

Conjure and Female Empowerment in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

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Abstract: Set against the backdrop of African American literary and cinematic traditions, this study investigates the intersection of conjure and female empowerment in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). Both fictional works emerge from a cultural continuum where spirituality, oral tradition, and ancestral memory serve as sources of identity and survival for Black women. The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate how Naylor and Dash use conjure to articulate a distinct form of Black female agency rooted in matrilineal wisdom and communal resilience. By foregrounding women as spiritual leaders and custodians of tradition, both artists reframe the relationship between power, gender, and spirituality within the African diasporic experience. In the frame of this study, a qualitative research method based on a comparative textual analysis of the novels under study has been used. This piece of scholarship draws on Black feminist theory, Post-Colonial theory and myth literary criticism as interpretive framework. The results show that conjure in *Mama Day* and *Daughters of the Dust* functions as a liberating language through which women redefine identity, reclaim ancestral strength, and challenge patriarchal domination.

Keywords: Conjure, Empowerment, Black Feminism, Spirituality, and Identity.

Vaudou et Autonomisation de la Femme à travers *Mama Day* de Gloria Naylor et *Daughters of the Dust* de Julie Dash

Résumé : Inscrite dans la tradition littéraire et cinématographique afro-américaine, cette étude examine l'intersection entre le conjure (ou magie spirituelle afro-descendante) et l'autonomisation féminine dans *Mama Day* (1988) de Gloria Naylor et *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) de Julie Dash. Ces deux œuvres s'inscrivent dans un continuum culturel où la spiritualité, la tradition orale et la mémoire ancestrale constituent des sources d'identité et de survie pour les femmes noires. L'objectif principal de cette étude est de démontrer comment Naylor et Dash utilisent le conjure pour exprimer une forme singulière d'agence féminine noire, fondée sur la sagesse matrilinéaire et la résilience communautaire. En plaçant les femmes au centre du pouvoir spirituel et de la préservation des traditions, les deux autrices redéfinissent la relation entre pouvoir, genre et spiritualité au sein de l'expérience diasporique africaine. Dans le cadre de cette analyse scientifique, la méthode qualitative basée sur une étude comparative des deux œuvres, appuyée par la théorie féministe noire et les cadres spirituels de la diaspora africaine ont été utilisés. Les résultats montrent que le conjure dans *Mama Day* et *Daughters of the Dust* agit comme un langage libérateur

permettant aux femmes de redéfinir leur identité, de réaffirmer la force ancestrale et de contester la domination patriarcale.

Mots-clés : Conjure, autonomisation, Féminisme noir, Spiritualité, Identité.

Introduction

African American literature has long been a site of cultural memory, identity construction, and resistance. From the narratives of slavery to contemporary fiction, the thirst of African American writers and scholars for self-realization has never stopped. In this line of thought, conjure is considered as a spiritual and healing practices rooted in African cosmology. It emerges as a powerful metaphor of survival, creativity, and empowerment. Historically misunderstood and demonized by Eurocentric discourse, conjure encapsulates a holistic worldview that connects the physical and the spiritual, the individual and the collective, the present and the ancestral.

Thus, African American women writers consider conjure as a means of resistance against patriarchal and racial oppression. It symbolizes a reclaiming of knowledge systems historically denied to African women. This is particularly evident in the works of Gloria Naylor and Julie Dash, two major figures who depict conjure as a tool for expressing Black women's agency and spiritual strength. In *Mama Day* (1988) and *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) conjure is presented as a cultural and feminist practice that plays a pivotal role in women's emancipation.

The central problem of this research is the insufficient scholarly attention to the link between conjure and women's empowerment. Though many scholars have underscored conjure as folklore or as a trace of African survivals, fewer have examined it as a transformative political and epistemological practice. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how conjure operates as a narrative and symbolic strategy that empowers women in *Mama Day* and *Daughters of the Dust*.

