



## **MEN’S SEXUAL TRAUMA RESISTANCE IN BLACK AMERICAN FOLKLORE: A POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM OF NEGRO “WOMAN TALES”**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper “Men’s Sexual Trauma Resistance in Black American Folklore: A Postcolonial Criticism of Negro “Woman Tales” from the Gulf States” was to discuss the reflection of postcolonial sexual trauma and resistance to it through storytelling among African Americans in the Gulf States. The study was concerned with 3 folktales classified under the cycle “Woman Tales”. The folktales were selected from the collection made by Zora Neale Hurston in the southern states of Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana from 1927 to 1930 and compiled in the book *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folktales from the Gulf States* (2001). The postcolonial approach and trauma theory based on the interpretative qualitative method and library research was used in the discussion of the selected folktales. It was found that the performance of the “Woman Tales” is informed by the black men’s traumatic memories of slavery and post-slavery emasculation. Black male narrators imitate trauma narratives in which they reflect male sexual trauma and recreate black woman identity to contain it. Through this imitation and reflection, the folktales challenge the legacy of the plantation patriarchy by reconstructing a woman's identity that is docile to black masculinity.

**Keywords:** African American, folklore, postcolonial trauma

### **Introduction**

The interest in the present paper was inspired by Sethi’s assertion that “postcolonial studies and the US have a deep and binding connection” because the settling of the Europeans in America, the genocides of the Indians, and the enslavement of Africans are essentially postcolonial concerns (2011, p. 87). In light of this idea, Afro-American narratives are in themselves postcolonial discourses and are reliable data for the study of black American responses to the traumatic experiences of slavery and racism. Therefore, the study of African American oral narratives from this perspective sheds light on the contemporary sociocultural, political, and economic realities among the black American folk groups to a lesser extent and the whole American mainstream society to a greater extent. In what follows, I support this idea by arguing that the performance of the Negro “Woman Tales” from the Gulf States is informed by the oppressive sexual conditions of black

men and reflects the resistance to this traumatic experience. In addition to the introduction that comprises the background, problem statement, and theoretical and methodological framework of the study, the paper includes findings and discussion, and conclusion sections.

For the clarity of the problem treated here, the concepts of trauma resistance, African American, folklore, and folktale are defined in the orientation of the topic. Firstly, the term trauma and 'resistance' are, here, conceptualized from the perspective of the postcolonial framework. The issue of resistance is central to postcolonial studies. It operates to capture the different forms of subjugation of the "other group" and its resulting struggle. According to David Jefferess, there are two tendencies in the interpretation of resistance in postcolonial theory (2018, p. 3). The first view considers resistance as a form of mimicry, hybridity, or ambivalence of the colonial power, that is, the subversion of the colonial binary opposition and related subaltern identities resulting from colonial awareness. On the other hand, resistance is addressed from the perspective of decolonization to refer to the political and military opposition to undoing colonial rule and all the oppressive sociocultural structures connected with it. These two forms of resistance, that is cultural subversion and political or military revolt are germinated by identity negotiation. In this thesis, African Americans claim their identity through the first form of resistance, that is, through the hybridization process. African American folklore as a resistance narrative challenges the trauma of "self-identity" and differential identities of race, gender, and ethnicity which are linked with the politics of power and cultural imperialism" (Starosta & Chen, 2003, p. 226).

Secondly, the expression "African Americans" or "Black Americans" refers to black American slaves and their descendants (Kusharyanto, 2012; Marbley, 2011, p. 35; ). The first Africans arrived in America in 1619 in Virginia but slavery began in the Massachusetts colony in 1641. The descendants of these people are referred to as African Americans or Black Americans. Jerrilyn McGregory in *Encyclopedia of American Folklife* (Bronner, 2013) refers to the "African American community" as the African American single and collective unit. In other words, the expression "African Americans" implies a sense of a shared ethos, culture, and value system. Despite the varieties of folk traditions and communities, there is a common folklife that distinguishes African Americans from other ethnic groups in the United States. In this study, the expressions "African Americans", "black Americans", Afro-Americans, and "Negro Americans" are interchangeable.

