THE PLACE AND EXPRESSION OF ORAL TRADITION IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED, SONG OF SOLOMON* AND RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

BY

ASHITUABE, APEYE LUCY
P13AREN8074

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES,

FACULTY OF ARTS,

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY,

ZARIA, NIGERIA

SUPERVISOR 1: PROF. ABU LIMAN

SUPERVISOR 2: DR. EDWARD ABAH

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled *The Place and Expression of Oral Tradition in Toni Morrison's Beloved, Song of Solomon and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* has been written by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies under the supervision of Professor Abubakar Liman and Dr. Edward Abah Ochigbo.

The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this thesis was previously presented for another degree or diploma at any university.

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Name of student Signature Date

CERTIFICATION

This dissertation entitled *The Place and Expression of Oral Tradition in Toni Morrison's Beloved, Song of Solomon and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* by Ashituabe, Apeye Lucy meets the regulations governing the award of Masters of Arts Degree in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, is approved for its contribution to knowledge and Literary Presentation.

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Prof. Abubakar Liman Date
Chairman, Supervisory Committee

---------- ----------

Dr. Edward Abah Ochigbo Date
Member, Supervisory Committee

---------- ----------

Prof. T. Y. Surakat Date
Head of Department

---------- ----------

Prof. S.Z Abubakar Date
Dean, Postgraduate School

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to Almighty God for His unending love and protection. It is also dedicated to my family for their overwhelming support throughout the period of this research.

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The writing of this dissertation has been made possible by God almighty who gave me much insight and guidance from the very first day I began the research. I appreciate the grace of God in my life throughout the course of this research.

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ABSTRACT

The place and expression of Oral tradition in selected novels of Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison shows how oral tradition is able to link the past and present in terms of family origins and cultural identity at the same time. Since Africans were transported as slaves to America, they have nurtured and created a dynamic culture within a climate of intense racial, social and economic exploitation and injustice. They developed kinship networks, religious beliefs, and families infused with their values and race knowledge. This rich expressive culture articulates their deepest feelings, aspirations, and wishes. The research focuses on the place and expression of oral tradition in both urban and rural communities. The African Americans have maintained a lively and widespread verbal art tradition in spite of urbanization, industrial growth, education, and mass communications which has become a tool for writers. This has been possible because blacks for their own survival and sanity improvised and formed their own culture within the dominant ones, one which remains predominantly oral as discussed in the selected texts. The oral tradition as a form is hugely expressed and deployed in the selected text: Toni Morrison's *Beloved (1989*) *Song of Solomon (1977)* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man (1952).* The selected texts shows how blacks lived apart yet as a part of the larger society using stories, songs, and other kinds of folklore to continue to develop and preserve their history. The wealth of oral lore includes many traditional forms such as songs, proverbs and rhymes, handclap, dance and rap, as well as toasts and tales recited by adults. Although each genre has its own concerns and norms, all represent a unique oral response to a difficult historical and economic climate. The introductory part discusses the background and the theoretical framework of the research. There is also a review of related literatures on the selected novelists showing different perceptions. These views by various authors on Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison clearly shows that the aspect of oral tradition has been neglected by researchers. The research explores these oral traditions in the selected texts and delineates what they mean to African Americans. The desertation relates the essence and uses of oral tradition and practices for African Americans and it is discovered that the past lives of African Americans can never be complete without relating their ties to Africa. Blacks were transported to the new world as slaves and what kept their spirits and history alive is their rich cultural heritage and oral traditions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Oral traditions are practices that virtually all societies of the world have laid claims to at one time or the other. However, for some societies they were the preferred means for conveying information to the community for various reasons.Storytelling, proverbs, myth, tricks and so on were developed in oral cultures because they were easier forms that helped in retaining information as a series of events instead of as a set of facts**.** Without libraries or archives it was the responsibility of the oral historians to keep records and orally pass on the information to the whole population but particularly to the younger generations.

Oral traditions are highly structured and in one of its form such as the folktale for instance the storyline is repeated over generations by writers though with some details changing. In other words, because they are oral texts, they are not static or unchanging. The oral text may evolve somewhat with time, place, regional style, performer and audiences in order to keep the relevant ideas it contains. Also, the narrative may slowly change as the values and conditions of the society change.Additional scenes or descriptions may be added to improve the story or make it more meaningful.

Cultural information is also passed on from one generation to the next by storytellers. The forms of oral tradition include poetry (often chanted or sung), folktales, and proverbs as well as magical spells, religious instruction, and recollections of the past. Music and rhyme commonly serve as both entertainment and aids to memory. Hewlett, B. S. and Cavalli-Sforza(1996) explained that epic poems concerning the destiny of a society or summarizing its myths often begin as oral tradition and are later written down. In oral cultures, oral tradition is

the only means of communicating knowledge. The prevalence of radio, television, and newspapers in Western culture has led to the decline of oral tradition, though it survives among old people and some group of people that uphold their history, as well as among children, whose games, counting rhymes, and songs are transmitted orally from generation to generation.

Scholars and writers recognise both the role and constituents of human culture and the need to take cognisance of the oral components of people's tradition a reason for developing the field of oral literature. A prominent scholar in the field of oral literature is Ruth Finnegan. She published *Oral Literature in Africa (1970)* and this has been praised as one of the most important books in this field. The study traces the history of storytelling back to Africa. The study of Oral Literature has been identified by scholars as orature, traditional literature, folk literature and folklore, while the pre-dominant word remains literature that is the creative texts that appeals to our imagination or to our emotions. Oral tradition, oral culture and oral lore are cultural materials and traditions transmitted orally from one generation to another. Ngugi (2007) observes that the messages or testimony are verbally transmitted in speech or song and may take the form, for example, of folktales, sayings, ballads, songs, or chants. In this way, it is possible for a society to transmit oral history, oral literature, oral law and other forms of knowledge across generations without a writing system.

Orature has been used variously since the Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu who coined it in the early seventies of the last century to counter the tendency to see the arts communicated orally and received aurally as an inferior or a lower rung in the linear development of literature. Ngugi (2007) explains that Pio Zirimu rejected the term oral literature, but he never lived long enough to develop orature as a concept; his life was untimely cut short by the brutal Idi Amin dictatorship, whose agents poisoned him in Nigeria during the famous *Festac'77*. Ngugi adds

that Idi Amin hated critical performing artists, and Pio Zirimu was one on the list of his victims. But his brief definition of orature as the use of utterance as an aesthetic means of expression remains tantalizing, pointing to an oral system of aesthetics that did not need validation of the literary form. The term however has spread, and one reads variously of Hawaiian Orature, Namibian Orature, Ghanaian Orature and many others. Despite the widespread usage, very few have engaged with the term to tease out the various theoretical possibilities in the term. Pitika Ntuli of South Africa is one of the few who have attempted to take the term beyond its Zirimian usage.

Furthermore, oral literature has been described by Okpewho (1992) as 'Literature delivered by word of mouth'. This has turned out to be a very useful concept for those scholars interested in examining the cultural relationships between those who can read and write and those who cannot or, in a more professional language, between orality and literacy. The term orality, is described by Walter J. Ong(1982) as a thought and verbal expression in societies where the technologies of literacy (especially writing and print) are unfamiliar to most of the population. The study of orality is closely allied to the study of oral tradition. However, it has broader implications, implicitly touching every aspect of the economics, politics, institutional development, and human development of oral societies. The study of orality has important implications for international development, especially as it relates to the goal of eradicating poverty, as well as to the process of globalization.

Walter J. Ong (1982) distinguishes between two forms of orality: 'primary orality' which refers to thought and its verbal expression within cultures totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, and 'secondary orality' which presumes and rests upon literate thought and expression, and people reading written material. In essence, secondary orality is a term which

refers to an aspect of his influential theory of transformative technologies. The theory considers the transformative effects of print on consciousness/cognition and on various aspects of society in oral/pre-literate and literate cultures. To understand secondary orality, one must first understand that it is uniquely a product of literacy but that it also allows for a return to some of the characteristics of orality.

In addition, Walter Ong (1982) is of the view that in primary oral or pre-literate cultures, people lived in close-knit communities that were limited by place. Knowledge was typically linked to doing and learned through apprenticeship. Knowledge was preserved through oral retelling, often communally. Oral cultures were homeostatic, changing slowly. These characteristics changed with the introduction of writing and later print. Print therefore encouraged individualization, distance, and objectivity. Print also encouraged abstract and analytical thought. Writing preserved knowledge across time and space, allowing for a development of historical consciousness. Change was facilitated as information could be shared more quickly and new ways of knowing facilitated societal changes. Secondary orality is post-literate, relying on the affordances of the print culture but revisiting some of the cultural characteristics present before literacy.

This research therefore utilises products of electronic technologies, which are built on print. In this regard, secondary orality allows for instantaneous feedback in communication between people, facilitates the development of community, and allows for the preservation of information as texts while encouraging fluidity and communal ownership of information. Because of the time-and-distance-spanning capabilities of cyber and digital communications, secondary orality can build community and group mindedness, but it also allows for subjectivity, empathy, situational focus, and closeness to the human life-world. Knowledge can be preserved

and it is subject to change. As the Internet and the Web allow people from around the world to communicate freely with each other, users can potentially develop a global awareness. In these ways, secondary orality offers potentials that build on literacy but also reintroduces many of the features of primary orality.

1.2 ORAL TRADITION AS A TOOL FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITERS

There has been a constant changing trend concerning the place of African Americans' in American society over the centuries. Before the American Civil War of the 1860s the literature primarily consisted of memoirs otherwise called slave narratives by people who had escaped from slavery; the genre of slave narratives included accounts of life under slavery and the path of justice and redemption to freedom. There was an early distinction between the literature of freed slaves and the literature of free blacks who had been born in the North. Free blacks had to express their oppression in a different narrative form. Free blacks in the North often spoke out against slavery and racial injustices using the spiritual narrative. With the passage of time, writers began to experiment with different oral forms which reflect the rich cultural heritage of the blacks. American Literature has grown over the years with the immense contributions of African American writers. African American literature could be described as writings by people of African descent living in the United States of America. Guragain(2009) opines that African American writers are preoccupied with the notion of blacks as marginalized and black literature as the non-canonical literature. Their literary careers started with the crisis of their identity as blacks caught in the complex web of colour related concerns in America.They strive to redefine white/black hierarchy of mainstream discourse. Mainstream hegemonic discourse always undermines black's presence in the making of American literature and culture.

Guragain (2009) also affirms that the African-American literary tradition began with the oral culture long before any of the materials in it were written on. Throughout American history, African Americans have used the oral culture as a natural part of black expressive culture. They are very powerful voices that give fuller meanings to words on a page. The America South is an important landscape in African American literature. The South was a primary port of entry for slaving vessels. Most black slaves remained in the Southern states, while those that could afford to move towards the north did so since slavery was more subtle there. The South was an important place for the African American literature because the South was served as the site of hope and change for the black slaves but there were also horrors.

The majority of African captives entered the New World from the Southern ports and remained in the Southern states as stated in (*Wikipedia).*They relied heavily on the African cultural heritage and belief systems. From slave spirituals to the moving and powerful writing of former slaves, from the poignant sadness of the blues to the energetic rhythms of hip-hop, blacks made important contributions to the literary culture of the United African States. Each of these art forms traces its roots to the blending and recreating of African tradition with European and American culture that took place centuries ago.

As slaves, African Americans found ways to express their sense of joy and sorrow, their identity and their longings. The African American literary tradition began with the slave narratives, which provided a history of their lives in bondage. Along with the slave narratives, the oral tradition of folktales, which also had its origins in Africa, became in time part of mainstream American culture.

The oral tradition of storytelling, in which African folktales were retold and adapted to fit new surroundings and circumstances, was an important part of everyday slave life of an African

American. Perhaps the greatest satisfaction for black writers during the nineteenth century was to have the freedom to write. Learning how to read and write was a tremendous accomplishment for many African-Americans, since southern law prohibited such knowledge to the slaves. Frederick Douglass, himself a former slave, used his eloquence as a writer to persuade Americans to oppose slavery. Valerie (2005:65) affirms that:

> Douglass's narratives consistently make room for his culture's ways of telling. His treatment of his own family history is an instance. As he fleshes out the early scenes of his life, the centrality of the oral tradition to communal continuity receives particular attention, though -not overtly. The Narrative and My Bondage both tell of slavery's design to erase personal, familial, and cultural knowledge, and both, at the same time, show how oral traditions allowed for their maintenance. In the Narrative Douglass recalls slavery's intent to foster Fragmentation…Douglass wrote and rewrote his narrative. The slave steeped in the orality of his community found ways to honor it in the crafting of his written narrative, and we as readers should do no less. To read his work solely through a logocentric lens overlooks revisions that memorialize a vernacular presence. Douglass's skill foreshadows other writers who will use style to symbolize cultural emancipation.

As the bonds of slavery loosened, black writers clamoured to be heard, but the range and scope of their work was limited. Their lives as slaves were practically the only subject in their repertoire. It is believed that the turning point in African American literary history came during the Harlem Renaissance, which extended from the late 1910s to the early 1930s as stated in Baym, Nina, ed (2003). During the Harlem Renaissance, a number of African American writers moved away from the earlier emphasis on slavery and, although they heeded the grim reality of racism, explored the meaning of their identity as black people. Yet, even amid the cultural flowering, black writers confronted serious literary and intellectual problems. The African American historian Nathan I. Huggins(1977), argues that most black writers of the Renaissance

either imitated white literary standards or presented an image of blacks as primitives that fit the white racial expectations and stereotypes. He mentioned this in one of his papers' presentation online:

> The Harlem Renaissance has become a well-known episode in American cultural history, as the time and place of the first great public flowering of black American art and literature. Yet, as Nathan Huggins suggests in his 1971 book of the same name, it is much more the idea of a Harlem Renaissance than its actual productions that has proved to be durable. Of the cultural figures associated with it, perhaps only poet Langston Hughes is still well-remembered, and his work still presented to a wide public. In contrast, Harlem Renaissance novels such as Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* are more likely to be read today as cultural artifacts than as works of literature in their own right.

Slaveholders prohibited education of enslaved African Americans because they feared it might empower their chattel and inspire or enable emancipatory ambitions. In the United States, the legislation that denied slaves formal education seemed to have contributed to their maintaining a strong oral tradition, a common feature of indigenous African cultures. African-based oral traditions became the primary means of preserving history, mores, and other cultural information among the people. This was consistent with the *griot* practices of oral history in many African and other cultures that did not rely on the written word. Many of these cultural elements have been passed from generation to generation through storytelling. The folktales provided African Americans the opportunity to inspire and educate one another. Examples of African American folktales include trickster tales of Br'er Rabbit and heroic tales such as that of John Henry. The *Uncle Remusstories* by Joel Chandler Harris(1980) helped to bring African-American folk tales into mainstream adoption, Harris led two significant professional lives. Editor and journalist Joe Harris ushered in the New South alongside Henry W. Grady, stressing regional and racial reconciliation during and after the Reconstruction era. Joel Chandler Harris,

fiction writer and folklorist, recorded many Brer Rabbit stories from the African-American oral tradition and revolutionized children's literature in the process.

Harris did not appreciate the complexity of the stories nor their potential for a lasting impact on society. Other narratives that appear as important, recurring motifs in African-American culture are the “Signifying Monkey,” “The Ballad of Shine,” and “The legend of Stagger Lee”. The legacy of the African-American oral tradition manifests in diverse forms as will be discussed in this research. African-American preachers tend to perform rather than simply speak. The emotion of the subject is carried through the speaker's tone, volume, and cadence, which tend to mirror the rising action, climax, and descending action of the sermon. Often song, dance, verse, and structured pauses are placed throughout the sermon. Call and response is another pervasive element of the African American oral tradition. In direct contrast to recent tradition in other American and Western cultures, it is an acceptable and common audience reaction to interrupt and affirm the speaker. This pattern of interaction is also evident in music, particularly in blues and jazz forms. Hyperbolic and provocative, even incendiary, rhetoric is another aspect of African American oral tradition often evident in the pulpit in a tradition sometimes referred to as "prophetic speech" amond some gospel preachers today.

Other aspects of African American oral tradition include trash talk, rhyming, semantic inversion and word play, many of which have found their way into mainstream American popular culture and become international phenomena. Spoken word artistry is another example of how the African American oral tradition has influenced modern popular culture. Spoken word artists employ the same techniques as African American preachers including movement, rhythm, and audience participation. Rap music from the 1980s and beyond has been seen as an extension of oral culture.

