



## Gender And Race In The Novels Of Toni Morrison And Alice Walker: African American Perspectives

Kavitha H S<sup>1</sup>, Aravinda Reddy N<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government First Grade College and PG Center, Chintamani, Chikkaballapura District, Karnataka, India 563125

Email: [hskavitha16@gmail.com](mailto:hskavitha16@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government First Grade College Banarutirupathi, Kolar District, Karnataka, India-563116

Email: [aravindgfc@gmail.com](mailto:aravindgfc@gmail.com)

### APA Citation:

N, A.R., S, K.H., (2020). Gender And Race In The Novels Of Toni Morrison And Alice Walker: African American Perspectives, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 16(3), 1691-1701; 2020.

Submission Date: 01/06/2020

Acceptance Date: 15/09/2020

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### Abstract

The paper discusses gender and race in the novels of Afro-American writers Toni Morrison Alice Walker. Both authors have added to the fullness of Black Narrative; their literature has explored the agony and ecstasy, wolfsbane from ancestor's past. *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Song of Solomon* (by Morrison) and *The Color Purple* (1982), *Meridian* (1976), *Possessing the<sup>1</sup> Secret of Joy* attention seriously to a comprehensive examination distillation in two major components representation female role's identity—the consequences race—embrace nature does not offer mindset that no longer clouded by male-centeredness or racism. Their reception and impact on literature, both critically as well as historically, is also considered in relation to artists helping promote awareness or representation. Accounting for these themes, the paper intends to reach for and through them in both Morrison's as well Walker 's novel (*America's Black Women: An Introduction to Literary Studies*) demonstrating that recognizing gendered aspects of oppression and resistance is crucial when studying Afro-American Literature.

**Keywords:** Afro-American Literature, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gender Roles, Racial Identity, Intersectionality, African American Experiences, Female Empowerment, Racism, Literary Analysis.

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### I. Introduction

#### A. Brief Introduction to Afro-American Literature

African American literature is one of the most well-known sub-fields within Afro-American studies. What the corpus of literature engaged in here investigates, is this African American history as well documented and written about by numerous authors them perhaps when they explore slavery or negro segregation, or Apartheid To what extent can it be read through their various texts to give an account identity struggle racial strife for rights (Gates & Smith 2004). It showcases the multiplicities voices and

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Email: [hskavitha16@gmail.com](mailto:hskavitha16@gmail.com)

viewpoints that make up African American culture, making it a crucial component of the broader American literary canon.

## **B. The Significance of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in Literature**

Two of the most significant figures in Afro-American literature are Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. The Nobel laureate is celebrated for her gripping, poetic survey of African American life and history. In her novels "Beloved" and "The Bluest Eye," she examines the psychological and cultural consequences of slavery, racism (Morrison, 1987; Morrison, 1970). Walker, a Pulitzer Prize-winning African American woman known for her writings on race and gender, her most famous novel "The Color Purple" was rooted in issues of gender, race and oppression so it was a form of storytelling that shared narratives around empowerment (Walker, 1982).

## **C. To Investigate Gender & Racial Dimensions in their Novels**

This paper focuses, on the way, how these tropes are operational in the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. The paper attempts to do this but considering their work, to what extent they address issues of race and gender showing the ways in which oppression uniquely affects African American women. In doing so, this essay will uncover the extent to which Morrison and Walker critique prevailing social constructs through forging alternative discourses on society.

## **D. Statement of the Problem**

But while the works of Morrison and Walker have been widely celebrated in literary scholarship, there is still a necessary need for unpacking their complex depictions of gender and race. The protagonists of these authors reflect the actualization of African American women but also critiques the contrary oppressions that underlie race and gender. This paper aims to fill a gap in the study of literature, as little systemic scholarship has been done on how Morrison and Walker use these themes comparatively (a prominent comparative analysis between walker and Morrison), therefore deepening insight into their literary works didactic properties and grounding them more firmly within social reality.

