

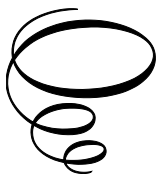
Triple Consciousness
in Selected Works of
Toni Morrison,
Alice Walker
and Maya Angelou

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By

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To my mentor:
His Excellency Prof. Peter Agbor Tabi
of blessed memory.

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PREFACE

The intellectual journey into the theme of triple consciousness in the selected works of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou represents an attempt to deepen and broaden the longstanding discourse on identity, race, gender, and cultural hybridity within African American literature. While W. E. B. Du Bois first theorized double consciousness as the fractured awareness of African Americans caught between their African heritage and the imposed American identity, the realities of Black women who must simultaneously navigate racial oppression, gender subjugation, and cultural invisibility necessitate the recognition of a third layer of consciousness. This triple consciousness reveals itself not only as a psychic burden but also as a site of resilience, creativity, and redefinition.

The historical background of this study, for all intents and purposes, is rooted in the entangled legacies of slavery, segregation, and systemic racism, which converge with patriarchal structures and cultural marginalization. For Morrison, Walker, and Angelou, history is not a backdrop but a living presence that shapes voice, memory, and belonging. Their works foreground the lives of Black women who struggle with societal contradictions yet transform these struggles into affirmations of identity and humanity.

The theoretical foundation of this research draws from African American literary criticism, Black feminist thought, postcolonial theory, and dialogical perspectives on identity. Thinkers such as Du Bois, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Frantz Fanon, Patricia Hill Collins and Homi Bhabha provide a framework to understand how overlapping oppressions create fractured selves, while also offering a lens to perceive the transversality of identity that is, the ability of consciousness to cross, intersect, and negotiate multiple dimensions of existence simultaneously.

The impact of Morrison, Walker, and Angelou cannot be overemphasized. Through narrative strategies, folklore, autobiography, and mythic reconstruction, they have collectively shaped the canon of African American literature and influenced global conversations about gender, race, and liberation. Their voices illuminate how literature functions not only as

testimony but as therapy, as pedagogy, and as resistance against the erasures of history.

This work also considers the perspectives on transversality, emphasizing how triple consciousness operates not as a closed identity but as a crossing point of different experiences African and American, male-centered and female-centered, local and global, individual and communal. By highlighting the transversal nature of identity, the study positions these writers within a broader dialogue on human interconnectedness and the politics of recognition.

This preface, therefore, situates the reader within a tradition of inquiry that seeks to honor the complexity of Black women's subjectivities, acknowledge the multiplicity of oppressions they endure, and celebrate the transformative power of their literary voices. In bringing Morrison, Walker, and Angelou together under the theme of triple consciousness, the work aspires to contribute to an evolving discourse on identity and intersectionality in both literature and lived experience. The good fight 'It's not the destination, it's the journey', is a quote famously attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson the American philosopher.

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Finally, I concede that, due to space constraints, not all my helpers have been mentioned here. I sincerely pledge that I will never wean myself from those who have nurtured this work so far. Despite the support given to me by various people, I am entirely responsible for all the errors in this work.

ABSTRACT

This book, entitled “Triple Consciousness in Selected Novels of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou” investigates how African American women navigate the creation of their identities amidst racial, class, and gender biases. Put differently, this research aims to examine how problems of race, class, and gender combine to debase and sometimes dehumanize the African American woman, making it difficult for her to fashion her own identity. The study is based on the assumption that the novels of Morrison, Walker, and Angelou reveal the multidimensional troubles that confront the African American woman and how these obstacles hinder the development of her identity and self. In order to effectively examine how racism, classism, and sexism intersect to marginalize and disregard African American women and to thoroughly investigate the impact of these different forms of oppression on the women in the novels of the authors under study, the Psycho-analytical and New-historicist approaches are going to be used.

The analyses reveal that the novels of the three authors under study serve as a powerful means of conveying an image of women's subordinate status and of mobilizing women and men for action. According to the thesis, black women have found it challenging to be wholeheartedly committed and fully active in both the black liberation struggle and the women's liberation movement because of sexual, racial, and class politics within each. The authors recognize the demands of multiple jeopardy politics and the detrimental effect of neglecting these triple commitments. The study also recognizes that in their works, the authors consider the multiple and creative ways in which black women address their interdependent concerns of racism, sexism, and classism.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The differences that exist amongst human beings vary in nature and form, and the reasons for such discrepancies and divergences continue to change and swell as humanity evolves. People from different parts of the world seek to distinguish themselves from others in a bid to create a unique identity. This need for a certain uniqueness and distinctiveness in appearance, opinion, and culture has been the primary cause of some of the most unfortunate events and circumstances that have confronted humanity. As a result, human dignity has suffered and deteriorated due to these challenges, and modern civilization struggles to grapple with these issues. Slavery and the slave trade, colonization, racism, classism, and sexism are some of the fundamental factors that have caused people to choose to live poles apart from each other.

