The Representation of Black Feminism in Black Female Literature

A Master's Thesis by:

Azra Rekovic

Aalborg University

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Supervisor: Bent Sørensen

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the representation of black feminism in black female literature. This will be done through an examination of two all-time black female novels; *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston (2006) and *The Color Purple* (2017) by Alice Walker. The examination of the two novels will be done through theory from some of the most famous authors that dedicate their work to the understanding of black feminism and the overall black female experience, namely Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins. In this matter, the paper will use the following theoretical materials; *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991) by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, *feminist theory: from margin to center* (2015) by bell hooks, and lastly *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000) by Patricia Hill Collins.

When referring to black feminism, the paper is primarily going to analyze the novels through the notion of intersectionality, controlling images, and sisterhood. These terms will be used to frame the analytical framework by examining how each author represents them in the novels. Thus, intersectionality will be the primary theory that is going to function as the overall tool in terms of the analyses. By applying intersectionality as the main tool, it is going to address how the different intersectional parameters, such as race, gender, and class are represented through the main characters. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of the lives of the protagonists will be made in order to examine the main reasons that have led these women to become victims of oppression, and how they manage to rescue themselves from being the victim. Ultimately, the use of the black female theory will function as the foundation for the analytical framework.

Introduction

The topic of black feminism has been highly discussed and processed in the United States ever since the early days of slavery. This meant that the lives of African American women were dependent on men, who believed that their dominance would forever subdue women into the stage of passiveness and submissiveness. After many years of civil rights movements and the struggle to be acknowledged as an equal in American society, African American women have succeeded in establishing rights that give them access to vote as well as gender equality in workplaces and educational institutions. However, African American women still face the challenges of their gender and race, because many years of oppression have led them to be fragile and less appreciated in comparison to white women in American society. In this matter, it is important to state that African American men also experience the struggle of being black and with that, they are forced to face the consequences that follow along with the struggle, which is caused by racial issues. Racial issues are especially evident when innocent black people are being mistreated by the police, who use their power of force to marginalize men and women. These examples illuminate the outcome of many years of oppression in terms of racism and sexism, where women, in particular, have suffered the most as this has allowed them to become the prime targets of oppression.

To examine these issues, this paper will focus on how black feminism is represented in black female literature. This will be done through an analysis of two fictional pieces from the mid to late 20th century. In this case, the paper will take starting point in two all-time novels from black literature, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2006) by Zora Neale Hurston and *The Color Purple* (2017) by Alice Walker. In order to achieve this, the paper will use the theory that is relevant to the overall topic of the paper. First and foremost, the paper will look into the theory of intersectionality by respectively Kimberle Williams Crenshaw through her theoretical essay *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991). This will be followed by the theory of respectively bell hooks' *feminist theory: from margin to center* (2015) and by respectively Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). Ultimately, these theories will help to discover how the novels represent African American women through the portrayal of black feminism.

Historical context

In this section, I have chosen to unfold some of the most important events that are crucial for the periods in which *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* were written. In this matter, the most prominent events that took place during these periods are those concerning the Great Depression, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Civil Rights Movement. The beginning of the Great Depression began in 1929 in the United States, which was known as the longest and biggest economic downturn to have taken place in modern history (Pells). This resulted in mass unemployment and increased the number of homelessness and poverty, especially among African Americans, who were the most affected by the Great Depression. Even before the depression, African Americans were paid less in comparison to white Americans and were the first to be laid off from their jobs, making them suffer more than any other race in America. Due to the economic issues in the country, major political developments were formed among African Americans, which later led to the founding of the National Negro Congress in 1936 as well as the Southern Negro Youth Congress in 1937 (Lynch).