## **II. Overview of Toni Morrison's Works**

### **A. Life and Work of Toni Morrison**

One of America's preeminent Novelists, essayist and editor, Toni Morrison (born Chloe Ardelia Wofford in Lorain O., 2/18/31.) She earned a BA in English from Howard University and an MFA at Cornell. Morrison started her career as an academic and a book editor before she turned to writing fiction. In 1970, she wrote her first novel *The Bluest Eye*. Awards she received during her career include the Nobel Prize in Literature, for which she was awarded with 1993 and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 (for *Beloved*). She has done a lot more for the literary world, too: her work played an important role in putting black literature on the map. She answered her call August 5, 2019 (Denard, 2008).

### **B. Key Themes in Morrison's Novels.**

One of the most famous and controversial insights into African American life comes by way of Toni Morrison novels. Here are some of the main subjects:

**Bondage and Beyond:** because Morrison repeatedly look into the historic Persekutuan of slavery on Recoil American citizens manner how it traumatic backstories recipe themselves strategy personality as well CITATIONMor87 l 1033 (Morrison, 1987).

**Race and Racism In her works:** Morrison critiqued the social structure of American that was built on a foundation racism (Morrison, 1970).

**Coming of Age:** Morrison's works often center on the coming-of-age experiences or rites of passage, for African American women -- exploring such themes as gender oppression and empowerment (Morrison 1973).

**Communities/Family:** The significance of community and familial relationships in African American culture, really developing the nurturing as well as destructive nature that both can have on each other (Morrison; 1977)

**Magic Realism:** Morrison uses African American myth and folklore, making her texts rich in culture depth Bronson adds that she borrows from both combined with oral tradition forms a body of historical resonance for these stories (Morrison 1987).

### C. Notable Works

**The Bluest Eye (1970):** Morrison's debut novel chronicles the tragic life of Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl growing up in Ohio who dreams covetously of possessing blue eyes and white skin despite being harassed at school by other children for her dark complexion. The book speaks to the detrimental effect of racial self-hatred and cultural ideals of beauty (Morrison, 1970).

**Sula (1973):** Follows the lives of two African American women, Sula Peace and Nel Wright, from childhood to their 50 years friendship-ending feud over a local man in this novel about friendship & community set in an Ohio town. The novel explores questions of loyalty, betrayal and oppression from the struggle for spiritual liberation in between societal paradigms (Morrison, 1973).

**Song of Solomon (1977):** A densely textured narrative that traces the passage of Macon "Milkman" Dead III through his pursuit to learn more about his family heritage and himself. The book mixes personal with communal past, blending in black folklore and magical realism (Morrison, 1977).

**Beloved (1987):** Considered one of Morrison's finest novels, *Beloved* takes place after the American Civil War and follows Sethe, an escaped slave who is haunted by a ghostly presence that she comes to believe may be her dead daughter. The book addresses the terrors of slavery, and the horrors for those trying to recover on a psychological level (Morrison 1987).

## III. Overview of Alice Walker's Works

### A. Brief Biography of Alice Walker

Alice Walker Born: February 9, 1944 Eatonton Georgia American author poet and activist After attending college at Spelman, she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English from Sarah Lawrence College. Walker was first known as a poet, but it is her novels for which she has been widely celebrated. Her third novel, "The Color Purple" (1982), brought her the National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and soon established her as an important voice in contemporary literature. Many of Walker's works focus on race, gender and social issues in the American South, often building from her own experiences as a black woman. However, she is still a noteworthy author and activist today (Lerner 2006)

### B. Themes of Walker Novels

Among her many works Alice Walker Novels tend to be renowned for their incredibly deep look into social and individual themes. Characteristics of her alleged works include:

**Racism and racial identity:** Addressing the issue of racism, Walker explores some prevailing dilemmas concerning colour within black community. In many of her works, Walker's characters are seen to struggle and fight stereotypes (Walker 1982).

**Sexuality and Gender:** Walker's wrote the books almost all of African-American women. For instance, she speaks out about sexual violence, reproductive rights and the power of female solidarity (Walker 1982).