Thirdly, in his discussion of history and scholarship in America, Simon Bronner, in *Folk Nation: Folklore in the Creation of American Tradition* (2002) collects papers and letters dealing with the movements in the historical development of African American folklore. The paper written by Alice Mabel Bacon mentions that the beginning of African American folklore coincides with the black folklore movement that took place at Hampton Institute between 1894 and 1894 (p. 87). This first movement in African American folklore aimed at collecting and representing black-American traditions in the context of American cultural development and civilization. Later with the contribution of Black American elites such as Robert Russa Morton, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. DuBois the goals of the Hampton Institute were improved to advocate African American ethnic groups in their cultural diversity and dynamics. Thus in these attempts, African American folklore corpus was defined to include such genres as folktales, customs,

folk arts, traditional ceremonies and beliefs, proverbs and sayings, and songs and music that reflected the past and current conditions of African Americans. Various studies in the area of African American folklore followed the Hampton Institutes' initiation adopting either a Eurocentric approach or an Afrocentric hypothesis. While the Eurocentric tradition has been characterized by a tendency “to attribute any African American expressive tradition with an apparent parallel in European tradition rather than African cultural provenance”, the Africanist scholars have stressed the existence of a “dynamic continuity between African and African American cultures and folk traditions” (Roberts, 1990, p. 9). In this study, I apprehend African American folklore from the perspective of folklife practices, expressions, and behavior patterns developed by black people in response to their experiences in the United States.

Finally, according to Dan Ben-Amos, a folktale is an oral narrative that is “told by peasants, lower classes, or traditional people whose literacy, if existing, is minimal” (Bauman, 1992, p. 101). As a genre of oral tales, a folktale is one of the three main elements in the “European generic classification of oral narratives”. Other genres of the oral tale include legend and myth. The distinction among these forms of verbal folklore varies with culture and with time in a particular society. Thus in terms of the cultural conception of truth and reality, “a myth is believed to be true, a legend purports to be true”, whereas a folktale is purely fiction and fantasy (p. 102). Moreover, considering these genres in their relation to belief, a myth deals with “supernatural beings that exist beyond the boundaries of human time and space”. As for the legend, it is concerned with “identifiable personalities, dates, or places”, even though it involves extraordinary events whereby humans and supernatural beings interact. As far as the folktale is concerned, it is a fictional and fantastic tale that involves human characters, times, and spaces that cannot be identified socially, historically, or geographically. However, the categories of tales overlap and make the study of folktale genres complex. Zora Neale Hurston in her collection of African American folklore compiled in *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Tales from the Gulf States* (2001) classifies African American folktales under 15 cycles, namely God tales, preacher tales, devil tales, witch and hunt tales, heaven tales, John and Massa tales, tall tales, neatest trick tales, mistaken identity tales, fool tales, woman tales, school tales, talking animal tales, and animal tales. Only one out of the fifteen categories, that is “Woman Tales” constitutes the study object for this thesis. These tales are treated as a form of traumatic narratives of the American oppressive culture and discourses that are based on the cultural performative imitation of African American twentieth-century conditions in the Gulf States.

The present paper sets out to examine how and why the performance of Negro folktales expresses black men's sexual trauma resistance in the Gulf States. It is based on the following research questions:

1. Why does the narration of Negro folktales mirror resistance to sexual trauma among African American men in the Gulf States?
2. How does the narration of Negro folktales reflect resistance to sexual trauma among African American men in the Gulf States?

While various studies have been conducted on African American folklore in general and African American folktales in particular from various approaches and theoretical perspectives, no postcolonial trauma study has been done on African

American folktales collected by Zora Neale Hurston and compiled in *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folktales from the Gulf States* (2001). However, many studies have been conducted on African American folktales assembled in other folklore book collections. From different approaches, Jacqueline Fulmer (2002), Purnowidodo (2003), Christopher Peterson (2011), Tytianna Nikia and Maria Wells Smith (2012), Anish Alfred Vaz (2013), and Nur Saktiningrum (2017) have written on African American folklore either focussing on the experience of slavery and/or racism among Africans Americans. But, to the best of my knowledge, no postcolonial trauma study has been conducted to examine trauma reflection in the folktales collected by Zora Neale Hurston in *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folktales from the Gulf States*.