Moreover, as it turned out that the Republican administration ignored African Americans during the 1920s, it meant that a large number of votes during the presidential election in 1928 were votes of African Americans. This was the first time that African Americans voted for the Democrats in such high numbers (ibid.). During the presidential election in 1932, African Americans showed their support for Franklin D. Roosevelt, who at the time was a candidate for the democratic party (ibid.). Furthermore, with Roosevelt's election came the New Deal reforms which were used to stabilize and create a better economy in the United States, which gave the African Americans a new chance to uprise from the bad economy, as it turned out that the New Deal reforms were of great benefit for African Americans (ibid.). For instance, one of the benefits provided African Americans with low-cost public housing, which allowed working-class families a place to live. In addition, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), created in 1935 under the New Deal, helped many African Americans to get jobs, and at the same time worked on supporting the work of black writers, which was done through the Federal Writers Project, where one of them happened to be Zora Neale Hurston (ibid.). Hurston's literary work spread across the nation when she joined the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, which was an African American cultural movement in New York City. The Harlem Renaissance was a great place that allowed people to be creative in literature, visual arts, musicals, and theatrical arts. In this case, literature was viewed as the most prominent (Hutchinson).

The Harlem Renaissance is considered to be one of the most influential time periods that has taken place in African American literary history, where the flowering of the "New Negro" was celebrated by all its members as they embraced their African heritage: "participants sought to reconceptualize "the Negro" apart from the white stereotypes that had influenced Black peoples' relationship to their heritage and to each other" (ibid.). The Harlem Renaissance sought to use fiction as a place to give black authors the opportunity to write about Black Southern life, as white authors had failed the task. However, one particular writer took on the task and showed that no one could do it better than her, namely Hurston. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston portrays several elements of Black Southern life through the fictional characters, as they undergo racism and intersectional oppression issues. Furthermore, The Harlem Renaissance was very important to black authors and their creations, as it helped to bring awareness to the culture of black folks in the United States (ibid.). However, Hurston's novel did not receive much attention when she released it in 1937, due to negative comments from the Harlem Renaissance. Unfortunately, this meant that Hurston never got to sell many copies of her novel while she was alive. A big interest in the work and in the life of Hurston brought Alice Walker on a journey to Eatonville, Florida in 1973 to find Hurston's unmarked grave: "On August 15, 1973 I wake up just as the plane is lowering over Sanford, Florida, which means I am also looking down on Eatonville, Zora Neale Hurston's birthplace" (Walker 9). Walker's discovery of Hurston brought the novel back into the sphere of African American literature, making the novel Hurston's most famous work of all time.

In comparison to the historical context of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Walker's novel *The Color Purple* is set in a time period when segregation was at its highest. This period was known as the American Civil Rights Movement, which started in the mid-1950s and functioned as a mass protest movement against discrimination and racial segregation (Carson). On December 18th, 1865 slavery was officially abolished by The 13th Amendment, which meant that slaves were freed from slavery. However, the abolishment of slavery did not put an end to racial segregation or discrimination and therefore African Americans still had to face the consequences of being victims of racism. Issues regarding race and racism were worst in the South where white supremacy dominated the lives of African American people, meaning that nothing was done in the favor of blacks. The most significant reason for white supremacy in the South was the Jim Crow Laws that enforced racial segregation between the end of the Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s (Urofsky). Furthermore, laws were later passed requiring that whites were separated from African Americans in schools and on public transportation, for instance, the bus

where white people were granted the seats at the front of the bus, while African Americans could only sit in the back of the bus (ibid.). Also, some of these laws were later extended to theatres, parks, cemeteries, and even restaurants to make sure that any contact between African Americans and white Americans prevented them from being perceived as equals (ibid.). As the main purpose of the Civil Rights Movement was to fight for equal rights, the movement began to include activism and social movements as an uprising against the laws that prohibited blacks from their rights as Americans.