These factors have continued to be at the forefront of debates and discussions around the world because of their varying implications on the human landscape. History has, therefore, been the principal informant on the nature and perspectives of these issues. Today, however, economics, science, politics, religion, and literature are significantly influenced by these events all over the world. While some people have benefitted from the above-mentioned factors others have suffered untold hardship and frustration, leading them to seek to redefine their values and personalities. In this last group, are African American women, who, like members of the other groups, have experienced feelings of marginalisation and bitterness, which they are striving to redress. African Americans, for example, have suffered injustices because of racism, sexism, and classism. It is important to mention that racism and sexual assault are crimes of violence and control that arise from an individual's desire to exert power over another. Consequently, regardless of one's sex, gender or age, everybody is vulnerable to sexual assault.

The history of the African American women reveals their unique predicament within the dominant culture as victims of a tripartite form of oppression- racism, classism, and sexism. Since the era of American slavery, these women and their male counterparts have experienced significant brutality; however, her womanhood has made her even more vulnerable. Regardless of whether an African American writer chooses to

emphasize oppression based on race, class, or sex, the victimization of the African American woman always comes to the limelight. For example, Frederick Douglass (1968:60) notes in *My Bondage and My Freedom* that “the slave woman is at the mercy of the fathers, sons or brothers of her master”. In the same vein, Blassingame (1979:155) asserts in *Slave Community* that “Frequently, they (the slave masters) purchased comely black women for their concubines”. Hence, while racism remains their major focus, sexism and classism are also key issues in the African American experience.

As institutionalized racism has been a much-debated subject, the present emphasis on class and female subjugation for the African American woman then becomes a revived or fresh case of study for today’s critics, particularly among women writers. This study deserves consideration given the persistent nature of racism in African American life. The focus of this thesis is to show how three twentieth-century African American women writers, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou, depict the three-dimensional peculiarity of the African American woman’s plight in a society fraught with oppression and suppression.

African-American literature provides insight into the micro-politics of race, class, and gender in America. This literature has been shaped by historical events such as slavery, reconstruction, migration, social protest, war abroad, civil rights, integration, and the backlash against affirmative action. African-American literary history and literary production began with a movement by African-Americans to challenge the White racist discriminations¹. The three authors mentioned above portray whites who believe that blacks are intellectually inferior, and so should be subservient to them. These black authors challenge racist assumptions and foreground major themes, including the quest for identity, self-definition, self-determination, power, resistance, and intersections of race, class, and gender.

The Male and the Female

Dating back to the dawn of time and the inception of the first man, the Christian origin of woman delineates her creation as Eve of Adam: “So God created man in His image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them” (Gen. 1:26). While both men and women are created by God, they are fundamentally different. Zora Neale Hurston supports this idea of difference in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She states, “Now, women forget all those things they do not want to

remember, and remember everything they do not want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they {women} act and do things accordingly” (1). Female writers continue to remind us of the differences between males and females and the struggles they face. In his book *Canonization, Colonization, Decolonization: A Comparative Study of Political and Critical Works by Minority Writers*, Seodial Deena discusses the fate of women, particularly women of colour who “had no alternative but to discover and define themselves through their writings in order to liberate themselves” (19). The liberating act of writing for women of colour is, therefore, of greater importance and precedence than for women who have not been classified as racial “others”. Specifically, the patriarchal system that places the male in dominance over the female is a structure that quantifiably places the ethnic male in third rank; moreover, this placement positions the ethnic female at the bottom of the societal power chain. The tool of writing for women of colour, in the past and presently, continues to create “a new territory for postcolonial women” (Deena 19). Within this “new territory,” the postcolonial woman can assert authority, which was previously possible only when she played the role caregiver, mother, worker, or servant. The postcolonial woman, as revisited through female writers of colour, exposes the ever-present strife engendered by racism, classism, and sexism. It is here that the argument of this present research is directed.

By examining the selected works of the above-mentioned authors, the study aims to reveal the unique experiences of African American women, and highlight the varying methods in which works challenge the triangular establishments of racism, classism, and sexism. A study of this nature is important today since the atmosphere for writings by women has changed, resulting in an abundance of literature. Modern women have grown substantially despite the existence of past and present forms of encumbrance. But, how did the modern woman make it to this point? Remarkably, the modern woman has overcome numerous obstacles to achieve placement within a patriarchal society. This feat is exceptional both for African American women and other women of colour whose struggles, like those of women of European descent are shaped differently by the impact of colonialism.

