, she describes how Dr Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement:

[G]ave us back our heritage. He gave us back our homeland; the bones and dust of our ancestors, who may now sleep within our caring and our hearing. He gave us the blueness of the Georgia sky in autumn as in summer; the colors of the Southern winter as well as glimpses of the green of vacation-time spring. Those of our relatives we used to invite for a visit we now can ask to stay... He gave us full-time use of our own woods, and restored our memories to those of us who were forced to run away, as realities we might each day enjoy and leave for our children. He gave us continuity of place, without which community is ephemeral. He gave us home.⁵⁵

King gave African Americans a spiritual, collective sense of home in the American community. King encouraged the nurturing of tradition and culture and promoted African-American identity through the creation and recreation of their past which was to be reflected in their present. King did not say that African-Americans should emulate the white middle class of the United States, but argued they should be able to choose their own way of life, ideas that gave Walker the motivation to write about African-Americans in general, and women in particular. One of the main concerns of *The Color Purple* is to make women aware that social problems are not confined to particular individuals but are shared by other women

⁵⁴ Levin, p. 98.

⁵⁵ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 145.

and that their alleviation requires the raising of a collective consciousness.⁵⁶ Today, in an increasingly global economy, many cultures coexist, forming new mixed and hybrid communities within other cultures, largely as a consequence of the African diaspora. The dance steps and musical rhythms of Africans were carried with them to be performed by African Americans: ‘A dance step performed on a street in Lagos or Dakar may resemble one in Los Angeles or the Bronx’.⁵⁷ There are many forms of African cultural practice that help sustain the identity of African descendants such as rap, jazz, and much of what is considered American is actually rooted in African folklore and culture.

Walker presents African cultural traditions such as folk tales, vernacular expression, and the blues, all of which belong to the oral tradition. Other practices include folk customs and beliefs, such as the significance of the roofleaf, scarification rituals, and mythical animals. We also have the hut and quilt, which may generally be categorised as folk expressions that are important for Walker’s purpose in *The Color Purple*.

Quilting

A knowledge of piecing, the technique of assembling fragments into an intricate design, can provide the contexts in which we can interpret and understand the form, meanings, and narrative traditions of American women’s writing.⁵⁸

The cultural practice of quilting is expressive of the linking and building of relationships, either amongst people or between nations. It is also considered a memory aid in which many pieces from different personal histories are joined in one artistic piece. In other words, it

⁵⁶ Monica Udoette and S. Udoette, ‘Female Consciousness in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*’, *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 2.5 (2014), 74–80 (p. 78).

⁵⁷ Levin, p. 180.

⁵⁸ Nancy K. Miller, *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 227.

functions as collective memory, a form of history for those without written words. In her short story, 'Everyday Use', a character describes a quilted piece:

One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain.

In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jerrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.⁵⁹

In this short story Walker evokes the importance of quilting for her characters, showing what this simple work means to them and their family, 'some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her.'⁶⁰ Afraid that this quilt might not be fully appreciated by Maggie who may 'put them to everyday use',⁶¹ the quilt nevertheless becomes the material document of family, communal memory, and national history.

Quilting also plays a significant role in *The Color Purple* in Sofia's confrontation with Celie, one so intense that the curtains are torn apart. Celie repents, asks for forgiveness and the women bond by making a quilt of the torn fabric, an act of female friendship and mutual support. Quilting, importantly, also allows Celie agency for the first time. The first pattern she makes is called the 'Sister's Choice', a traditional pattern documented in a classic survey of quilt patterns by Hall and Kretsinger, *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America* 1935. This moment, for Celie, is the first step on the way to empowerment and is the result of having a strong connection with another woman.

Walker uses the quilt in *The Color Purple* as a metaphor for the connection between the past and the present. As we have seen, quilting is considered as a way to document the past, and that every part of a quilt represents a specific time and a relevant memory. The

⁵⁹ Alice Walker, *Everyday Use* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 32.

⁶⁰ Walker, *Everyday Use*, p. 33.

⁶¹ Walker, *Everyday Use*, p. 33.

author herself is a quilter and she incorporates both quilting and writing in her daily routine. She writes about these activities in her essay 'Writing *The Color Purple*': 'Then I sold a book ...And so, I bought some beautiful blue-and-red-and-purple fabric, [...] and a quilt pattern my mama swore was easy, and I headed for the hills'.⁶² The texture of the novel and the separate, yet connected, stories of its characters clearly echo the variety of colour of quilted fabric,.

African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)

AAVE is also known as Black English Vernacular among sociolinguists, while outside academia it is known as Ebonics.⁶³ The origin of this variation of English is a controversial matter among scholars. Some historians, such as Dalby (1972) and Dunn (1976), argue it exists due to the contact between speakers of West African languages and other vernacular English varieties, 'West Africans learnt English on plantations in the southern Coastal States'.⁶⁴ Some scholars suggest that this led to a form of pidgin that later developed through the process of creolization. This assumption about the true origin of AAVE may be transformed into a tangible fact if we make a comparison between some words from African languages and compare them to AAVE. It warrants consideration because there are some vocabularies in AAVE that are not evident in any other variety of English. On the other hand, we can find some words used in English that have African origins, such as 'okra' from the Akan and banana of the Mandingo. In addition, it has been proved that AAVE is structurally related to some languages of the West African countries. This dialect can be traced back to the period when Europeans tried to impose their languages on Africans, a notion John R. Rickford discusses in detail. Although some research suggests it developed during the slave trade and the West's colonisation of Africa, others consider its origin to be later. The justification for this argument is that black slaves tried to create their

⁶² Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 358.

⁶³ Arnett and Arnett, I, p. xxi.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

own identity in the new land and, in mixing with ex-slaves from different parts of Africa that themselves spoke different languages, the dialect is the result of the mixture of multiple tribal languages with English. Most linguists claim that African-American dialect originated in Creole language, which developed as a result of contact between West Coast Africans and European traders. Another divergence in the language took place in the United States, where African-Americans suffered segregation from other members of the tribe who spoke their language, a form of oppression that was to lead to the creation of a dialect necessary for communication.⁶⁵

African-American oral culture is rich and distinctive. Its uniqueness does not come from content only, but also originates from structure and sound. The structure of the dialect is reflected in *The Color Purple* and Walker depicts speech patterns convincingly.

Celie receives a rudimentary education school and should differentiate between written and spoken English, yet she writes in the same vernacular in which she speaks. This may indicate that Celie is simply conscious of her identity and not ignorant of the rules of formal written expression. Of her teacher she says, ‘she say long as she been a teacher she never knew nobody want to learn bad as Nettie and me’.⁶⁶ To support this claim we can refer to how she is corrected by Darlene, who asks her to speak in Standard English, and yet Celie refuses to change. Celie writes to Nettie about this matter saying ‘Darlene trying to teach me how to talk. She say US not so hot. A dead country give-away. You say US where most folks say WE, she say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white

⁶⁵ ‘Linguists supporting the Anglicist view have considered data from speakers in speech communities in Nova Scotia and Samaná (Dominican Republic), areas settled by African Americans during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Settlers in these areas are argued to be good data sources because they may use a variety of English that is very close to the variety used by early Africans in America.’ Lisa J. Green, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 9.

⁶⁶ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 20.

folks be amuse’.⁶⁷ Celie believes that the way she talks is peculiar to her and that she would be a fool to change; ‘what I care? I ast. I’m happy’.⁶⁸

There are linguists who do not agree that AAVE has its origins in Creole expression. John McWhorter argues: ‘There certainly are examples, in some parts of the world, of African languages that have kept their African syntax and simply replaced the words of the dictionary by English words (they are known as creole languages). And AAVE just is not like that’.⁶⁹

English vernacular represents African-American identity and was generally spoken by poor and uneducated people and there was a ‘the tendency to look down on Black English is a product of the environment they live in’.⁷⁰ Many young African Americans have, especially after the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, reclaimed it as part of their hard won heritage.

The Blues

The blues evolved around the end of the nineteenth century as the musical and vernacular expression of former African slaves in the southern states and was transferred to the north by migration. The Blues is a form of protest for African Americans and finds its expression in the character of Shug Avery, a blues singer, in *The Color Purple*. She lives free of society’s restrictions, working in nightclubs and having relationships with married men. Although this type of singing usually reflects a mood of depression emerging from the self-expression of the singer living within the black community, it is also the source of consolation:

When performed for nonmembers of the ethnic group or for those with little or no intimacy with the music, it is generally considered mere entertainment; but

⁶⁷ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 193.

⁶⁸ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 193.

⁶⁹ Rebecca S. Wheeler, *The Workings of Language: From Prescriptions to Perspectives* (Westport Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), p. 45.

⁷⁰ Yonghua, p. 31.

when performed among black Americans, especially members of the working class, it is a social ritual: a ceremonial, residual oral form whose recurring performance reinforces a sense of in life and preserves the shared wisdom of the group. [...] The blues and gospels are secular and sacred lyrical expressions of hard times and possibility of overcoming personal misery through toughness of spirit.⁷¹

The blues still has significant influence for most contemporary African-American music, although it may be argued that its peak was reached during the Harlem Renaissance.

Hutchinson comments 'The Blues and Jazz took off as popular musical forms in the wake of the war and, aided by the new recording industry, appealed across lines of class, race, region, and nation'.⁷² Jazz uses the same traditional melodies and structures as a framework and, importantly, '[s]ome black novelists recognized the literary potential of these residually oral folk forms as an extension of their social reality'.⁷³

Shug's musical expression helps Celie and Mary Agnes to break through their oppression and achieve a position of importance in society. Mary Agnes's transformation under the influence of Shug means she can stand against those who once degraded her. When Harpo, her husband, calls her Squeak she corrects him, giving her proper name, 'Mary Agnes'. When he asks her what difference there is between his name for her and her given name, she replies 'When I was Mary Agnes I could sing in public'.⁷⁴ She thereby asserts her right to name herself and express herself through singing. Musical expression alleviates pain and becomes an articulation of agency and female empowerment.

⁷¹ Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, p. 26.

⁷² George Hutchinson, *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 7.

⁷³ Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 183.

Traditions, African and African-American

I think Africans are very much like white people back home, in that they think they are the center of the universe and that everything that is done is done for them. The Olinka definitely hold this view.⁷⁵

Sustaining tradition is one of the most important duties of any group that considers their history as central to their identity. For instance, Tashi risks her life for the sake of saving what has been left from her tribal culture. Her father refuses to take the medicine provided by the missionaries and consequently dies of Malaria. Tashi participates in her tribe's customs, such as facial scarification and the custom of genital mutilation. It is not important how traumatic and painful these traditions can be. Olivia, on the other hand, represents a new understanding of cultural tradition by resisting them and thereby reflects Walker's own standpoint on such practices. African-Americans face a paradox here, in wishing to respect their ancestral heritage but only those practices they consider acceptable.