**Spirituality and Self-Discovery:** This leads to another major theme in *Miss Celie's Blues* that was explored at length by Walker in her novel — spirituality and self-discovery, as indicated by the following table (Walker):

**Community and Activism:** Walker often brings forth the concepts of community, mutual support, cooperation as well as activism from a sense of solidarity in her work for social justice (Walker 1992).

**Nature and Environment:** Walker interweaves themes of nature and the environment, calling for ecological consciousness alongside the realization that all is one in life (Walker 1997).

### C. Notable Works

**The Color Purple (1982):** This novel about a young African American girl, Celie who suffers abuse and oppression but ultimately gains strength in her own skin and becomes liberated through sisterhood. The novel is praised for its strong endorsement of female survival and opposition to racial and gender violence (Walker, 1982).

**Meridian (1976):** "Meridian" depicts the story of a woman named Meridian Hill who gets fascinated towards civil rights movement in 1960's. Set against a backdrop of the civil rights movement, *The Color Purple* explores themes of activism and its relationship to motherhood as well as issues surrounding the personal costs of political engagement (Walker 1976).

**Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992):** A novel that tackled female genital mutilation - told through human characters like Tashi, a woman who faces grave medical and psychological challenges long after being cut. For example, in her work she critiques cultural practice that subordinates women and their rights by men (Walker 1992).

## IV. Exploration of Gender Aspects

### A. Gender Roles and Identity in Morrison's Novels

#### 1. Representation of Female Characters

**Complex Portrayals:** Toni Morrison novels present intricate, multilayered representations of African American women. The characters like Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, and Sethe in *Beloved* form part of Morrison's studies when it comes to the concept about Gender roles. This book exposes the terrorizing effect of social standards of beauty on little black girls as seen in *Pecola*, and also examines the layers where gender, race and trauma intersect within a landscape heavy with slave pasts such as represented through Sethe (Morrison 1970; Morrison 1987).

**Resilience and Agency:** Morrison often depicts her female characters as strong individuals who strive to become their own persons even when they face societal resistance. Sula Peace in *Sula* is an example of this challenging traditional gender roles by being inflammatory and unapologetically independent (1973) - something that could only be achieved if the character was written as a woman.

## 2. Female Empowerment and Struggles

**Struggling with Identity:** Morrison novels assess the conflict and trouble that African American women go through to preserve their right identity against societal levels. *Song of Solomon* more broadly examines the implications for identity and heritage through Milkman Dead's journey to reclaim his family history, which affects all female characters around him (Morrison 1977).

**Collective Empowerment:** Often, female power is shown as found in sisterhood and mutual bonding. In *Beloved* by Morrison (1987), Sethe's relationship with other women like Denver and Paul D contributes significantly to her healing process and aid in building a sense of self.

## B. Gender Roles and Identity in Walker's Novels

### 1. Representation of Female Characters

**Variety of experiences:** Alice Walker novels show how African American women can experience everything from oppression to empowerment. *The Color Purple* tells the story of Celie as she goes from being a victim of domestic violence to finding autonomy and identity, portraying ongoing issues with gender throughout the novel (Walker 1982). For example, in *Meridian*, the protagonist's participation with Civil Rights Movement is one that intersects between gender and political activism (Walker 1976).

**Challenging Norms:** Walker often challenges traditional gender roles by portraying women that rebel against societal norms. The book *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker uses Tashi to explore cultural practices that oppress women, especially female genital mutilation: a story where one is trying for her justice (Walker, 1992).

### 2. Female Empowerment and Struggles

**Patriarchy:** Walker illustrates the divide between generations by portraying her characters as they struggle against male-dominant societies that limit their growth. Celie's search for her own identity and empowerment is evident in the quest of self-actualization which takes place through personal as well as social changes that seek to breakdown male hegemony (Walker 1982).