Manthia Diawara (1998) explains that African American literature has its roots in the oral traditions of African slaves who were transported to America. The slaves used stories and fables in much the same way as they used music. These stories influenced the earliest African American writers and poets in the 18th century such as Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano. These authors reached early high points by telling slave narratives. Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison also borrowed this tradition.

During the early 20th century Harlem Renaissance, numerous authors and poets, such as Langston Hughes, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Booker T Washington, grappled with how to respond to discrimination in America. Authors during the Civil Rights era, such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about issues of racial segregation, oppression, and other aspects of African American life(*Wikipedia*). This tradition continues today with authors who have been accepted as integral part of American literature, with works such as Toni Morrison *Beloved, Song of Solomon* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* achieving both best-selling and/or award-winning status.

There is no doubt that African American literature has its stem in the oral tradition of African origin. This has been attested to by a number of critics, for example, Jerry (1998:146) opines that:

> African American literature is the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of African descent. The genre traces its origins to the works of such late 18th century writers as Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano, reaching early high points with slave narratives and the Harlem Renaissance, and continuing today with authors such as the Nobel Prize-winning Toni Morrison and award-winning Walter Mosley being ranked among the top writers in the United States. Among the themes and issues explored in this literature are the role of African Americans within the larger American society, African-American culture, racism, slavery, and equality. African-

> American writing has tended to incorporate oral forms, such as spirituals, sermons, gospel music, blues and rap.

Behind the achievements of individual African American writers during the antislavery era lies the communal consciousness of millions of slaves, whose oral tradition in song and story has given form and substance to much subsequent literature by black Americans. An online source, "The Sermon and the African American literary imagination" by Dolan Hubbard affirms: 'Douglass recalled that the plantation spiritual "Run to Jesus" had first suggested to him the thought of making his escape from slavery. When slaves sang "I thank God I'm free at last," only they knew whether they were referring to freedom from sin or from slavery. A second great fund of Southern black folklore…'

Furthermore, Gayl Wilentz (2008) in *Liberating Voices,* as its subtitle suggest focuses on the prevalence of oral tradition in African American literature. The book is separated into three sections: Poetry, Short Fiction, and The Novel. In her introduction, she identifies the Harlem Renaissance as the moment when "folklore or oral tradition was no longer considered quaint and restrictive, but as the ore for complex literary influence" (9). Relating this tradition to Euro-American authors such as Mark Twain, she ends her introduction with the concept of an African American "multilinguistic" text which is an admixture of literary and oral genres, both "spoken and musical"On a more elaborate term, Sven Birkerts (1992:168) is of the opion that:

> The basic premise of Gayl Jones's Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature is that modern African American writers did not begin to realize their true literary identity until they either rejected the dominant modes of the European American tradition, adopting instead the forms and approaches suggested by their own oral and musical traditions, or else found ways to transform the received patterns through the deep incorporation of indigenous elements.

Thus, it is glaring that oral tradition is a vital tool for African American writers who wish to represent the rich cultural heritage that was transported to America during the slave period; many writers have therefore used the indigenous elements to drive home this message.

A scholar of African American Literature, Dr. Herbert Woodward Martin from the University of Dayton points out in one of his speeches delivered at Ohio University titled "*The African American Oral Tradition*" that African American writers imply oral forms in their literary works and that literatures draw from different types of genres to form its narratives about slavery. Genres such as, spiritual, folk songs and gospels are all intertwined together to form each individual work. Herbert Martin begins by explaining the language of the African Americans. The law forbade anyone to teach the slaves standard English; therefore, they learned solely by ear. When they transferred the language that they heard to paper, a new style of language was formed which was referred to as dialect. Dialect was not Standard English because it was what the African Americans perceived they had heard or how they thought the word was spelled, since they were forbidden to learn Standard English.

The Cambridge History of African American Literature (*CHAAL*) (2011) has a goal that may seem radical within the tradition of writing literary histories. Beyond presenting a fairly complete chronological description of African American literature in the United States, from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries, this reference work seeks to illustrate how the literature comprises orature (oral literature) and printed texts simultaneously. The reason is not far to seek. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1988:170) demonstrated in *The Signifying Monkey*, performance is one of the distinguishing features of African American literature. The role of utterance or speech is not necessarily secondary to the role of writing or inscription. Speaking and writing are interlocked frequencies of a single formal phenomenon.

In addition, Johnny Van Hove (1996) buttresses on the use of oral tradition long before the modern time and as such transmit information that covers every aspect of the society saying 'the first major twenty-first century history of four hundred years of black writing'. *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* presents a comprehensive overview of the literary traditions, oral and print, of African-descent in the United States. Expert contributors, drawn from the Unite States and beyond, emphasise the dual nature of each text discussed as a work of art created by an individual and as a response to unfolding events in American cultural, political, and social history. Unprecedented in scope, sophistication and accessibility, the volume draws together current scholarship in the field.

Considering the aforementioned, Toni Morrison ranks among the most highly regarded and widely read fiction writers and cultural critics in America. As a critic she refuses to allow race to be relegated to the margins of literary discourse. In one of her interviews with Susanna Rustin (October, 2008) titled *Predicting the Past* she focuses on the importance of African American's oral and musical culture and to reclaim black historical experiences. Morrison says that African Americans have rediscovered texts that have long been suppressed or ignored, have sought to make places for African American writing within the canon and have developed ways of interpreting these works. Morrison recalls the ubiquitousness of African American culture rituals in her childhood and adolescence; the music, folklore, ghost stories, dreams, signs and variations that are so vividly evoked in her fictions have been shaping and empowering presence in her life as well. The impact of these forces in her life has inspired her to capture the qualities of African American cultural expression in her writing. Morrison has described the influence of oral tradition, call and response, jazz and dance in her narratives. Yet the presence of myth, enchantment, and folk practices in her work never offers an escape from the socio-political

conditions that have shaped lives of African Americans. Cultural dislocation, migration and urbanization provide inescapable contexts within which her explorations of African American past are located.

In a review of *Invisible Man*, SH Hobbs(2001) views that unlike conventional novels that present a series of related sequential events, *Invisible Man* consists of a series of seemingly unrelated scenes or episodes often expressed in the form of stories or sermons linked only by the narrator's comments and observations. In this way, the structure of the novel mirrors the structure of a jazz composition, players stepping forward to perform their impromptu solos, then stepping back to rejoin their group. The structure also emulates the oral tradition of preliterate societies. Passed down orally from generation to generation, their stories embodied a people's culture and history. In the novel, each character's story can be viewed as a lesson that contributes to the narrator's growth and awareness, bringing him closer to an understanding of his own people's culture and history.

Being confronted with a more powerful opponent, African Americans resorted to unconventional tactics like wit, deceit and masking. Gates traces the origins of Afro-American tricksterism to the mythologies of Yoruba cultures. The chief trickster was called Esu. African American tradition replaced Esu with the Signifying Monkey (Gates 1989: xxi). The relationship between whites and the black trickster parallels that between the Lion and the Signifying Monkey. The Lion, although more powerful, is outsmarted by the Monkey, because he cannot decipher the Monkey’s figurative language. He reads it literally, not figuratively. African tricksterism was transplanted onto American soil, finding its way into African American oral tradition and into everyday life of African Americans.

In the light of above, it is obvious that both Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison explore oral tradition extensively in their works. Their fictions are self-consciously concerned with myth, legend, storytelling, and other traditional forms, as well as with memory and history. The stories are conscious of African cultural heritage as well as African-American history, thus demonstrating the importance of the past to the struggles of contemporary African Americans.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many scholars seem to be more focused on slave narratives giving little or no attention to oral tradition as a viable link between African Americans and Africa where they were transported from. This study therefore, is concerned with how African oral traditions strongly survived the harsh forces which transported them from their homeland and the dislocation experienced in a strange continent where blacks were forced to live as slaves. This study deals with how oral traditions have been employed in varied artistic forms, in this case, prose form by African American writers. The study shows abundant evidence that people of the African diaspora in various parts of the world, especially in America, still practice traditions that are traceable only or in many ways to Africa. Furthermore, these age-old traditions and their variants continue to manifest themselves remarkably in oral and written literature, particularly in African American literature. Understanding these traditions and how individual authors have employed them in their works could lay a solid foundation for a correct reading, critiquing, and appreciation of the thematic and aesthetic aspects of the selected texts.

This study explores the use of oral tradition to reconstruct the past ways of a rural, black community in America, during the late 1900s. Hence, African-based oral traditions are the primary means of preserving history, morals, and other cultural information among the people.

This was consistent with the griot practices of oral history in many African and other cultures that did not rely on the written word. Many of these cultural elements have been passed from generation to generation through storytelling. The folktales provided African Americans the opportunity to inspire and educate one another.

Elements of black family identity have not been given enough attention when viewed from a cultural context that reintroduces history through the usage of folk tradition. Having an authentic voice in literature and having this voice being distinguished by the use of memory shifts shows how black literature is presented, allowing therefore how others perceive such literature being mindful of African-American culture and beliefs. Through the deconstruction of the slave narrative in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison is able to uncover a startling truth: through the use of memory, slavery is rewritten from an authentic folklore tradition that humanizes vulnerability in African-American and female characters. In her novel*Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison explores the intricate connection betweennames and stories, and between the related processes of naming and storytelling. In the case of *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, the text shows that one of the main motifs of the oral tradition is oratory which imbued with of the irony, wit and symbolism provides a major base and canvass for the text's narrative.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study is aimed at providing an insight into African cultural survivals in the form of oral and folk traditions of African American writers. The study shows how Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison use the oral tradition of African American community to show the collective image of the blacks in a hostile environment. The following are therefore the key objectives of the study:

- To highlight different forms of African American oral traditions and explain the context in which they are used (e.g., proverbs, spirituals, folktales, epic narratives, etc.) in the selected texts.
- To demonstrate basic understanding of how these oral traditions and serve as a form of relief or a means of mediation for African Americans.
- To apply knowledge of African American oral and folk traditions to analyzing and interpreting African American literature.
- To analyze the utility of oral tradition itself in order to determine the usefulness of the oral tradition to the novels narrative structure and to critically examine the benefits that result when a population relies on oral sources and forms.

1.5 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

The research evaluates the relationship and influence of African oral tradition on African American Literature. An exploration is done of *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison and *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. These primary texts have been chosen for illustrative purposes but references are drawn from both non-African American and African American writers. Much attention has not been given to this area in literature, making this effort a contribution to knowledge in the field. This research does not reflect oral tradition in its raw form before being transliterated, but captures Toni Morrison's and Ralph Ellison's use of oral tradition as reflected in the selected books.

1.6 JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

This study attempts to bring together the relationship between African Americans and their African origin as evidence in literary productions. The survival of oral tradition as portrayed in the selected texts is evidence that though the blacks have been uprooted from their African roots they are still very much attached to numerous aspects of their culture and values. This research shows the power of orality as a secondary material for writers and how it has embodied the characteristics of a human society that has preserved its cultural heritage orally, or inscribing the reflections, thoughts, and emotions of its people. Furthermore, each of the members of such a society is responsible for perpetuating orality. From this point of view, orality is the restitution of memory transmitted through diverse expressions of voice or words of a culture. Similar to reproduction by language, sounds and images are transported through a particular level of creation and expression, in this case, oral tradition.

In addition, the research shows the uniqueness of these oral traditional influences in the selected novels of Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison. It demonstrates in clear terms how oral tradition is able to link the past and present family origins and the cultural identity of African Americans at the same time. Since Africans were transported as slaves to America, they have nurtured and created a dynamic culture within a climate of intense racial, social, and economic exploitation and injustice. They developed kinship networks, religious beliefs, and families infused with their values and race knowledge. This rich expressive culture expressed largely in physical and oral forms articulate their deepest feelings, aspirations, and wishes.

The research employs the uses of oral tradition in both urban and rural communities in the selected texts. The oral tradition as a form is variously expressed and visible in the selected texts: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1989) *Song of Solomon* (1977), and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible*

Man (1952). The selected texts show how blacks lived apart yet as a part of the larger city using stories, songs, and other kinds of folk traditions to continue to develop and preserve their history. The wealth of oral lore includes many traditional forms such as songs, proverbs and rhymes, handclap dance and rap, as well as toasts and tales recited by adults. Although each genre has its own concerns and norms, all represent a unique oral response to a difficult historical and economic climate.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is carried out to evaluate the place and expression of African oral tradition in African American literature. Selected African American literary texts have been chosen as source for primary data. Consequently, the materials for critical analysis and review of related literature are library and internet based. Other secondary sources include journals, unpublished theses and seminar papers.

1.8 POST COLONIAL DISCOURSE AS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Post-colonial literature is described by Ashcroft etal (ed)(1989:3) as a body of literary writings that react to the discourse of colonization. Postcolonial literature often involves writings that deal with issues of de-colonization or the political and cultural independence of people formerly subjugated to colonial rule. It is also a literary critique deployed in studying texts that carry racist or colonial undertones. Postcolonial literature in its most recent form, also attempts to critique the contemporary postcolonial discourse that has been shaped over recent times. It attempts to re-read this very emergence of post-colonialism and its literary expression itself.

Post-colonial literature takes on an added importance in this research as writers attempt to depict their respective landscapes and cultures in a more authentic way so as to appeal to a new generation. In an attempt to depict oral tradition in the selected texts, the strands of post-colonial discourse used in this study allow for an analysis that appreciates the place and social context of the African American writer and the experience of the people that is presented.

Furthermore, Post-colonial analytical theory is appropriate in this research because the urge to present the effects of what slave masters left and the effects on the colonised has become imperative. New independent countries had to deal, not only with many economic and social issues, such as poverty and lack of education, but also with the aftermath of colonialism just like the case of the black characters in the selected texts of Toni Morison and Ralph Ellison. Centuries of maltreatment, complete disrespect and negation of the natives' values and culture alienated the subjugated people from their own lands and brought an erosion of their identity. Beliefs established by colonizers that indigenous people were savages and that their culture was less important proved to be wrong. The post-colonial authors' challenge was to find and re-establish their lost national identity, history and literature, and to define their relationship with the land and language of their former master, Ashcroft etal (ed)(1989:20).

Using the framework of postcolonial discourse as basis for this research therefore is to provide a platform of comprehending how African American authors reflect in their writings the effects of colonialism and the survival of oral traditions among the blacks within America. The preservation of African American cultural history which is rooted in slavery has been successfully done to a large extent by writers who have continued to build on these experiences and social realities of the African Americans basically to inform the new generation. By retelling or re-enacting a tale learned from another, it is kept alive for a new generation. "…oral tradition

has somewhat different purposes in its ‘art’ than written traditions. The stories are much more important for the preservation of group identity and cultural practices. Sociologists might also emphasize a requirement that the material is held in common by a group of people, over several generations, and might distinguish oral tradition from testimony or oral history’ Henige (2009:199-200). In the same vein, ‘as an academic discipline, it refers both to a set of objects of study and a method by which they are studied… the oral traditions represent a social activity more than an artistic one. There are reasons for the ‘art’ of it. Songs and poems learned and passed on in the oral tradition possess certain characteristics. In the same way that all cultures have taboos which are different across cultural boundaries, all oral traditions rely on repetition, affirmation, and patterning, though they vary across the traditions.’ (Dundes, Alan1988:10-12)

Cultures that are said to rely on oral traditions look at the concept of time differently. Events are not always sequential and they are not always consistent with historical events or human development. In some oral cultures, time seems almost collapsed in that the origin of the individual, or the activities of the individual, are not separated in the way that they are for written language cultures. Part of the reason for this is the way the stories are told. Oral traditions do not rely on strict memorization; some stories are contained in or modified by others. In addition, because things are not recorded, it is not possible to go back to particular dates or eras with any degree of specificity or reliability. In this light, oral traditions are generative and mnemonic. They are affirming of the present order and provide a level of predictability. Sometimes the stories are changed, or may reflect a vision of the culture that doesn't agree with historical fact. Changes to legends, or stories (cultural mythologies) serve to make the events more interesting, more flattering to the culture, which helps keep the story alive and thereby, the culture as well. (Graham2011:15-18).

That African traditions ultimately survived the harsh forces which transported them from their homeland to other continents is a salient subject in world history, but how they have been employed in varied artistic forms still requires further investigation. Anthropological studies show abundant evidence that people of African Diaspora in various parts of the world still practice traditions that are traceable only to Africa.

Using the Post-Colonial analytical theory therefore, this research captures African oral tradition in African American literature as a literary creation that embodies many different ways in which the African-American writer explores what Africa is, what it means to him or her, and what it means to the world. This tradition appears in various forms like poetry, songs, incantations, etc. and is reinforced from generation to generation and can be seen from the perspective of post-colonial discourse.