The pressure on Tashi to follow her tribe's traditional practices comes not only from men but from women too. Her mother, frightened of the elders, risks her daughter's fate for the sake of following ancestral ritual and rites. Although this can be considered as an accurate representation of the situation that African women are experiencing, this is not the case with Morrison in her novels. One of the points where Walker differs from Morrison is that Walker believes her representation of African women is accurate in that they have as many difficulties, under patriarchy, as black women in America. Morrison, however, emphasises how many African-American women have found inspiration and sustenance in African traditional societies. In their different ways, though, both authors serve the cause of sustaining meaningful identities for their female characters.

⁷⁵ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 155.

Genital Mutilation

Walker conducted an in-depth study of the ritual of genital mutilation and found that it is not exclusively an African ritual, but rather has universality among different nations and parts of the world. The United States is not an exception, as Walker introduced a white American woman whose mother forced her into a procedure of genital mutilation as a child.⁷⁶ We shall look further into this issue later in this chapter as it plays an important part in the sequence of events of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.

Identity and Belonging

W.E.B. Du Bois argued in *The Souls of Black Folk* that African descendants' spiritual consciousness emerges from within their souls. The argument Du Bois makes can be traced in *The Color Purple*, represented by a letter from Nettie to Celie describing her feeling when she first reaches Africa:

Did I mention my first sight of the African coast? Something struck in me, in my soul, Celie, like a large bell, and I just vibrated. Corrine and Samuel felt the same. And we kneeled down right on deck and gave thanks to God for letting us see the land for which our mothers and fathers cried - and lived and died - to see again.⁷⁷

Walker reminds us of the African heritage of black Americans when Nettie describes the glory of Africa in her message to Celie:

Did you know there were great cities in Africa, greater than Milledgeville or even Atlanta, thousands of years ago? That the Egyptians who built the

⁷⁶ Levin, p. 106.

⁷⁷ Walker, *The Color Purple*, pp. 132–33.

pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa?

That the Ethiopia we read about in the Bible meant all of Africa?⁷⁸

Nettie works as a missionary in Africa, and being black allows her to become grounded in Afrocentric thought and relay to her sister her pride in having a psychological connection to her roots.

Religion and Faith

As a college student I came to reject the Christianity of my parents, and it took me years to realize that though they had been force-fed a white man's palliative, in the form of religion, they had made it into something at once simple and noble. True even today, they can never successfully picture a God who is not white, and that is a major cruelty, but their lives testify to a greater comprehension of the teaching of Jesus than the lives of the people who sincerely believe a God *must* have a color and that there can be such a phenomenon as a "white" church.⁷⁹

Religion has a prominent position in many cultures around the world, influencing people's thinking and structuring their way of life. Therefore, research into folklore cannot ignore the importance of religion in the lives of both Africans and African-Americans. Religious belief is profoundly significant for Walker's novel which begins with Celie's letters to God: 'You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy'.⁸⁰ Walker discusses the religious dimension of *The Color Purple* in an interview, 'It is a theological book, *The Color Purple*, it is about who is god?'⁸¹ Further into the novel we see how Celie's faith begins to crumble.

⁷⁸ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 123.

⁷⁹ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, pp. 17–18.

⁸⁰ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 11.

⁸¹ 'The Color Purple | Video | C-SPAN.Org'.

She believes her father is godlike as he has power over her, though she does not think that he is God:

‘Finally she ast where it is?

I say God took it.

He took it. He took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods. Kill this one too, if he can’.⁸²

This belief is later altered when Nettie’s letters reach Celie, as the former explains the Olinka’s rituals and gods, and again reflective of Walker’s personal stance. Walker has spoken in interviews of how she is more interested in nature than any god, or at least not the Christian God, ‘And for me god can never be the traditional Christian God, it just doesn’t work even though I was raised as a Methodist in a Christian church’.⁸³ This change from a belief in God to belief in nature is also found in the novel; Celie writes to Nettie, ‘I don’t write to God no more, I write to you [...] the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown’.⁸⁴ Celie sees God as a man no different to other men who mistreat her and becomes angry with a God who ignores her letters.

Celie has though, at least up to this point, great faith in religion and God and explains to Sofia how she is afraid of God, and that she does not want to go to hell for killing Albert, ‘This life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways.’⁸⁵ Religion plays a double role in Celie’s life; it prevents her from acting firmly to defend herself and is also the source of self-respect. This is one of the reasons Nettie and Celie change their understanding of God, an ideological shift that Nettie undergoes when she reaches Africa and the Olinka. She finds the Olinka worshipping the roofleaf as a god offering shelter, a transformative moment in her

⁸² Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 12.

⁸³ ‘The Color Purple | Video | C-SPAN.Org’.

⁸⁴ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 175.

⁸⁵ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 47.

understanding of the concept of the divine. Nettie herself does not believe that the roofleaf is a god, but it is godlike, ‘We know a roofleaf is not Jesus Christ, but in its own humble way, is it not God?’⁸⁶ She finds that what nature provides to help people can be considered a god to them. Walker refers to this perspective of nature-worshipping when describing how her parents would go to church while she remained at home, looking at the sky, contemplating the beauty of clouds and the rain they bring, ‘I found my church in nature ... The beauty of the earth is divine, I mean we live in heaven already, so that is partly what I am exploring in *The Color Purple*’.⁸⁷

The missionaries attempted to impose the Christian faith on the indigenous societies of Africa. They also tried, over a long period, and somewhat succeeded, in changing African beliefs and culture. The missionaries were mainly of European descent and many were Americans, such as the missionaries in *The Color Purple*, and generally saw little of value in African culture. Levin states that ‘The major difference between the picture of Christianity in the original slave narratives and in the contemporary works I have analyzed is that the former address white Christians, whereas the latter question Christianity among African Americans as well’.⁸⁸

In *The Color Purple* religious belief plays a central role, not only as expressed by Celie’s letters but also in the life of the priest’s daughter, who becomes a singer of dubious morality, and in the worship of the natural world. We also have the missionaries to Africa among the Olinka tribe and their introduction of Christianity and Western culture.⁸⁹ Alyson Buckman refers to this in relation to Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*: ‘Here we have two African-Americans who have accepted a religion, foreign to their ancestry, that was once used as a justification for slavery; in turn, they are asking Africans to replace their beliefs

⁸⁶ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 142.

⁸⁷ ‘The Color Purple | Video | C-SPAN.Org’.

⁸⁸ Levin, p. 117.

⁸⁹ Levin, p. 99.

with this same religion'.⁹⁰ Olinka life includes the interaction of culture and religion which influences some of the tribe members to adopt Christianity as a religion. For instance, the role of the leader of their tribe is a holy one and his orders must be followed, including that of maintaining the ritual of female genital mutilation. Yet, we see that even those who have abandoned the religion of their ancestors still practice some traditions: 'Our Leader, our Jesus Christ, said we must keep all our old ways and that no Olinka man—in this echoed the great liberator Kenyatta—would even think of marrying a woman who was not circumcised'.⁹¹ In using this perspective, Walker asserts that being a leader does not come from oppressing women and submitting the tribe to the control of one dominant gender. She indicates that resistance comes not from following western ideology but through fighting any oppression, even if it originates in religion or tradition. Adopting and being proud of one's identity is to take the positive aspects that help regulate one's life without being oppressed.

At the end of the novel religion to Nettie and Samuel become less literal. The representation of God to them is less human, as the missionaries believe and yet neither the expression of the material world, as the Olinka believe. This marks a considerable recalibration of Nettie and Samuel's religious understanding and, as with Celie, they become free of their old assumptions about God. Walker thus leaves her readers with the idea that there is no perfection in either of the societies, whether African or American:

God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone—a roofleaf or Christ—but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us.'⁹²

⁹⁰ Alyson R. Buckman, 'The Body as a Site of Colonization: Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*', *Journal of American Culture*, 18.2 (1995), 89–94 (p. 91).

⁹¹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 122.

⁹² Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 122.

This is the African perspective on religion and its impact, whilst the American perspective is represented by Shug and Celie. Shug plays an effective role in changing Celie's understanding of religion, saying:

My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it.⁹³

Shug instils in Celie the desire to find God for her personal satisfaction, but first she should reject the notion of the old white personification of God in western society. Celie finds God within her which helps her in the journey towards reshaping her character as a woman with the courage to stand up to her abusive husband. The same advice, in an indirect way, comes from Nettie:

When we return to America we must have long talks about this, Celie. And perhaps Samuel and I will found a new church in our community that has no idols in it whatsoever, in which each person's spirit is encouraged to seek God directly, his belief that this is possible strengthened by us as people who also believe.⁹⁴

Again, Walker presents here her authorial perspective, her belief in nature and intolerance of the notion of a patriarchal God of colour. Walker states in an interview with O'Brien:

I seem to have spent all my life rebelling against the church and other peoples' interpretations of what religion is – the truth is probably that I don't believe there is a God, although I would like to believe it. Certainly I don't believe

⁹³ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 178.

⁹⁴ Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 227.

there is a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake.⁹⁵

Finally, we can say that her use of folklore in *The Color Purple* contributes to Walker's intention to maintain African-American identity and her presentation constitutes a philosophical, historical and political articulation that affirms a collective identity of race and sisterhood.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Walker, *The World Has Changed*, p. 64.

⁹⁶ Boesenbergs, p. 242.

Section Two: The Temple of My Familiar (1989)

If you tear out the tongue of another, you have a tongue in your hand the rest of your life. You are responsible, therefore, for all that person might have said. It is the torturers who come to understand this, who change. Some do, you know.⁹⁷

In *The Color Purple* Walker explores various notions of racial and gender identity and how such ideas have influenced the lives of African Americans. There has always been a historical identity crisis in the African-American community, which is illustrated by the cultural and artistic expressions of the Harlem Renaissance and its interrogations of African-American identity. For decades, many African-American writers have endeavoured to promote equality through highly politicised works, including Walker herself, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison. Walker, in *The Temple of My Familiar* explores various themes related to racial and gender discrimination within the community, and how folklore has been utilised by the community to establish identity.

The Temple of My Familiar may be seen as the sequel to *The Color Purple* as many characters, such as Lissie and Zede, appear in both novels. *The Temple of My Familiar* deals with the complexities of identity and its transformations.⁹⁸ As in *The Color Purple*, this novel uses the practices of African folklore as the means to link the past lives of its characters and to indicate a possible future for African-American subjectivity. 'If the crisis of modernity is the loss of history, and hence the loss of community, then the solution is for the subject to become ethnic, to discover and invent ties to a past that write the self into a collective narrative'⁹⁹. *The Temple of My Familiar* uses the ancestor presence, spirits and folktales of animals to address issues of racial and gender oppression in United States and consists of sixty one chapters formed into six groups, each focussing on the life of one of six main

⁹⁷ Alice Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990), p. 310.

⁹⁸ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, p. 356.

⁹⁹ Kawash, p. 171.

characters living in North Carolina in modern times. Their stories span thousands of years in the history of humanity as each character struggles with their identity and past lives in the quest for positive futures.