The study is conducted against the backdrop postcolonial approach and trauma theory based on Bell Hooks' concepts of plantation patriarchy and black masculinity and apprehended from the perspective of American studies. Two main schools inspire postcolonial trauma criticism, namely the aporetic and therapeutic hypotheses (Visser, 2015, p. 251). These central approaches to postcolonial trauma studies have been amended or reconciled by scholars among others, Jeffrey Alexander (Pucherova & Gafrik, 2009, p. 148), Visser (2015), and Martínez-Falquina (2015, p. 842). While the first two scholars emphasize a sociological approach to postcolonial trauma, the latter deals with power relations in postcolonial traumatic experiences. In general, scholars establish a relationship between literature and trauma.

Jeffrey C. Alexander sustains that postcolonial literature is a trauma narrative because it is a socio-cultural construction that captures traumatic experiences in their interrelations to the past and the present by articulating "conflicted traumatic memories of individual and collective complicity with hegemonic systems of oppression" (Visser, 2015, p. 258). For Visser, postcolonial criticism must study how literature articulates the way indigenous people express their traumatic experiences and the way they confront them through their "belief systems" and "rituals". In the view of Silvia Martínez-Falquina, postcolonial literature is considered a resistance narrative because by expressing their traumatic experiences, the subalterns react against the "silencing" act of colonial oppression and redefine themselves (p. 838). Therefore, postcolonial trauma criticism must deal with how the margin groups express their traumatic experiences and how they represent "unequal relations of power" and challenge or revert them (p. 842). The points made by these scholars are pertinent to the investigation of postcolonial trauma among African Americans by focusing on their folktales.

Abigail Ward, in *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, and Resistance* mention that African Americans' dolorous experiences, such as "enforced migration to the US", "enslavement and suppression", "segregation", "resistance", "Civil Rights movement", and "self-representation and responses to the Western master discourses" are relevant to postcolonial trauma theory (2015, p. 7). In this spirit, Marshall confirms that African American oral narratives narrated during the plantation period feature "ambiguity, transformation, and transcendence" capable of confronting the anguish of racism and slavery (Ward, 2015, p. 49).

Relying on Marshall's argument, African American folktales are a form of trauma narratives that enable the participants in performance in the plantations or on the porch to express and challenge the traumatic experience or legacy of the

transatlantic voyage, the plantation oppression, and the racial discrimination following the emancipation of slaves. While Marshall intends to apply the trauma theory to the postcolonial criticism of the African American novels by Ellison and Larsen, it is employed here to approach folktales in a bid to discuss the representation of resistance to the traumatic oppression of African Americans in the Gulf States. Thus, Bell Hooks' concepts of plantation patriarchy and black masculinity that are exposed in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004) are applied. Through this exploration, folktales are treated as "trauma process narratives" constructed by black men to undo the sexually traumatic experiences connected with the legacy plantation patriarchy. Additionally, the narratives reflect the recreation of a new black woman identity in view to restoring the black masculinity linked with African American tradition and ethnic values.

### **Method**

As stated in the previous paragraph, this study is conducted against the backdrop postcolonial approach and trauma theory. It follows the interpretative qualitative and library research methods. In the data collection process, the library documentation method is used. The study is based on a corpus of three (3) folktales, (T1) "Once there was a man who wanted to catch up with his wife..." (Hurston, 2001, pp. 185–186), (T2) "A lady once married and her husband never would stay home..." (Hurston, 2001, p. 187), and (T3) "There was a widow woman ..." (Hurston, 2001, pp. 188–189). By the topic and aims, the researcher uses the interpretative qualitative method (Stokes, 2003, p. 2). The analytical procedure includes reading "Woman tales" meticulously by identifying trauma forms and resolutions linked with them; relating the data obtained from the folktales to the African American storytelling context and sociohistorical and cultural conditions in the South; and critically analyzing the folktales and discussing them in the light of postcolonial trauma theory. Finally, to make easy the interpretation and citation of folktales, a sequential order is used in each category of folktales. The tales will be respectively labeled T1, T2, and T3, that is, tale 1, tale 2, and tale 3.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This section explores the cause of the black man's performance of sexual trauma and the way he challenges it through oral narratives based on women. The black woman is signified through controlling images by black men who struggle to recuperate their masculinity dismantled by the white heteronormativity and plantation patriarchy.