This piece of scholarship intends to reveal the relationship between conjure and women's empowerment through Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). That is, this research investigates how both Naylor and Dash reframe conjure to challenge the marginalization of Black women and to redefine femininity through spirituality. By closely reading the two novels, the study aims to uncover how the female characters' connection with ancestral

knowledge reclaims authority, voice, and identity in a world marked by racial and gender subjugation. In the frame of this study, a qualitative research method based on a comparative analysis of both authors' works has been applied. Supported by three major literary theories such as Feminist theory, Post colonial theory and Myth literary criticism, this research method helps to establish the relationship between conjure and women empowerment in American communities.

I. Literature Review, Methodological and Theoretical frameworks

1. 1 Literature review

Many scholars have already used conjure and female empowerment motifs in their works. This part of the current research work establishes the conceptual foundations necessary for analyzing Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. Furthermore, it highlights how previous researchers have theorized spirituality, cultural memory, gendered agency, and matrilineal structures, thereby situating the current study within a broader academic landscape.

Deborah McDowell (1993, p. 118) asserts that conjure serves as a counter-epistemology that challenges Eurocentric notions of rationality. His argument is highly relevant, since conjure in both *Mama Day* and *Daughters of the Dust* functions as an alternative knowledge system validating women's spiritual expertise. Moreover, his work provides the vocabulary for interpreting conjure as a cultural and intellectual tradition rather than a superstition.

Similarly, Cheryl Wall (2005, p. 66) emphasizes the central role of ancestral memory in shaping African American women's identities. In this sense, her analysis helps shed light on how *Mama Day* and *Nana Peasant* embody matrilineal continuity. In addition, Wallace's framework strengthens the interpretation of female elders as custodians of generational wisdom.

Building on this, Collins (2000) develops Black feminist thought as an epistemological framework grounded in lived experience, community survival, and collective memory. Consequently, her theory informs this study's approach to understanding how conjure women function as agents of power within their communities. Therefore, Collins's work becomes foundational for exploring the political and social dimensions of female spirituality.

Baker (1987) identifies the “blues matrix” as a structure of African American creativity rooted in endurance and transformation. His insights are particularly useful because both works under study reflect this creative matrix through spiritual resilience and healing practices led by women. Thus, Baker contributes to the understanding of narrative survival strategies. From another analytical angle, Hooks (1989) argues that Black women reclaim their subjectivity through every day acts of resistance embedded in cultural practices. This perspective is crucial, as conjure represents precisely such a practice of cultural resistance. Consequently, Hooks’ argument enriches the analysis of everyday empowerment in both texts.

Brodber (2003) examines Caribbean and African American spiritual traditions as repositories of collective memory. Her diasporic approach offers a broader geographical frame that connects the Gullah culture depicted in *Daughters of the Dust* to wider African spiritual heritage. Hence, this work helps to contextualize Dash’s film within a transnational lineage.

Likewise, Mae G. Henderson (1990, p. 258) posits that female narratives rely on orality to preserve and transmit knowledge. Accordingly, her analysis is particularly pertinent for studying the storytelling structures that shape the worlds of Willow Springs and the Sea Islands. Thus, Henderson’s insights support the examination of narrative voice as a spiritual medium.

Martin (2001) explores African cosmology as a foundation for identity formation in women-centered narratives. Her conclusions reinforce the interpretation of conjure as a spiritual and cultural process that shapes identity in both texts. Similarly, McDowell (1998) analyzes gendered forms of spirituality and their impact on female authority. Her work is instrumental, for it clarifies how Mama Day’s spiritual leadership emerges within community structures that both restrict and enable women’s power.

Rushdy (1999) investigates the function of memory as a structural principle of African American storytelling. His insights are particularly valuable for *Daughters of the Dust*, where memory organizes both narrative chronology and cultural identity. Along similar lines, Barbara Christian (1985, p. 42) argues that myth plays a significant role in encoding resistance within Black women’s narratives. This interpretation is essential, as both Naylor and Dash rely heavily on mythic symbolism and ancestral cosmologies.