In *The Temple of My Familiar* Walker takes aspects of African folklore and designs her characters as human and animal folkloric manifestations in a contemporary setting. They include a Latin American woman Carlotta, who is forced to leave her country and has a relationship with a rock star, Arveyda; Lissie, one of the most important characters, is a goddess who has lived for hundreds of years; and the free-spirited, Fanny, who has a relationship with an American history teacher Suwelo. There are also characters from *The Color Purple* of secondary significance, including Celie, the traumatised mother of Olivia, and Shug Avery.

The opening introduces Zede, Sr., a South American seamstress, a sewing magician creating traditional capes made from peacock, cockatoo, and parrot feathers and worn by dancers, local village festival musicians, and even priests. The novel ends with Miss Lissie, a mysterious trickster figure who takes on the form of a lion and is Walker's representation of black female creativity as a marginal yet magical space filled with knowledge and power and the repository of ancestral tradition. Zede the Elder is an example of Walker's ability to create a connection between feminine art and marginality as Zede makes her capes in isolation away from the community.

Walker employs the African-American trickster figure to negotiate the lack of correspondence between self-identity and self-difference. Barbara Johnson states that 'the sign of an authentic voice is thus not self-identity but self-difference',¹⁰⁰ which means that African Americans are not just a component of American society but the strength of their group identity comes from being unique and rich in culture. The distinctive character of the

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Johnson, 'Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*', in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), p. 212.

trickster comes from the power of the voice; identity here comes from being able ‘not to pretend that there is no difference, but to assume and articulate the incompatible forces involved in her own division’.¹⁰¹ Johnson’s argument justifies Walker’s use of the trickster figure and Jay Edwards also comments on this point, stressing how the trickster figure ‘assumes his unique and powerful role by virtue of his crossing and violating boundaries’.¹⁰² Travelling across time and shape-shifting throughout, such a character serves as witness to history and its traumas.

The interaction between characters’ folkloric, magical personifications adds a spiritual dimension to their quest for identity. For instance, the messages from Fanny to Carlotta, as the latter confronts her broken marriage. Also, Fanny’s fascination with Arveyda’s music is such that she does not want to attend his concert to avoid any disappointment. Moreover, the effect of Lissie on Suwelo’s way of looking at life and women, by telling him about the way she had once lived in the pre-historic times.

Fanny regularly falls in love with the spirits who inhabit her, and vice versa. She also relates with the living too. For instance, on her journey to Africa, she meets her sister, with whom she shares her appearance and middle name, ‘Nzingha’. Such interaction with the living and the dead is similar to Miss Lissie’s, who describes herself as ‘Myselfes’ to indicate the shapes, men, women, and even animals she assumes throughout her long life.

Like much of Walker’s work, the novel’s focus is the history of African Americans, male oppression, female friendships, and art expression. Walker conveys these themes through Lissie’s monologues about her experience throughout centuries of reincarnation as a woman, a white man, a slave, a slave owner and a lion. Lissie is also an ancestral figure representing wisdom and knowledge of human history:

¹⁰¹ Barbara Johnson, p. 212.

¹⁰² Jay Edwards, ‘Structural Analysis of the Afro-American Trickster Tale’, in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 91.

“When you ask me about peace, Suwelo,” said Miss Lissie, “if I’ve ever in all my lifetime experienced peace, I am nearly perplexed. Could it be possible that after hundreds of lifetimes I have not known peace? That seems to be the fact.”¹⁰³

Walker evokes a time when men and women lived apart and there was no such thing as private property. Women lived harmoniously with animals until men came to claim ownership of them and separate them from their familiars and animals.

Celie makes reappears in *The Temple of My Familiar* and her daughter, Olivia, shares her mother’s passion for colour. Olivia narrates a story about her mother being ecstatic when she saw the right shade of blue which she was looking for. Celie believes this shade of blue gives energy a notion corresponding to Walker’s faith in the power of belief to affect existence.

The Temple of My Familiar is a profound extension of the desire to establish identity and equality. The novel has an uncommon range, including North America, South America, Europe and Africa within its compass.¹⁰⁴ One of its central characters is a prosperous dark man called Suwelo, dumbfounded by the loss of his wife, Fanny. Suwelo is a history instructor who changes personality to understand how to transpose scholarly history into an alternative narrative. Suwelo’s wife makes up for lost time in another story, for she is a granddaughter of Miss Celie, the strong and courageous woman of *The Color Purple*. Fanny looks to the future and shares the strengths that became evident in Celie and Shug’s affectionate relationship in *The Color Purple*.

The Temple of my Familiar evokes a ‘womanist’ point of view in Walker’s representation of the lives of two women and, importantly, men. She is interested in equality

¹⁰³ Alice Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar* (London: Hachette UK, 2011), p. 83.

¹⁰⁴ Keith Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables, and Gothic Tales* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), p. 56.

and reality in her focus on male as well as female characters.¹⁰⁵ Walker's radical narrative approach is primarily found in the segments which recount Miss Lissie's brief, alarming stretch as a white man in a black group. The weaving together of accounts occurs as characters mentioned in one section become a central character in another. For example, the white woman, Mary Jane, who rescues Carlotta and her mother, Zede, from a prison camp in South America then features in Africa as married to Ola, Nzingha and Fanny's black African father. Fanny is the granddaughter of Mama Shug and Mama Celie, the two characters from *The Color Purple*. Shug and Celie occupy a foundational role in the story as discernibly honest and good in ways that other characters are not. Shug and Celie are warm, practical (especially in explaining 'the gospel according to Shug'), and astoundingly human. They are fragile, however, and not as focused as the other characters. The moment when, for example, Carlotta's significant other, Arveyda, relinquishes her for her mother, Zede, the reader feels tricked, for no real motivation has been given, a recurring motif throughout the novel. It is hard to establish any profound relationship with Walker's characters, and the resolution of their conflicts is too pat to be in any way satisfying. The novel has a shifting cast of characters; in each chapter, a new character enters with increased importance.

Throughout the novel, characters keep in touch with each other's lives, in a direct or indirect manner. For example, Carlotta gets massages from Fanny when trying to find an escape from her broken marriage. Fanny communicates with the spirits and becomes enchanted by Arveyda's music but prefers not to see him perform. Miss Lissie alters Suwelo's perspective on life and women when she educates him concerning her former lives in the pre-historic past.

Each character steadily becomes comfortable with the others for the most part, despite the fact that their circumstances are so dissimilar. Initially, the fundamental characters (apart

¹⁰⁵ Cynthia B Dillard, *On Spiritual Strivings: Transforming an African American Woman's Academic Life*. (Ithaca: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 22.

from Lissie) are profoundly divided as they battle with a dangerous dread or struggle in their lives and endeavour for a state of wholeness and solidarity. Lissie experiences prejudice and Zede endures a life without tranquillity, sold into subjugation from youth, and yet she alleviates her suffering through fellowship that overrides the reckless narcissism of man separated from nature, one race isolated from another, the old from the young. Distinctive forms of correspondence, letters, recorded accounts, works of art, music, dreams, and stories are introduced and characters speak with each other as they go through different stages in their progression towards wholeness. They strive to reach a universal, mutual recognition of each other and the community. Miss Lissie recollects her past lives, as white or black women and men, and which stretch across the entire history of humankind. Her narrative adds to the sustenance of that conventional congruity of the Native Americans and Africans. The thought of the past and the persistent present that leads into the future is what Walker builds her concept of dream recollections and re-recollections from.

Lissie is shocked at the stupefied condition and says, 'Clearly everything that was once free is different today'.¹⁰⁶ Assessing her capture and subjugation in the Middle Passage, Miss Lissie symbolises the misery of losing the refined status of Africa and distressingly recalls that it was her uncle who sold her mother and children into slavery in return for the money to buy trinkets for his life partner.¹⁰⁷ Here Walker confronts the historical complicity of Africans in their own subjugation through memory as the means for the recovery of lost identity.

Reality and the fictional world coexist in *The Temple of My Familiar* as Walker's narrator, Eleandra, visits the museum of natural history and its replica of an African village in which a native of the village, M'Sukta, is assigned to represent the traditional way of life for tourists. Eleandra claims that she could smell the fear of M'Sukta, 'It was, I realized, the

¹⁰⁶ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 359.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 61.

smell of *fear*. This tiny, childlike creature was afraid of us!’¹⁰⁸ Eleandra equates the situation of M’Sukta to that of animals in a zoo, captives as a source of entertainment for other people.¹⁰⁹

To smell fear is an important aspect of this novel as it evokes the supernatural dimensions of African folklore. For instance, in the real world of Mrs Maureen’s beauty parlour, she can smell the satisfaction of women. Such close interrelation is mentioned again in regard to those women who can travel to the other realm. For instance, Ntozake Shange, in her novel *Betsey Brown*, writes that ‘women who can see over the other side are never far from each other’,¹¹⁰ and this quotation asserts such interrelation. The mixing of reality with the magical is shared by Walker and Morrison, not as a means of escaping reality but, as Kusumita Mukherjee has argued, as a way to underscore the morbidity of the ‘real’.¹¹¹

Perhaps the most imaginative feature of the novel is Walker’s examination of the past. Suwelo acquires a house in Baltimore where he meets Lissie – little, old, and very dark. Lissie can recollect all of her past lives and epitomises what Suwelo would want to ignore, the unrecorded trauma that lies beneath official history. In *The Temple of My Familiar* Walker opens up the overlooked experience of workers and slaves who are the progenitors of America's black communities. Lissie's recollections, however, reach beyond the beginnings of bondage in Africa as Walker asks us to consider how it felt to be human before history wove its destructive web around our lives. Like other writers that consider this question, Walker reveals more about her own feelings than she does about the realities of ancient times.

In this literary mixture of reality and fiction the ancestral figure represents the homeland of Africa and its continued significance for African-Americans. The image of

¹⁰⁸ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 224.

¹⁰⁹ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 224.

¹¹⁰ Ntozake Shange, *Betsey Brown: A Novel* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2010), p. 28.

¹¹¹ Kusumita Mukherjee, ‘Amalgamation of Real and Unreal: Magic Realism in the Fiction of Walker, Morrison, Naylor and Shange’, *International Journal of Management and Social Sciences Research*, 4.7 (2015), 40–45 (p. 45).

Africa corresponds to guidance and inspiration, the place of origin that some characters long to visit again, as in *The Color Purple*. In *The Temple of My Familiar* Walker provides a more explicit consideration of slavery as Miss Lissie recounts her experience as a child sold into slavery:

It was my uncle who sold me. It was the uncle who sold a lot of women and their children, [...] there were four huge men squatting at the edge of the okra patch, [...] they caught me and tied me up [...]. My mother was just begging and pleading and calling for mercy, because she knew about slavers.¹¹²

Lissie is 'bitter' about the past, and adds, 'who can claim I do not have a right to be? This is not heresy. I was there'.¹¹³ Africa loses its place in her heart and ceases to be the source of positive affirmation. Walker places Miss Lissie as a wise ancestral figure and transfers affirmation from a place to a person.