**Gendered Empowerment:** Also reminiscent of Morrison, Walker relies on female agency in traffic with gender oppression. For example, the relationships between women in her novels like Celie and Sofia from *The Color Purple* (Walker 1982) stress on tenderness of leaving no woman behind.

## C. Comparison of Gender Themes in Both Authors' Works

**Representation and Empowerment:** Morrison and Walker both develop female characters who question the restrictions placed on women by their gender. Indeed, Morrison's characters often contend with their challenges in a backdrop of historical trauma and community, while Walker allows her protagonists to react more directly against patriarchal norms or cultural practices. In what is possible the major similarity between both authors themselves, are how they focus so closely on independence from societal constraints through self-empowerment and female solidarity.

**Struggles and Resilience:** Even though they both represent the experiences of African American women; Morrison focuses more on their psychological and historical struggles as novels that convey how traumas from past are affecting contemporary identity formation. Meanwhile, Walker often focuses on women who actively resist or self-actualize in spite of societal and cultural violence.

**Intersectionality:** Morrison and Walker both address gender in conjunction with race, yet they do so at opposite ends of the spectrum. Morrison brings those themes into broader investigations of racial history and identity, whereas Walker also delves into critiques on particular cultural practices as well as systemic oppression. Each viewpoint enhances our apprehension of the nuances that are brought forth through gender and race in African American literature.

## V. Exploration of Racial Aspects

### A. Depiction of African American Experiences in Morrison's Novels

#### 1. Racism and Its Impact on Characters

**Systemic Oppression:** *The Bluest Eye* explores how systemic racism influences African American self-identity through the lens of Epitome. This interpretation of self-hatred is represented in Pecola Breedlove who reflects white beauty onto herself so much that she desires blue eyes (Morrison, 1970). This internalized racism provides a great window into the psychological wounds that are inflicted on an individual living in such racially oppressive society.

**Historical Trauma:** *Beloved* explores the aftereffects of slavery, and how it wore a scar on every single person involved in that institution. The experiences of Sethe detail the crushing barbarity slavery could impose on black families in American history, and it speaks to how deeply historical wrongs can continue reverberate today (Morrison, 1987).

#### 2. Cultural Heritage and Identity

**Relationship with Roots:** *Song of Solomon* throws light on sense and significance of cultural, heritage while Bronte family deals it differently. The narrative follows Milkman Dead as he travels to find his roots, reconnecting them with a long, almost forgotten history in African American tradition and lore. This tale of reconciliation within origin is one that strengthens individuality through heritage (Morrison 1977).

**Community and Identity:** *Sula* shows the nature of African American communities, particularly how Black people create collective identifications rooted in shared histories. The village of The Bottom functions as an example for African American culture and social life (Morrison, 1973).

### B. Depiction of African American Experiences in Walker's Novels

#### 1. Racism and Its Impact on Characters

**Personal and Societal Struggles:** Walker also defined the African American woman in a racist society. For example, the life of Celie is plagued by both racial and gender oppression; thus, showing intersectionality elements to her plight (Walker, 1982).

**Activism and resistance:** *Meridian* covers the struggle against racial terror during Civil Rights Movement. The main character, Meridian Hill represents activism and rebellion towards ongoing racism (Walker 1976).

## 2. Cultural Heritage and Identity

**Converging with Roots:** in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* there is also theme of cultural heritage and home found again through Tashi. This novel deals with traditional vs, modern human rights (Walker 1992)] partially the conflict between cultural identity versus individual autonomy.

**Idle No More:** Empowerment through Heritage, Walker usually loves to highlight the empowering features of compartmentalization and cork-like one's ethnic or else if not you can be imprisoned by deadly approximation. Nettie's letters from Africa in *The Color Purple* add context to Celie's identity and self-esteem (Walker 1982).

### C. Comparison of Racial Themes in Both Authors' Works

**Depiction of Racism:** Morrison and Walker provide vivid portrayals of how racism permeates an African American experience. Where Morrison largely explores the historical and psychological aspects of anti-Black racism, Walker employs a mix of personal struggles against domestic violence while drawing broader societal contests with race. In Morrison's work, her characters have to contend with the residue of slavery and systemic oppression while in Walker's writing her characters are more about resistance an achieving a personal as well collective freedom.