Young (2007, p.67) on his part, he views conjure as a diasporic survival strategy, allowing communities to maintain cultural autonomy. Therefore, her work strengthens this study's argument that conjure functions as an instrument of resilience. Alexander (2005) further contributes to this discussion by applying womanist theory to African American storytelling. Her work provides an ethical and political framework for interpreting empowerment in both texts. Likewise, Brown (2010) focuses on the healing functions of spirituality in Black women's writing. Her findings are especially relevant, since physical, emotional, and communal healing is central to the narrative arcs of both works.

As for Gunning (1995, p .12), he emphasizes the importance of ritual in maintaining communal identity. Consequently, her work informs the analysis of Gullah rites in Dash's film. Stephens (2004) argues that diasporic women negotiate modernity by maintaining spiritual continuity. Thus, this perspective is highly applicable to the Peasant family's struggle between migration and tradition. On another note, Wardi (2011, p.17) addresses memory, trauma, and embodiment in African American women's narratives. Her emphasis on the body enriches this study's interpretation of conjure as an embodied practice.

Keizer (2001, p. 381) explores magical realism in Black women's literature as a tool for political critique. Accordingly, her analysis assists in interpreting the magical realism of *Mama Day* as a critique of rationalist worldviews. Moreover, Davis (2013, p.77) examines matriarchal authority across the African diaspora, offering useful parallels for understanding *Mama Day* and *Nana Peasant* as community leaders.

Finally, Johnson (2016) analyzes spirituality within African American cinema, providing critical insights into Dash's aesthetic strategies for representing ritual and ancestral presence. Taken together, these scholarly perspectives illuminate the rich intellectual tradition that surrounds conjure, spirituality, and Black women's empowerment. Consequently, they form a robust theoretical foundation for the present study's comparative analysis of *Mama Day* and *Daughters of the Dust*.

1.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. It is a close, contextual interpretation of texts--attentive to symbolism, form, voice, and cultural meaning, which aims at producing thick insights rather than numerical generalizations. This paper combines both a literary and film analysis. The textual analysis of *Mama Day* involves close reading of narrative structure, characterization, and thematic motifs related to conjure and empowerment. The methodology adopted while addressing *Daughters of the Dust*, includes filmic analysis of mise-en-scène, cinematography, sound, and symbolism. This method makes it easier to emphasize how these elements communicate spiritual and cultural meaning.

The adoption of both textual and filmic analyses makes it possible to examine similarities and differences in the treatment of conjure across the two mediums. In short, the interpretive framework adopted, allows for an integrated understanding of how African American women's spiritual and cultural practices are represented and their impact on identity construction and empowerment.

1.3 Literary Theory

This paper draws on Black Feminist Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Myth criticism as its interpretive framework. Reshaped by Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, Black Feminist Theory helps to analyze literature through the lens of race, gender, and spirituality. It emphasizes the agency of African American women, the importance of communal knowledge, and the transformative potential of cultural practices like conjure.

Building on this foundation, Postcolonial Theory further situates how the history of colonisation affects the identities, cultures and societies of people who have been colonized. This theory complements this by situating the works within the context of historical oppression, displacement, and cultural survival. Gloria and Julie rewrite colonial archives by restoring ancestral cosmologies. In this line of thought, conjure could be interpreted as a form of resistance against both patriarchal and colonial systems. It embodies a reclaiming of epistemologies historically denied to Black women.

Myth criticism examines archetypes and archetypal patterns to explain the structure and significance of texts. Myth criticism uncovers Gloria and Julie's transformation of oral cosmologies into literary aesthetics. It reveals African mythic structures encoded in literature.

Together, these theoretical perspectives make it possible to analyze conjure as both a cultural and feminist practice, emphasizing its role in preserving heritage, asserting autonomy, and fostering empowerment. As Trudier Harris (1988, p. 145) argues, "African American women writers and filmmakers employ conjure as a means of cultural survival, memory preservation, and reclamation of power."

II. Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Definition and Origin of Conjure

Before addressing the in-depth analysis of this study, it is worth defining the key concepts. The term conjure refers to a complex system of spiritual and healing practice. It is rooted in West and Central African traditions that survived the transatlantic slave trade. Historically, enslaved Africans brought to the Americas preserved fragments of their religious and cultural beliefs, which evolved into what anthropologists later termed as "*Hoodoo*," "*Rootwork*," or "*Conjure*." These practices combined African cosmologies with elements of Christianity and indigenous knowledge, creating a syncretic form of spirituality that resisted colonial domination and cultural erasure.

The dominant white culture has labeled conjure as superstition, witchcraft, fetishism, and devilish practices. In contrast to white cultural interpretations, Black communities view conjure as a holistic worldview where the material and the spiritual coexist, and where healing, protection, and empowerment are inseparable from cultural identity. The conjure woman, often a midwife, herbalist, or healer, serves as a mediator between the human and the divine. She also serves as a mediator between the living and the ancestors. The conjure woman embodies wisdom, spiritual strength, and moral authority within her community.

As Yvonne Chireau observes in her work *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition*: "conjure provided enslaved Africans with a means of interpreting and influencing the world around them, preserving a sense of agency under conditions of extreme oppression" (2003, p. 76). Through this lens, conjure becomes an act of spiritual resistance,

asserting control over one's destiny when social and political power is denied. Thus, in literature, conjure often functions as a metaphor for reclaiming agency and reconnecting with suppressed histories.

2.2 Feminism and Female Empowerment

The concept of female empowerment is central to Feminist Theory. Though it seeks to dismantle patriarchal systems that subordinate women, Feminism critiques the double marginalization of women of color who are oppressed not only by sexism but also by racism. Black Feminist scholars such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Patricia Hill Collins have emphasized the need to redefine power in ways that center the lived experiences of Black women.

In the context of African American literature, empowerment often emerges through the reclamation of voice, body, and heritage. Conjure, as a form of spiritual and communal power, provides women with an alternative framework of authority that contrasts sharply with patriarchal and Western rational models. The conjure woman challenges male-centered hierarchies by positioning spiritual knowledge and intuition as sources of legitimacy.

As bell hooks asserts in *Ain't I a Woman*, "to be empowered, women must reclaim their right to define their own reality, establish their own identity, and name their own experience" (hooks 2003). Within this framework, the conjure woman becomes a feminist figure, one who defines her existence through her connection to the sacred, rather than through dependence on male approval or institutional validation. Her spiritual autonomy symbolizes resistance and liberation, especially for African American women whose histories of enslavement and silencing have rendered empowerment an act of survival.

2.3 The Intersection of Conjure and Womanhood in African American Tradition

The intersection between conjure and womanhood lies at the heart of African American spirituality and creativity. According to the history, Black women have been the custodians of oral traditions, folk medicine, and communal values. Conjure, transmitted matrilineal, and often functioned as a secret language of empowerment. It is like a coded form of resistance against both racial and gender oppression. Through ritual, prayer, and ancestral invocation, women preserved a sense of agency that transcended material constraints.

From this perspective, conjure embodies both a cultural memory and a political act. The conjure woman's knowledge of herbs, healing, and prophecy signifies not only physical survival but also psychological and spiritual freedom. Conjure women are highly respected because they connect their community to ancestral roots, underlining the sacredness of Black womanhood. This connection is clearly illustrated in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, where Baby Suggs preaches self-love as a revolutionary act: "Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them" (Toni Morrison 1987). Such expressions of embodied spirituality echo the ethos of conjure where the act of healing oneself and others becomes a declaration of freedom. In both Naylor's *Mama Day* and Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, conjure seems to be reimagined as a sacred inheritance that validates women's intuition and leadership.

III. Conjure and Female Empowerment in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and in Julie's *Daughters of the Dust*

3.1 Importance of conjure

In Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988), conjure is not a marginal practice but the living pulse of the fictional island of Willow Springs, a space unbound by the laws of time and colonial reason. The main character of *Mama Day* is a palpable example of conjure women. She is depicted as a healer, midwife, and matriarch who carries the ancestral knowledge of her people. Through her, Naylor reconstructs the image of the African American woman as the spiritual and moral foundation of her community.