Often described as “the mule of the world” (Hurston *Eyes* 14) the modern woman of colour has carried the weight of the world throughout history, and her story deserves to be told.

As time passes, change inevitably occurs. In the social sphere, it is evident that the condition of women has changed with the passage of time, though

these changes have not affected all women equally. While women of European descent have made significant strides within the home and within society at large, their progress clearly surpasses what has been accomplished in totality all women. As women have risen above gender barriers that hindered their progress throughout history, they have managed to work together to defend their new place in society. The roots of feminism can, therefore, be traced back to the gradual changes that have occurred throughout the world.

If women have, no doubt, been oppressed on multiple levels. Though oppression on women had varied effects, especially on women of colour, it has pushed these women to go further in order to counter the attempts to silence and marginalize them. The silencing and marginalization that has occurred among women despite changing conditions continue to present a problematic situation. Black women have come a long way in their journey to find not only acceptance but also to define a space that has been long denied to them.

More than ever, there is a critical need to continue the discussion of the predicaments faced by black women within a world shaped by colonization. It is, after all, the house of imperialism that has imposed invisible walls around black women. It is the same house that nurtured Celie's silence and told Pilate she was unnatural. This same house was likely filled with mirrors, causing the young Zora Neale Hurston to question what it meant to be a coloured woman. However, this house imposed far more.

Regardless of her background, a woman is, from birth, oppressed by the very factors upon which her birth negates. The female sphere is designed and constructed by patriarchal forces that extend natural authority to males. Black women, specifically, have been required to submit to their male counterparts, even though they barely possess any power within the world. Consequently, a woman must manoeuvre the social sphere by first overcoming the genetic defects associated with her birth as a female. This would include any of the unique features inherent to being a female: sensitivity, compassion, beauty (male proposed), understanding, and mothering. A woman must know her place, or else, she may find herself reprimanded or punished for her actions. The act of silencing is another method of oppression that also seeks to punish women.

Recurring bouts of abuse decorously note the lived experiences of black women. However, more often than not, the abuse of white women has not been discussed in the same manner as that of other women. While blacks

and other women of colour have been vocal about the forms of abuse which they have suffered, white women's stories of abuse are no less prevalent. The forms by which such abuse takes place may be different, yet that does not dispel the fact that some form of abuse occurs. If one is oppressed, then they are consequently abused. In this fashion, women are again united by the common association of their experience with abuse, physical and/or psychological but essential abuse.

The act of establishing a place in the world is a fundamental step in one's psychological maturation. Born outside the privilege of manhood, women must exert greater effort in establishing a place within society. Naturally, men have a genetic advantage as the subconscious mantras that permeate the existence of life are generally male. While men are born in a world where they can easily make their marks, women struggle to find where they can make their mark in a world largely dominated by patriarchy. It is through the manipulation of usually masculine principles that one achieves success and contentment in the world. Women, therefore, must find their way in a world wherein they act as accents, decorative pieces in the world's living room of man. Colonialism has touched everyone, literature, alone, provides a firm testament to the lives of women. Although Black women, just like other women of colour, have been affected differently, all women have been affected. Perhaps time will be the deciding factor in bringing together a truly united front that does not separate the Celie's and Nora Helmer's of the world. Instead, one will finally acknowledge that all women should be included and protected by a united multicultural feministic front.

Art is the medium through which African-Americans express the ill-treatments they have suffered at the hands of the White masters. In times of slavery, slave women became the object of White master's lust. Sexual abuse of Black youths by White women was also frequent. The Blacks were often lynched and their bodies thrown away by the Whites. This shocked not only the other Blacks but also the conscientious Whites.

The history of African-American literature is invariably connected with the history of literature in general. In countering centuries of dispossession and misrepresentation, Black writers have reclaimed an identity and voice of their own, which were denied to them by imperialism and racism. As they refuse to be robbed of it again by the Whites, they display greater resistance in the face of intolerance and prejudice. Their struggle to survive and to restore a sense of self-worth and dignity beyond the White definitions of Blackness has helped them to formulate a theory of Black consciousness.

W.E.B. Du Bois expressed this sentiment in 1903 in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Murray, 132)

Du Bois bears witness to the pain of the Black people in a racially unequal world ruled by the Whites. His identification of “double consciousness” has informed attempts to theorize Black cultures and modes of interpretation ever since.