Franz Fanon(1963) argues that the first step for colonialized people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. For centuries the European colonising power will have devalued the nation's past, seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilised limbo, or even as a historical void. Children, both black and white, will have been taught to see history, culture and progress as beginning with the arrival of the Europeans. If the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one's own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued.

Other scholars whose strands of Postcolonial theory are essential to this research include Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha. Gandhi, Leela (2007) views Edward Said's Orientalism' as the founder stone of post-colonial study. Orientalism established the scientific study of postcolonial theory published in 1978. It revolutionized the area of postcolonial theory and literatures. It depicts the imbalance between the West and East by

showing the superiority of West over the East, West always dominated the East. Said applied terms and concepts as " orient' the other' and 'accident' to show the relation between two distinct cultures - West and East. In the case of this research factors like irrationality, sensuality, primitiveness, despotism and idleness are attributed to the whites to establish dominance. In the case of this research this process of attributions marginalised African Americans. Binary opposition of colonised and colonizers suggests that the valley of discrimination among them is wider, relating this to Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison's characters, African Americans were perpetually subjugated but they never gave up as seen in the characters created. They use oral tradition to reaffirm their identity and value among the whites.

"West and East form a binary opposition in which the two poles define each other, the inferiority that orientalism attributes to the East simultaneously serves to construct the West's superiority. The sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the East construct the West as rational, democratic, and progressive and so on." (Bertens, 2007: 205). In this case African Americans are seen as the East while the white Americans, the West. Again, the view of superior West and inferior East is expressed by Peter Barry in his comments on Said's Orientalism. He says that Said's Orientalism started postcolonial theory exposing the very basic ideas regarding this area. Said identifies a European cultural tradition of 'Orientalism', which is a particular and long-standing way of identifying the East as 'other' and inferior to the West."(Barry, 2006).

He further, explains the three stages of postcolonial literature to understand the various dimensions of postcolonial theory. The first stage is the Adopt phase in which the writer seeks the form of genre and mentions its universal validity. The second stage is the Adapt phase, here the author adapts or borrows the form, particularly the European form to the native subject

matter. The last stage is the Adept phase, focusing over the independence of the text. In the last phase, there is no find interference of European cultural forms. Regarding the third phase, Barry made a remark: "Characteristically, postcolonial writers evoke or create precolonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and, the contemporary that is tainted with the colonial status of their countries. Here, then, is the first characteristic of postcolonial criticism- an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral 'other." (Barry2006:194). This commentary on 'Orientalism' clarifies the objective of study of postcolonial theory as to unite the different cultural, social, political, economic, ethno-racist aspect in literatures of both the Worlds- East and West.

Although this research area is based on African American literature and not the 'West' nor the 'East' but the descriptions could be used to describe the relationship that existed between African Americans and the white Americans. In this case, the rift between these two groups lay bare the binary opposition in the selected texts.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987) widened the scope of subaltern literature including the literatures of marginalised women. 'Spivak can be said to be the first postcolonial theorist with a fully feminist agenda. That agenda includes the complicity of female writers with imperialism... Spinvak's insistence on the importance of feminist perspectives is part of a larger role that she has perhaps unintentionally played over the last two decades: that of the theoretical conscience of postcolonial studies. Her work has as much addressed theoretical shortcomings in postcolonial theoriszing as it has focused on postcolonial issues itself.'(Bertens,2007: 211). Spivak's chief contribution of postcolonial theory is her terms - subaltern, essentialism, strategic essentialism, which gained a specific reference in postcolonial literary and critical studies in contemporary age.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of Hybridity gained currency in defining the vision of postcolonial theory that all cultures are confluence in each other and it cannot be separated. In this regard, the diasporic writing become important; it redefined the postcolonial aftermath not only in literature but also in socio-cultural, political, national, economic, etc. Selden remarks: "Bhabha sees hybridity as a problematic of colonial representation which reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal (of difference), so that other 'denied' knowledge's enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority."(Selden,2007: 228).

Bhabha also raises the question of cultural identity. He uses the term mimicry to indicate the Westenrization of native cultures. Native cultures are imitating blindly the Western culture without knowing cultural demolition of natives.

Gandhi(1998) surmises that postcolonial theory revolves around some issues and they are found in postcolonial literature. It is necessary to note down some of the issues often discussed in postcolonial theory. They include:

- Cultural difference in literary texts
- Double identity and identity crisis in different cultures and their texts.
- Rejection of Western literature and their norms, and establishment of native literature creating their own norms.
- Western literature has not the ability to speak over the matters like colonialism and imperialism.
- Support to the notion that western literature is not the universal literature.
- Representation of prominence of 'Other' cultures in literature.
- Strong belief in hybridity, multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, and cultural polyvalence.

- Use of ‘otherness’ and ‘marginality’ as the power, source of energy and potential change for the natives.
- Foregrounding of marginality is the chief task of native literature.

Thus, postcolonial theory as epistemology, ethics, and politics, addresses matters of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a postcolonial national identity, of how a colonized people’s knowledge about the world is generated under specific relations between the powerful and the powerless, circulated repetitively and finally legitimated in service to certain imperial interests. In the light of this, this research is a reflection of some of these issues as experiences and realities of African Americans are multifacet.

Based on these foregrounding realities, employing a deconstructionist approach and focusing on the binary operations that are intrinsic or immanent in African American social realities is imperative in this research. In this case, oral tradition becomes the medium through which African American writes back to assert their identity and place in a society that once treated them as second class citizens. It also discusses how the authors: Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison, express their resistance to colonialism through some of the characters and symbols in the novels, that is *Beloved(1987), Song of Solomon(1977)* and *Invisible man(1952)* respectively.

More importantly, this research examines Morrison’s characters as they tell the story as griots, or oral historians, in whom the African ancestral experience is stored, and who can see and sing the past, present and future. This is achieved through interplay of voices and a narrative structure which disrupts chronology, meandering and circling and repeating. Toni Morrison echoes this in her interview with Cecil Brown (*Interview with Toni Morrison, Massachusetts Review, Fall 1995*). "Black people have a story and that story has to be heard. There was an articulate literature before there was a print. There were griots. They memorised it. People heard

it. It is important that there is sound in my books—that you can hear it, that I can hear it." From the this quotation, one sees that There are links between Morrison's post-colonial reclaiming of self, of history, and of place. Through the expression of oral tradition in this research there is an emphatic response to this view.

While Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man (1952)* brings to surface a number of postcolonial issues on a close reading. Ralph Ellison narrates the tale of African Americans being on the margin and at the bottom of social hierarchy. An article titled *"Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man and Postcolonialism*" by Samina Azad views that African Americans have a black history which is different from any other group in America. They have a unique past which comprises of Africa, the Middle passage, slavery, liberation, migration to north, racism, dual identity etc. White people hold the centre and white civilization is glorified. This past have been highly embellished in the oral form which paints a brighter picture of Africa. Through the nameless black narrator who travels a hard and rough road to find out the hidden faces behind the mask of whiteness and even blackness brings this to fore.

It is important to note that the research touches on some relevant aspect strands of postcolonial theory to drive home the message owing to the multiple issues that pervades the lives and social realities of African Americans. Thus, utilizing the medium of oral tradition, the ultimate goal of postcolonial theory in this research combats the residual effects of colonialism on African Americans in the selected novels.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 TONI MORRISON

Both Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison explore oral tradition extensively in their works. Their fictions are concerned with myth, legend, storytelling, as well as with memory, history, and historiography. Although many researchers and critics have opined that the stories are conscious of African cultural heritage as well as African-American history but none or only a few have attempted to evaluate these oral traditions and demonstrated the importance of the past to the struggles of contemporary African Americans:

> Morrison's vast cultural knowledge is the source of the richness in her novels. She is also a gifted writer with a keen grasp of detail and the skills to invent compelling narrative. Nowhere are her talents more evident than in Beloved. In the many voices and memories in this text, Morrison explores and dramatizes the past and present of African-American history through the myth and folklore of many nations and peoples. Her themes revolve around the wish to forget and the necessity to remember, to reject and to reclaim; and to elide the boundaries between past and present. She imagines and fills in what was not written into the slave narratives. Who else writes a ghost story to re-create history and raise a monument? Where else do we find Ghost story, history lesson, mother-epic, incantation, folk and fairy tale … lost children and men on horseback; a handsaw, an ice-pick and a wishing well; Denver's "emerald light" and Amy's velvet; spiders and roosters and the madness of hummingbirds with needle beaks; … a devouring past of everything that is unforgiving and denied; a hunger to eat all of the love in the world? – Beloved belongs on the highest shelf of our literature (Andrew and Mckay 1999:9)

African American writers have always found it difficult or have been reluctant in presenting their past; hence as Morrison has shown, black writers deploy the oral tradition as both a source and vehicle for passing their messages across to readers. Despite the dangers of remembering the past, John Edgar Wideman prefaces his novel *Sent for You Yesterday* with this testament:

> Past lives in us, through us. Each of us harbors the spirits of people who walked the earth before we did, and those spirits depend on us for continuing existence, just as we depend on their presence to live our lives to the fullest." This

> insistence on the interdependence of past and present is, moreover, a political act, for it advocates a revisioning of the past as it is filtered through the present. Wideman elsewhere has asked, "What is history except people's imaginary recreation?" Racial memories, he suggests, "exist in the imagination." They are in fact a record of "certain collective experiences" that "have been repeated generation after generation.

In an attempt to connect the past to the present lives of African Americans, this research holds the words of Toni Morrison in high esteem, "If we don't keep in touch with the ancestor … we are, in fact, lost."(Andrew and Mckay:1999:37) Keeping in touch with the ancestor, she adds, itis the work of a reconstructive memory: "Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was – that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way." This concern with the appearance, with the ideology of transmission, though, only part of the overall trajectory of her revisionary project. Eventually her work, she states, must "bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded." It must, that is, signify on the past and make it palatable for a present politic – eschewing that part of the past which has been constructed out of a denigrative ideology and reconstructing the part which will serve the present.

Andrews and Mckay are of the view that Morrison's background has a great influence in her writing; this is because she is a victim of the hostile environment of white dominated America:

> By taking a historical personage – a daughter of a faintly famous African-American victim of racist ideology – and constructing her as a hopeful presence in a contemporary setting, Morrison offers an explanation into the fields of revisionist historiography and fiction. She makes articulate a victim of a partriarchal order in order to criticize that order. Yet she portrays an unrelenting hopefulness in that critique. She does not inherit, as Deborah McDowell maintains some writers do, "the orthodoxy of victimage," nor does she reduce her narrative to anything resembling what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has called a

> "master plot of victim and victimizer." She, like Ralph Ellison, returns to history not to find claims for reparation or reasons for despair, but to find "something subjective, willful, and complexly and compellingly human" – to find, this is, something for her art. She does so, moreover, by doing what Hortense Spillers claims Ishmael Reed does with the discursive field of slavery in his Fight to Canada: "constructing and reconstructing repertoires of usage out of the most painful human/historical experience." In articulating a reconstructive – critical and hopeful – feminist voice within the fields of revisionist historiography and contemporary fiction, what Morrison does is create daughters signifying history (Andrew and Mckay 1999: 38).

Holland (2000:55) posits that 'as a manifestation of African spirit(s), divinity, and African American child, the novel *Beloved* is the root from which collective desire unfold. This desire is actualized in the bizarre relationship between Beloved and Paul D. Beloved murmurs, "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name" (116). Holloway interprets Beloved's beckoning as a demand "to be removed from her nothingness, to be specified, to be called (522).

The peculiarity of this research is that it interrogates the use of myth in Morrison's work and explore the relationship of African American oral traditions to the paradigms of classical mythology; typically, this study interprets the folkloric orientation of *Song of Solomon* as a foil to the classical heroic epic. Furman (2003:11) cites Michael Awkward in *Unruly and Let Loose': Myth, Ideology, and Gender in Song of Solomon* who reads the novel as Morrison's radical revision of classical male myth. In contrast to the dominant critical focus on male consciousness, Awkward shows that Morrison is really just as interested in a female perspective that calls attention to women's exclusion from traditional male narrative. Awkward borrows the phrase 'unruly and let loose" from an interview in which Morrison used the term to describe female imagination. In Morrison's words, when the imagination "is unruly and let loose, it can bring things to the surface that man – trained to be men in a certain way – have difficulty getting access to". This, Awkward maintains, is the gender ideology's informing *Song of Solomon*.

Being aware of the power of myth to shape cultural values and beliefs, this research shows how Morrison uses the legend of African flight to call the attention of recent generations to black people's forgotten magic and transcendence. Although while creating a story in which men soar as women languish, many critics show Morrison also undermines gender stereotyles. Awkward's "Afrocentric feminist reading" pinpoints Morrison's intentions of celebrating (black) male fight but also of rejecting the consequences of female grounding.

Furman (ed) (2003) also underscores the use of oral tradition in an article titled 'Civilizations Underneath: African Heritage as Cultural Discourse in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*,' the article suggests that:

> Such comparisons to other writers may be valid, but the magnificent complexity of Morrison's work comes from the historical roots of "her mother's stories, her tribe, and her ancestors – African and African American." Wilentz makes salient Morrison's intention that her fiction approximates the luxurious power of black oral narrative; her desire is to restore the language of black people and bring back "that civilization that existed underneath the white civilization."
> Wilentz tracks this repressed civilization to its African roots and finds it unambiguously present in Song of Solomon. Pilate emerges as a woman with strong connections to her African ancestry. She is a culture bearer in the African village tradition. The supernatural, ancestor worship, the importance of a name to identity, and of course flying Africans are all representative of the novel's Africanisms. Morrison is a masterful storyteller, composing in the mode of an "African dilemma tale," searching out the community's folk roots, and bringing the people back to themselves through her privileging of African heritage and culture perceptions over Western epistemology.

Morrison uses myth in her work in such a way that it explores that close relationship with African American oral traditions to the paradigms of classical mythology; typically, these study interpret the folkloric orientation of *Song of Solomon* as a foil to the classical heroic epic.

Spillers (2009) believes in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison revises the myth of the African American man just as in *Sula* she revises the myth of the African American woman. In Sula, Morrison both cherishes and criticizes the character Nel, who (ambiguously) embodies the myth

of the black woman as a nurturing, self-sacrificing, infinitely strong burden bearer. Hortense Spillers describes the novel as a "counter-mythology" because it "abandons the vision of the corporate good as a mode of heroic sufferering for black women"; the novel shakes loose clear definitions between the good and the evil woman and thereby offers the possibility of subversion of and liberation from the confining myth.

It is evident that in the first pages of *Song of Solomon*, Morrison established a reading practice based on the ironic and humorous inversions of white meaning from a black perspective. In the course of situating the reader physically in the town, she also situates us as readers with a pointed example of African Americans "signifying on' the white authorities when the authorities attempt to assert their naming power in an official proclamation. The proclamation avers that the street in question, known as Doctor Street Avenue and not Doctor Street" (4). The narrator replies in the voice of the community, "It was a genuinely clarifying public notice because it gave Southside residents a way to keep their memories alive and please the city legislators as well. They called it Not Doctor Street, and were inclined to call the charity hospital at its northern end No Marcy Hospital" (4). The mockery of the narrative voice illustrates, first of all, the blind pompousness of the white authorities who could announce that something "had always been and would always be" when it clearly was not so. It also illustrates the mask of humble self-effacement that wishes to "please the city legislators" while indeed laughing at anyone who would believe such a thing. What this notice "genuinely clarifies" is far different for the black readers of the official document than for the white writers, which indicates the differences in the reading practice and the practice of signification for black readers and white. By making central African American signification and placing the black reader's subject position in the forefront, Morrison insists that just as in "white" America, black people need a double consciousness in the

black world of her novel, a white reader needs a double consciousness, along with the ability to signify on his own status.

The African traditional mind concerns itself with the causes and effects of evil, not its origin, since the concept of the Devil does not exist. Traditional religious recognize misfortunes that are the product of moral evil, acts committed by one person against another that damage relationships. Almost always considered to be female, African witches, the principal agents of moral evil, unconsciously and involuntarily visit dis-ease, death, and material misfortune on familial and communal members in close spatial proximity to them. Witches, who remained within their tribes despite the threat that their presence posed to kings, living elders, and communal stability, were among the first that Europeans enslaved when their value as trade goods rose. Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood (1991) maintains that:

> A "considerable part" of the African women sold into slavery in the Americas was reported to have been convicted of witchcraft… Persons who were suspected of being witches were seized and confined until a slave vessel arrived, whereupon they were transported to the Americas as slaves, by that means continuing and preserving many traditional beliefs and practices in Afro-Atlantic cultures.If the number of African women accused of witchcraft increased exponentially during the transatlantic slave trade because of material greed, then a surge in witchcraft lore also traveled to the New World even when legitimately divined witches did not.