Both novels, then, present the concept of the ancestral figure but in different ways. Ikenna Dieke states that the characters of *The Temple of My Familiar* 'betray a peculiar passion to reconnect with their past [...]. For them, without a principle of continuum, of the past merging with the present in a constantly shifting melange, it becomes meaningless to speak of the self'.¹¹⁴

Walker's relationship to the African-American literary tradition can be considered an ambivalent one. On the one hand she is deeply rooted within the tradition, especially her early works such as *The Color Purple*, which make explicit reference to other African-American writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in relation to Gates's critical theory of signifying. On the other hand, her texts are

¹¹² Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 61.

¹¹³ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 65.

¹¹⁴ Ikenna Dieke, 'Toward a Monistic Idealism: The Thematics of Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*', *Indiana State University*, 26.3 (1992), 507–14 (p. 509).

simultaneously perceived as extending this literary tradition as part of the Black Aesthetic, which is reflected through her evocations of the ancestral figure, so central in the work of writers such as Ralph Ellison.¹¹⁵ The presence of ancestors helps in the articulation of complex racial and gender issues and also sustains African-American identity through the assimilation of the past with the present. This operates through the memories of Lissie, who travels through time and space to places where human beings and animals cohabit in harmony, an escape from the realities of materialism, envy and malice.

Miss Lissie is a transcendent female character in and represents the eternal presence of the ancestors. She symbolises not only the African folklore represented by the spirits, history, and culture, but also the entire existence of mankind; she describes herself by saying 'It is hard for people to comprehend the things that I remember. Even Hal, the most empathetic of fellow travellers, up to a point, could not follow some of the ancient and pre-ancient paths I know'.¹¹⁶

Carlotta and Arveyda must restore the way in which their ancestors lived, where no gender seeks to dominate the other, seeking instead harmony; therefore, they live in a freer way but apart from each other to sustain their marriage.

Lissie reviews a vastly far off past when people lived separately, meeting just for procreation:

But who was Lissie? He began, almost unconsciously, to scrutinize the pictures on the walls again. There were pictures of Uncle Rafe as a very young man, just after he'd come up from the Island [...] 'Most of the women are Lissie,' said Mr. Hal. 'The men are different ones. Your daddy. Cousins. Uncles. Granddaddy. Maybe a aunt or somebody else female, but I don't recall anybody else. 'But there're a lot of women,' said Suwelo. 'Lissie is a

¹¹⁵ Jana Heckova "Timeless People" the development of the ancestral figure in three novels by Walker. P. 2

¹¹⁶ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 364.

lot of women'. 'Actually, I'm glad you brought her up,' said Suwelo. 'I've seen her name around here a lot'.¹¹⁷

The principal themes in *The Temple of My Familiar* are racism, the reality of black lives, white and male supremacy, art, and female fraternity. Many of these are explored through Miss Lissie's monologues as she depicts her season of revival. Being an ancestral goddess, Miss Lissie shares stories of being a slave and a slaveholder, a woman and a man, a white man, and even a lion.¹¹⁸ As a slave in her past life, she remembers:

When they pressed the metal to the skin of a buttock or upper arm there was much pain. The swelling and burning continued for days afterward. Though the slavers dotted our wounds with a bit of vinegar and palm oil, nothing soothed like the milk from a nursing mother's breast, a remedy with which all Africans were familiar, and though most Africans no longer believed in the worship of the mother, this last vestige of her power was believed in firmly. Luckily, there were nursing mothers among us, although without their babies. Babies were not permitted on the slave ship, nor mothers too far advanced in pregnancy. Some of the babies were simply smashed against the ground by the captors of their mothers, some were left on the trail to die, some were sold or, less usually, adopted by a tribe that did not believe in or participate in the slave trade.¹¹⁹

The use of folklore for the assertion of identity is so clear here. The worship of the Mother Goddess is an instance of this, symbolising insight and the certified learning of humanity's history, which may have all the hallmarks of being otherworldly or even Utopian.

Miss Lissie's illumination is closely connected with another critical theme – that of male dominance and the condition of women. She emphasises that Africa is the real

¹¹⁷ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 38.

¹¹⁸ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 355.

¹¹⁹ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 67.

beginning of human progression, and woman the true genitor of supernatural qualities. Lissie emphasises, through the use of folklores of past existence, the particular importance of black women as the possessors of knowledge that may alleviate the traumas of slavery and racism.

Parentage, especially motherhood, and again addressed through the figure of Miss Lissie, symbolises the cultural, historical and mythical interconnectivity of the human race. She transcends the confinements of time and space and is Walker's presentation of a concentrated form of spiritual consciousness:

I am old now and my brain cells-brain cells are like batteries, you know —
are dying, millions of them at a time. Of my earlier lives in Egypt and
Atlantis I recall nothing. I only mention these places because everyone does,
mostly people who need to feel better about themselves in the present
lifetime but cannot.¹²⁰

Miss Lissie also states, 'I do not remember with my brain itself anyway, but with my memory, which is separate, somehow, yet contained within it. Charged, I feel my brain is, with memory. Yes, as I said, like a battery'.¹²¹ Lissie takes on an extensive and eternal corporeal shape that incorporates the whole of human experience and affirms the fundamentals of compassion, empathy and magnanimity Walker feels are necessary for the alleviation of the condition of contemporary African-American women.¹²² Lissie recalls, 'in these days of which I am speaking, people met other animals in much the same way people today meet each other. You were sharing the same neighbourhood, after all'.¹²³ Modernity, industrialisation and imperialist expansion have destroyed the interactions of man with nature and only folklore and ancestral tradition remain for the sustenance of identity.

¹²⁰ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 52.

¹²¹ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 52.

¹²² George Yancy, 'Feminism and the Subtext of Whiteness: Black Women's Experiences as a Site of Identity Formation and Contestation of Whiteness', *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 24.3 (2000), 156–66 (p. 156).

¹²³ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 356.

Memory and rememory are themes evident in both Morrison and Walker's work. Like Lissie, Walker has her own cosmological projection as her words transcend the strictures of race, gender, time, space and species. Lissie talks about her memory and the history it contains, informing Suwelo about the number of locks that his grandmother has, saying 'Exactly one hundred and thirteen, [...] It is not, then, the very ancient past that I was conversant with as a child, even as a baby, but with the recent past of up to a few thousand years ago'.¹²⁴ Lissie recalls everything as 'rememberer' and affirms the way in which women once coordinated their lives and conveyed their traditions to their daughters. She is a vault of time and conveys Walker's message that without the nurturing of custom and heritage there is no positive future. Lissie states, 'It becomes the voice of an almost disembodied person, though her words remain incisive, lucid, brilliantly skilled. But then, whenever she is free to speak as herself, everything has jagged edges, and listening to her is like hard walking with pebbles in your shoes'.¹²⁵

As in the first novel of this trilogy, *The Color Purple*, Walker uses folklore as a device to illuminate the dynamics of identity within the narrative of *The Temple of My Familiar*. We see this in the character of Fanny, the granddaughter of Celie, and a masseuse in San Francisco who places a crystal at the head and feet of her clients and speaks what seems to Carlotta to be 'the very babble of witches'.¹²⁶ Walker presents black female characters and their creativity as marginal and of a magical space, inhabited by goddesses filled with symbolic codes of knowledge and power. In this form of representation, the author applies Henry Louis Gates's term, 'the blackness of blackness', which we have discussed earlier.

Folkloric elements serve several functions in this novel. The feather hats that Zede makes are stolen by her daughter Carlotta, who had once stole materials for her mother so she

¹²⁴ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 53.

¹²⁵ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 54.

¹²⁶ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 293.

could make hats for profit. However, because they are stolen Carlotta is considered as a “Cixousian *voleuse*”, a bird-robber-woman who disrupts order as her source of pleasure and happiness.¹²⁷

Gender politics ensue once men begin to assert proprietary rights over women, children and the land itself. The patriarchal structures imposed disturbed the harmony that had existed in the natural world of creatures and women:

My mother kept me with her at all times, and she was always stroking me, rubbing into my skin various ointments she'd concocted from the flesh of berries and nuts that she found. As a small child I didn't notice anything wrong about spending so much time with my mother, nor was it ever unpleasant. Quite the contrary, in fact. Her familiar was an enormous and very much present lion; they went everywhere together. This lion also had a family of his own. There was a lot of visiting between us, and in the lion's little family of cubs I was always welcome.¹²⁸

The beauty of the African traditional folkloric reference lies in the way the lion is evoked as a gentle presence without a threatening roar; it is the hare that tricks the lion by enticing him into a beehive, a trick that explains the lion's roar. The lion is the most revered animal in African folklore. Lissie tells Suwelo:

This perhaps sounds strange to you, Suwelo. About the lions, I mean. But it is true. This was long, long ago, before the animals had any reason to fear us and none whatever to try to eat us, which— the thought of eating us— I'm sure would have made them sick. The human body has been recognized as toxic, by the animals, for a very long time. In the Bible I know there's a line somewhere about a time in the future when the earth will be at peace and the

¹²⁷ Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Isabelle De Courtivron and Elaine Marks (New York: Schocken, 1981), p. 258.

¹²⁸ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 355.

lion will lie down with the lamb. Well, that has already happened, and eventually it was to the detriment of the lion.¹²⁹

Folklore, then, an essential element in establishing and affirming African-American identity, is derived from its primary function in African culture.¹³⁰ Walker's narrative layers the intricate storylines of six characters in contemporary central Carolina across a time span of more than one thousand years. Arveyda is an artist who needs to recover and understand his past, Carlotta his wife who lives estranged abroad. Suwelo is a black man and historian of American History who understands the oppressions of patriarchal power. Fanny is Suwelo's previous wife who has never known her father. These are just a few of Walker's characters and all have extremely complex narratives as they search for identity, travelling back and forth between the past and the present.

African-American identity has been asserted in various ways through the deployment of art, music and literary expression. The Harlem Renaissance, the 'Intellectual, social, and artistic explosion'¹³¹ that took place in New York, saw affirmations of African-American identity in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay and Duke Ellington amongst many others and contemporary writers, including Walker herself, have taken inspiration from the movement: 'When life descends into the pit I must become my own candle willingly burning myself to light up the darkness around me' and the determination to contribute to this tradition, in the face of discrimination is also expressed, as she continues: 'Fire burns brighter in the dark'.¹³²

¹²⁹ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 356.

¹³⁰ Richard M Dorson, *American Negro Folktales: Collected with Introduction and Notes* (New York: Mineola, 2015), p. 67.

¹³¹ Shannon Marks, 'Jazz Poetry and Making Visible the Black American Experience' (University of Wyoming, 2019), p. 15
<https://mountainscholar.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11919/3819/STUW_HT_ENGL_2019_Marks_Shannon.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹³² Alice Walker, *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting for: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness* (New York: The New Press, 2006), p. 39.