Statement of the Research Problem

Female victimization and the question of racial segregation are some of the fundamental issues that continue to attract much attention because of the varying controversies and challenging arguments that the issues generate. In several countries around the world, these factors have led to much tension and scepticism amongst people from the same country and between citizens from different countries, especially as each group seeks to improve on its lot with much indifference to the plight of the others. Although this situation has received much attention from governments, politicians, and civil and human rights activists all over the world, problems relating to race, sex, and class continue to fuel much trouble in our modern societies. This deplorable phenomenon has sometimes given rise to many minority groups that decide to fight for more rights for their people. It is in the background of all these that this research sets out to examine how the African American woman reacts to racism, sexism, and classism in contemporary American society. In other words, the problems of race, gender, and class are still a bone of contention among Black women in the United States.

African American women have endured several rejections, including the colour of their skin, their gender and status in society. This triple complexity almost crippled them as they were forced to accept a subordinate position in society as women, to suffer the neglect and negativity that comes with being black, and to endure the pains of being raped at will. This thesis, therefore, analyses this triple-decker crisis of African American women and investigates how they forged through this crisis to improve and assert their rights. According to the thesis, the novels of Morrison, Walker, and

Angelou are an exploration and an examination of these troubles and how the authors themselves, victims of such injustices, kept striving to gain recognition and acceptance in a society that legitimately belonged to them.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this work is to identify the triple consciousness created by Morrison, Walker, and Angelou for the female characters in their novels and to examine the plight and predicament of the African American woman. In other words, the thesis intends to trace the tripartite perspectives of the troubles and difficulties faced by African American women and to see how this three-way complicatedness is an extension of the double consciousness defined by W. E. B. DuBois, which includes an understanding of the self as an American, an African American, and a woman. The study, therefore, aims to demonstrate that the factors that contribute to the author's female characters' success in the negotiation and synchronization of their triple consciousness include a strong connection to heritage and community, a connection to African ritual and tradition, and control over their sexual identity. According to the thesis, Morrison, Walker, and Angelou use their successful female characters to make a powerful statement to African American women about their role within their community. Through these characters, the authors acknowledge the need for a strong connection to community and heritage (both African and Southern).

According to the study, the notion of double jeopardy is not a new one. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Anna Julia Cooper, who was born into slavery and later became an educator and earned a PhD, often spoke and wrote of the double enslavement of Black women and their being "confronted by both a woman question and a race problem." In 1904, Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, wrote, "Not only are coloured women ... disabled on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are coloured women." The dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism remain pervasive, and, in this study, class inequality compounds those oppressions.

Equally, according to Deborah K. King, in *Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology*, Frances Beale, a founding member of the Women's Liberation Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and, later, a member of the Third World Women's Alliance, introduced the term "double jeopardy" to

describe the dual discriminations of racism and sexism that subjugate Black women (12). On this issue, King quotes Beale as follows; "As blacks, they suffer all the burdens of prejudice and mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin. As women, they bear the additional burden of having to cope with white and black men" (13). According to Beale, therefore, the reality of dual discrimination often entailed economic disadvantage; unfortunately, she did not incorporate that understanding into the conceptualization. Perhaps she viewed class status as a particular consequence of racism rather than as an autonomous source of persecution. However, this study argues that economic class oppression must necessarily constitute a third jeopardy because a preponderant majority of black women have endured the very lowest of wages and the very poorest conditions of rural and urban poverty.

The study, therefore, intends to elucidate that the fictional worlds of Morrison, Walker, and Angelou are concerned with people who, in terms of their ancestry, are displaced, dispossessed, and separated from their identity and history. However, there is a strong appreciation throughout the works that this identity and history should not be seen as stable and essentialist. Boundaries and limits are perceived as signifying spaces in which cultural, political, and economic power are contested, negotiated, or reaffirmed. In almost all their novels, the authors explore the forces that impede and shape individuals. The study postulates that each of the authors has earned a reputation as a gifted storyteller, with troubled characters seeking to find themselves and their cultural riches in a society that warps or impedes such discovery. In this way, the thesis considers the fiction of the authors as models for reconstructing a culturally empowering past.

The importance of choosing these three texts is that they (1) "all examine Black women's assertion or self-will within African-American families and communities" (Collins 176). Moreover, (2) these texts also inform the ideology that " (because) our (black women's) actions change the world from one in which we merely exist to one over which we have some control, they enable us to see everyday life as being in process, and therefore, amenable to change. By persisting in the journey toward self-definition, we are changed, and this change empowers us" (Collins 113). The three texts chosen from Morrison and Walker are considered to be canonical in that they discussed vividly the themes relevant to the topic, and only two texts from Angelou because these are the two texts considered by the researcher as having addressed issues in relation to the thesis.