Some of the leading activists in the Civil Rights Movement were Martin Luther King with his "I have a dream" speech in Washington in 1963 along with the case concerning the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was originated by NAACP activist Rosa Parks, as she refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama (Carson). Overall, the movement became a success in that it ended segregation in public spaces and developed a new act that banned discrimination in workplaces. By the same token, the Civil Rights Movement influenced in the 1960s the Women's Right Movement to end racial discrimination against women. As the Civil Rights Movement was led by men, the Women's Right Movement was only led by women, albeit the purpose of the two movements was primarily identical. The movement corresponded with the second wave of feminism, whereas the first-wave feminism of the 19th and 20th centuries primarily focused on the legal rights to give women the right to vote, the second-wave feminism then focused on areas concerning politics, work, sexuality, and family (Burkett). The Women's Rights Movement became an inspiration to many black female activists, who used the movement to refine the black female theory through their own black female experiences. With this section, I have purposely chosen not to go into detail about the different events, as the main purpose is not to make a thorough examination but rather to create a foundation that is going to provide the paper with an understanding of why these events are important for the time in which the novels are set.

Methodology

The aim of this section is to illustrate the work and the choices that have been made throughout the project in regard to theory, and analysis. As the thesis statement for this project exposes, I have chosen to emphasize how black feminism is presented in black female literature. In this matter, I searched for two literary works that would fulfill the requirements for the thesis statement, and after plenty of research it came down to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The main reason that led me to the choice of the novels was their major impact on the lives of black women in the United States and on feminism in general. Also, part of my research was to look for literary work before the 21st century, as my wish was to examine literary pieces prior to this century. Ultimately, I wanted to examine black feminism during a time when racism and sexist oppression of women dominated in the United States, which is exactly what the novels represent, and yet another reason that made me choose the two novels. In an effort to get a better understanding of the novels, a historical overview of some of the most important events in American history has been described independently to frame the project within a historical context.

Moreover, in order to achieve the aim of my thesis statement, I searched for the theory that was going to be relevant to my project. Furthermore, this was done through the procedure of online searching, where I was able to pick out books and texts from valid websites, such as the online library from Aalborg University and Google Scholar, where both websites give access to academic materials and trustworthy sources. However, as it was not possible to find particular books and texts online, I used the physical library at Aalborg University, from where I found most of the books that I was going to use for the theory. This gave me access to a broader selection of literary materials, which made the research process less complicated. As for theory, I chose to use the work by respectively Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins to create a theoretical understanding of black feminism. Moreover, these women are known for their hard work and consistency in the history of black feminism where they have helped to develop a general construction of black feminism through theory. Despite their differences, each of these women shares the same understanding of black feminism in terms of race, gender, and class. This way each author independently contributes to the fundamental understanding of black feminism in their theoretical framework. By including the theory from Crenshaw, hooks, and Collins the project has achieved knowledge of different approaches to black feminism, through which I have been able to analyze *Their Eyes Were Watching* God and *The Color Purple* from a broad and critical perspective.

As for the analytical framework, the novels respectively by Zora Neale Hurston and Alice

Walker have been selected on the basis of their individual work on representing the victimization of black women in violent marriages. However, both authors depict these issues differently and use their own personal life as an inspiration to the structure and narrative of the novels. The combination of their personal lives portrays the novels from a genuine perspective in regard to the representation of the black female experience, which both authors represent through the protagonists of the novels. Although Hurston and Walker never got to meet each other, Walker's successful discovery of Hurston and the rebirth of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is what connects these two writers to each other. Ultimately, the purpose of the analytical approach has been to examine the issues of black feminism primarily through the theory of intersectionality by using it as an analytical tool for the analysis. As a result, the approach has allowed me to make an in-depth analysis of the novels in terms of the representation of black feminism through fiction.