In *The Temple of My Familiar*, as Marjorie Spiegel points out, ‘The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men’.¹³³ Colour is also again significant in this novel. For instance, Olivia, the long-lost daughter of Celie, describes her mother’s obsession with colour: ‘My mother, Celie, was very much influenced by color,’ said Olivia’.¹³⁴

Carlotta was yellow. The young, hopeful immigrant color, the color of balance, the color of autumn leaves, half the planet’s flowers, the color of endurance and optimism. Green was his own color, soothing green, the best color for the eyes and the heart. And Zede— Zede’s color was peach or pink or coral. The womb colors, the woman colors.¹³⁵

This novel has multiple visionary narrators, characters who narrate their past lives in the present in a complex tale, or ‘quilt’, amplified by African folklore as the inspiration for the negotiation of identity. An example from the text which expresses the folkloric roots of identity is found in the following statement ‘The sight of a black nun strikes their sentimentality; and, as I am unalterably rooted in native ground, they consider me a work of primitive art, housed in a magical color; the incarnation of civilization, anti-heathenism, and the fruit of a triumphing idea’.¹³⁶ Walker confronts the oppression of women by patriarchal structures in Suwelo’s statement :

And I was brought up on Playboy, in which the goal of every red-blooded man is to pierce as many women as possible, and to think of their minds, their creative gifts, and their professional abilities as added sexual stimulation,

¹³³ Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (New York: Mirror Books, 1996), p. 14.

¹³⁴ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 145.

¹³⁵ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 24.

¹³⁶ Alice Walker, ‘The Diary of an African Nun’, in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. by Toni Cade (Chicago: A Mentor Book, 1970), pp. 38–42 (p. 38).

nothing more. I loved that joke inspired, I'm sure, by the Playboy mentality:

What did you do with the female scientist who discovered a cure for the common cold? You screwed her. Yuk, yuk'.¹³⁷

The Temple of My Familiar evokes an ancient and harmonious world as the template against which contemporary notions of African-American identity may be expressed. As Lissie says:

I have always been a black woman. I say that without, I hope, any arrogance or undue pride, for I know this was just luck. And I speak of it as luck because of the struggle others have trying to discover who they are and what they should be doing and finding it difficult to know because of all the different and differing voices they are required to listen to.¹³⁸

In 'The Gospel According to Shug' Walker offers more details about each of the characters in *The Temple of My Familiar* that combines reality and dream to confront racist ideology as it operates in the contemporary world.

As Diana Hayes has argued, the significance of spirituality for the construction of African-American identity has been touched upon but not in enough detail.¹³⁹ The origin myth makes its cursory appearance: 'Then one of the men told of a birth among the women. That clinched it. Immediately they imagined a *mujer muy grande*,¹⁴⁰ larger than the sky, producing, somehow, the earth. A goddess. And so, if the producer of the earth was a large woman, a goddess, then women must be her priests, and must possess great and supernatural powers'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 280.

¹³⁸ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 364.

¹³⁹ Diana L Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace: African American Spirituality* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2012), p. 174.

¹⁴⁰ A Spanish old woman.

¹⁴¹ Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*, p. 49.

Walker endeavours to break gender stereotyping in patriarchal societies where today, for example, the rate of literacy among African-American women is lower than that of their male counterparts and this is regarded as indicative of their inferiority.¹⁴² Both the characters of Zede and Lissie, however, are possessed of profound ancestral knowledge as priestesses and healers confronting the legacy of slavery. Black women, whose ancestors were brought to the United States from Africa in subjugation, have survived conditions of savagery and they re-examine themselves in light of such knowledge.¹⁴³

Ancestral proximity and folkloric elements in Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* work through the memory of Lissie, the saint who voyages through a universe of propagation, where animals and individuals live in harmony and which serves as Walker's alternative to the violence, exploitation and subjugation of the contemporary world. Walker deconstructs history in narratives that alleviate the subjectivity of black people in the United States and beyond. Writers such as Paule Marshall, Sherley Ann Williams, Gloria Naylor, and filmmakers such as Julie Dash, appropriate histories of slavery within creative frameworks that transcend temporal restrictions.

The Temple of My Familiar exposes the obfuscation of the histories of non-white people in the United States, South America and Africa before colonisation. Walker deploys the female ancestral figure and her worldview within the main structure of her novel as the holder and transmitter of memory that destabilises patriarchal historiography.

¹⁴² Joyce L. Harris, Alan G. Kamhi, and Karen E. Pollock, *Literacy in African American Communities* (Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2001), p. 153.

¹⁴³ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), p. 57.

Section Three: Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992)

There are those who believe Black people possess the secret of joy and that it is this that will sustain them through any spiritual or moral or physical devastation.¹⁴⁴

After writing *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar* Walker returned to what she thought had been left unidentified, a story that needed to be told. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) is the third novel of Walker's trilogy and its subject is female genital mutilation. The title is taken from Mirella Ricciardi's *African Saga*, in which she writes 'They possess the secret of joy, which is why they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them'.¹⁴⁵ Mbatia reads this to Tashi who becomes angry about how a writer could make such a statement.¹⁴⁶ Tashi comments:

These settler cannibals, why don't they just steal our land, mine our gold, chop down our forests, pollute our rivers, enslave us to work on their farms, [...] devour our flesh and leave us alone. Why must they also write about how much joy we possess.¹⁴⁷

Published ten years after *The Color Purple* (1982) reading *Possessing the Secret of Joy* allows us to trace the changes, if any, throughout the trilogy in terms of style and Walker's ideological position on African-American identity and its African origins. In it Walker develops both the character of Tashi and the Olinka and achieves a wider perspective in a work that completes the narrative thread of the first two novels.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Walker continues the story of Tashi and elucidates controversial aspects of African history and heritage, including female genital mutilation and its consequences, and the patriarchal strictures of tribal society. Alyson Buckman describes

¹⁴⁴ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, pt. epigraph.

¹⁴⁵ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 271.

¹⁴⁶ An African girl who is considered as a spiritual daughter to the protagonist, Tashi.

¹⁴⁷ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 270.

the novel as constituting “a revolutionary manifesto for dismantling systems of domination”.¹⁴⁸ *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is a call to fight for the rights of women and a radical challenge to their oppression throughout the world. Walker’s purpose has a profound humanitarian dimension in her interrogation of the practice of female genital mutilation as torture in the name of tradition and religion. Walker, in a note ‘To The Reader’, makes her intention clear, writing, ‘It is estimated that from ninety to one hundred million women and girls living today in Africa, Far Eastern and Middle Eastern countries have been genitally mutilated’.¹⁴⁹ Part of the royalties from her work contributes to the education of females and males alike, to make them aware of the physical and psychological effects of such practices, not only for individuals but also for society in general and the world at large.¹⁵⁰ Walker also raises questions related to nationalism and the interrelationship between gender and cultural identity. The novel raises issues of national identity, expressed through the main character’s support of her people, the Olinka. Walker is also concerned here with male/female relationships and successfully transcends physical borders by raising African issues in America.

The novel’s central character, Tashi, is a fictional African character from a fictional African tribe, the Olinka. She undergoes the ritual of initiation, genital mutilation, to show her commitment to her tribe and as a form of resistance against colonisers intent on destroying the Olinka’s cultural traditions. As we have seen in *The Color Purple*, Tashi has two close friends, Olivia and Adam, Celie’s children. They belong to an African-American family of missionaries who advise her not to go through with this rite of passage, but to no avail. She later marries Adam, but her decision to undergo genital mutilation brings great psychological and physical damage. Depressed and traumatised, she consults a psychiatrist, who makes her realise how she must identify and confront the cause of her trauma. Tashi

¹⁴⁸ Buckman, p. 93.

¹⁴⁹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 266.

¹⁵⁰ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 266.

finally understands her trauma originated with the death of her sister, Dura, caused by the mutilation she had herself endured: 'I knew what the boulder was; that it was a word; and that behind that word I would find my earliest emotions'.¹⁵¹ Tashi decides to murder the person who caused her pain and her sister's death, the *tsunga*.¹⁵²

Many characters in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* are known to the reader and events in the earlier novels are retold from new perspectives. For example, the journey to the Olinka village is described by Nettie in *The Color Purple* in positive terms as she is amazed and fascinated by Africa. However, in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* we have Olivia's traumatic account in which Dura, Tashi's sister, bleeds to death due to genital mutilation. This change of perspective sets the tone of the novel.

African Folkloric Elements

The practice of female genital mutilation dates back to the Egyptian Pharaonic period: 'Even Cleopatra was circumcised, he [Pierre] says. Nefertiti, also'.¹⁵³ The ancient Egyptians believed in the 'bisexual aspect in the soul of every person. As a consequence, in order to define their gender, both women and men need to be circumcised'.¹⁵⁴ This practice is still carried out in parts of Africa with various justifications for its continuation. For instance, in some parts of Nigeria the clitoris is considered a dangerous organ that may kill the baby during delivery or cause the development of 'a hydrocephalic head'.¹⁵⁵ In some parts of Sudan and Ethiopia it is believed that if the clitoris is not removed it will extend as a penis, a notion Walker uses as the basis for the tradition of her fictional tribe: 'Who would not laugh

¹⁵¹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 81.

¹⁵² The circumciser of the Olinka tribe. Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 208.

¹⁵³ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 176.

¹⁵⁴ Gabriela Eltz Brum, 'Sexual Blinding of Women: Alice Walker's African Character Tashi and the Issue of Female Genital Cutting' (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2005), p. 47
<<http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/4506/000501958.pdf?...1>>.

¹⁵⁵ Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa* (New York: Haworth Press, 1989), p. 39.

at the notion that a clitoris, like a penis, can rise?’¹⁵⁶ Moreover, in Burkina Faso it is believed that this organ has ‘the power to render men impotent’.¹⁵⁷ It is considered to be an insult in Sudan, according to Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, to call a person the son of an uncircumcised woman.¹⁵⁸

Walker’s treatment of the practice of female genital mutilation involves the story of an Olinka man, Torabe, who is exiled because he cannot control his wife. He cuts his wife upon marriage and yet her family affirm his traditional right to do so. She drowns herself, ‘In water that didn’t even reach her knees’¹⁵⁹ and Torabe is left to die alone, and outside the village as he is considered a threat to the “fabric of the tribe”. It is important to clarify that the practice ‘is not a tradition which started with the advent of Islam’,¹⁶⁰ but one originating earlier than the establishment of the major religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Interventions to prevent its practice often merely intensify commitment to such ancestral tradition. As Nahid Toubia explains ‘the implicit and explicit message is that it is something we inherited from an untraceable past which has no rational meaning and lies within the realm of the untouchable sensitivity of traditional people’.¹⁶¹

Again, colour plays a significant part in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* as Walker refers to the red of the Olinka flag of independence as representative of the blood shed in resisting colonialism and the white as symbolising new government and nationhood. The colour yellow stands for ‘the gold and minerals in which our land is still rich, even though the whites have carted mountains of it away’,¹⁶² and blue ‘for the sea that laps our shores, filled with riches and the wonders of the deep; blue also for the sky, symbol of our people’s faith in the

¹⁵⁶ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 235.