Research Questions

It is important to search for a deeper understanding of the strong will of the black woman. How have Black women in the past been driven to confront their conditions and overcome the barriers to their greatness? What kinds of experiences and influences did they have that allowed them to pave their way and make an impact on history? Put differently, at what point did Black women writers begin to break the silence, and at what cost? This thesis is an attempt to answer these questions, but moreover, to address that void and give voice to the silence.

Hypothesis

The study is based on the assumption that the novels of Morrison, Walker, and Angelou reveal the multidimensional troubles that confront African American women, and how these obstacles hinder the development of their identities and selves. Put differently, the thesis focuses on how Morrison, Walker, and Angelou, in the twentieth century, used the novel to expose the quandaries and difficulties braved by African American women: being American, African American, and woman. The study, therefore, considers the novels of the three authors as an exploration of the injurious and ruinous ills of racism, sexism, and classism in American society and how all these led to the glitches and hitches that continue to make life difficult for African Americans.

Definition of Key Terms

For purposes of clarity and to better understand the issues to be analysed in this thesis, it is necessary to define the terms “Triple” and “Consciousness” and to discuss the perspectives in which they are used in this study.

The Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary defines triple as “Consisting of three parts or members”. According to the dictionary, the word is an adjective and can also mean three times as much in size, strength, number, or amount. The dictionary further explains that the word can also be used to talk about a number or quantity three times as great as another or a group or set of three, a triad. On a similar note, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines the word as “having three parts or involving three groups, people, or events”. The dictionary also sees the word as an adjective that describes a number or quantity “three times more than a particular number” (1776). The word is, therefore, used in this study in line

with the above dictionaries since the study grapples with three elements that subjugate the African American female. Perceiving the dilemma of the African American woman from the viewpoint of race, class and sex, the word triple is used in the topic to bring together these three factors and to investigate how they function together to dehumanize the female African American.

On its part, "consciousness" is a more complex word to define. Critics and researchers around the world have continued to differ extensively on the sense and connotation of this word. While some researchers have limited themselves to the literal meaning of the word as defined in most dictionaries, others have continued to argue that the whole meaning of the word can hardly be achieved without relating it to the mind. In order to attempt a better understanding of the term, it is important to look briefly at the etymology and history of the term.

The concept of "consciousness" is often attributed to John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690. Locke defined consciousness as "the perception of what passes in a man's mind". His essay influenced the 18th-century view of consciousness, and his definition appeared in Samuel Johnson's celebrated Dictionary (1755).

The earliest English language uses of "conscious" and "consciousness" date back, however, to the 1500s. The English word "conscious" was initially derived from the Latin *consciūs* (*con-* "together" and *scio* "to know"), but the Latin word did not have the same meaning as our word. It meant "knowing with"; in other words "having joint or common knowledge with another". There were, however, many occurrences in Latin writings of the phrase *consciūs sibi*, which translates literally as "knowing with oneself" or, in other words, "sharing knowledge with oneself about something". This phrase had the figurative meaning of "knowing that one knows", as the modern English word "conscious" does.

In its earliest uses in the 1500s, the English word "conscious" retained the meaning of the Latin *consciūs*. For example, Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* wrote: "Where two, or more men, know of the same fact, they are said to be Conscious of it one to another." The Latin phrase *consciūs sibi*, whose meaning was more closely related to the current concept of consciousness, was rendered in English as "conscious to oneself" or "conscious unto oneself". For example, Archbishop Ussher wrote in 1613 of "being so conscious unto myself of my great weakness". Locke's definition from 1690 illustrates that a gradual shift in meaning had taken place.

It is important to mention that the dictionary meaning of the word *consciousness* extends through several centuries and associated cognate meanings, which have ranged from formal definitions to somewhat more sceptical definitions. One formal definition indicating the range of these cognate meanings is given in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, stating that *consciousness* is:

"(1) a. awareness or perception of an inward psychological or spiritual fact: intuitively perceived knowledge of something in one's inner self. b. inward awareness of an external object, state, or fact. c. concerned awareness: interest, concern -- often used with an attributive noun. (2) the state or activity that is characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, or thought: mind in the broadest possible sense: something in nature that is distinguished from the physical.