#### ***Legacy of plantation patriarchy and black men's sexual trauma***

In "Women Tales", the husband is represented as castrated or abstracted by his adulterer wife. In T1, the husband is emasculated through love triangulation. The story "Once there was a man who wanted to catch up with his wife..." opens with a marital infidelity conflict. The narrator mentions, "Once there was a man who wanted to catch up with his wife. So he pretended he was going to work and sent a little boy to his house to spend the night" (lines 1–3). These opening lines introduce us to the spousal relationships among African Americans in Alabama. The mythological character of the folktale ensures the reality of marital infidelity in the homes of black Americans. The storyteller Arthur Hopkins takes his audience

into mythological fiction by building on existing realities in the day-to-day life of the Afro-Americans.

Adultery among black American women was a common phenomenon. Patricia Collins associates the strange behavior of Afro-American women with their historical and cultural backgrounds (p. 70). During slavery, black American women were the sexual property of the white master, his sons, and his overseer. They became used to sexual intercourse with many partners. In addition, the division of labor in the plantation and the house of the white masters did not distinguish male and female tasks. They were equally treated. Then they lost the sense of the African family which was patriarchal. This squash of black masculinity developed a feeling of emasculation for black men. As Bell Hooks mentions in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004), through “racist discrimination and exploitation”, black men were deprived of their patriarchy (p. 12).

The African American woman was not afraid of the black man, she had witnessed a series of humiliations by the Whites, especially sexual violence. In the new African American families, the wife was not perpetually bound to her husband like in the African tradition; rather she would try any man who pleased her. In other words, in addition to her husband, a woman could have a secret sweetheart as is the case in this story. The narrator uses repetition and contrast formulas to act out the romantic identity and infidelity of the woman. The castration of the husband in T1 is represented by the woman’s romantic interaction with her sweetheart. The narrator mentions a black woman's character, “you better eat, as we have plenty to eat this afternoon” (line 7). Of the man, she mentions, “Let us talk, we have plenty of time to eat” (line 8). The sweetheart’s intention for the visit is not food but love. The absence of the husband captures the sexually traumatic import of the story. This is achieved through the performance of romantic aesthetics whereby the food and a tantalizing dialogue between the lovers are presented to the audience. The dialogue indicates that the black woman is not a sign of mother and maternity. She is an independent lovmaker who takes the profits of her wealth to seduce a man of her choice. The male participants in the story performance are led to the “plantation patriarchy” and later racist practices that reduced the black man to a boy. These memories resurrect the trauma of black men whose manhood and power to control black women and their sexuality were denied to them (p. 170). The historical castration of the black man by the white vigorous male who controls both black and white women and their sexuality still haunts the Negroes in the Gulf States.

The abstraction of the husband and his replacement by a little boy is a signification of man’s narrative reflection of sexual trauma in “Women Tales”. Arthur’s storytelling (T1) suggests the trauma associated with the domination of femininity over masculinity. Before the woman prepares food for her sweetheart, she sends the little boy upstairs to bed. This insinuates that the woman controls the man and his sexuality. The little boy is forced to sleep while the wife enjoys her sweetheart’s bosom in the absence of her husband. When the husband intrudes into the house, the little boy gets ready to report marital infidelity. The connection between the arriving husband and the reappearance of the little boy ensures masculine power or patriarchal abstraction. The little boy “came down stretching as if he had been asleep” (line 15). The performer acts out the boy through the insertion of a small tale into his story (lines 19–24). By this insertion technique in the storytelling, the performer demonstrates his skills in telling stories and

delivering moral lessons to prove the reduction of the black patriarchy to a boy easily endeared by the dominating female. The small tale included in the quotation contains the images, that is 'father' and 'pig' which demonstrate a masculine struggle to regain the power to control the woman.