Mama Day's authority does not come from formal education or institutional religion but from her connection with the land and the ancestors. Her power to heal and foresee springs from a deep harmony with the natural world, reflecting African cosmological beliefs that human life is inseparable from the spiritual realm. Naylor writes of Mama Day's intuitive connection: "The power that flows through her veins is older than her bones. It is the pulse of the island itself" (Naylor, 1988, p.13). This statement situates *Mama Day* as a vessel of ancestral memory and as the embodiment of a collective consciousness that predates colonial interruption. As a matriarch, she performs the dual role of nurturer and protector, guiding her community with wisdom that transcends Western rationality. Her conjuring is not an act of magic in the Eurocentric sense but a manifestation of sacred knowledge that affirms life and continuity. Through this characterization,

Naylor offers an alternative model of authority rooted in womanhood, spirituality, and community service qualities that position *Mama Day* as a symbol of empowered femininity.

In addition, Conjure has been presented as an act of resistance against the alienation imposed by modernity and colonial narratives. Willow Springs, geographically and symbolically separated from the mainland, operates as a site of cultural preservation where African-derived traditions continue to flourish. Within this insular space, conjure becomes a language of self-definition, one that allows Black women to construct their identities outside of dominant Euro-American frameworks.

The relationship between *Mama Day* and her grandniece Cocoa illustrates this process of reconnection and self-discovery. Cocoa, who initially represents modern detachment from her ancestral roots, gradually learns that true empowerment lies in embracing the spiritual legacy embodied by *Mama Day*. The elder's teachings lead her to understand that healing and identity cannot be found through assimilation but through acceptance of her heritage.

The death of George, Cocoa's husband, further reveals the limits of Western rationality. His refusal to believe in *Mama Day*'s spiritual wisdom results in tragedy, emphasizing the necessity of faith and cultural continuity. Naylor uses this moment to challenge the epistemological arrogance of modernity and to affirm the validity of African spiritual knowledge. Through conjure, Black women reclaim power not through domination, but through harmony, intuition, and ancestral communion.

3.2 Conjure and Female Empowerment in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) stands as a seminal cinematic text in African American cultural expression. Through its poetic narrative and symbolic imagery, the film reconstructs the ancestral past of the Gullah people descendants of enslaved Africans living on the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Dash's film weaves together history, memory, and myth, presenting conjure as a spiritual and cultural language through which women reclaim agency and continuity.

At the center of this matrilineal world stands Nana Peazant, the family's spiritual leader and healer. Like Naylor's *Mama Day*, Nana embodies the wisdom of the ancestors and the enduring

power of conjure as a source of female strength. Her body, aged and weathered, becomes a living archive of African heritage. She is the keeper of rituals, prayers, and traditions that bind the family to its roots. Dash depicts her not as a relic of the past but as the guardian of collective identity:

We are the daughters of those who chose to survive. The blood of Africa still runs through our veins. Do not forget who you are...I am the hope and the dream of the slave. I come from the breath of my mothers, and I remember everything. (Dash 1991)

This statement serves not only as a spiritual invocation but also as a political manifesto. Through Nana's voice, Dash affirms that memory itself is a form of conjure. It is an act that summons the strength of ancestors to resist historical erasure. The conjure woman, therefore, operates as a bridge between worlds: the visible and invisible, the past and the present, the living and the dead. This passage highlights Dash's feminist cosmology where memory, spirituality, and survival are woven together as the essence of empowerment. Through this metaphysical framework, Dash challenges linear Western conceptions of time, proposing instead a circular, ancestral temporality that honors continuity rather than rupture.