It is obviously because of the complexity of this term that Max Velmans, in *How to Define Consciousness – and How Not to Define Consciousness*, attempts to develop a working definition of consciousness. He notes that:

This everyday understanding of consciousness based on the presence or absence of experienced phenomena provides a simple place to start. A person or other entity is conscious if they experience something; conversely, if a person or entity experiences nothing, they are not conscious. Elaborating slightly, we can say that when consciousness is present, phenomenal content (consciousness of something) is present. (111)

Concerning the issue of the mind mentioned above concerning the definition of consciousness, Velman further notes that:

It is important to reserve the term "mind" for psychological states and processes that may or may not be "conscious". ... Restricting the phenomenology of "consciousness" to the phenomenology of "thought" is too narrow. ... To allow a clear distinction between consciousness of oneself and consciousness of things other than oneself, it makes more sense to reserve the term "self-consciousness" for a special form of reflexive consciousness..... (114)

According to Velman, therefore, the term "consciousness" refers to experience itself. Rather than being exemplified by a particular thing that we observe or experience, it is exemplified by all the things that we observe or experience. In this regard, consciousness is seen as the quality or state of self-awareness or of being aware of an external object or something within oneself. Like Velman, Susan Schneider sees it as sentience, awareness, subjectivity, the ability to experience or to feel, wakefulness, having a sense of selfhood, and the executive control system of the mind. Despite the

difficulty in definition, many philosophers believe that there is a broadly shared underlying intuition about what consciousness is. As Max Velmans and Susan Schneider wrote in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*: "Anything that we are aware of at a given moment forms part of our consciousness, making conscious experience at once the most familiar and most mysterious aspect of our lives" (91).

We realize that the definitions of Velmans and Schneider are similar to the definition in The Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary given above. It is, therefore, from the perspective of The Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary that this research endeavour understands and uses the term "consciousness". The term is used in this study to relate to the knowledge of everything in American society relating to African Americans and, particularly, female Americans of African descent. According to this research, knowledge of the origin of African Americans and the troubles and tribulations they go through in America, both as African Americans and female African Americans, constitute their consciousness. Consciousness, therefore, has to do with the knowledge of their identity and all the prejudices and biases that go with it. In this perspective, the term "triple", earlier defined, is used in the topic as an adjective to qualify the term "consciousness" to limit the reader's mind to consciousness of race, class, and sex, which constitute the basis of the research.

Structure of Work

The thesis is made up of a general introduction, five chapters, and a general conclusion. The general introduction presents the subject matter of the thesis and addresses significant issues like the statement of the research problem, the purpose of the study, the hypothesis of the study, and the definition of key terms used in the topic of the thesis.

Chapter one is entitled "The Authors and Their Times," and it aims to demonstrate from the new-historicist and psychoanalytical perspective that it is necessary to understand the complex relationship between a work, its ideological world, and how it affects the psyche of the writers. Put differently, the purpose of the chapter is to analyse the novels of the authors as a reflection of the conditions of their upbringings and the social, cultural, and political atmospheres in which they wrote. In this respect, the chapter examines the novels of the authors as products of the contradictions and incongruities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in America. The chapter concludes that Morrison and Angelou are well-known pioneers of Black Feminism, while Walker is attached to womanism. Equally, all the

authors frequently stimulate black women in their writings to love themselves, their race, and their culture and avoid being trapped in white superiority or white beauty standards. They believe that the survival of Black women in a white racist society greatly depends upon their emphasis on loving their race, their own culture, and loving themselves, and not on engrossing themselves in white culture or white beauty standards.

Entitled “Morrison’s Novels: The Chronicle of a Triple-Decker Relegation,” chapter two aims to investigate racial, sexist, and class tensions and notions in Morrison’s novels and to examine, from the New-historicist and psychoanalytical perspectives, how inter-racial and intra-racial practices unite with sexist tensions and class divisions to debase African American women and deny them their constitutional rights. In other words, the chapter aims to investigate the intersection of race, sex, and class towards the plight of African American women and to examine how this intersectionality leads to the development of power relations within society. The analysis in the chapter will, therefore, draw upon Foucault as he mainly investigate power relations within society and their invisibility from time to time. Equally, from a Foucauldian perspective, racism will be discussed here based on the development of power becoming more effective in its ingrained nature in structures, rendering a solely top-down and authoritative form of power no longer necessary.

The focus of the chapter is, therefore, on the implications of racial differences and sexist troubles in the novels of Morrison and how these connect with class consciousness to hurt and abuse African American women. The chapter concludes that the identity crisis and disillusionment that arise because of the gruesome effects of racism, sexism, and classism continue to relegate African American women to the margins of American society and render them almost invisible. In this respect, the chapter depicts Morrison speaking as a Black woman in a world that still undervalues voices of Black women. Her novels lend themselves to feminist readings because of their challenge of the cultural norms of gender, race, and class.