On the contrary, "saw" symbolizes femininity which dominates man. The sweetheart in the pot rack is effeminate. By hiding himself in the pot rack in the kitchen, he has symbolically lost his masculine power and condescended to the traditional woman status. He is like the mythological sow or metaphor of the woman that is culturally a sign of kitchen and sex. In the closing statement, the narrator uses the performance formula "Every since then" (lines 23) to restore the past and makes the participants sense the female thwarting of patriarchy in the African American ethnic group. The black man suffers his desire to be equal with the mainstream American white society whose woman is "regarded to be more suitable to deal activities involving emotion" such as caregiving, educating children, cleaning the house, cooking for the family, sewing, and washing clothes"; the black man wants to maintain the status quo (Juliasih, 2012, p. 205). As a result of the "Woman Tales" performance, male participants release their trauma linked with their lost image of the invincible power that must be respected and feared by any female member of the community.

The abstraction of masculinity is also reflected in T2, that is, "A lady once married and her husband never would stay home...". The performance represents the incapacity of the postcolonial black man to cope with the new black femininity constructed by the American sociocultural environment. The new woman's identity does not signify marriage and sex. She has lost her culinary skills and household care. She is no longer courteous towards her husband. The hoodoo lady tells the protagonist, "You havin' trouble with your husband" (lines 4–5). The conflict here is because the woman does not meet the cultural responsibility demanded by the black patriarchal masculinity, that is, to have skills and abilities to manage the material domestic life of the family and to be trained enough to optimally quench the erotic thirst for her husband. The hoodoo lady demanded the protagonist, "All right, come take me to yo'house" (line 7). She takes the woman back to the household because she has backslidden from her cultural responsibility. The anguish of her husband is her shift from her traditional role. The husband is an abstraction without 'real' existence before the wife restores her cultural attributes. For Bell Hooks, the aspiration to "maleness" and "patriarchal manhood" develops trauma in many black boys (p. 81). The black man suffers the melancholy of his lack of patriarchal power to dominate black women.

In T3 man's sexual trauma is reflected through the image of a seducer widow. In the story, "There was a widow woman ...", the woman is presented as a "hot momma" and seducer widow in search of a husband. The narrator mentions that "she had been trying to get one for years" (line 2) and that "every Sunday she uster dress up and put Cologne water on herself and primp her mouf up little to go to church" (lines 2–4). The Madonna myth is here used to suggest the sexuality of the black woman and its impact on black masculinity. The woman is, here, portrayed as an extravagant temptress in the quest for men. Her target is an unmarried local preacher. Like Jannie who runs after Tea Cake after castrating Jody before his subsequent death in "Their Eyes Were Watching God" (Hurston, 2000, p. 35), the protagonist is presented as a churchgoer hypocrite running after her pastor. By

presenting a widow as a 'pretty baby', the black men display their historical unconscious castration. This construction of the woman in men's narrative among African Americans is referred to by Patricia Collins as the controlling signification of the woman (2000, p. 75). In the American patriarchal culture, a black woman is portrayed as an emasculator. This myth of the black woman is used in the oral narratives in the Gulf States to represent black men's sexual trauma.

Additionally, the death of the husband in the narrative suggests the absence of male heteronormativity. The wife is a lure who lives alone. The oppressive conditions linked with post-slavery and the legacy of racism in the South affect the life of the woman. Her adoption of the urban ways of the white woman around her does not please the man who expects her to be his mule. The narrator makes a connection between the fashionable woman and the "mule" (line 10) in the cornfield to insinuate the desires of the black men in the southern states. The performer draws his audience's attention to the confrontation between the woman and the mule, "You mule, git out dat corn; oh, you mule, go on out de corn!" (line 10). The performer is representing the trauma of men who feel that the black woman should not be an urban extravagant beauty. Rather she would remain a mother for field and domestic work.

### ***Restoration of black masculinity and sexual trauma challenge***

In "Woman Tales", the storytellers redefine the woman for the sake of the recovery the black masculinity. They imitate a woman who constructs her behavior and uses folkloric activities to satisfy a man. The woman is mirrored by the performers as a lovable and domestic subject. She resorts to folkloric activities and behavioral patterns to operate a cultural transformation that satisfies man's wishes. In T1, the African woman character is characterized by a mastery of folk cuisine. She uses foodways for sex and love purposes. She "baked a cake of cornbread and fried some meat for the little boy" (lines 3-4) and "baked a pig with an apple in his mouth [and] a sweet potato pone for her sweetheart" (lines 5-6). Through this folk culinary art, the woman goes back to the kitchen to satisfy masculinity. Her skills in foodways or material folklore empower her to gain the love of man.