According to Dash, conjure should be a means of resistance against historical displacement and cultural amnesia. The film takes place in 1902, on the eve of the Peasant family's migration to the mainland. This is a symbolic departure from their ancestral home. Nana warns against abandoning the island, fearing that separation from the land will sever the family's spiritual connection to their origins. Her invocation of the ancestors becomes an act of defiance against the forces of assimilation and modernity that threaten to erase the community's identity. In one of the film's most powerful scenes, Nana performs a ritual at the water's edge, praying to the spirits of the Ibo who walked into the sea rather than accept enslavement:

Those that walked into the water still live within us. Their spirit is the dust we carry on our skin. Remember them when you touch the earth. Remember them when you taste the salt of the sea. (Dash 1991)

From this extract, conjure may be viewed as an act of remembrance and liberation. Dash uses the visual motif of water as a spiritual threshold symbolizing both loss and rebirth. The empowerment of the Peasant women lies in their ability to reinterpret suffering through sacred

memory. Eula, who has been violated by a white man, finds healing not in silence but in ritual participation. Her reconciliation with the family and with herself marks a spiritual rebirth:

I am not what was done to me. I am my mother's daughter.
I am the daughter of the dust... We carry their dreams
inside us. Their strength is our inheritance. We are the
daughters of the dust, and we will not forget. (Dash, 1991)

This extract epitomizes Dash's message that empowerment arises through remembrance and reclamation. The invocation of "dust" in the title becomes a metaphor for ancestral resilience something enduring, elemental, and sacred. Through her film, Dash transforms conjure into a cinematic theology of liberation. The women of *Daughters of the Dust* embody empowerment not through confrontation but through spiritual continuity and communal solidarity. Their power is rooted in ancestral wisdom, in the ability to remember and to pass on what Western modernity seeks to erase.

3.3 Appropriation of Power through Spiritual Knowledge

Mama Day's empowerment is not individualistic. It is communal, relational, and deeply spiritual. Her strength derives from her role as a mediator between the living and the ancestral, the human and the divine. In Naylor's cosmology, power is understood as balance rather than control. The ability to heal or transform reality is not granted by social status but earned through faith, moral integrity, and alignment with ancestral wisdom.

Naylor defines the real sense of women empowerment in a patriarchal world. Her conjure practices plant-based medicine, rituals, and intuitive insight symbolize a re-appropriation of knowledge traditionally dismissed as superstition. From this angle, Naylor's narrative critiques the historical marginalization of Black women's epistemologies. By placing a conjure woman at the center of her story, Naylor inscribes African spirituality into the literary canon, transforming what has been silenced into a site of affirmation.

One of the most profound expressions of Mama Day's power appears when she attempts to save George through spiritual intervention. The narrative shifts into an almost mythic register: "She raised her hands to the wind, whispering the names of those who came before. The air thickened with memory, and the island itself began to hum with power." (Naylor, 1988, p. 27)

So, Naylor portrays conjure as a sacred inheritance through which women reclaim their identity, dignity, and agency. *Mama Day*'s empowerment lies not in domination or defiance, but in her capacity to heal, to teach, and to sustain. Her wisdom embodies the continuity of African American womanhood and demonstrates that spirituality, far from being passive, can be a radical act of self-definition and liberation.

3.4 Black womanhood in Naylor's *Mama Day* and Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

Both Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) construct narrative universes in which the survival of Black womanhood is intrinsically tied to spiritual heritage and ancestral memory. In both texts, conjure is not portrayed as superstition but as a sacred epistemology that resists colonial definitions of reality.

Naylor and Dash center their narratives on matriarchal figures Mama Day and Nana Peazant. They are presented as spiritual mediators between the visible and the invisible world. Through them, conjure becomes an instrument of remembrance, healing, and resistance. Both women embody what Patricia Hill Collins (1990, p.12) terms "*mother wisdom*," an inherited knowledge rooted in survival, care, and spiritual endurance.

Therefore, conjure transcends its folkloric roots to become a language of cultural affirmation and feminist agency. Naylor and Dash use conjure not only as narrative content but also as an aesthetic structure: non-linear storytelling, cyclic temporality, and oral expression all mirror the spiritual rhythm of African cosmology. In *Mama Day*, the narrative alternates between first-person plural and dual perspectives, creating a polyphonic texture that reflects communal identity. The novel's structure itself becomes a ritual, in which each retelling of Sapphira Wade's legend renews the community's sense of purpose.