**Heritage and Identity of Culture:** In their writings, both authors emphasize the weight of culture and community. Morrison's novels, such of *Song of Solomon* take back further in the ancestral genealogy and folklore that comprises African American culture for its history on Black heritage as a power source and infinite sense-of-self. Like Walker, cultural roots reassert themselves as well in *The Secret Life of Bees* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* on Tashi's journey to reconcile tradition with individual agency. The same authors both note the role of community in shaping an identity - individually and collectively.

**Intersectionality: Morrison and Walker:** both show the intersections of race, gender at play but Morrison is a bit more subtle in her delivery than Walker While Morrison confronts the identities of her characters in relation to historical trauma and community, Walker often has her heroines rebuff both cultural traditions and societal convention. These perspectives both add depth to portrayals of African American lives, providing a more comprehensive view of how race interplays with gender and identity.

## VI. Critical Reception and Impact

### A. Critical Reception of Morrison's Works

#### 1. Initial Reception and Accolades

**Literary Influences:** Critics greeted Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), with a range of reactions from appreciation for her powerful portrayal of African American culture to discomfort over the questions she explored in it. It remains a classic thanks to an equally daring portrayal of race and looks (Otten, 1993); though it has since been widely acknowledged as such.

**Major Awards:** Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) was highly praised and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. Bloom (2004) provided the work glowing praise for its emotional heartiness paired with critically significant historical analysis of slavery and post-slavery relationships. She ultimately became the first woman of African descent to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, celebrating this honor with her award in 1993.

#### 2. Scholarly Analysis and Interpretation

**Thematic Exploration:** Scholars have analysed Morrison works over the years and they are usually cited for their depth in plain African American identity, history of ownership and culture. Although furan is not its magical realism and complex narrative structures are, it was the main focus of criticism by literary critics.

**Themes of Cultural and Historical Impact:** The historical context of Morrison's novels is often referenced in connection with commentary on the issues left unresolved by slavery or simply because she remains an African American literary luminary. Her work is recognized in the American canon as pivotal, providing profound new insights into African-American life (Peach 2000).

## **B. Critical Reception of Walker's Works**

### **1. Initial Reception and Accolades**

**Pioneering works:** *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker who won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and National Book Award. The novel was also a commercial success, dealing with African American women's struggle for identity in terms of society racially discriminated against them through an epistemology format that allowed Alice Walker to show the oppressive context leaving behind critics and readers to understand how subjugated black people were still socially isolated from white.

**Walker's Later Works:** Her later works, too, have earned continued recognition, as the novels *Meridian* (1976) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) were praised by critics for their perspective on gender relations caste divisions among African Americans. This activism and her writing have given Angelou a position as one of the leading voices in contemporary literature (Gates Jr.

### **2. Scholarly Analysis and Interpretation**

**Feminist and Womanist Perspectives:** Walker's works are almost always interpreted through feminist or womanist viewpoints. Womanism as a concept was first introduced in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), and has indeed had significant influence on literary conversations about race/gender/genre (Christian 1985).

**Cultural Critique and Empowerment:** Walker is best known for her lucid critiques of patriarchal and racist structures. Scholars have written at great length about Larischs seemingly gleaming portrayals of powerful, resilient women to argue the intersectional nature of her themes (White 2004).

## **C. Influence of Their Works on Afro-American Literature and Society**

### **1. Literary Influence**

**Ancestral figures in African American Literature:** Morrison, as well as Walker are considered pioneers of literary works exploring the experiences of women among black community. Through their own efforts they have created literature which serves as a basis for generations of writers who hoped to follow, writing about the same concerns on race and gender identity (Taylor-Guthrie 1994).

**Educational Impact:** Their novels are often added to academic curricula, providing students with a window into African American history and culture. So, their contributions have served to diversify literary studies as well as sensitize us towards a broader spectrum of narratives (Byerman, 1996).