A critical view of Toni Morrison's novels reveals the black lore, black music, black language and all the myths and rituals of black culture as prominent elements in Toni Morrison's writing. She feels a strong connection to ancestors because they were the culture bearers. She thinks that it is the responsibility of African American writers to dig out that annihilated history and secure the importance of it in the making of American civilization. Many critics praised Morrison's complex treatment of issues of African-American identity in her novels. Gurleen Grewal (1996) expressed Morrison's concern with African-American identity throughout her

oeuvre in stating, “African Americans must negotiate a place for themselves within a dominant culture; how they situate themselves with respect to their own history and culture is a pervasive theme of Morrison's novels.” Yvonne Atkinson described Morrison's use of Black English as central to her narrative voice, asserting, “Morrison has enveloped the written word in the oral tradition: the use of words from Black English and rituals and style of the oral tradition enhance her texts, and the systems of language, the style, and the lexicon of Black English that Morrison uses in her novels bear Witness to African-American culture. Similarly, Andrew and Mckay (ed) (1999:5) examine the ways in which Morrison utilizes a lyrical narrative voice in *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* to express African-American experience and construct a sense of cultural identity in the African Diaspora. Holloway asserted, “Morrison's novels recall a West African version of reality that allows the coexistence of the spiritual and physical worlds within the same narrative spaces. In these spaces, mythic voices reconstruct an African-American universe.” Rob Davidson commented on the ways in which Morrison's *Beloved, Jazz,* and *Paradise,* loosely grouped as a trilogy, function as meta-narratives about the construction of African-American identity; Davidson stated, “One of the most important concerns in the trilogy is the ‘use value’ of narrative. Storytelling is historiography in Morrison's fiction, and in each novel she carefully examines the role of narrative in the reconstitution of both the individual self and society at large.” In an entry on Toni Morrison for the book *Postmodernism: Key Figures,* Thomas B. Howe observed that Morrison's use of multiple narrative voices in many of her fictions is a key element of her work. Morrison's fictions repeatedly challenge cultural traditions defined by patriarchal, assimilationist, and totalizing standards. Ever since her first novel … she has set herself in opposition to the European American white mainstream by portraying and celebrating

unique, powerful voices of marginalized women from American history and contemporary American life.

Andrew and Mckay (ed) posit that:

> African American writing is double-voiced and self-consciously intertextual in its relation to both standard English and vernacular discourse. The permeation of the black oral traditions in the narrative is value-laden and influences the reader's interpretation. A well-discussed example is the author's revision of the tar baby tale, through which Morrison invites readers' imagination in the improvisation of the story.

Employing the postcolonial literary tools of analysis, this dissertation shows a connection between African Americans and Africans, effectively analysing the characters and showing their depiction of oral tradition as a tool which brings out the uniqueness of this research. Commentaries are made after reading through some secondary materials on how as an African American writer, Morrison illuminates the place of African oral tradition through her characters in *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* to appropriate this to the overall experiences of the blacks.

2.2 RALPH ELLISON

In *Invisible Man*, Ellison identifies the improvisatory oral forms and forces urging him to experiment with the novel: "Having worked in barbershops where that form of oral art flourished, I knew that I could draw upon the rich culture of the folk tale as well as that of the novel, and that being uncertain of my skill I would have to improvise upon my materials in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild starburst of metamorphosis" (*Invisible Man,* p. xxi) Ellison's reliance on improvisation reinforces his theme of identity, and the urgent appearance of an invisible voice in protean form calls for techniques of performance.

Furthermore, as a novelist whose sense of improvisatory eloquence is informed by jazz as well as speech, Ellison looks to the jam session for confirmation of his collaboration with the narrator, the protagonist.

O'Meally (ed) (1998:18) is of the view that some recent critics have even seen in *Invisible Man* a strange precognitive power:

> Its young hero's mix of idealism and alienation, his escapes into music, marijuana, and gadgetry; the book's study of interracial angst and urban riot; its exploration of the relation of the "woman question" to the Afro-American freedom struggle; Its dangerous, false-faced establethal "saviors" like Ras and Rinehart – all seem to belong to an era after the one in which the novel first appeared. Invisible Man, that is the narrator recalls, and often makes specific reference to, the beginnings of the novel as a literary form: to Cervantes, Fielding, Defoe and, more significantly, to works by great nineteenth-century novelists, Twain, James, Dostoievsky, and especially Melville, who provides one of the book's epigraphs. Like Moby Dick, Invisible Man is a capacious novel, one that tries many things, both are rhetorical tours de force containing letters, sermons, fights, songs, political speeches, dreams, and descriptions of private homes, meeting halls, offices, brothels, bars, and churches.

In addition to this declaration is that this research presents the oral forms that the protagonist uses in his invisibility in order to keep memory alive. This idea shows the inclusiveness of Ellison's novel. He tries to be realistic by his broad views and descriptions bringing everything about his encounters to play; one sees a bit of everything, particularly as it relates to African oral tradition which adds to the beauty of this research.

John Callahan(ed)(2004:153) cites 'Project Worker Ellison's' records of a Harlem yarn spinner in this way:

> I hope to God to kill me if this ain't the truth. All you got to do is to go down to Florence, South Carolina and ask most anybody you meet

> and they will tell you it's the truth… Florence is one of these hard towns on colored folks. You have to stay out of the white folks way, all but sweet. That the fellow am fixing to tell you about. His name was sweet-the-monkey. I done forget his real name, I caint remember. But that was what every body called him. He wasn't no big guy. He was just bad. My mother and my grandmother use to say he was wicked. He was bad all-right. He was one sucker who didn't give a damn bout crackers. Facts is, they got so they stayed out of his way. I caint never remember ear tell of any damn crackers bothering that guy. He used to give em trouble. All over the place and all they could do about it was to give the rest of us hell.

It is therefore correct to say that Ellison is obviously practicing how to catch the sound of vernacular speech without distracting his reader with a thicket of misspellings and apostrophes in this passage.

Banks, Ann(ed) (1991) explains that although Ellison had a few writing successes, finding jobs and money was still extremely difficult during the Depression. Finally in 1938, Wright aided him in getting a job with the Federal Writers' Project. During this time, Ellison came into contact with many interesting interviewees from which he gleaned an interest in folklore and the distinctly African-American collection of rhymes, games, stories, and so on. The glimpse into personal lives enriched his knowledge of American culture and added to his stock of experiences learned in Oklahoma and Alabama. Much of his time was employed by the Project, but Ellison still found ways to submit materials to radical periodicals of the day, as influenced by the leftist Wright, such as 'Negro Quarterly', 'New Challenge', and 'New Masses'. Between 1937 and 1944, he published over twenty book reviews".

His belief in radicalism led to his break with his beloved mentor, Richard Wright, as Ellison criticized the character of Bigger Thomas in Wright's masterpiece, *Native Son*. Still, the time Ellison wrote his reviews was very much a growing time for him (*Wikipedia*). He published his first short stories, such as "Slick Gonna Learn", "The Birthmark", "King of the Bingo

Game", and "Flying Home". The early War years also gave Ellison the chance to edit 'Negro Quarterly' and begin *Invisible Man*. Moving away from politics and their champion, Wright, he also joins the Merchant Marine and many of his stories take on wartime flair. According to Seidlitz, Anne (2005), in 1946, he marries Fanny McConnell. The quality of his writing reached masterful proportions by the end of World War II, as he had learned to incorporate the likes of Twain, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, and Hemingway into his work.

In addition, *Invisible Man* explores the theme of man's search for his identity and place in society, as seen from the perspective of an unnamed black man in the New York City of the 1930s . In contrast to his contemporaries such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin, Ellison is noted to have created characters that are dispassionate, educated, articulate and self-aware, Tracy (2004). Through the protagonist, Ellison explores the contrasts between the Northern and Southern varieties of racism and their alienating effect. The narrator is "invisible" in a figurative sense, in that "people refuse to see" him, and also experiences a kind of dissociation. The novel, with its treatment of taboo issues such as incest and the controversial subject of communism, won an award in America in 1953 barely a year after it was written. Trading Twelve's (2000) records that the award was his ticket into the American literary establishment.

The influence of African oral tradition is evident in *Invisible Man*. Gayl Jones (1991:140) asserts:

> Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* is such a luxuriant novel that it might be used as a model to discuss a multitude of traditional oral forms and motives in speech, metaphor, and architectonic structure. Jazz, for one, informs and complicates the structure and personalities of the novel and enhances Ellison's vision of the "fluid American reality" as well as his creative resolution of a world of possibility.

In an affirmation to the above caption, Ellison himself discusses some of these developments in the speech he gave after receiving the *National Book Award* for *Invisible Man* in 1952:

> As for the rather rigid concepts of reality which informed a number of the works which impressed me and to which I owe a great deal, I was forced to conclude that reality was far more mysterious and uncertain, and more exciting, and still, despite its raw violence and capriciousness, more promising. . . I was to dream of a prose which was flexible, swift as America changes swift, confronting the inequalities and brutalities of our society forthrightly, but yet thrusting forth its image of hope, human fraternity and individual self-realization. I would use the richness of our speech, the idiomatic expression and the rhetorical flourishes from past periods which are still alive among us.

Living in a world of double reality, music became a tool for African Americans to challenge the apparent form of invisibility. Jazz music particularly is rooted in African oral tradition and it is effectively utilize by the African Americans to ease the pressure of living in American society. To buttress on this fact Ellison states that "I use folklore in my work not because I am a Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce mad me conscious of the literary values of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo). I knew the tricksters Ulysses just as early as I knew the wily rabbit of Negro American lore." And certainly the riddle is one of the folkloric forms that lies at the back of literary tradition in thematic structures, plots and symbolism: riddles of character and circumstance, identity and illusion, nightmare and reality the human ambiguities".(Gayl:1991:145).

Ellison's *Invisible Man* is viewed as a novel that is highly embedded in African American oral tradition. It is compared to other African American writers like Frederick Douglass, Richard

Wright and other great writers as possessing some similarities. Robert O'Meally (ed)(1988) introducing the novel states:

> The novel uses of black folklore and blues have frequently been studied in a fine recent book, the Trueblood section of the novel is closely read in light of the economics of the blues. Myth-archetype New critics of various kind, critics concerned as much with historical and cultural context and with the necked text itself, physiological critics, structurelalist, deconstructionist and even a Marxist deconstructionist- all have contributed to the Ellison canon… To its strategies as an elaborated picaresque tale about a character who, as Ellison say, "possess both the eloquence and the insight into the interconnections between his own personality and the world about him to make a judgment upon our culture."

It is on this note that O' Meally (1998) explains that the crucial point to make here is that his novel Ellison reaches out to the reader by raising a sheaf of intellectual issues that have disturbed and intrigued people of all backgrounds forever: what is the shape of history? What is the rue relation of science, art, and politics? How does one account of human motives for action? How does one know the self? The other? By drawing such questions out of the vernacular experience of a black American character, Ellison manages to "splice into . . . the deeper current on life," to show the universality of blackness.

Showing the beauty of this research, although Ellison has tended to call less attention to the role black authors who forged the integrated matrix of culture and the literary legacy that informs his fiction, but critically and certainly black folkslore, particularly the trickstars and dupes represented by the figures of Brer Bear and Brer rabbit, permeates the discussion done on *Invisible Man*, with the narrator not only serving as foil for each but also at various points, from the opening episode at the battle royal on, assuming each of archetypal roles.

This research therefore has moved beyond the views of critics and other writers who have limited their analysis to themes, slave narratives or stylistic devices and paying very little attention to the aspect of place and expression of oral tradition in the selected texts. It is on this

note therefore, that this study appropriates the various forms of oral traditions in the selected novels of Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison. In exploring the postcolonial discourse as an analytical tool, the research summarily depicts the place and expression of oral tradition as it captures the experiences of African Americans in general.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 ELEMENTS OF ORAL TRADITION IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND *SONG OF SOLOMON*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Morison's view that it is essential for one to return to pure traditional culture, nature and one's true self, thereby owning a sense of belonging. Toni Morrison's works usually show deep concern for the existence and development of the blacks and also that of human beings in general. In her article, "Beyond the "Literary Habit": Oral Tradition and Jazz in *Beloved*", Cheryl Hall(1994:89-95) argues that the narrative style of the novel emulates the circulation of a story passed down through generations. Stories in oral cultures serve many of the same purposes as the repeated stories in *Beloved*: the transmission of historical data, the preservation of cultural values and ideas, the education and entertainment of children (and adults). The knowledge transmitted is not static, however, though essential details may be retained. It is enriched and modified with every telling, and by each different storyteller. Tales are told over and over again, as often as they are called for by the listeners, or as often as the (actual or ceremonial) need for their telling occurs (Hall: 92).

Hall uses the story of Denver's birth as an example of a story "enriched and modified" by multiple telling. The story, which is told twice in the novel, has Denver as the narrator on both occasions. However, the first time, Denver tells it to herself, as a way of giving comfort. "And the story that she recounts seems to have been handed down straight from her mother" (Wolfe 268). This version focuses on details that seem out-of-place in a story about a birth – Sethe's swollen feet, images of the afterlife – and is abruptly ended before Denver is born, by thoughts of the white dress Denver had seen through the window, standing next to her praying mother.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* shows that the book was inspired by the true story of a black American slave woman, Margaret Garner. She escaped with her husband Robert from a Kentucky plantation, and sought refuge in Ohio. When the slave masters overcame them, she killed her baby, in order to save the child from the slavery she had managed to escape. Morrison later told that "I thought at first it couldn't be written, but I was annoyed and worried that such a story was inaccessible to art"(Hill, 1991). The protagonist, Sethe, tries to kill her children but is successful only in murdering the unnamed infant, 'Beloved'. The name is written on the child's tombstone, Sethe did not have enough money to pay for the text 'Dearly Beloved'. Sethe's house, where she lives with her teenage daughter, Denver, is haunted by the dead baby daughter. Paul D whom Sethe knew in slavery, comes to visit her, and manages to drive the ghost out for a while. For a used-to-be slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a crocker sack, well, maybe you'd have little love left over for the next one. Time passes and Paul D. is seduced by Beloved, who becomes more violent. Denver leaves the house. Sethe is found at the farm, with the naked body of a very pregnant Beloved. The spell breaks, and Beloved disappears. Paul D. returns to take care of Sethe. The film version of the book from 1998 was directed by Jonathan Demme, who used much special effect and was interested in the horror aspects (From *Novels into Film* by John C. Tibbetts and James M. Welsh, 1999)

Reading through Toni Morrison's novels, one realises the constant use of African oral tradition. Morrison has rebelled against Eurocentric readings of her novels, arguing instead that her works demand an Afrocentric approach. In a 1983 interview with Nellie McKay, for instance, Morrison illustrated the problems of a Eurocentric approach to her fiction, claiming that

her novels are written according to "some structure that comes out of a different culture...I represent how characters and things function in the black cosmology" (McKay 425). Similarly, she has combated the notion of a "universal" standard for novels; stories, she argues, should serve the community from which they originate. As she told Thomas LeClair in 1981, *The Language Must NotSweat*: *Conversation with Toni Morrison* , "I never asked Tolstoy to write for me, a little colored girl in Lorain, Ohio....And I don't know why I should be asked to explain your life to you" (LeClair, p28). Indeed, Morrison hopes her novels reflect and create the African-American community much as Faulkner's novels reflect the community of Yoknapatawpha County. An admirer of Faulkner, Morrison explains: "Faulkner wrote what I suppose could be called regional literature and had it published all over the world. It is good ... because it is specifically about a particular world. That's what I wish to do" (LeClair, p28). In other words, Morrison attempts to recreate and preserve the cultural values of her community, an undertaking which demands that we understand the "black cosmology" out of which she writes.

In order to do so, of course, one must recognize that this cosmology comes not only from African-American culture, but ultimately from African culture itself. Morrison pays allegiance to this African culture by consistently drawing on its folklore and mythology in her novels. Maxine Montgomery, for instance, writes that Morrison's emphasis on dreams, omens, and myths in *Sula* suggests a West African heritage. Morrison tells McKay that *Song of Solomon* 'comes out of a black myth about a flying man' (McKay 418), and she explains to LeClair that she researched a story about a tar lady in African mythology when *Tar Baby* was germinating in her mind (LeClair, p27). These borrowings of African folklore are intentional and conscious, even while the precise origin of the story may not be entirely clear. As Morrison relates, such stories were simply "part of the folklore of my life" (LeClair, p27).