Entitled “Womanism” and Threefold Repression in Alice Walker’s Novels”, the intention of chapter three is to explore the numerous forms of oppression suffered by African American women in Walker’s novels and to examine how the author struggles to raise consciousness towards the marginalization of African American women concerning race, gender, and class. Put differently, the purpose of the chapter is to look into the misfortunes of female African Americans as represented in the selected novels and to probe into the triple consciousness apparent in her works.

From the perspectives of psychoanalytic feminism and new historicism, the chapter will, therefore, focus on how race, gender, and class operate together to diminish and dehumanize African American women, and investigate how, through her concept of “Womanism”, Walker intends to salvage her race and raise awareness towards the impact of the intersection of race, gender, and class. The chapter concludes that Walker’s novels uncover and illuminate the coercion and compulsion that enable the intersection of race, sex, and class against women in the United States of America. According to the chapter, tools of oppression like race, gender, and class relate and operate together to defame and vilify African American women.

Chapter four is entitled “The “Mule of the World” and Revolutionary Perspectives In Maya Angelou’s Novels”. It explores the motif of the African-American woman as the “mule of the world” and examines how they struggle against race, sex, and class barriers to transform the negative connotation of the “mule of the world” attached to their identities. In other words, this chapter seeks to investigate how, in her novels, Angelou reprimands oppression and successfully creates a new positive image for black American women amidst the derogatory image reserved for them. From the perspectives of New- historicism and Psychoanalytical feminism, the chapter, therefore, intends to analyze how the African American female is reduced to the “mule of the world”.It equally attempts to scrutinize the ramifications of the term and how Angelou successfully gives a positive meaning through the act of signification as theorized by Henry Louis Gates.

The chapter concludes that Angelou’s employment of Gates’s Theory of Signification in some of her works attempts to redefine the misconceived identity of the African-American woman. Angelou’s strategy attacks the heart of the issue by exerting the power of the signifier over the signified (deleting the old meaning of mule of the world and replacing it with their own). According to the chapter, Angelou’s works serve as a kind of roadmap for African-American women as they journey to gain a voice in society and create a new identity or concept of Black womanhood.

The last chapter of the work is titled “Narrative Strategies in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou.”It analyses the style used by the three different authors to capture the varying troubles of African American women. The chapter, therefore, examines the different techniques used by the authors to narrate fascinating and engaging stories about the plight of female African Americans. The chapter makes it clear that all three authors demonstrate a good grasp of the devices and strategies needed to drive home a message. The chapter considers that the paradoxes and

metaphors in the selected texts successfully bring to the limelight the agonies, frustrations, infuriation, and wishes of the African American woman. The general conclusion is a summary of the significant ideas raised in the thesis. In this section, the final observations and findings of the thesis are stated.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frame

According to William Wiersma, a literature review is one of the most significant parts of research because it helps to identify the relevance of a given research exercise to scholarship. In his book entitled *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction (1968:306)*, he states that a review of literature plays a dual role in research. According to him, a review of literature consists in showing what research work has been carried out in a given area of study and also serves as a springboard for further research. This, therefore, means that a literature review is a critique that opens new research horizons. It is from this perspective that we will proceed in this chapter to review critical opinions on the works of Morrison, Walker, and Angelou before examining the significant tools that will be used for the analysis.

It is important to mention that writing on Morrison, Walker, and Angelou is far from being a groundbreaking venture. The works of these writers have received scores of critical opinions from different critics around the world. Several critics have raised opposite and relevant points about their works, especially on gender issues and issues relating to race and class. Critics have paid much attention to Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* with comparatively little attention to *Sula*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Heart of a Woman* respectively. With due respect to the opinions of these critics, the present researcher thinks that most critics have focused principally on issues relating to class or race and sex in the novels of the authors, and little has been said about how the three concepts function as a whole to dehumanise African Americans in general and African American women in particular. This study departs from existing criticisms of the authors because it intends to argue that knowing that a woman lives in a sexist society is insufficient information to describe her experience. According to the study, it is also necessary to know her race, sexual orientation, and class, as well as her society's attitude towards each of these. The research, therefore, grapples with the concept of intersectionality and

examines how social and cultural categories such as gender, race, and class interact to create social inequality and marginalization.