The gender roles division that black patriarchy claims are restored. The performer plays on the African American cookery to present the identity of the woman needed by black masculinity. She must be a skillful domestic woman while the husband retains the appanage of public life. The performers capture sexual recovery through their association of cookery with love. The food that the protagonist woman gives the little boy is a mere nutrition portion without any sexual import. But the pig that she roasts with an apple in its mouth is more than a simple food portion. In addition to aesthetics, the food cooked for the man has love and sexual connotations. The pig was a precious food for African Americans. By baking the pig with an apple, the woman romantically entices the man. Moreover, by presenting him with sweet potato pone, she excites his sexual appetites. The spicy ingredients in the pone are sex drive for the sweetheart. Then both the pork and the pone constitute an aphrodisiac food to stimulate the man victim of the American racist institutions.

Like T1, T2 represents the restoration of black masculinity through the male reconstruction of a woman's identity. Folk religion and black feminine touch are distinguishing markers of the black woman. At the beginning of the story, a female

hoodoo doctor is presented with solving a spousal relationship conflict. The performer mentions, “A lady once married and her husband never would stay home, so she said she’d go to the hoodoo” (lines 1–2). Through this performance opening formula, Wade, the performer takes the audience to the identity of the woman in the complexity of African American folk culture. He further mentions, “So she went to the hoodoo and she ast de lady (line 3). The story suggests that African American women participate in the cultural network of the natural and the supernatural, religion and medicine, and life and magic. The protagonist in the folktale has to consult a hoodoo lady to change the behavior of her husband who is no longer interested in her. The hoodoo lady consulted by the woman in the story foretells the client what made her come to see her before the visitor says anything. The narrator says, “So de lady said, “Here you come, and I know whut you come for. You havin’ trouble with your husband” (lines 4–5). This shows that hoodoo craft is more than a mere medication. The conjurer is a goddess who can see through the patient and space before a sick person visits her. In the South, conjurers or supernatural practitioners are believed to be powerful in society. The “Hoodoos” and “root workers” are believed to be capable of manipulating unseen forces; “work the spirits”, “Root doctors” are considered as persons who practice healing; and the “Conjure doctors” are known for possessing the power to do harm as well as heal (Chireau, 2003, p. 21). This cultural complexity points to the interrelationships between gender, culture, and politics expressed by African American folklore. Through hoodoo ritual performance, the woman rootworker is endowed with the power to arbitrate males and females through her medical power. In addition, this folkloric practice enables her to participate in the economic machine of the community by generating familial and social revenues through goods and services.

In addition to folk religion, women are redefined by black patriarchy from their folk feminine touch. The hoodoo lady does not administer any root medication to the woman. She rather suggests her client take her to her place. Then when they arrive home, the hoodoo woman prescribes an easy posology. She says, “Get you some concentrated lye, scrub yo’house, wash all yo’clothes, comb yo’head, powder yo’face, make up your bed, light and neat, and don’t have a thing to say to him when he come in” (lines 9–11). The male participants in the storytelling event are made to appreciate the African American aesthetics and culture of beauty and love. By decorating her body and her house, the hoodoo lady is sure that the husband will be stimulated to love his wife. Through cultural aesthetics and arts, the woman reestablishes the distorted spousal relationship. She becomes a master of bed and home. In the story, when the man comes back home, he cannot resist the folk feminine touch of his wife. Therefore, both lounge on the porch before the husband endears the wife, “Dear let’s go to bed” (line 16).

The folkloric activities of the wife strengthen her domestic life and her relationship with her husband. In the performance of T2, the couple relaxes both on the porch and in bed. The porch which is a symbol of African American folklore suggests, here, expressive communication between the husband and his wife. This interconnectedness between hoodoo performance, feminine touch performance, house care aesthetics performance, and porch stories performance validates the fluidity of oral-aural arts supported by Ngũgĩ in his performance theory of orature that is exposed in his article “Notes Towards the Performance Theory of Orature” (2007, p. 4). Various forms of black folklore are integrated into one vision of life

to cement familial relationships in accord with the cultural system of the community.