Meanwhile, Dash employs cinematic conjure: images, music, color, and gesture serve as a means of communication. The film's visual symbolism white garments, the ocean, the unborn narrator serves the same function as Naylor's oral storytelling. Both authors thus transform conjure into a meta-language that conveys the ineffable dimensions of Black womanhood. Furthermore, conjure in both texts defies patriarchal and colonial systems of knowledge. While Western rationality privileges separation between the sacred and the secular, both authors reintegrate

spirituality into everyday experience. Healing, prayer, memory, and storytelling coexist seamlessly in the feminine space, showing that for Black women, empowerment is not an abstract ideal but a lived, embodied practice.

Within these similarities, it is worth underlining some divergences in tone and medium. Though the fictional works under study share thematic and ideological foundations, they diverge in tone, medium, and aesthetic approach. Naylor's *Mama Day* is rooted in literary realism and psychological introspection, exploring the intersection between myth and modern love. Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, on the other hand, relies on visual lyricism and collective narration.

Naylor's conjure woman operates within the framework of interpersonal healing: Mama Day's wisdom restores balance between Cocoa and George, revealing how love and spirituality intertwine. Dash, however, situates conjure in the collective realm. The entire Peazant family becomes a vessel of ancestral resilience. Her film operates as a ritual of remembrance performed on screen, emphasizing communal transcendence over individual redemption.

Thus, Naylor's narrative is dialogic and psychological, while Dash's is ceremonial and aesthetic. Both, however, achieve the same ultimate aim: to present conjure as a legitimate epistemology of liberation. This is an African-centered mode of knowing that restores dignity, power, and voice to Black women.

Conclusion

This piece of scholarship depicts the relationship between conjure and women empowerment within the Black community. Both Gloria Naylor and Julie Dash consider spirituality as a foundation of female empowerment. For them, conjure is not merely a cultural residue but a living philosophy. It is a tool for reconstructing the self and resisting erasure. Both works affirm that memory is the essence of freedom. Through their depictions of conjure women, Naylor and Dash articulate a vision of womanhood that is at one and the same time ancestral, sacred, and self-determining. They remind us that empowerment begins with remembrance. It is described as a vital force that can heal the present, and preserve the past.

A close analysis of these novels, makes it possible to understand that conjure becomes a means of resistance. The power of the Black woman lies in her capacity to carry history in her spirit

and to turn pain into prophecy. This study examines the link between conjure and female empowerment in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). Both works foreground the spiritual and ancestral dimensions of African American womanhood, depicting conjure not as superstition but as a profound epistemology. It is a means of resistance, identity reconstruction, and communal healing.

In *Mama Day*, conjure is depicted through the character of Mama Day, a healer and matriarch whose knowledge bridges the old and the new generations. Her power derives from communion with the ancestors, intuitive wisdom, and alignment with the natural world. Naylor positions conjure as a tool of empowerment, demonstrating that Black women's authority is rooted in spiritual and cultural continuity rather than institutional recognition.

In *Daughters of the Dust*, Dash portrays conjure through the Peasant women of Ibo Landing, emphasizing collective memory, matrilineal inheritance, and ritualized practices. Nana Peasant embodies spiritual leadership, reminding the family of their heritage and the sacredness of ancestral continuity. Through visual and symbolic language, Dash transforms cinema into a medium of conjure, articulating Black women's resilience and agency. Both texts reveal that conjure operates at the intersection of memory, spirituality, and empowerment. Conjure allows women to assert agency, resist marginalization, and preserve cultural knowledge. While Naylor focuses on interpersonal healing and character-driven narrative, Dash emphasizes communal ritual and cinematic lyricism. Despite these differences, the central message remains consistent: empowerment emerges through conjure. Future researchers could compare Naylor and Dash's Conjure dynamics with those in works by Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison.

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