### **2. Social and Cultural Impact**



**Awareness and Activism:** The idea of Morrison's and Walker's works have increased a social cognizance about African American societal issues as well poor people, the crushed legacy yet perseverance that exists inside their groups. In this traditional of racist and sexist the Simpson family representations served to steer popular representation back into discard spread wide cast Jim Crow like structures. their depictions of color poverty as well, accomplished in effect was a positive contribution toward new social cultural discussions race gender America (Koyana, 2002).

**Representation and Empowerment:** Their characters often fight through great adversity - which has become synonymous with physical empowerment. Continue conversations about social justice and race (Henderson, 1993) to inspire those who read 1.

## VIII. Conclusion

### A. Summary of Key Points Discussed

**Afro-American:** The paper opened by setting a background of what Afro-American literature was, followed up with the work that had been done in the field through Toni Morrison and Alice Walker It has provided a forum within which to represent the diverse African American experience, most notably gender and race.

**Toni Morrison Works:** A short description of a schoolteacher was followed by an analysis on "Being and Nothingness," the book Mr. Goad mentioned, then worked through Morrison's most prominent work - her novels which were driven by elements such as identity struggle in America, tragedy (among other things), resistance to it all... We talked about her great works, *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* or *Song of Solomon* to show she was a masterful writer.

**Introduction to Works of Alice Walker:** Aldam, *Announcing Alice Walker — Bio and Themes*; She epitomized both because her better-known novels, *The Color Purple* and *Meridian* as well as *Possessing the Secret of Joy* illuminate gender; race and cultural heritage.

**Exploration of Gender Aspects:** The gender roles and identities of the characters in Morrison's and Walker are scrutinized. Both authors illustrate the oppression and empowerment of African American women, themes that will be explored in this paper such as female empowerment, representation, to fight against patriarchal power.

**Exploration of Racial Aspects:** The portrayal of African American lives in the novels by Morrison and Walker was considered. Racism, cultural heritage and identity were common themes that enriched their works with the lived experience of other people.

**Gender and Gender Intersections:** The readers examined the ways gender and race intersected in both sets of texts. Morrison and Walker reflect the long history of simultaneous racism, sexism as well the resistance performed by African American women against these intertwined forces. Comparative Analysis revealed that while one author dealt with narrative techniques another explored different themes.

**Critical Reception and Impact:** A review of critical reception and scholarly interpretation of Morrison's and Walker's novels- what are they for(not just in critique) Their works and their effect on Afro-American literature, as well as the society were highlighted to show that they work toward enlightenment and social representation.

## B. Final Thoughts on the Significance of Studying Gender and Racial Aspects in Morrison's and Walker's Novels

The concept of gender and race in her novels is very crucial for this: -

**Further Understanding of Intersectionality:** Their writings offer unique perspectives on the co-implications of gender and race, which illustrate a more nuanced understanding of double discrimination experienced by African American women. It is fundamentally necessary to understand this in order to grasp the larger context of oppression and resistance within a given society.

**Enriching Literary Canon:** Morrison and Walker have done a lot to expand the literary canon with rich, complex stories that push back against mainstream depictions. Without them, we would not have gotten the existence(rise) of Literature Inclusive and Diverse.

**Encouraging into Compassion and Noesis:** Morrison and Walker push their readers towards a more informed, empathetic perspective through great storytelling. They write novels that require people to face the truths of racism and sexism by supporting social justice and equality in their works.

**Inspiring Future Generations:** The enduring impact of Morrison and Walker is evident in a dedicated commitment to future generations occupying the interconnected social roles as writers, scholars and activists. And like all effective literature, their examination of gender and race issues acts as a baseline for further talks and actions to pave the way towards a fairer society.

Ultimately, the narratives of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are not just great works of literature; they provide powerful insights into human nature. It is for this reason we need to continue looking at the gender and racial aspects that their work explores, as a tool through which we can better understand and address some of these complexities in our world.

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