Morrison elaborated on this notion in a live, three-hour interview on CSPAN's *Book TV* on February 4, 2001. In response to a call-in question regarding her use of African symbols and rituals, Morrison replied: "Once in a while, the connections are deliberate, when I'm trying to feed into a culture that is older than the one that blacks cobbled together in this country and the diaspora" (Morrison , "In Depth: Toni Morrison"). She continued, however, by explaining that she more often draws on the culture she grew up with--her mother's, grandmothers, and great-grandmother's traditions and lore. Speaking of ghosts and other elements of her novels, Morrison explained: 'all of these things are all part of the mythology, the culture that I grew up in, and apparently have real living life in other African cultures that have been redistributed among us, and I would just love to see the history of some of those things taken from my books' (Morrison, 'In Depth: Toni Morrison').

3.2 AFRICAN HERIOC EPIC IN *BELOVED*

In both style and content, *Beloved* reflects the values and themes of the African heroic epic. Morrison's novel represents a transformation of this epic tradition, one certainly transfigured as it made its way across the Middle Passage, through slavery, and into the twentieth century. African stories and traditions, though, survived in this fashion, helping to create an African-American culture which, as John W. Roberts(1987) believes, draws upon and transforms features of African culture in order to maintain African values under new conditions (Roberts, p12). In fact, according to Roberts, African heroic epics 'existed as a vital form of African oral literature at the time of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and could have easily served as expressive models for spiritual song creation and performance' (Roberts, p121). Given this evidence, it seems likely that these epics would have continued to survive in bits and pieces during slavery and afterwards. Accordingly, Morrison draws upon the transformed African heroic epic tradition

in *Beloved*. Exploring some of these African values as they evidence themselves in the African heroic epic and in *Beloved* will illustrate the ways in which the epic and the novel create and endorse cultural values.

The African heroic epic represents one of the most comprehensive surveys of African customs and values because of the presence of oral tradition. These multi-generic narratives provide keen insight into the moral systems of African societies, and reflect the richness and complexity of their cultures. Morrison has similar roles for her novels. As early as 1981, she identified her writing as 'village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe' (LeClair, p26). Like the epics, her novel gives nourishment to her community as they tell the community's stories. On several occasions Morrison has compared the function of her novels to that of music for the earlier black community which was based on folk tradition. In an article titled “Rootedness”: Morrison writes that for a long time, the art form that was healing for Black people was music. That ‘music is no longer exclusivel yours; we don't have exclusive rights to it...So another form has to take that place, and it seems to me that the novel is needed by African Americans now in a way that it was not needed before’ (LeChair, p34). This explains the fact that the novel is highly a medium for the preservation of this oral heritage; African Americans have had to turn to the novel as a means of cultural survival and preservation.

In a similar manner, Anthony J. Berret (1987) says Morrison's novels create a “literary culture in which African Americans can find themselves represented and integrated into modern society”' (Berret, p113). By building this literary culture, then, Morrison's novels become a sort of cultural monument to the African-American community. In creating these cultural monuments, both the African epic and Morrison's novels depend upon performative strategies. Bieb defines the African heroic epic as a “long, orally transmitted narrative presented in an

episodic manner. Incorporating almost all of the literary forms known to Africans, the heroic epic is a multi-generic performance sung by a bard, and then narrated episode by episode. The performance can include rhythm, song, dance, drama and poetry (Biebuyck and Mateene, 13-14). Morrison's novel, too, can be read as a "performance" of African and African-American culture. Indeed, Morrison herself urges that her novels be read as outgrowths of the oral tradition (McKay, p421) The oral nature of Morrison's novel, then, echoes the epic performance.

In the epic and in Morrison's novel, the performance depends on an active audience. When describing the Nyanga epic performance, Biebuyck attests to the participatory quality of the epic: Invariably, the narration of oral texts draws a participating crowd in the African communities (*Epic as Genre'* p262). This same participatory impulse drives Morrison's novel. She enjoins her readers to help create the text: "The reader and I invent the work together....It's a total communal experience". In a different interview, Morrison describes her works as containing 'holes and spaces' so the reader can come into it... 'My writing expects, demands participatory reading'.

In *Beloved*, she draws readers in as both audience and creators, investing them with a sense of involvement in the novel's community. Andrews and Mckay(ed)(1999) are of the opinion that the oral nature of the prose begs to be read aloud; readers in some way share Morrison's role as creator in that they participate in the sound of the work In "Rootedness'' Morrison identifies the ability to be both print and oral literature as a characteristic of Black art itself, and she defines a successful novel to be one which tries to make you stand up and make you feel something profoundly in the same way that a Black preacher requires his congregation to speak, to join him in the sermon, to behave in a certain way, to stand up and to weep and to cry and to accede or to change and to modify. This does not mean Morrison views her role as

that of a moral leader, like a preacher, but instead that she refuses to separate the print and oral qualities of her texts. Like a preacher, she has 'created' her texts; but, also like a preacher, she encourages her congregation of readers to help her deliver those texts. Morrison envisions for her novels, then, what Biebuyck and Mateene call 'group solidarity and mass participation' (*Beloved*, p14).

Morrison highlights the importance of both storytelling and participatory reading within *Beloved* itself. Sethe and Denver perform as storytellers time and again both trying to satisfy Beloved's insatiable need to be entertained, which is an indication of her cultural starvation. Beloved and Denver too needs to hear stories in order to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of community. The stories that Denver and Sethe tell relate the story of their family, Denver's birth, Sethe's earrings, and finally the more troubling and guilt-laden stories of Sethe's actions in the woodshed. The most striking example of participatory storytelling is when Denver tells Beloved the story of Denver's birth. For Denver, the story is a way of keeping Beloved's attention, a 'net to hold Beloved' (76). Like the epic bard, Denver embellishes the sketchy story she has heard all her life (76). As she adds details, the story itself comes alive for Denver 'Denver was seeing it now and feeling it' (78). In a passage reminiscent of Quentin and Shreve in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, Denver speaks while Beloved listens, and the 'monologue becomes, in fact, a duet as the two did the best they could to create what really happened' (78). Through the act of storytelling, then, the two girls try to recapture the past and rewrite their own histories. Additionally, Morrison has modeled for her readers the type of participatory reading her novels demand; the 'monologue' of *Beloved* becomes a duet, or even a chorus, when read properly. In addition to the participatory nature of the epic and *Beloved*, both defy traditional chronological narration. The episodes of the African epic, for instance, are not organized chronologically, nor

are they told in any specific order. Frequently, the bard repeats episodes to emphasize their importance (Biebuyck , 'African Heroic Epic') Morrison's stream-of-consciousness technique also disrupts a chronological ordering of her text, and sometimes variations of the same story are repeated by different characters.

These techniques might underscore the notion that Morrison's novel, like the epic, is not a stagnant text; it circulates as an on-going, shifting narrative in order to serve the fluctuating needs of the community. Additionally, like the African epic, *Beloved* functions as a circular narrative. The refrain in the final section of the novel, repeated three times, changes slightly in its third use. Shifting from past to present tense signifies repetition with a difference, reminding readers of the interdependence of past and present within the story itself. The section (as well as the novel) culminates in the name of the girl that the section describes (*Beloved*, p275). This name, the last word of the text, immediately recalls the first word of the text, the title, returning back to the beginning through the circular technique. This poetic and musical technique, then, becomes a trope for Morrison's narrative strategy.

Perhaps the most intriguing stylistic similarity between the epic tradition and *Beloved* is the vivid use of language in both. According to Biebuyck, the epic bard is acutely aware of the 'finest nuances of the grammatical system' and possesses a rich vocabulary (*Hero and Chief* 75). He further maintains that the bard is a master of poetic usages, and has a sophisticated grasp of the metaphorical properties of the word *(African Heroic Epic* 28). Epic bards frequently use stylistic and aesthetic devices such as repetition, onomatopoeia, exclamations, and enjambment (Biebuyck,29). These qualities combine to produce a work rich in metaphoric and vivid language, and one that lends itself to song which a characteristic of oral tradition in Africa.

Morrison is also a master of language. She brings her descriptions to life by using evocative and unusual images. '124' is a house 'palsied by the baby's fury' (5), Baby Suggs dies 'soft as cream' (7), and Sethe's dress is stiff, like rigor mortis' (153). Adding to her vivid descriptions is Morrison's use of synesthesia. Sethe considers the size of the miracle, and the dying landscape has 'insistent and loud voices' (116). Morrison explains that she capitalizes on the resonant language of African Americans: it is 'full of metaphor and imagery....It has sight and sound' (Jones, p140). She recognizes the importance of language in her community: Language is the thing that black people love so much--the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them'. Her task as an artist, then, is to make the language appear effortless. It must not sweat (LeClair, p27). Indeed, critics have long praised Morrison's lyricism. Barbara Hill Rigney writes that a 'musical quality of language, a sound and rhythm ... pervade Morrison's work," ultimately pronouncing that Morrison sings her novels (and anyone who has heard Morrison read from her work will know this is literally as well as metaphorically true)'

In addition to sharing performative qualities, African epics and Morrison's *Beloved* also reflect the richness and complexity of their cultures. Though it is of course dangerous to speak of a generalized 'African culture, the efforts of Biebuyck and other folklorists suggest, for the most part, African cultures value harmony, restraint, and community ("Heroic Epic" 28).

Furthermore, Biebuyck and Mateene argue, these values are the main themes in the African epic tradition (34). The three themes are interrelated within the epics and the societies: excess (a lack of restraint) leads to destruction (a lack of harmony within the community). An obvious parallel presents itself in Morrison's portrayal of the African-American community in *Beloved*. Baby Suggs's excess of hospitality and generosity leads the community to envy, thus

disrupting the harmony of the community. Sethe's excessive love drives her to murder her own daughter, upsetting the harmony even further (163).

In reaffirming the place and expression of African oral tradition, this research has shown in clear terms Morrison's concern to reclaim and find her place within black cultural history,an objective which reaches its climax in *Beloved,* where she faces the unspeakable source of her people's oppression and slavery slavery. In blocking out that whole experienc of slavery, some things of value might be lost. So courageously she confronts the diaspora (the dispersion, or migration) of her enslaved ancestors. In doing so, she affirms the positives of black life and culture that enabled them to survive, even though Sethe's excessive pride prevents the community from helping her after she is released from jail, prohibiting any resolution or appeasement which is a common practice in most African societies.

3.3 APPROPRIATING CULTURE AND CULTURAL PRACTICES IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED.*

Most African societies see a delicate balance between the individual and the community. The individual must follow his own destiny and identity, while not surpassing the limits of the community. As Roberts (1999) asserts: '…the collective power of the group is measured by the individual powers of its members which makes up the culture. If one member's power is upset, the harmony of the group is disrupted, and the community takes action to restore this balance'. This is obvious in *Beloved*; Beloved slowly drains Sethe's power and the self. When the community discovers this they assemble to restore the harmony and to strengthen their collective power since African Americans practice communal living.

In *Beloved*, Morrison is indeed interested in survival, but not solely of the individual. She is deeply committed to the survival of the African-American community. Theodore O. Mason, Jr(1986,p23) in his article suggests that Morrison is 'a writer particularly interested in depicting, and thereby preserving and perpetuating, the cultural practices of black communities'. Morrison's use and revision of these African heroic epics consciously or not illustrate her own preoccupations with cultural formation and preservation. She highlights the importance of storytelling as a way to gather the community and endorse its values, and her novel itself becomes a cultural record. Slave tales take up a significant percentage of the stories in oral circulation in black culture. *Beloved* is not the symbolic reproduction of a particular oral account but Morrison's awareness of the way tales circulate in an oral culture.

Culture is said to serve much purpose like transmission of historical data, the preservation of cultural values, ideas, and the education and entertainment of children. The knowledge transmitted is not static, however, though essential details may be retained. It is enriched and modified with every narration and by each different story teller. Tales are told over and over again, as often as they are called for by the listeners, or as often as the actual or ceremonial need for their telling occurs. *Beloved* is experimented differently by different readers but with the understanding of oral tradition the novel engages any reader in harmony and accord with a rememorable experience.

Jennings (2008) opines that 'Black Americans were sustained, healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into art form. In visualizing the experience of the black Americans, Morrison's art sustains the American Black Community by various cultural traditions, including oral tradition from Africa. In African lore there are certain river spirits, seeming lunatics, believed to have contact with the unseen world. They are primarily identified

by something strange about their hands and feet. The young woman who suddenly appears and assumes the title role in the novel has hands and feet with unnaturally smooth and soft skin that looks "new"'. She arrives by rising from a river. Beloved is seen as reflecting her African past and the slave ship experience.

More so in showing the expression of African oral tradition in *Beloved,* in the end Beloved is shown as a woman running through the wood, looking as if she had "fish for hair". She was apparently aiming to return to the river from which she had first emerged. Beloved appears to be more like an African water spirit than an actual human being. Morrison here has portrayed Beloved as the "ghost" of slavery says Wendy Harding's *A World of Difference* that has come to haunt both personal and historical memories. In *Beloved* Morrison also uses the myth of the black community, that is, she remotivates collective images in the experience of her people. She transfers black collective identity on images, stories and beliefs long forgotten. Her edition on *The Black Book* is conceived as "history as lived". Beloved is the progressive confluence of all the lost stories of the past as retold by a community of survivors.

Morrison sets out to tell a series of stories that would add up to one encompassing story about her people. It is therefore said that she employs with great success natural imagery, a bearer of the culture and history of tradition which she tries to pass on. Morrison is especially effective in using water and tree imagery. Water imagery becomes a metaphor for new life and with the idea of free life it is closely associated. Allusion to water is also made with the birth of Denver and the arrival of Beloved. Morrison uses tree imagery to signify shelters, companions, comforters and reminders of the past. In African religion it signifies the source of life and links it to the physical and spiritual worlds. Morrison uses it to connect the living with the dead and also physical with the spiritual.

The place and expression of African oral tradition is still very emphatic in *Beloved*. A close look at the activity of the child ghost in the house at the beginning evokes in Sethe, memories of her baby girl. Ghosts are vital in African oral traditions, especially the part of Africa which in turn conjures up images of a degrading sexual union with a stonemason as payment for a headstone. An exposition is shown of a ghost that is seen haunting the house, which had its throat cut that the blood "had soaked her fingers like oil". (5) 'It is not until halfway through the book that a third person narrator describes, from the hunter's viewpoint, the arrival, into a yard, of a slave-catcher, a sheriff, schoolteacher and his nephew, who have come to reclaim unidentified fugitive slaves, a black woman and her children, under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.'(Marie C Burns, 1988)

Apparently, Paul D, one of the slaves, who had been owned by the Garners of Sweet Home with Sethe, enters the story, meeting her for the first time in the eighteen years since they had arranged their escape to freedom, which was the last time Sethe had seen her husband, Halle. Paul D clears the house of the haunting ghost thereby emphasizing the activities of the ghost show casing the cultural heritage of Africa.

Also culture is symbolized in the numerous references to having Sethe's milk taken from her. This is an essential premise of *Beloved*. Marie C. E. Burns(1988) in "The Unspoken SpokenToni Morrison's Beloved analyzed in the context of the African American experience of slavery, and slave narratives"opines that the importance she attaches to preserving black culture and connecting with one's ancestry, so crucial to giving the blacks identity and history, is synonymous with the nurturing of one's children. Sethe was denied her mother's milk, only having seen her in the fields and remembered speaking to her once: 'Nan had to nurse

whitebabies and me too because ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own'. *(Beloved* 200)

This added to the fact that Sethe had had hers taken from her, accentuates this elemental destructive aspect of slavery which not only cuts the bonds that unite, and bonds womanhood, but removes the natural biological function of motherhood. Morrison demonstrates the strong connection she herself feels to the generations of her people who had been brought to America in the slave ships by dedicating the book to them - "the "Sixty Million and more"(Jennings 2008) who have never been known or recognised, and who were part of the beginning of black American history. The horrors they endured on the middle passage are an underlying feature of the account. Now, she takes the opportunity to use the movement of the coming baby in Sethe's body, during labour and at the moment of birth, to give them a presence when she introduces echoes of them speaking in their African tongues and visions of them performing their African dances. The implication is that, although these are of the past, their memory still has power to influence.

Evocations were seen to bring forth from Sethe as integral part of African oral tradition, are affirmation and appreciation of the black culture which permeated her consciousness. As a mother, Sethe saw herself as the natural link by which her children would know their true heritage and was determined to convey it to them with pride. To do this, and to instil in them the same pride, she had to deliver them from slavery and the attitudes which classified them as animals.