The porch provides the integration and complete recovery of a man from his sexual trauma. It operates as a folk tradition platform where the woman can perform stories and jokes to fascinate further her husband. As a result of this performance, the man can yield to his wife. Therefore, the orature circle or Pitikian full circle is fulfilled (Thiong'o, 2007, p. 1). Through folklore, the hoodoo lady, wife, husband, hoodoo art or magic, religion, and various elements of nature are integrated into a web of communication to support the African American folklife universe. This is further evidenced by the end of the story. The following day, in the morning, the wife speeds up gaily to the hoodoo lady to pay her due. The performer mentions, "she got up the next morning and went back to de hoodoo lady and paid what she charged and de hoodoo lady told her to jest keep dat up twice per week and her husband would always go to bed and go to sleep" (lines 17–20). By practicing hoodoo, the lady improves her economic conditions. In addition, she is favored with the love of the patriarchal and masculine power. Contrary to the plantation patriarchy that is characterized by gender and race violence, this new masculinity is characterized by collaboration between black American spouses. Bell Hooks, in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, uses two different generations of black men and the way they live their sexuality to illustrate the difference between this form of black masculinity and the plantation patriarchy. She compares the way her father and brother relate differently to woman's gender and sexuality (2004, p. xiii). In the comparison that she makes, she indicates that the early generations of African American men imitated the plantation model of patriarchy whereas the younger generation attempted to forge a new masculine identity seeking gender equality and freedom for both men and women in American society.

In T3 the power of black masculinity is restored through the mythological imitation of a connection between the black woman and the mule. Taylor performs a story about a widow who uses her body makeup to win the love of a new preacher in a local church. But in the end, her elegant attire is defiled by a mule. The distortion of the woman's make-up by the mule in the story shows that the black woman is acting her false identity. Tylor acts out, "Now look whut you done! Done made me open my mouf wide. Now I got to go all de way back to de house and primp it agin befo' I kin go tuh meeting" (lines 15–17). The woman has to go back home to her cultural place. Their extravagant appearance cannot make her appreciated by black men. The narrator makes the black woman pass through corn fields on her way to the church "meeting" (line 18). This indicates a connection between agrarian life and the black woman's identity. In addition to her household tasks, the black woman can also work on the plantations. This resistance of black patriarchy to the urban surrounding corroborates Chireau's assertion that the black patriarchy intends to save its position despite the sociocultural transformation of the South (2003, p. 37). This goes with the attempt to preserve African American folk culture during the white American culture especially the church and other social institutions. The construction of a domestic woman by the black chauvinistic system is a result of the appropriation of the postcolonial trauma. The younger generation of black American men is still affected by the legacy of their ancestor's horrors. Therefore, they operate to subvert their conditions by controlling the black woman in signifying her through cultural behavioral patterns and actions.

## Conclusion

In the “Woman Tales”, the myth of the African American woman is represented by the black patriarchal culture to challenge sexual trauma. Relying on Bell Hooks’ concept of plantation patriarchy and black masculinity, the examination of the “Woman Tales” showed that the performers are moved in their mythological imagination by their everyday sexual traumatic experiences linked with the legacy of racism, slavery, and post-slavery and their impact on the African American family. Their stories mirror the everyday experience of the African American woman and mythologically imitate how she relates to the patriarchal culture that creates the folktales and mythology. Thus in the folktales examined, that is, T1, T2, and T3, the woman is constructed as a resistance to the plantation patriarchy. But a new woman's sexual identity is constructed by the male narrators in the course of the narratives to ensure full control of the woman and her sexual life in the perspective of black ancestral patriarchy. Thus foodways, feminine touch, folk religion, and other folkloric activities and cultural behavioral patterns are used by the performers to signify the African American woman. As a result of these folkloric activities and behaviors, in T1, the woman is constructed through ambiguous signification whereby she has the power to restore man’s dismantled masculinity or against her husband by resorting to love triangulation. In T2 and T3, the distorted black patriarchal masculinity is recovered in the narratives by creating a new woman identity that contributes to the perpetuation of the femininity values supported by the black patriarchal culture.

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