¹⁵⁷ Brum, p. 48.

¹⁵⁸ Lightfoot-Klein, p. 69.

¹⁵⁹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 138.

¹⁶⁰ Brum, p. 49.

¹⁶¹ Nahid F. Toubia and Elizabeth Fernea, ‘The Social and Political Implications of Female Circumcision: The Case of the Sudan.’, in *Women and the Family in the Middle East* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), pp. 148–59 (p. 150).

¹⁶² Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 110.

forces of the unseen and their optimism for the future'.¹⁶³ The colour blue is also evoked when Tashi tries to 'locate and focus on a blue hill'¹⁶⁴ but sees instead a group of women holding up their female children in a show of solidarity and resistance that reflects the title of the novel; they have found the secret of joy lies in their affirmation of identity in opposition to oppression. Tashi and her story 'tends to efface difference and is problematic for readers acquainted with African culture and history', therefore, the author tries to send a message to those with less knowledge about this issue and make them aware of it.¹⁶⁵

Walker returns to the theme of quilting in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* as Tashi describes the patterns of paint and material by which she metaphorically re-inscribes tribal history and memory:

[L]ater, in the middle of the night, I found myself painting a design called "crazy road" a pattern of crisscrosses and dots that the women made with mud on the cotton cloth they wove in the village when I was a child [...] I was painting the lower folds of one of M'Lissa's tattered wraps.¹⁶⁶

Possessing the Secret of Joy is a 'dual exercise in reading culture' as it, firstly, focuses upon the rite of female genital mutilation and, secondly, creates a fictional world, the Olinka tribe, where the protagonist lives.¹⁶⁷ We also have the transnational nature of Walker's characters, African tribes people and African Americans such as the Johnsons, and Tashi, who bridges the gap between them. The importance of Tashi lies in her status as an African, experienced in African tradition, who becomes an American citizen and sees through

¹⁶³ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 110.

¹⁶⁴ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 280.

¹⁶⁵ Angeletta K. M. Gourdine, 'Postmodern Ethnography and the Womanist Mission: Postcolonial Sensibilities in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*', *African American Review*, 30.2 (1996), 237–44 (p. 240) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3042357>>.

¹⁶⁶ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁶⁷ Angeletta K. M. Gourdine, *The Difference Place Makes: Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora Identity* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), p. 21.

a dual lens. As Gourdine writes, ‘Tashi’s body serves as the stage upon which the opera of African American culture/ ethnic identity can be performed’.¹⁶⁸

As we have seen, the novel is informed by Walker’s research and, indeed, further reading is included. For example, Pierre refers to African folklore relating to the Dogon people, believed to be ancestors of Egyptian civilisation. Pierre quotes from the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule’s book *Conversation with Ogotemmel*: ‘In the moment of birth the pain of parturition was concentrated in the woman’s clitoris, which was excised by an invisible hand [...] and was changed into the form of a scorpion’.¹⁶⁹ It was also believed that among the Dogon there were elders who were considered to be the guardians of ‘the knowledge of the beginning of man’.¹⁷⁰ These points reveal the depth of interest Walker has in historical context and indicate her pedagogical purpose.

The Olinka Tribe

The name of the tribe, Olinka, is fictional as are other words Walker uses such as *tsunga*.

Walker comments:

Tsunga, like many of my “African” words, is made up. Perhaps it, and the other words I use, are from an African language I used to know, now tossed up by my unconscious. I do not know from what part of Africa my African ancestors came, and so I claim the continent. I suppose I have created Olinka as my village and the Olinkans as one of my ancient, ancestral tribal people. Certainly, I recognize Tashi as my sister.¹⁷¹

The Olinka and its folklore is used by Walker for her negotiation of the oppressions of modern Africa in relation to advanced western culture. Yet, as stated by Oana Cogeanu,

¹⁶⁸ Gourdine, ‘Postmodern Ethnography and the Womanist Mission’, p. 237.

¹⁶⁹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 177.

¹⁷⁰ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 234.

¹⁷¹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, pp. 267–68.

‘Africa is liable to become the site of a pathological sexuality and morality, while the West becomes, as always, the site of the intellectual, medical, psychoanalytic, political, etc.’.¹⁷² In her trilogy generally Walker resists the tendency to objectify Africa in the ways Cogeanu identifies, but it is still, it may be argued, traceable.

Tashi submits to genital mutilation for the sake of her tribe and its traditions and as a form of resistance against colonial ideology and its impositions of western culture. Initially, before understanding its effects, Tashi refers to the ritual as a ‘healing’ not a ‘wound’.¹⁷³ This is a response to the brutal practices of colonial rule and their impact on African culture and economy. However, Tashi begins to understand the consequences of, and the real reasons behind, female genital mutilation as constituting the patriarchal oppression of women. This understanding begins with a Freudian dream: ‘Indeed, I felt as if I were seeing the cause of my anxiety itself for the first time, exactly as it was. The cock was undeniably overweening, egotistical, puffed up, and it was his diet of submission that had made him so’.¹⁷⁴ According to Cogeanu this dream represents ‘a key turning point in the process of ideological realignment’,¹⁷⁵ as Tashi reassess her views and realises that blame lies not with the colonisers but is a consequence of patriarchal power. Tashi states during the trial: ‘White is not the culprit this time. Bring me out paper of the color of our flag’.¹⁷⁶

Walker also highlights the shared responsibility of women for the practice of female genital mutilation and the complicity of the female *tsunga* in the continuation of the ritual. This group of women have the power to perform circumcision and it is one of their group members, M’Lissa, who mutilates Tashi, telling her of how this torturous role is inherited and forced upon her. She tells her they must learn not to feel: ‘Can you imagine the life of a

¹⁷² Oana Cogeanu, ‘Inscriptions on the African Body: Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*’, *Linguaculture*, 2 (2011), 55–65 (p. 59).

¹⁷³ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 60.

¹⁷⁴ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 76.

¹⁷⁵ Cogeanu, p. 57.

¹⁷⁶ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 264.

tsunga who feels? I learned not to feel’,¹⁷⁷ just like her grandmother who ‘would circumcise the children and demand food immediately after, even if the child still screamed. For my mother it was a torture’.¹⁷⁸ M’Lissa also reveals her doubt about God, saying there is no God who would allow this to happen to children, and adds that power comes only from within women, that ‘the God of woman is autonomy’.¹⁷⁹

Walker further complicates the issue of female genital mutilation by noting its economic dimension, as women pay the *tsunga* to re-sew them after childbirth. They work under the direct command of the chief and there is also a spiritual motivation to fulfil their duties towards their culture. Their main mission though, according to the tradition, is to help women to be clean: ‘Our Leader said we must keep ourselves clean [...] by cutting out unclean parts of our bodies’.¹⁸⁰

Tashi’s resistance against this practice takes the ultimate form of killing M’Lissa, the *tsunga* who mutilates her. According to Olinka tradition, the killing of a *tsunga* by a circumcised woman elevates the *tsunga* herself to the highest rank and yet ‘RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY’.¹⁸¹ Joy is to be found in rejecting patriarchal strictures that operate, like colonialism itself, by inscribing the female body as property to be colonised by African men. Tashi even considers Adam and Olivia as colonisers as they impose their way of life on the Olinka, accusing them of barbarity. Tashi says ‘You are black, but you are not like us. We look at you and your people with pity, I said. You barely have your own black skin, and it is fading’.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 221.

¹⁷⁸ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 221.

¹⁷⁹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 207.

¹⁸⁰ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 221.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 281.

Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 23.¹⁸² Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 23. 15/04/2020 01:55:00 PM

Female Initiation

If you lie to yourself about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoyed it.¹⁸³

Walker came across FGM for the first time in 1966 when working in Kenya on an education programme: ‘Nothing in my own experience has prepared me to understand female genital mutilation. It took me years, I say, just to gather my nerve to attempt to write about it’.¹⁸⁴

Meeting the actress who plays Tashi in the film of *The Color Purple* was one of the motivations for Walker to write *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and yet she writes of how ‘it took me twenty-five years since I first heard about female genital mutilation to know how to approach it’.¹⁸⁵

The Olinka describe FGM as a ‘bath’ that purifies every Olinka girl of a certain age. Tashi’s initial resistance to the practice, due to the influence of the missionaries and the death of her sister, is overturned as her form of protest against colonial rule and in response to a call from the Olinka’s imprisoned leader: ‘From prison Our Leader said we must keep ourselves clean and pure as we had been since time immemorial – by cutting out unclean parts of our bodies’.¹⁸⁶ They aim to preserve femininity by cutting away ‘the unclean’ otherwise, they believe, it will grow to the point that they become masculine and no man will be able to satisfy them as ‘her own erection would be in the way’.¹⁸⁷ Although this myth is Walker’s invention, the belief does have origin in Africa and other parts of the world.

The origin of FGM lies in Olinka myth, overheard by Tashi as a child. An Olinka man says: ‘God liked it fighting! ... God liked it tight! ... God liked to remember what he has

¹⁸³ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 164.

¹⁸⁴ Alice Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved* (London: The Women’s Press Ltd, 1997), p. 39.

¹⁸⁵ Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar, *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996), p. 269.

¹⁸⁶ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 121.

¹⁸⁷ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 112.

done, and how it felt before it got loose'.¹⁸⁸ Despite this, Tashi and Adam do not enjoy their sexual relationship anymore: 'neither she nor Adam, her husband, could ever again experience the sexual pleasure they had before the operation'.¹⁸⁹

There is a distinct difference between Tashi and M'Lissa response to FGM. Tashi chooses to go through initiation while M'Lissa is compelled by tradition. Ultimately, Tashi fulfils the tradition of the *tsunga* by murdering M'Lissa. Traditionally, the *tsunga* will be glorified if she is killed by the hand of a woman she has circumcised, and this is indeed what happens. Therefore, Tashi practises the tradition of her people willingly, through facial scarification, initiation, and finally killing the *tsunga*:

One day [...] she informed me blandly that it was only the murder of *tsunga*, the circumciser, by one of those whom she has circumcised that proves her (the circumciser's) value to her tribe. Her own death [...] would elevate her to the position of saint.¹⁹⁰

Walker presents M'Lissa as a complex character, both the perpetrator of bodily violence and victim of patriarchy. Tashi says 'it is curious, is it not, that the traditional tribal society dealt so cleverly with its appreciation of the *tsunga* and its hatred of her'.¹⁹¹ Walker elsewhere makes clear that child abuse has nothing to do with culture: 'People customarily do these things just as they customarily enslaved people, but slavery is not culture, nor is mutilation'.¹⁹² Therefore, 'Walker treats the theme of female initiation as an act of empathy'.¹⁹³ The calling for the continuation of rituals by Olinka leaders is a political act to mobilise tribe members against the colonisers, and as Walker notes in *Warrior Marks*:

¹⁸⁸ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 238.