Still on African oral practices in *Beloved* is reincarnation, which is a tradition very peculiar to Africa and Toni Morrison brought it into the novel, the only one she thought had any

right to judge Sethe (111). Ambiguity surrounds her personhood but there are indications to suggest that this young woman could be perceived as the reincarnated "crawling already" baby, appearing at an age she would have been had she lived(Holland, 2000). When Sethe reaches the conclusion that this is her daughter, she envelops her with love. She is not seeking forgiveness, because: Nobody on this earth would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper…Maybe Baby Suggs could…live with the likelihood of it; Sethe had refused and refused still." (251)

The ambiguity that surrounds the Beloved character is intriguing because she has been written into the work in such a way that, besides being the daughter, killed out of love, she could be the personification of slavery itself, in the manner in which she took all that her mother had. Another perspective could be that, from the experience she depicted of capture in Africa and conditions aboard the slave ships, she was representative of the millions of blacks lost without trace. Whatever her role, and it would appear that it was multipurpose, she is a central character in a novel that has portrayed an immediate, personal and comprehensive history of black American experience of slavery. It is also such a human response to the inhumanity of slavery that its message has to be universally received and acknowledged.

One does not have to be black to realise that slavery was a holocaust, or to empathise with the suffering of the generations who were worn down, physically and mentally, but who had the forbearance to survive against such adversity. Reaction to the catalogue of injustice and abuse perpetrated upon the members of the black race, as depicted here, can be nothing but revulsion and horror. And reaction to their fortitude could be nothing but respect.

More essentially, from the aforementioned, this thesis has demonstrated through the use of oral traditions like evocation, reincarnation and many activities of the ghost that Morrison has used history to point the way. She has resurrected and exposed the buried ghosts and her characters have dealt with them. She has shown in Sethe, a character whose commitment to her children will not be compromised. She has enabled her individuals and community to come to terms with their past. She has brought them together. She has shown that blacks and whites have co-operated and were pleased at working well together. She has brought to life a history that many would prefer to forget. She has given her black community hope for the future. Toni Morrison has exorcised the ghost of *Beloved* and in doing so, has shown her black brothers and sisters how to exorcise the ghosts of slavery that still haunt many of her race. She has given them reasons to be proud.

3.4 STORY TELLING, SONGS AND ANCESTRAL CULTURAL HISTORY IN TONI MORRISON'S *SONG OF SOLOMON*

By presenting the story of Dead family in *Song of Solomon,* Morrison tries to find a way out for black people as well as the whole mankind in this pluralistic modern world. The protagonist, Milkman's unwitting search for his root enlightens the puzzled modern human beings. Jin-lian Wu (2012) posits that:

> To a certain degree, black people in her works are representatives of mankind since African Americans are human beings first, and then the black. Morrison reflects deeply on the existence of human beings by creating stories of black people. In Morrison's opinion, finding a sense of belonging is essential for the existence and development of human beings who tend to live aimlessly and consider life boring and meaningless. One cannot live meaningfully without owning a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is one of the ancient necessities of human beings. If one wants to own a sense of belonging, he or she needs to comprehend one's true self, return to their pure traditional culture and the simple natural life, in other words, return to the basics.

He explains further that modern people tend to forget tradition, ancestral culture and true self, thereby losing themselves during their blind material pursuit, especially those who live in a heterogeneous cultural background, such as African Americans in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. These black people who are weighed down by self-identity crisis feel a strong sense of loss and rootless. They are often uncertain about the answer to the question "Who am l?". Callahan, Karen(1993) asserts: 'The members of Dead family in *Song of Solomon* are physically alive while spiritually dead as their surname "Dead" indicates. They are "dead" for they are cut off from knowledge of their ancestral name and ancestral past. Because of certain white registrar's ignorance and carelessness, the Dead family is deprived of its real name derived from the paternal ancestor. Macon Dead I, originally named as Jake Solomon, goes to register his name at the end of the Civil War. The drunken white registrar inquires him of the place of birth as well as his father's name. He tells the registrar that his place of birth is Macon and that his father is dead'. The negligent registrar puts down Macon (the place of birth) as the first name and Dead (the fate of the patriarch's father) as the last. Thus, illiterate Jake Solomon is misnamed as Macon Dead and hands down the humiliating name from one generation to another. Because his wife Sing thinks that the new name can wipe out the past, the first Macon keeps it willingly, unconscious of losing his true self. He expects that his new name can give him a new fate. In order to relieve the pain of getting lost, one has to trace back to one's root and come close to nature for a sense of belonging.

This buttresses the fact that the lost African Americans' well-being is derived from their returning to their ancestral culture, their returning to nature and recognizing themselves which is embedded in their oral tradition. In other words, their owning of a sense of belonging from a certain degree, to seek a sense of belonging means to identify with the ancestors' traditional

culture which is oral tradition. Morrison explains this point of view of hers through Pilate's journey around the whole country and Milkman's journey back to his ancestral past, a journey home in *Song of Solomon.*

In addition, Lawrence, W. Levine, in a paper titled *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* is of the view that although Milkman has embraced his ancestral culture and nature, he is still uncertain about who he is and where he comes from before finding his ancestral name accurately. Milkman's perplexity and aimlessness are mainly resulted from his lost identity. It is essential for Milkman to trace the history of his name, till to the one that is real, the ancestor's name. Milkman's original intention of the journey is to search for the gold; however, his interest in his relatives surpasses his interest in the gold as his journey progresses. In Denville, he gets some idea of his grandparents' names and their hometown's name from Circe. He gets to know "Jake" and "Sing" for the first time in his life. Then in Shalimar, his grandparents' hometown, he gets more information about his grandmother's family, the Byrd family and visits Susan Byrd, one of his relatives. After the first visit of Susan Byrd, Milkman begins to attach importance to blood relationship and feel a sense of belonging. He senses the familiar atmosphere he sensed at Pilate's home previously. He shows much more interest in his family history.

In returning to the general store to fix his car, Milkman watches a group of black children playing and singing the blues song Pilate often sings. The children substitute "Solomon" for "Sugarman". While watching the children play and listening to the familiar tune, he starts to Miss Pilate, her home and his family members and reflect upon his previous attitude towards people around him. After listening attentively and repeatedly, he realizes that they are singing about his grandfather Jake. He learns to complete, understand, and sing the song that contains the

history of his family. The Song of Solomon is the key that unlocks the door to his family history and the meaning of his life. When he works out the riddle of his familial roots, he regains his lost identity and comes to know fully who he is and where he belongs. He returns to his true self. Therefore, when he runs into the general store, he finds his eyes shining with great happiness from the shop window glass. The second visit to Susan Byrd confirms his knowledge about his ancestors' names and he feels happy. He rises in fuller recognition of his own identity; and he comes to understand his place in a cultural and family community, thereby becoming spiritually independent and free. He does not fail to meet his grandfather's expectation. He helps him find his real name "Jake Solomon" and takes him home finally. Moreover, he is eager to share it with the black people at home in Michigan. He begins to understand his aunt Pilate and feel much closer to her whom he regards queer and somewhat despises before. During the process of his search for his lost identity, he pursuits truthfulness, goodness, and beauty unwittingly and his heart which was previously empty and at loss is enriched. After recovering his real name, Milkman begins to pay attention to the meanings of names on the way back to Michigan. "He read the road signs with interest now, wondering what lay beneath the names" (p.333). He realizes the importance of names. Although Milkman fails to find any gold during this trip, he understands fully his place in the world. He is no longer a black man with a white heart but a real African American. Azizmohammadi and Kohzadi(2011: 34) opines that:

> Usually when a particular ethnic group within a larger community comes to occupy a marginalized position there is a plea to admit them into the dominant social framework even while maintaining their distinct ethnic identities. That is what we see in the case of Afro-Americans. They try to keep alive their ancestral tradition brought from their homeland, Africa. Within the dominant modes of social and power structures which try to erase their tradition and culture, they pass on their heritage through techniques of their own-the oral tradition, folk arts, folk culture, etc. they have developed their own indigenous cultural cults-a distinct Afro-American one. And their

> activism is not just the Afro-American community, but for their whole race. Thus racism also becomes a part of their ethnic tenets.

It could be seen that African American writers use ethnic elements and techniques of storytelling in their works as a device to retrieve and rejuvenate their heritage and culture, folk arts and folk cultural forms are distinct aspects of ethnicity.

Morrison's novels address the black people to see themselves within a culture. 'In other novels like *Jazz* reveals Morrison's affinity to black folk arts and *Tar Baby* is based on a black American folk tale wherein a white farmer tries to trap a mischievous rabbit with the help of a tar baby he makes for the purpose' (Harris, Trudier, *"The Trickster in African American Literature." Freedom's Story*"). But he is out-witted by the rabbit. In *Song of Solomon* one finds exemplary instance of ethnic elements being employed in literary venture, an analysis of the novel reveals this fact. Morrison has created a whole autonomous world of blacks in *Song of Solomon*. The two major characters are symbolic of all blacks and are archetypal. They are typical representatives of black life-Milkman is symbolic of all blacks and his aunt, Pilate, is the archetype of all black women, the Great Mother.

Furthermore, Morrison depicts how blacks take pride in being black and revels in their sense of historical heritage as the backbone of their culture. Larson, Susan (April 11, 2007) states that "The novel is an authentic assertive of Afro-centrism. Morrison's role as an Afro-centric storyteller is unmistakable and the orature of her foremothers as well as the oral traditions of the black community are evident both in the language and structure of the novel. In her works, Morrison more than often weaves into it the African American folktales, folksongs and legends. *Song of Solomon* is based on a story that she heard from her maternal grandparents and it is imbued with folk myths and legends from the African diaspora"

To buttress on the aforementioned, the novels draws on African American legends about Africans who could fly and who used this magical ability to escape from slavery in America. Stories about Africans who either flew or jumped off slave ships as well as those who saw the horrors of slavery when they landed in the America in their anguish sought to fly back to Africa are very popular among the African Americans. In *Song of Solomon* the main feature of Morrison's narration is her use of folklore, superstitions, children's games, songs, etc. The history spirits of the black culture are intensified in these old songs. Milkman's search for his ancestral roots finds meaning in such sources as the blues songs and especially in the 'Song of Solomon'. He links himself with the past by unceasingly piercing it all together.

It is therefore obvious that Morrison recognizes that oral tradition or folklore can directly convey the truth than relying on the analytical descriptions based on Western logic and traditions. John W. Roberts(1989) affirms that 'Morrison wanted to utilize the black folklore, especially the magic and superstitious part of it, in her texts because black people believe in magic and it is part of their heritage. This, she says, is the reason for using flying as the central metaphor in Song of Solomon. In *Song of Solomon* Morrison can be seen often dramatizing the traditions of her community. Thus her works often resemble the oral technique of the storyteller which places more emphasis on African oral tradition'. Just as an African woman storyteller does, Morrison narrates the tale of the Flying Africans. This is done with a purpose to rejuvenate the traditions and culture of her community. Morrison uses a number of storytellers in her text and Pilate is the most significant. Through Pilate Morrison tries to convey and retain the traditional role of African women as the guardians of rich cultural heritage and the transmitters of this cultural history to the future generations through oral techniques of storytelling. It is Pilate's remembering of her past which sows the seeds for Milkman's growth-both socially and

psychologically. Moreover, the stories of his sister Lena, his mother Ruth, and his distant cousin Susan Byrd along with Pilate help Milkman to learn how to be a single separate Afro-American individual while remaining intricately entwined in relationship to a family, a community and a culture.

Through Pilate, Morrison asserts and exemplifies African values and African oral tradition that has been brought to America by their forefathers. She has stature, strength and presence associated with an ideal African woman. Macon Dead, Pilate's brother himself states thus: 'If you ever have a doubt we from Africa, look at Pilate. She looks just like Papa and he looked like all them pictures you ever see of Africans' (54). Another retrospection of African heritage can be had in the image of three generations of women living in harmony, plaiting hair and singing songs. This recalls to our mind a scene from the African villages. But the difference with Afro-American life comes when we see that Pilate is unable to bring her extended family back together as a force to confront racial oppression. Morrison has very beautifully painted Pilate as the ancestor for Milkman whose nurturing transforms him into a responsible individual who is humane too. It is stories and songs, the children's songs turned into woman's blues which she passes on to her children that inspires Milkman to unravel the history and the lore of his family. The song that is sung by Pilate at his birth accompanies him throughout his life and helps Milkman to realize that he is a descendant of the Flying Africans who refused to exist under the confines and humilities of slavery. The myth of the Flying African is being re-enacted from time to time as a ritual to enliven their past. The novel opens with the symbolic flying of Robert Smith. As a member of the Seven Days which functions to liberate the black community from slavery and yearns to fly to freedom, Smith's act can be viewed as a remembering and re-enacting of their past. This myth of Flying Africans is kept alive from time to time through such

acts of Robert Smith. From Smith the tradition is taken on by Milkman when he finally surrenders himself to air at Solomon's Leap. He realizes what Shalimar knew: 'If you surrendered to the air, you could ride' (34*). Song of Solomon* thus is one of the most impressive fiction by Morrison which elucidates how the past of a community makes its impression in re-creating a present rooted in this cultural past. The concept of knowing one's name, tribe and cultural heritage, the importance of the knowledge of the ethnic elements of one's community and its retention in the present, is paramount and very evident in the novel. She exposes the conflict of Western and African cultural perceptions and reveals the importance of African roots, heritage and values for Black Americans.

Through the text Morrison asserts the necessity of stripping off the layers of hegemonic discourse which is subversive and which conceals the values of a civilization that lies underneath. The work is thus a discourse on the construction of a strong ethnic identity by re-creating the past through recalling the traditions, customs, lore, culture, experience and values that had originally gone into the making of an individual belonging to a particular community and thereby a distinct ethnic identity. Valerie Smith (1995) sums up that:

> The essays that follow the introduction focus on how African American language is embodied in a variety of narrative structures. In "From Orality to Literacy: Oral Memory in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," Joyce Irene Middleton analyzes how the tension between orality and literacy generates the narrative in *Song of Solomon*. Middleton maintains that Morrison, by foregrounding the spoken language in her novels, stimulates the reader's memory to "see how the survival of cultural consciousness, or nomos, is preserved in a highly literate culture" (29). Morrison fosters memory by punning, naming, and stimulating listening skills so vital to African American culture... By refusing to accept the white man's textual authority, Macon Dead reveals a "unique creativity that merges oral and written traditions in cultural naming" (27).

In line with this, it is obvious that oral tradition plays an important role in the history of African Americans. During slavery, African Americans often included acting, gestures and singing into their storytelling, thereby creating it into an art. Storytelling also emphasizes repetition, rhythm and short phrases, making the story easily repeatable and memorable. Milkman discovers the importance of oral tradition when he realizes the meaning of the children's song/game. This also allows Milkman to come in direct contact with his roots, through an old African American tradition. Thus, Milkman finally accepts his black heritage.

The song titled ‘Song of Solomon’ not only immortalizes Milkman's ancestry, it is also an important statement about African American social circumstances. In the song, Solomon abandons Ryna to fly back to Africa, and leaves her with twenty-one children. The theme of abandonment and flight is very prevalent throughout the entire novel. Guitar's mother flees after her husband's death, unable to bear the burden of raising her children alone. Pilate leaves behind Reba's father, lest he discover she does not have a navel. Milkman leaves behind Hagar, who bestowed upon him unconditional love. ‘The theme of abandonment was also apparent in African American society; oftentimes, the male had to leave in order to search for work. Many times, as revealed through the Great Migration, families were torn apart as family members went North in search of work. Thus is the case with Milkman's family, as his father eventually travelled north and left his Southern homeland behind’(Grimes, William1993).

Hagar's death, indirectly caused by abandonment, has roots in her lack of a positive self-image. Hagar is convinced Milkman will love her if she changes her physical appearance, and so she goes on a wild shopping spree. Her plan does not work and Hagar dies believing Milkman would love her if she had silky, copper-colored hair. Hagar herself has kinky, at-times wild hair, and feels she does not meet the standards of beauty required by society, especially a white

society. While she is dying, the narrator states she is in her Goldilocks bed, thereby making another reference to the fairy tale world. Hagar's death can also be compared to Sleeping Beauty's coma-like trance, who awaits her Prince Charming. Hagar however dies when she realizes Milkman will not come and rescue her with love. Hagar's funeral is an odd ceremony when compared to typical African American funerals. Many African Americans believe that life is arduous, and that death allows for freedom. Most times, a reverend delivers words of comfort, and traditional hymns are sung. Pilate ignores ritual rites, enters halfway through the service, and sings a lullaby. Her indifference to tradition shows that she cannot be easily consoled, and also, it accentuates her independent character.