In his *Race, Class, and Gender: Theory and Methods of Analysis*, Bart Landry (2007:47) states that intersectionality is a sociological paradigm that looks at how various socially constructed categories interact and shape one another. Its basic assumption, according to Bart, is that the classical approach to analyzing oppression, based on race, gender, ethnicity, class, and so on, does not reflect the true complexity of the social environment because these dimensions do not have separate and independent effects, but rather intersect and influence one another. The result is what Bart calls “interlocking systems of oppression” (47).

In other words, understanding oppression through an intersectional lens means accepting the fact that race, as well as class, gender, or ethnicity, interact and shape the way discriminated groups are treated. For example, in order to better understand the oppression of black women in the United States, one must look at the way the social structures and social environment are influenced by race, class, or gender. Of course, many other intersecting dimensions can be taken into consideration, depending on the social group that is investigated: for example, sexuality, religion, nationality, disability, or any combination.

Morrison's works have been praised almost all over the world by reviewers and have been the subject of numerous academic books and essays in the fields of gender studies, ethnic studies, postmodern theory, literary theory, and cultural studies. Many critics praised Morrison's complex treatment of issues of African-American identity in her novels. Gurleen Grewal expressed Morrison's concern with African-American identity throughout her oeuvre. He states that “African Americans must negotiate a place for themselves within a dominant culture; how they situate themselves with respect to their history and culture is a pervasive theme of Morrison's novels” (19). According to Grewal, Morrison's central preoccupation in her works is with the question of the African American identity.

Grewal's preoccupation, therefore, has to do with Morrison's depiction of the African American woman's identity. Like Grewal, the present study also grapples with issues relating to the identity of the African American woman, but unlike the former, the present researcher goes further to examine how the combining forces of racism, sexism, and classism frustrate the African American woman in Morrison's novels and affect her identity negatively.

In her article, "Something Rogue: Commensurability, Commodification, Crime, and Justice", Megan Sweeney discusses Morrison's works and her visitation of the African American narrative. Sweeney discusses Morrison's narratives as stories that are both African and American and their method of encompassing the basic ideas of American wealth, power, pursuit of happiness, family, and love. Sweeney's central argument is evidenced by her proclamation that Morrison's use of narrative allows a deeper exploration of the American experience. Consequently, it is the experience of African American women, in particular, that helps define the parameters of the specific challenges within a postcolonial society. Furthermore, it is these experiences that have outlined the identity of the black woman in modern society. A discourse of the struggles of African American women exists in axis with the discourse of the formation of black female identity. Specifically, according to Sweeney, it is challenging to provide ideas relative to one's struggles if there is no declaration of the processes involved in the creation of identity.

It is, therefore, clear that in her article, Sweeney is concerned with Morrison's narratives and how they are a reflection of both African and American societies. Although Sweeney's idea is in line with this thesis, Sweeney's article does not address issues in relation to the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and how these consistently define the identity crises suffered by African American women in America as is the case with the present study.

Yvonne Atkinson described Morrison's use of Black English as central to her narrative voice. She asserts that "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" (25).

While Atkinson's article focuses on Morrison's use of Black English, the present research is interested in investigating the relationship between racism, classism, and sexism in Morrison's novels and how these factors work together against the African American woman.

In an essay entitled "Gothic Repetitions: Toni Morrison's Changing Use of Echo." Katherine Piller Beutel maintains that Morrison adapts the ancient myth of the Echo to produce Gothic effects with ghostly characters in her works. He states that in responding to an interviewer's observation about her

novels, Morrison once claimed, "I am thrilled to hear that my books haunt" (26).

Beutel's interest is, therefore, in Morrison's use of the ancient myth of Echo in contrast to this thesis, which focuses on the triple effects of race, class, and gender on the African American novel in the novels of the authors concerned.

On his part, Karla K. Holloway examines the ways in which Morrison utilizes a lyrical narrative voice in *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* to express the African-American experience and construct a sense of cultural identity in the African Diaspora. Holloway points out that "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 how Morrison's *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*, loosely grouped as a trilogy, function as meta-narratives about the construction of African-American identity. Davidson states, "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 Morrison for the book *Postmodernism: Key Figures*, Thomas B. Howe observed that Morrison's use of multiple narrative voices in many of her fiction is a key element of her work. Howe noted, "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."

Some critics have discussed Morrison's work, particularly *The Bluest Eye*, as a critique not only of the standards of female beauty prescribed by the dominant white culture but of acceptance of those standards by blacks themselves. Pin-chia Feng in *Feminism in Literature* discusses the development of the two young girls in the novel, concluding that "Claudia survives to tell the story by resisting social and racial conformity. Pecola fails the test precisely because of her unconditional internalization of the dominant ideology" (94).