¹⁸⁹ Buckman, p. 90.

¹⁹⁰ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 208.

¹⁹¹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 277.

¹⁹² Walker and Parmar, p. 270.

¹⁹³ Veena Abirami and Leelavathi Mundanat, 'The Secret Murder of Joy: An Ecofeministic Study on Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*', *ANGLISTICUM. Journal of the Association for Anglo-American Studies*, 4.0 (2016), 51–55 (p. 52).

‘They’re [the tribal leaders] looking for an issue which is of sensitivity to the people. So the moment we [Walker and her campaign] raise the question of genital mutilation, they then mobilize people against us’.¹⁹⁴

Tashi’s death can be seen as immolation to the young women and to end the future suffering of others. Her death is one of martyrdom, not a message of surrendering to pain or a call to those who have experienced FGM to commit suicide or murder. This is illustrated by the conversation between Tashi and her spiritual daughter, Mbat. Mbat is determined not to bring a child into this brutal world to which Tashi replies ‘are you saying that we should just let ourselves die out? And the hope of wholeness with us?’¹⁹⁵ Walker presents Tashi’s death as a unique and an individual act, with Tashi saying ‘that human compassion is equal to human cruelty and that it is up to each of us to tip the balance’.¹⁹⁶ Slavery and circumcision are two sides of the same coin, a notion expressed by Pierre who says ‘it was about now, at last, I recognised the connection between mutilation and enslavement that is at the root of the domination of women in the world’.¹⁹⁷

African-American Folkloric Elements

All I care about now is the struggle for our people [...] who are you and your people never to accept us as we are? Never to imitate any of our ways? It is always we who have to change [...] you are black, but you are not like us. We look at you and your people with pity, I said. You barely have your own black skin, and it is fading.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Walker and Parmar, p. 248.

¹⁹⁵ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 257.

¹⁹⁶ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 288.

¹⁹⁷ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 139.

¹⁹⁸ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 23.

The above quotation is Tashi's answer to Olivia, who begs Tashi not to submit to tribal tradition. Tashi affirms her identity by undergoing mutilation without knowing that she will be damaged by African cultural practice and its patriarchal justification. Yet she finds the strictures of patriarchy are not a matter of geography but merely take on different forms as Adam refuses to tell her story to his American parishioners. He explains 'the congregation would be embarrassed to discuss something so private and that, in any case, he would be ashamed to do so'.¹⁹⁹ For Tashi, this is another example of patriarchal culture casting its shadow on religion in the United States, as Adam willingly speaks of the suffering of Jesus. Tashi says 'I am a great lover of Jesus, and always have been. Still, I began to see how the constant focus on the suffering of Jesus alone excludes the suffering of others from one's view'.²⁰⁰ She asks 'was woman herself not the tree of life? And was she not crucified? Not in some age no one ever remembers, but right now, daily, in many lands on earth?'²⁰¹

Through the character of Mrs Johnson Walker refers to the origin of baptism, a ritual originally carried out before the birth of the first Olinkan. M'Lissa says that the blood of the women had been sacred, and that when the men and women became priests blood should be smeared on their faces, 'until they looked as they had at birth. And that symbolized rebirth: the birth of the spirit'.²⁰² She also tells Tashi that she was baptised by Mr Johnson, the missionary: 'I bowed my head and hold my tongue, for I knew their church's water was a substitute for woman's blood',²⁰³ to show that she is not ignorant but, on the contrary, is in possession of alternative knowledge.

¹⁹⁹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 23.

²⁰⁰ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 275.

²⁰¹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 276.

²⁰² Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 207.

²⁰³ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 207.

Walker and Tashi

Reading *Possessing* then becomes a journey into the political, social, and gendered consciousness of Alice Walker. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is about Alice Walker and her politics more than, or at least equally as much as, it is about Tashi and her trauma.²⁰⁴

Walker discusses in 'To The Reader' how central the character of Tashi is to her literary purpose: 'Tashi, who appears briefly in *The Color Purple* and again in *The Temple of My Familiar*, stayed with me, uncommonly tenacious, through the writing of both books, and led me finally to conclude she needed and deserved, a book of her own'.²⁰⁵ *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is Walker's most African novel and her subject is both complex and challenging for the reader. As Kuhne notes 'one does not want to read *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Instead, clutching one's stomach [...] one wants to howl to the wind and the heavens in angry protest and despair'.²⁰⁶

As we have seen, Walker lost the sight of an eye as a child and she draws a comparison between the effects of her injury and the suffering of Tashi. In *Warrior Marks* She writes:

I was eight when I was injured. This is the age at which many "circumcisions" are done. When I see how the little girls [...] drag their feet after being wounded, I am reminded of myself. How had I learned to walk again, without constantly walking into something? [...] I was banished, set aside from the family, as is true of genitally mutilated little girls.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Gourdine, 'Postmodern Ethnography and the Womanist Mission', p. 240.

²⁰⁵ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 284.

²⁰⁶ Kuhne, D. *A Continent of Words: African Settings in Contemporary American Novels*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999, p.74.

²⁰⁷ Walker and Parmar, pp. 18–19.

On Walker's psychological connection to her protagonist Tashi, Olakunle George writes:

'The quest for wholeness explored in the novel is at once Tashi's and that of her creator'.²⁰⁸

Walker has also discussed the importance of Jungian analysis for her work and its impact on her personally: 'I thank Carl Jung for becoming so real in my own self-therapy (by reading) that I could imagine him as alive and active in Tashi's treatment. My gift to him'.²⁰⁹ Jungian analysis emphasises the importance of artistic expression for the exploration of the subconscious.²¹⁰

Tashi becomes, for Walker, a means for the negotiation of her own identity. Walker's decision to consider FGM in relation to identity marks a significant moment in African-American women's writing and it is important to understand that is from within an African-American tradition that Walker is writing. Tashi, and Walker's, ethnicity shapes the novel in ways that justify Tashi's actions and Walker's motives for writing about them. Tashi stands against those who use particular forms of nationalism as a justification for depriving women of their rights; she is against masculinist views that consider control of the female body as an appropriate means by which to assert a national identity. Walker too, opposes patriarchal practices, including the degradation of women's bodies, believing that women have a major role in the transformation of culture. This does not mean that Walker is against cultural nationalism, the practising of culture for the sake of empowering national identity, but she does resist using it as an excuse to exploit women and curb their freedoms.

Both positive and negative aspects of American and African cultures are shown in Tashi's actions and evolving worldview. She represents the tribal world of the Olinka at the beginning of the story, taking a courageous position in defending her people's values and traditions, but across Walker's trilogy we see changes in her perspective as Tashi struggles

²⁰⁸ Olakunle George, 'Alice Walker's Africa: Globalization and the Province of Fiction', *Comparative Literature*, 53.4 (2001), 354–72 (p. 357) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3593524>>.

²⁰⁹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 269.

²¹⁰ Geneva Cobb Moore, 'Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 33.1 (2000), 111–21 (p. 116) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/slj.2000.0010>>.

with moving ‘between “oppressive/traditional” Africa versus Western freedom and advancement’.²¹¹ Tashi negotiates tensions in the relationship between the tribal life of Africa and western life, as epitomised by the African-American missionaries. Tashi befriends the Americans and comes to privilege their way of thinking over her own tribal traditions. In her affair with Adam, Tashi breaks the deadliest taboo of Olinka’s tradition: ‘This way of loving, among her people, the greatest taboo of all’.²¹² Other Olinka taboos include asking questions about how somebody has died. During Tashi’s trial the attorney says, ‘it is a taboo question, in Olinka. One never asked for fear of the answer’,²¹³ showing how traditional codes of the tribe are incorporated it into legal structures.

Changes in the Writing of Alice Walker

‘White is not the culprit this time. Bring me out paper of the colors of our flag’.²¹⁴

If, in *The Color Purple*, Walker is concerned with ‘the ethical centrality of feminine self-sacrifice and the rejection of the African American Christian tradition’,²¹⁵ in *The Temple of My Familiar* she examines the changes people undergo within their societies. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, however, Walker confronts oppressive traditional African practices, although it goes with the racist assumption that considers Africans as ‘barbaric’ by in relation to the practice of FGM. Ideological concerns come to replace literary considerations; the novel is not a literary failure, but undoubtedly the focus on FGM is a cause for debate.

The way in which Walker presents the protagonists across all three novels varies. In *The Color Purple* Celie develops from a passive character into one of agency conscious of

²¹¹ Cogeanu, p. 59.

²¹² Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 28.

²¹³ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 161.

²¹⁴ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 264.

²¹⁵ Cogeanu, p. 64.

her goals and determined to prove her abilities. In *The Temple of My Familiar* characters embark on an adventurous quest for identity, that transcends history. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Tashi is transformed from a disciplined character into one who succumbs to revenge and surrenders to her trauma. For Tashi, however, the transformation is positive: 'Just at the end of my life, I am beginning to reinhabit completely the body I long ago left'.²¹⁶ If Walker gives Celie an opportunity to live happily but 'at the cost of failing the conventions of the realistic novel and steering towards a romance',²¹⁷ Tashi, the protagonist of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is offered only a tragic destiny.

Walker's narrative strategies also vary. The epistolary mode of *The Color Purple* sees Celie express her feelings through writing to God and to her sister Nettie in the voice of her African-American dialect. Educated by missionaries, Tashi refuses to write about her pain: 'never would I be able to write a book about my life, nor even a pamphlet, but that write something I could and would'.²¹⁸ Tashi resists oppression and privileges action over writing, with fatal consequences.

There is ambivalence in Walker's treatment of the Olinka, a fictional tribe based on the Igbo tribes of Nigeria.²¹⁹ In *The Temple of My Familiar* Walker depicts Olinka rituals and traditions from different points of view, such as those of Olivia and Ola. However, for the writing of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Walker found inspiration for her development of Tashi after meeting the actor who played her in the film adaptation of *The Color Purple*: 'The young woman who played Tashi [...] was an African from Kenya [...] seeing her brought the Tashi of my book vividly to mind'.²²⁰ More importantly, it is decolonisation and nationalist calls for a return to African tradition and ritual that permeate the novel and echo President

²¹⁶ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 183.

²¹⁷ Cogeau, p. 62.

²¹⁸ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 210.

²¹⁹ Adiele Afigbo, 'Prolegomena to the Study of the Culture History of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria', in *West African Culture Dynamics: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. by B. K Swartz and Raymond E Dumett (The Hague: Mouton, 1980), p. 305.

²²⁰ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 284.