The theme of singing and songs is a reference not only to the African oral tradition but also to the days of slavery. Slaves, as means of getting through their work on the plantation, sang spirituals. Such songs talked of faith and hope, and how to live with in the spirit of God enduring the difficulties of slavery. Singing was a way in which slaves could express their personal feelings, and it was also a means of cheering one another up. Many songs also contained 'secret messages,' for instance making indirect references to the Underground Railroad. The act of singing communicates the importance of the oral tradition, demonstrated through Pilate's "Oh Sugarman done fly away..." The song, originally a reference to Solomon, tells the tale of Milkman's great-grandfather. It is this song that transmits Milkman's family history, and steers him towards his spiritual rebirth. Overall, songs underline the rebuilding of a spiritual and emotional bond. In the novel, Pilate, Hagar and Reba all bond through the act of singing. And, after Hagar's death, Reba and Pilate comfort one another through a song. Another opinion about the use of songs in the novel as cited by *Cliffnotes* suggests that:

> …we can speculate that in Morrison's Song of Solomon, "Song" signifies the relationship between African Americans and their African ancestors. We

> can also speculate that the character of Pilate, repeatedly referred to as the "singing woman," is based on the biblical character of the Shulamite woman. Scholars also argue that the term "lovers" can be translated as "friends" or "companions." Citing a passage in one edition in which the bride expresses a desire that her lover were "as my brother," they point out that the lovers, figuratively, are siblings. They also note that Song of Songs fulfills two functions: It conveys the lovers' emotions and critiques these emotions' meaning and value. Thus we can begin to draw significant parallels between the lovers in the Bible and the friends — Guitar and Milkman — in Morrison's novel.

In addition to the use of songs as relates to African Oral tradition is Myth. Manuela Lopez(2012, 105-129) attributes the myth of Solomon/Sugarman, 'the Flying African,' to be based on a Yoruba folktale that originated among African storytellers and was brought to the United States by free Africans sold as slaves:

> The story, which centers on a witch doctor or conjure man who empowers enslaved Africans to fly back to Africa, became popular among slaves on the isolated Sea Islands off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina; for them, the story symbolized a means of escaping the cruelties of slavery.The story also appeared in The Book of Negro Folklore, a collection of folktales compiled by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, two African-American writers best known for their works published during New York's famous Harlem Renaissance (1915-35). A revised, contemporary version of the story, "People Who Could Fly," appears in Julius Lester's Black Folktales.novel.

It can be summed up from the foregoing that oral tradition conveyed by African American writers could be traced to songs, practices, themes and styles in literary work. Through oral tradition of singing, Milkman identifies his origin and his situation turned around. This research therefore, shows that oral tradition is clearly evident in Toni Morrison is work as the discussion on *Beloved And Song of Solomon* has demonstrated. Which is why, African American history and literatures are intrinsically connected. This growing body of work meant that the African descendants in the United State are indeed human and should not be enslaved forever as

they find ways of relating or going back to their root. African Americans today continue to write in an effort to honor and acknowledge that legacy of the black voice.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 ORAL TRADITION IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

4.1 Introduction

Almost all authors, if not all draw upon past experience, people they have known, places they have been , as well as their own philosophy of life in their writings. Ralph Ellison, in his book Shadow *and Act* refers to this process when he said "the act of writing requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike" (p19). In preparing to write his novel he notes that "details of old photographs and rhymes and riddles and children's games, church services and college ceremonies, practical jokes and political activities observed during my prewar days in Harlem- all fell into place" (p27). In view of the quotation above, it is obvious in *Invisible Man* that the settings, plot, characters, themes, and point of view show the influence of people, place, and stories from his childhood.

Oral tradition is seen in the three parts which the plot is anchored, that is: Invincible man's school days, his involvement with the brotherhood and what happened to him during the Harlem race riot. Jack Bishop (1988:45) maintains that all of Invisible man's college days are based on Ellison's own days at Tuskegee.

In the introduction to *Invisible man*, Ellison relates that most part of the novel was written in Harlem, where it drew much of its substance from the voices, folklore, traditions and political concerns of those whose racial and cultural origins he shares. The inspiration for Invisible man's life in Harlem comes from Ellison's own life. When he came to Harlem in 1936, he lived at the YMCA for the first few months, because the rent was cheap (Bishop 19). Most of the jobs he had during this time did not last long, and were low paying. He worked at several factories where the

pay was so low that he could not afford to pay rent and often had to sleep on park benches(Bishop 20)

Just as the plot and setting of *Invisible man* shows influence from Ellison's life, so do the themes. Some of the themes of Ellison's novel can be traced to his struggle to answer questions relating to his true identity as a black American, and the tradition of oral story telling and folklore of his people. In *shadow and Act*, Ellison reveals that writing became his way of asking and working out question of his identity. He said "… fiction became the agency of my efforts to answer questions: who am I, what am I, how did I come to be? What shall I make of the life around me, what to celebrate, what to reject, how to confront the snarl of good and evil which is inevitable" (xxii)

Another influence that is worth nothing in Ellison's writing is the black tradition of storytelling and folklore. B.A Botkin in his book, *A Treasury of American Folklore*(1983) maintains that Negro folk tales such as Brer Rabbit were used by the slaves as parables to show how their intelligence gave them the ability to stay alive and outwit their master. These tales lightened the slaves which was also a way of disregarding their masters, and in another way help them endure the harshness of slavery(Botkin, p408). The lightened mood made the slaves to laugh; laughter that symbolized an inner resistance to domination by the whites. Ellision recalls, " having worked in barbershops where that form of oral art flourished, I knew that I could draw upon the rich culture of the folk tale as well as that of the novel (Elision xxxiii) In *Invisible man* these sayings, songs and riddles keep popping up to remind invisible man of his heritage.

4.2 AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY: TRICKSTER, POETRY, FOLKSONG, JAZZ AND SERMON IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN* .

When the narrator *of Invisible Man* awakes in the paint factory hospital, he has experienced a loss of memory. Symbolically, he is born again into northern Negro life. However, when the doctors question him about the Southern Negro folklore of Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear, it is clear that although he is reborn, he still cannot shake off his southern background. Robert (1989:1) affirms that: 'Almost every oral tradition in the world has trickster figures, and African American culture is no exception. Tricksters dominate the folk tradition that peoples of African descent developed in the United States, especially those tales that were influenced by African folk tradition, landscape, and wildlife'. By definition, tricksters are animals or characters who, while ostensibly disadvantaged and weak in a contest of wills, power, and/or resources, succeed in getting the best of their larger, more powerful adversaries. Tricksters achieve their objectives through indirection and mask-wearing, through playing upon the gullibility of their opponents. In other words, tricksters succeed by outsmarting or outthinking their opponents. In executing their actions, they give no thought to right or wrong; indeed, they are amoral. Mostly, they are pictured in contest or quest situations, and they must use their wits to get out of trouble or bring about a particular result.

A good example for the illustration above is one African American folktales, Brer Rabbit as retold in America Folklore (*Americanfolklore.net>folklore>2010/07*). The quintessential trickster figure in African American folklore, succeeds in getting Brer Fox to rescue him from a well by asserting that the moon reflected in the water at the bottom of the well is really a block of cheese. Brer Fox jumps into the other water bucket, descends into the well, and, in the process, enables Brer Rabbit to rise to freedom. This paints a clear picture that though trickster tales in

African American culture are frequently a source of humor, they also contain serious commentary on the inequities of existence in a country where the promises of democracy were denied to a large portion of the citizenry, a pattern that becomes even clearer in the literary adaptations of trickster figures. As black people who were enslaved gained literacy and began to write about their experiences, they incorporated figures from oral tradition into their written creations. In fact, some scholars have argued that the African American oral tradition is the basis for all written literary production by African Americans. To get a sense of this influence and these interconnections, it is necessary to explore the African American oral tradition.

People of African descent who found themselves enslaved in the New World, and specifically on United States soil, were not brought to the West to create poems, plays, short stories, essays, and novels. Tracy(ed)(2004) explains that Africans were brought for the bodies, their physical labour. Denied access to literacy by law and custom, anything they wanted to retain in the way of cultural creation had to be passed down by word of mouth, or, in terms of crafts, by demonstration and imitation. After long hours of work in cotton and tobacco fields, therefore, blacks would occasionally gather in the evenings for storytelling. Tales they shared during slavery were initially believed to focus almost exclusively on animals. However, as more and more researchers became interested in African American culture after slavery and in the early twentieth century, they discovered a strand of tales that focused on human actors. It is generally believed that enslaved persons did not share with prying researchers the tales containing human characters because the protagonists were primarily tricksters, and the tales showcased actions that allowed those tricksters to get the best of their so-called masters. In some of these instances, as Lawrence W. Levine notes, perhaps the actions of the characters did indeed reflect the actions of those enslaved.

> The records left by nineteenth-century observers of slavery and by the masters themselves indicate that a significant number of slaves lied, cheated, stole, feigned illness, loafed, pretended to misunderstand the orders they were given, put rocks in the bottom of their cotton baskets in order to meet their quota, broke their tools, burned their masters' property, mutilated themselves in order to escape work, took indifferent care of the crops they were cultivating, and mistreated the livestock placed in their care to the extent that masters often felt it necessary to use the less efficient mules rather than horses since the former could better withstand the brutal treatment of the slaves.(Lawrence 1977:122)

Brer Rabbit as the primary African American trickster may have been an adaptation of the African cunnie rabbit, a small deer, and/or of Anansi, the well-known African spider trickster. Animals that appear frequently in the tales about Brer Rabbit, such as elephants and lions, are also believed to be African transplants, since these animals are not native to the United States. From these adaptations, enslaved African Americans created worlds in which animal actions mirrored human actions during and after slavery. Their kinship to fables thus enabled the seriousness of the tales to be overlooked at times.

Foregrounding trickster figures in African American literary creation, Ralph Ellison as an African American writr epitomizes the practice. *In Invisible Man* (1952), Ellison illustrates characteristics of the trickster in the narrator's grandfather, who asserts that, in relation to dealing with whites, one should "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'emswoller you till they vomit or bust wide open."(P16). The implied militancy shocks the narrator and his family, who have all believed that the grandfather was an acquiescing Uncle Tom. It is much later, when the narrator arrives in New York and is used by the Brotherhood, that he begins to understand trickster mentality as a strategy for survival with dignity (what the grandfather employed) as well as a strategy for political intervention (what he attempts when he "grins" and asserts to the leadership of the Brotherhood that all is well in Harlem. In reality, the community is about to explode.)

The eviction scene in *Invisible Man* symbolizes the great difficulty of black urban existence. The protagonist observes the variety of the couple's possessions that are being thrown out on the street. Some of the items include the knocking bones, an Ethiopian flag, a breast pump, and a picture of Marcus Garvey. These items symbolize the Invisible Man's heritage and his inability to identify with his people and their history. Also, Tod Clifton's Sambo dolls help to symbolize the white's stereotypical views of the black people. The dolls are made in the image of the Sambo slave, who is stereotypically characterized as being lazy and worthless. Ellison describes these dolls as flimsy, entertaining dolls that can only move by the guidance of someone's hand. This symbolizes the idea of the invisible eyes that the Invisible Man believes watch over him at all times. This also represents how the black race is like a puppet that can only function with a white man's touch. This entertaining doll also relates back to the stereotype that the Invisible Man encounters when meeting a wife of a Brother from the Brotherhood. She assumes that the main character can sing and dance because he is black. The term "Sambo" is commonly derived from the word "zambo," which is a Latin American term for a person of mixed Indian and Negro descent. This mixture of races may symbolize the Invisible Man's difficulty with finding his true identity throughout the novel.

The use of poetry in the novel cannot be overemphasized, poetry is used here as an adaptation of oral form, a reflection of Africa. Clint Smith (2016) opines that the poems in *Invisible Man* are verses from blues songs which are embedded in oral tradition. These songs include "Boogie Woogie Blues" by Count Basie and Jonathan Rushing,"What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" by Louis Armstrong, "If It Hadn't Been for the Referee" by Memphis Minnie, and "Bread and Wine" later recorded by Cowboy Junkies. Many of the songs used within the novel were never recorded and cannot be linked to any particular singer. Instead, they are folk

songs that have been passed down to subsequent generations through oral traditions. They include "Did You Ever See Miss Margaret Boil Water," "Godamighty Made a Monkey," "John Brown's Body Lies a Molding," "They Picked Poor Robin Clean," "SamboThe Dancing Doll," "Buckeye the Rabbit" and "Time's Flying."

The allusions to "poems" or song lyrics in *Invisible Man* serves as a way to add another layer of depth to the narrative. For example, the Louis Armstrong song "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" is used in the prologue. When the unnamed protagonist hears Armstrong's voice singing the lyrics, he is awakened from his sleep. This foreshadows the emotional and mental "awakening" that the protagonist will experience in the novel

In writing *Invibsile Man* in the late 1940s, Anne (2005) declares that:

> Ralph Ellison brought onto the scene a new kind of black protagonist, one at odds with the characters of the leading black novelist at the time, Richard Wright. If Wright's characters were angry, uneducated, and inarticulate — the consequences of a society that oppressed them — Ellison's Invisible Man was educated, articulate, and self-aware. Ellison's view was that the African-American culture and sensibility was far from the downtrodden, unsophisticated picture presented by writers, sociologists and politicians, both black and white. He posited instead that blacks had created their own traditions, rituals, and a history that formed a cohesive and complex culture that was the source of a full sense of identity. When the protagonist in Invisible Man comes upon a yam seller (named PetieWheatstraw, after the black folklore figure) on the streets of Harlem and remembers his childhood in a flood of emotion, his proclamation "I yam what I yam!" is Ellison's expression of embracing one's culture as the way to freedom.

Similarly, Ellison, unlike the protest writers and later black separatists, America did offer a context for discovering authentic personal identity; it also created a space for African Americans to invent their own culture. And in Ellison's view, black and white culture were inextricably linked, with almost every facet of American life influenced and impacted by the African-American presence — including music, language, folk mythology, clothing styles and sports.

Reading through *Invisible Man*, one realises that it is a fascinating book at all times and it could be regarded as a celebration of literary heritage. Ralph Ellison creates a compelling

character, one that could be identified with in America society but still depicting the African oral tradition. It shows the story of black struggle; it is also the story of human struggle.

Morton(2005) is of the opinion that: 'Ralph Elllison's*Invisible Man* is a monumental novel, one that can well be called an epic of modern American Negro life. It is a strange story, in which many extraordinary things happen, some of them shocking and brutal, some of them pitiful and touching--yet always with elements of comedy and irony and burlesque that appear in unexpected places. It is a book that has a great deal to say and which is destined to have a great deal said about it'. After a brief prologue, the story begins with a terrifying experience of the hero's high school days, moves quickly to the campus of a Southern Negro college and then to New York's Harlem, where most of the action takes place. The many people that the hero meets in the course of his wanderings are remarkably various, complex and significant. With them he becomes involved in an amazing series of adventures, in which he is sometimes befriended but more often deceived and betrayed--as much by himself and his own illusions as by the duplicity of the blindness of others. *Invisible Man* is not only a great triumph of storytelling and characterization; it is a profound and uncompromising interpretation of the Negro's anomalous position in American society.

A black man in American society was not recognized or regarded to be as important as should be just because of his skin colour, in other words, his blackness is invisible to others. As a result of this segregation and struggle in order survive tells this story in *Invisible Man*. In addition to this, Minarobby(2010) states that: 'Jazz music brought life into each beat and note played. The music itself was almost tangible. It brought the imagery of a story and improvisation of a musician into one piece flawlessly. Likewise, the Invisible Man would turn to jazz in sharing his experiences, troubles, paranoia, and fears'. Also, Jazz was used by many characters to give a

similar message and express their emotions. Jazz is so significant in the novel because jazz was created by the black community, and typically, is a sufficient representation of emotion, and feelings that are relayed by the various black characters… "Too" by Langston Hughes "I, Too" is about the struggles the black demographic must endure and the racism still involved in segregation. This song speaks about an end to these times, and a new time of prosperity and equality amongst whites and blacks. 'Strange Fruit' represents the renowned Billie Holiday song which is often alluded to in the novel, *Invisible Man*.

This song, like the others, refuted the racism placed on the heads of the black demographics in America. It specifically names the overwhelming number of those lynched in the South as well as the discrimination occurring throughout the United States. Ralph Ellison used jazz in the story because jazz has he rhythm and movement and evokes feelings that he wanted to demonstrate in the book. Music is also a strong component of people's life and in the black community jazz was born. Jazz and the blues also represent the emotions of the character. Lynda, (on enotes) declares:Ellison's invisible man has been influenced by many jazz musicians. The writer works blues and jazz-specifically that of Louis Armstrong-into the novel to complement the narrator's quest to define himself. Ellison not only wrote about the jazz aesthetic but also incorporated jazz techniques into his novel. Invisible Man has often been analysed for its use of jazz and blues and rhythms and motifs in the development of the leading character, speech intonations and narrative riffs.

Ralph Ellison tackles the theme of racism and identity search. Besides its political dimensions, the novel can be considered for its aesthetic aspects as highly influenced by jazz music. Given that Ralph Ellison studied composition and played the trumpet, the novel contains many references to jazz music. The novel was a creation which shows the writer's ambivalence

about the “opportunities” and “penalties” of being black in a white dominated society. Thus, through the use of Armstrong’s song Ellison tries to epitomize the Invisible Man’s suffering for being black skinned. Invisibility here is because of the “sin” of blackness in a white world. Through this song Ellison expresses the character’s depression and non-satisfaction of identity. Questions as “Who the hell am I?” creates feelings of puzzled identity in the narrator’s mind. Jazz continues to dominate till the ends of the novel to enable the narrator realize what true identity is for him. At many levels in the novel the he listens to blues to show his actual state of mind and feelings. In addition to that, many of the characters are singers of blues such as Peter Weatstraw and True blood.

The narrator stays in his secret, underground home, listening to Louis Armstrong’s jazz records at top volume on his phonograph. He states that he wishes that he had five record players with which to listen to Armstrong, as he likes feeling the vibrations of the music as well as hearing it. While listening, he imagines a scene in a black church and hears the voice of a black woman speaking out of the congregation. She confesses that she loved her white master because he gave her sons. Through her sons she learned to love her master, though she also hated him, for he promised to set the children free but never did. In the end, she says, she killed him with poison, knowing that her sons planned to tear him to pieces with their homemade knives. The narrator interrogates her about the idea of freedom until one of the woman’s sons throws the narrator out on the street. The narrator then describes his experiences of listening to Armstrong’s music under the influence of marijuana and says that the power of Armstrong’s music, like the power of marijuana, comes from its ability to change one’s sense of time. But eventually, the narrator notes, he stopped smoking marijuana, because he felt that it dampened his ability to take action, whereas the music to which he listened impelled him to act.

Furthermore, the narrator hibernates in his invisibility with his invisible music, preparing for his unnamed action. He states that the beginning of his story is really the end. He asks who was responsible for his near-murder of the blond man—after all, the blond man insulted him. Though he may have been lost in a dream world of sleepwalkers, the blond man ultimately controlled the dream. Nevertheless, if the blond man had called a police officer, the narrator would have been blamed for the incident.

Ralph Ellison captures the use of sermon in *Invisible Man*. Sermon is defined by *Wikipedia* as an oration by a prophet or member of the clergy. Sermons address a Biblical, theological, religious, or moral topic, usually expounding on a type of belief, law or behaviour within both past and present contexts. Elements of preaching include exposition, exhortation and practical application. In a review of Dolan's book titled *The sermon and the African American Literary Imagination*, an online source sheds light on the use of sermon. It states that sermon is characterized by oral expression and ritual performance, the black church has been a dynamic force in African American culture. It asserts that:

In an article title *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination,* Dolan Hubbard explores the profound influence of the sermon upon both the themes and the styles of African American literature. Beginning with an exploration of the historic role of the preacher in African American culture and fiction, Hubbard examines the church as a forum for organizing black social reality. Like political speeches, jazz, and blues, the sermon is an aesthetic construct, interrelated with other aspects of African American cultural expression. Arguing that the African American sermonic tradition is grounded in a self-consciously collective vision, Hubbard applies this vision to the themes and patterns of black American literature... He shows how African American writers have employed the forms of the black preaching style, with all their expressive

power, and he explores such recurring themes as the quest for freedom and literacy, the search for identity and community, the lure of upward mobility... The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination is a major addition to the fields of African American literary and religious studies.

The expression of sermon is vividly captured in chapters five and six, where the narrator is seen attending a chapel, he hears Rev. Homer A. Barbee, a blind preacher from Chicago; deliver a powerful sermon about the Founder and his vision for the college. Overcome with emotion, the narrator leaves early to prepare for his meeting with Dr. Bledsoe. During the meeting, he is shocked to discover that Bledsoe, entrusted with carrying on the Founder's legacy, is nothing like the man Rev. Barbee built him up to be. That evening, after Bledsoe reveals his greedy, self-serving, and opportunistic character to the narrator, lecturing him on the politics of race and power, Bledsoe expels the narrator. Devastated, the narrator decides to leave immediately, returning to Bledsoe's office only to pick up seven letters that, Bledsoe assures, will help him get a job in New York where he can earn enough money to return to school in the fall. Grateful for his assistance, the narrator accepts the letters and places them in his briefcase along with his high school diploma. Ironically, these chapters reveal that, instead of preserving and presenting the Founder's legacy, Dr. Bledsoe preaches of white supremacy by educating his students to always stay in their place, subservient to whites. Thus, as the narrator suspects as he ponders the statue of the Founder lifting the veil, Bledsoe is, in fact, lowering the veil and ensuring that his students remain. An online article titled '*Invisible Man By Ralph Ellison: Summary and Analysis*' by Cliffnotes describes this as:

> '…still haunted by the horrors of slavery, which legally denied blacks the right to read and write, blacks saw education as a means of obtaining a measure of pride and dignity and an opportunity for a better life. Along with men such as Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute — which serves as the

> model for Ellison's nameless Southern college — blacks believed that education would provide a way out of the crushing cycle of poverty experienced by sharecroppers and tenant farmers, in addition to forcing whites to see them as intelligent, articulate human beings instead of brutes ideally suited for working in the fields and performing other types of hard, menial labor'.

Moreover, teaching people to become independent, critical thinkers and transmitting the culture and history of a people are two of education's primary goals. Neither goal, however, plays a part in Bledsoe's philosophy of education. Key images in these two chapters include the surreal image of Rev. Barbee's collar cutting off his head, symbolizing the separation of mind and body (because blacks were not allowed to integrate their mind and body and become whole men), and the statue of the Founder soiled by the mockingbird, symbolizing the white stain on black history.

At this point, one sees the role of religion, the power of sermonic language with its drama, biblical imagery, and emphatic repetition, and the impact of the black church on the black community, are also obvious reflection of the oral form. Although Ellison focuses on the importance of the church, through Rev. Barbee's blindness he also wants to point out that blind faith without some grounding in reality is of little use to the black community.

Ellison simply refers to the fact that religion was often used to keep blacks in a constant state of mind, that is not allowing them to think or reason beyond what they are taught. White preachers often preached sermons centering on the theme, 'Slaves, be obedient to them that are your masters(Ephesians 6:5)'. He is also trying to point out that surviving in this world necessitates both a spiritual vision as well as a firm grasp on reality.

4.3 THE EXPRESSION OF BLACK VERNACULAR IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

In reading through the novel it is realised that Ellison foregrounds much of his wordplay on black vernacular, the ordinary language of black Americans, enriched by colloquial expressions and proverbs as well as excerpts from songs and stories rooted in African and African American culture. Ellison's protagonist in *Invisible Man* comes upon a scene in which an old African American couple is being evicted from their apartment in Harlem, and he describes their belongings. "My eyes fell upon a pair of crudely carved and polished bones, 'knocking bones,' used to accompany music at country dances" (Ellison, 1952: 271). In the same scene, the narrator comes across a set of Free Papers originating from Macon, Georgia, and begins to reminisce so strongly that he becomes nauseous, because he is filled with images of black American history. He identifies with and cherishes his history the way one suffers, "a rotted tooth that one would rather suffer indefinitely than endure the short violent eruption of pain that would mark its removal" (Ellison, 1952: 271).

Luke Mahoney (2015) asserts that Ellison points to two phenomena in *Invisible Man.* Firstly, he points out that cultural remnants of southern rural black American life remain from the migration of black Americans to places like Harlem, and secondly, that these pieces of culture are so intrinsic in the identity of the black American psyche that they, even though painful, are cherished and strongly influence who black American people are.

Ellison's protagonist held inseparable ties to rural black American identity, but those ties also caused him pain, and the pain brought about by holding back from embracing black American culture surfaces multiple times in *Invisible Man.* For example, the protagonist

encounters the sweet potato vendor in Harlem and describes a, “a thin spiral of smoke that drifted the odor of baking yams slowly to me, bringing a stab of swift nostalgia. I stopped as though struck by a shot, deeply inhaling, remembering, my mind surging back,” and it is back home in the South that the narrator's mind is brought back to (Ellison, 1952: 262). Luke Mahoney states that Ellison often reminds the reader of the ties to Southern life that many black Americans have. He also underlines their attempts to shed those ties.

Additionally, Ellison demonstrates the hypocrisy involved in trying to keep dual identity this is seen when his narrator, in a moment of hysteria, realizes how easily Dr. Bledsoe might be undone in front of his white philanthropists if he were simply confronted with elements of his southern past (Ellison, 1952: 265). The protagonist imagines that by simply exposing Dr. Bledsoe’s delight for the common fare of black Americans in the south, that all of the white community would realize him to be a fool, and he writes, “I accuse you of indulging in a filthy habit, Bledsoe!,” that habit being the consumption of chitterlings, or pigs gut, “The weekly newspapers would attack him. The captions over his picture: Prominent Educator Reverts to Field-Niggerism! His rivals would denounce him as a bad example for the youth” (Ellison, 1952: 265). This passage exposes a little bit of the shame that some black Americans felt about their past, and their belief in the necessity of covering their up cultural heritage. Ralph Ellison used vernacular extensively in Invisible Man.

Ellison obviously delights in wordplay to achieve what he describes as blues-toned laughter. One of the more fascinating aspects of the novel, Ellison's wordplay allusions, puns, and rhymes as well as powerful metaphors and similes adds a dimension of literary and cultural richness to the novel. An online *review “History, and Character is served*” by Christopher Borrelli, buttresses on the use of vernacular:

> In providing instructions for burning down the tenement building, Dupre warns, 'After that it's every tub on its own black bottom!' Ellison might have used the more common and less colorful phrase, after that it's every man for himself, but this would not have grounded the scene in black culture. The two winos use a vivid simile to describe Ras on his horse, "looking like death eating a sandwich.' A third example is Trueblood's play on the word whippoorwill: we'll whip ole Will when we find him.'

The usage of vernacular is achieved in a couple of ways. *Invisible Man: Cliffnotes online* describes this: 'Ellison achieves much of his comic effect through a unique form of wordplay called playing the dozens. Rooted in black vernacular, playing the dozens is a subversive type of wordplay in which the oppressed (blacks) use the language of the oppressor (whites) against them without directly confronting or openly challenging the oppressor. Ranging from mildly insulting to overtly obscene, playing the dozens is a coded language that uses puns, hyperbole, humor, irony, repetition, reversal, and understatement to score points, and often includes sexual innuendo and references to 'your mama.'

In summary, African American writers, Ellison as one of them, has continued to keep their traditions alive by constantly re-echoing what identifies and sooths them. This is achieved through the use of oral traditions highly embedded in trickster, poetry, folksong, jazz, sermon and vernacular. Drawing illustrations from *Invisible Man*, the research portrays the black man in American society trying to communicate by using oral tradition peculiar to his root to relate his experiences in writing. The narrator who is the 'Invisible Man' is in many ways a symbol of every black man in his struggle against the circumstances which limits or marginalizes him.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CONCLUSION

Oral tradition has been effectively captured in the selected texts of Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison. In*Beloved, Song of Solomon* and *Invisible Man* respectively, the authors have shown how the platform of the novel offers materials for them as African American writers. African American writers are indeed highly preoccupied with the notion and experiences of blacks and black literature. This study has oral traditions and oral forms have been deployed in the exploration of African American experiences. By using these forms the writers have negotiated the issue of identity and the cultural experiences of African Americans. In this regard they consequently strife to redefine white/black hierarchy of mainstream literally discourse in order to provide other perspectives of the African American experiences.

This study has shown that by drawing from and by the adaptation of oral- literary forms in Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison's novels, the achievements of individual African American lies in the communal consciousness of millions of slaves and their descendants whose oral tradition in songs and other forms have given substance to much subsequent literature by black Americans. Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison have successfully brought the values of ancient oral traditions to modern fiction. Generally speaking, this thesis has shown that both Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison's novels are rich in participatory oral forms such as, songs, poetic language, the language of ritual and oral epic, which not only show their usefulness in the African American community but appeal for the readers' involvement. Other oral forms employed in this thesis include trickster, jazz, sermon, ancestral cultural history, incantations, invocation etc. which all depict how culturally endowed the African American community is.

Morrison clearly uses narrative resources to buttress the bedrock of black dehumanization, degradation and sorrow. Her narrative illustrates an archetypal black homeland, a cultural setting that lays claim to history's abandoned, defamed and disclaimed African and African American children and people. As seen in her two novels Morrison humanizes black characters that strive to overcome and excavate enforced invisibility of African Americans' social reality.

Furthermore, the major themes of Toni Morrison's writing redefined the notion of white American canonical texts and their idea of African American writing as being non-canonical or inferior. She demonstrates the idea of racial pride and how useful her supposedly non hegemonic culture is in her writings.

This study of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* has demonstrated that she decentres the notion of whiteness and its domination over blackness in America by effectively utilizing the oral form in driving home her point. When read closely her novels show that the view that black or African American people are dead, impotent or lacking cultural depth is rather misplaced and far from the truth.

Going by the above position the thesis appraised Morrison's writing on the African American experience drawing attention to the attitudes that have silenced the autonomy of African American literature since the seventh century by embracing the oral form. As this study has clearly shown that Morrison's writing is different from that of mainstream white discourse that considers African American literature as a subsidiary product. Morrison's writing reinterprets and redefines the hidden, dislocated and alienated African American presence in American mainstream discourse by showing that African Americans are no more inferior human beings.

It is in this light that the thesis has examined Toni Morrison's fiction as consistently making a case for an African American experience within a definable cultural context. Her characters experienced themselves as wounded, or imprisoned by racial and economic divisions within American culture. The boundaries that circumscribe black people are not only the prejudices and restrictions that bar their entry into the mainstream but the psychological ones they internalize as they develop in a social structure that historically has excluded them. Therefore, the thesis drew from Toni Morrison's rich store of black oral tradition as well as from her own imaginative angle of vision to illuminate the potentialities for both annihilation and transcendence within black experience. Black lore, black music, black language and all the myths and rituals of black culture are the most prominent elements in this study.

Furthermore, in the exploration of *Song of Solomon (1977)* basically, this research focused on the concern for the quest for identity of a black family, which is disinherited and has lost its name in America. Through Morrison's use of African oral tradition and musical culture there is a reclaiming of identity and belonging of the blacks. It is therefore right to say that African American writers have rediscovered texts that have long been suppressed or ignored, and have sought to make place for African American culture and tradition.

In enacting a strand of Postcolonial theory on the issue of strong belief in hybridity, multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, and cultural polyvalence, Ellison equipped his narrator of a viable and flexible identity, owing to the fact that black and white culture were inextricably linked. With almost every facet of American life influenced and impacted by the African-American presence including music, language, folk mythology, jazz and the like, this thesis has demonstrated that Ellison's *Invisible Man* utilizes African American culture and oral traditions that embodies the realities of the African American people people. The expression of black

culture and oral tradition embedded in trickster, poetry, folksong sermon and black vernacular as depicted the selected texts gives a sense of belonging to the characters and show how diverse and dynamic African American life is.

In a similar light, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* embraced traditions, rituals, and a history that formed a cohesive and complex culture that was the source of a full sense of identity. When the protagonist in *Invisible Man* comes upon a yam seller (named PetieWheatstraw, after the black folklore figure) on the streets of Harlem and remembers his childhood in a flood of emotion, his proclamation "I yam what I yam!" is Ellison's expression of embracing one's culture as the way to freedom.

By borrowing from and incorporating strands of the Postcolonial theory into the non-written oral traditions and folk life of the African diaspora, this research has made the concept of white superiority a relative term and has shown how white American and African American cultures can be treated on equal terms. In producing their own literature, Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison have been depicted in this study as writers that are able to establish their own literary traditions that redeemed that image of the blacks that was tainted by slavery and the racial experience that they have undergone in America.

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Masquerade, magic, and carnival in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man.

Music in *Invisible Man*: The *Invisible Man's* relationship to music relates closely to his *use* of marijuana. In fact, the *Invisible man* often compares**.**

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