Jomo Kenyatta's Kenyan nationalism. Kenyatta was jailed by the colonisers, as is the leader of the Olinka, and later he became a god-like figure to his followers. He was also associated with the armed rebellions, such as 'Mau', that led to Kenyan independence.²²¹ Importantly, the unnamed leader of Walker's Olinka, like Kenyatta, advocates genital mutilation as being crucial for the preservation of tradition. Also, only a detribalized person would be allowed to marry an uncircumcised woman according to the traditions of the Gikuyu,²²² which again was evoked by Kenyatta in *Facing Mountain Kenya*:²²³ 'When an uncircumcised youth is travelling in the same company as a circumcised youth, he may not drink water until his superior has drunk, not bathe in the river above the spot where the latter is bathing'.²²⁴ Walker brings to the attention of the reader factual information about this horrific practice that Kenyatta defended against Eurocentric denigration of his culture. His popular nationalism, however, marginalised women in limiting them to a reproductive role.

The three novels cover a wide range of concerns. In *The Color Purple* Walker provides a critique of cultural and social acts of sexual violence. In the second novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*, Walker delineates the individual's changing relationship with evolving societies. The final novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is concerned with the complexities of FGM. Across three novels, in dealing with different events and historical periods, Walker maintains her interest in tracing the trajectory of her characters and the fictional Olinka tribe. What also binds the novels is Walker's interest in African folklore, in its negative and positive incarnations, and her belief in its transformational power.

²²¹ Marshall S. Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory, and Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 14.

²²² They are the largest ethnic group in Kenya.

²²³ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 116.

²²⁴ Kenyatta, p. 116.

Possessing Identity

‘But you had already left Africa by then? Said Raye, as I explained this to her.

Yes, I said. My body had left. My soul had not’.²²⁵

The analysis of identity and its relationship with folklore in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is evident in Walker’s earlier novels *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*. She provides a critique of FGM, as practiced globally, but her focus on Africa enables consideration of the risks involved in African-American identification with the continent as a place of belonging.

As well as addressing the uncomfortable subject of FGM, Walker considers AIDS in relation to Africa. Resisting stereotypes, she reveals how AIDS is imbricated in the period of colonialism; the colonisers exploited African people, firstly through slavery and later by using them as an experimental laboratory for the analysis of diseases.

Alice Walker in this novel was highly conscious of the ‘otherness’ in her work. She supports this idea with the appendix ‘To the Reader’ where she provides secondary sources about genital mutilation, indications of African geographical location and a discussion of her invention of the Olinka tribe and thereby ‘authenticating the contextual reality of the narrative’.²²⁶

Tashi has several incarnations corresponding to the changes in her life: Tashi, the troubled African following tribal tradition; Evelyn, the adult Tashi and American citizen; Thirdly, Tashi-Evelyn, linking both of the characters in an African-American woman with remembrance of her tragic past in Africa; and Evelyn-Tashi, an Americanised African who describes herself as a wounded person. We also have Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson, an aged Tashi who confesses to killing the *tsunga* to avenge both her sister’s death and her own pain.

²²⁵ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 116.

²²⁶ Cogeanu, p. 63.

Finally, we have Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul, representative of the ‘reconciliation of opposites’ by which she accepts the consequences of killing the *tsunga*: ‘Tashi Evelyn Johnson. Reborn, soon to be Deceased’.²²⁷ It is at this stage that she sends a message to all women to resist, because resistance is the true secret of joy. This state can be considered in relation to Du Bois’s concept of African-American double consciousness, described as ‘two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body’.²²⁸ Tashi’s double consciousness is evident in her double identity as African and American, becoming confused when asked by M’Lissa ‘what does an American look like?’²²⁹ Her ‘twoness’ causes inner conflict expressed in her answer, ‘An American looks like a wounded person whose wound is hidden from others, and sometimes from herself. An American looks like me’.²³⁰ As Nontsasa Nako notes, ‘African and American are the two points between which the Negro has to negotiate his cultural identity as an African and American’.²³¹

With regard to the efficacy of memory we see that memory can sustain the identity of African Americans and is also the means for resistance. Memorialisation of the past reveals the true history of colonisation and works in opposition to the colonisers’ narratives of empire. The power of memory comes in its deployment for the deconstruction of the colonisers’ mythical histories. Not all colonialisms are the same, however, and the American form is an interior one entailing the subjugation of its internal populations. Here a people, originally from Africa, are marginalised within one country and the issue is one of remembrance as, for bell hooks, ‘memory sustains a spirit of resistance. Too many red and black people live in a state of forgetfulness, embracing a colonised mind so that they can better assimilate into the white world’.²³²

²²⁷ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 279.

²²⁸ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publication, 1994), p. 3.

²²⁹ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 210.

²³⁰ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 213.

²³¹ Nako, p. 11.

²³² bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London: Turnaround, 1992), p. 191.

Tashi, 'a wounded person', ²³³ is so debilitated by double consciousness she has to look in M'Lissa's mirror to confirm her blackness. Despite Tasha's negative feelings towards M'Lissa, she recognises that M'Lissa's has retained her African spirit as 'a witch, not the wary kind American children imitate on Halloween, but a spiritual descendent of the ancient healers', when she linked the African culture with the American to give a link of both.²³⁴

Female Representation

Understanding of FGM as trauma is complicated by recognition of it as the practice of women. Walker addresses this in the *tsunga*'s confession to Tashi that she too had experience of its horror, nevertheless we should be mindful of Sandra Ponzanesi's question:

Is there some notion of universal human rights that must be applied to African cultural traditions in order to establish what can be defined as oppressive for women and must therefore be eradicated, and what can be conceived as part of a social ritualistic heritage and must therefore be preserved?²³⁵

Ponzanesi adds, 'Alice Walker has clearly fictionalised a case of infibulation in which the issues of gender, tradition and transnationalism become embedded'.²³⁶ Some writers who have experienced FGM, such as the Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi, have been accused of internalising western ways of thinking in declaring it harmful.

Alice Walker presents a political, psychological and cultural reading of genital mutilation through the life and character of Tashi. Tashi is presented as a broken, wounded spirit in her African and African-American consciousness. She feels betrayed by both sides.

²³³ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 213.

²³⁴ Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 134.

²³⁵ Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Writing against the Grain: African Women's Texts on Female Infibulation as Literature of Resistance', *Bulletin (Centre for Women's Development Studies)*, 7.2 (2000), pp. 303–18 (p. 304) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/097152150000700210>>.

²³⁶ Ponzanesi, p. 306.

The first causes her harm, through the initiation, while the second cannot recognise her as a victim, since she exercised free choice in undergoing the ordeal of FGM. As Mieke Bal notes in light of this complexity: 'It is therefore necessary to invest both materially and conceptually to change the situation, and these texts are part of this reimagining'.²³⁷

Therefore, we can say that the novel is about two types of women: those whose freedom was taken away and who had no choice but to obey their tribal leader, and who had been forbidden to possess the secret of joy by not having the right to own their own bodies. On the other hand, we have those who prevented other women from having this right and freedom of choice. These types of women are presented through the conflict between Tashi and M'Lissa, where both could not survive the consequences of their beliefs.

For Bal, Walkers narrative strategy

was meant to enhance what usually passes unseen, to relativize what is usually emphasized. Focusing on characters rather than on storylines, on practice rather than on events, those motifs that in traditional commentaries tend to be passed on as part of the bargain became the central issues, *the bargain*.²³⁸

The females of the Olinka are sacrificed for the sake of the maintenance of patriarchy. Finally, the work reflects Walker's universal defence of women, a position not limited by borders. Walker's fiction is a 'weapon in her campaign against genital mutilation [and] offers an opportunity to reflect upon what fiction [...] can and does do'.²³⁹

As we have seen, AIDS has also featured in Walker's novel,²⁴⁰ a disease deployed to stereotype Africans as leading barbaric lives. Both FGM and AIDS are invoked by Walker in order for her to end the silence around these subjects. There must be a social revolution

²³⁷ Ponzanesi, p. 317.

²³⁸ Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 231.

²³⁹ George, p. 370.

²⁴⁰ For Tom Curtis AIDS may have its origins in 'another polio vaccine [that] may have inadvertently infected its recipients with an even more fearsome and insidious virus, the one that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome –AIDS.' Tom Curtis, 'The Origin of AIDS', *Rolling Stone*, 626, 1992, 54–59 (p. 54).

against popular myths surrounding FGM or AIDS. ‘Walker keeps reminding the reader, and this what it is like. Walker’s novel with its wounded main character struggling to take the covers off a practice as old as the pyramids and as current as the AIDS epidemic’.²⁴¹

Walker strives to raise awareness, educate and preserve cultural heritage as means for the affirmation of black identity that permit the imagining of a future sustained by memory. Her works are what she ‘calls a symbol of “racial health—a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature’.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad Press, 1993), p. 33.

²⁴² Kawash, p. 172.

Conclusion

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of his older selves to be lost.¹

In many ways this thesis is testimony to the lasting truth of Du Bois's statement above.

African-American writers' return to African folklore illustrates their longing, consciously or unconsciously, for self-definition. I have focused on the idea that black identity is reflected through forms of folklore and storytelling that affirm African-American culture in creative expressions of collective memory that are derived from a great African heritage.

This research has demonstrated that the fundamental feature of the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker is their use of folkloric elements. Folklore, manifest in stories, names, characters, actions, rituals, customs and songs, provides a resource for Walker and Morrison's articulation of past, present and future.

Walker chooses to focus on the devastating effect of rituals, especially in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* to complicate notions of identity and belonging in contemporary African-American fiction. Walker's work shows how these rituals may be a visible force and a powerful legacy for African-American women in particular. Walker's method is more direct, less poetic perhaps, than Morrison's and more diverse in terms of geography as she takes African Americans to Africa and Africans to America. Morrison's trilogy is set in the United States with closer reference to the rituals and folklore of African-Americans. Significantly, one may argue that Morrison makes reference to the continuation of African folklore as practised in the United States, which serve to sustain the identity of African Americans.

¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 2.

Conversely, Walker focuses on understanding traditions and folklore at their site of origin; both writers, however, aim for affirmations of African-American identity.

We have seen how African Americans practice rituals rooted in African belief systems. For instance, Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, Wild of *Jazz*, Consolata and Mother of *Paradise*, and Celie and Shug of *The Color Purple*, Lissie of *The Temple of My Familiar* and Adam of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* represent the spiritual consciousness of African descendants that come from within their souls as expressed by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*² as the means to awaken African-American traditional faith and religion and enable greater self-recognition and awareness.

The research findings conclude that African folklore has been used in the analysed literary works to sustain identity in a diverse society. Folklore and identity are interrelated and literary works can serve to preserve culture and heritage. It is hoped that the research in this thesis will lead to future studies on different authors and the study of folklore in different contexts, for example in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States or the transnational impact of African-American writers on the African continent.

This thesis has demonstrated the spiritual value of Africa to African Americans. Africa represents more than the period of slavery as it has a rich and full history before the arrival of Europeans. This includes African culture from before the time of slavery as well as the the heritage of those societies that were built during and after the slave trade period. The African inspiration for African-American literary works has extended to today and this thesis shows that these literary works are not an invitation for African-Americans to be possessed by the ghosts of the past, but to live and express spiritual connections that can transcend continental boundaries.

² Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 126.

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