Theory

Kimberle Crenshaw

To understand the issues of violence and identity politics against women of color, civil rights activist and leading scholar of critical race theory, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw is unavoidable. Crenshaw is most known for the introduction and development of the theory about intersectionality, as it frames the interactions of gender and race in the context of violence against women of color (Crenshaw 1296). In her theoretical essay *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,* Crenshaw has divided the focus on intersectionality into three categories called; *Structural intersectionality*, *Political intersectionality*, and *Representational intersectionality.* In the first category, Crenshaw discusses structural intersectionality by looking at how the location of women of color at the intersection of gender and race makes the experience of domestic violence and rape (ibid. 1245). In the second category, she analyzes how feminist and antiracist politics have helped to marginalize the issue of violence pointed at women of color (ibid. 1245). In the last category, Crenshaw discusses the cultural construction of women of color, where she considers how controversies in the representation of women of color in popular culture can elide the particular location of women of color, and in that way become a source of intersectional disempowerment (ibid. 1245). This project will only examine the first two categories, and therefore

there will be no thorough description of the third category. However, the following sections will describe a thorough understanding of the first two categories.

Structural intersectionality

In her work with the examination of structural intersectionality, Crenshaw has observed the different dynamics by looking at those women of color, who have been battered by their partners. Usually, women who experience physical assault end up in shelters, because they seek protection from their abusive partners. According to Crenshaw, many of those women who seek protection are typically unemployed or underemployed, and a good number of them happen to be poor (ibid. 1245). The reason why some women of color live under conditions of poverty is that they are burdened by the lack of job skills and childcare responsibilities, which is a constant battle that women of color face because of their gender and race. Furthermore, Crenshaw states that the high number of unemployment among people of color is what makes it difficult for battered women of color to depend on support from family and friends for temporary shelter (ibid. 1245).

The observations made by Crenshaw, show how intersectionality shapes the experience of being a woman of color. Crenshaw states that race, gender, and class are considered to be the three factors that identify women of color together with poverty (ibid. 1246). Being a woman of color is what makes it difficult for them to achieve the same things as white women, who, because of their color, are able to position themselves on a higher hierarchy scale. This means that women of color are situated differently in relation to white women when looking at the social, economic, and political worlds (ibid. 1250). When the reform efforts undertaken on the behalf of women default this fact, it puts women of color into a position where they are unlikely to have their needs met, compared to those women who are racially privileged (ibid. 1250). As an example, Crenshaw refers to counselors who provide crisis services to those women of color who have been raped, where a significant proportion of the recourses assigned to them have to deal with problems other than rape itself (ibid. 1250). This places the counselors at odds with their different funding agencies, which allocate funds according to standards of need that are middle-class and white (ibid. 1250) Allegedly, these counselors in minority communities report spending a lot of time locating the resources and contacts to meet housing and other needs of women, who have been physically assaulted (ibid. 1251). According to Crenshaw, this is only considered as “information and referral”: “The problem is compounded by expectations that rape crisis centers will use a significant portion of resources

allocated to them on counselors to accompany victims to court, even though women of color are less likely to have their cases pursued in the criminal justice system" (ibid. 1251). The fact that women from minority communities suffer from the effects of subordination together with institutional expectations based on inappropriate nonintersectional contexts, shapes, and limits the opportunities for meaningful intervention on the behalf of those women who are in the need of it (ibid. 1251).

Political intersectionality

Moving on, Crenshaw explains the meaning of political intersectionality, which is a concept that highlights the fact about women of color, and how they are situated within two subordinated groups, which follow the conflicts of political agendas. Having to split one's political energies between two opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment, which is what men of color and white women rarely have to confront (ibid. 1252). Racism experienced by men of color tends to determine the parameters of antiracist strategies, as well as sexism experienced by white women, tends to ground the women's movement. According to Crenshaw, this is not merely a problem where both discourses fail women of color by not acknowledging the "additional" issue of patriarchy and race, but also that the discourses are deficient in the tasks of articulating the complete dimensions of racism and sexism (ibid. 1252). Women of color do not experience racism in ways similar to men of color, and their ways of experiencing sexism differ from the experiences that are shared by white women. Likewise, the conceptions of feminism and antiracism are limited on their own terms (ibid. 1252). According to Crenshaw, the failure of feminism to interrogate racial issues means that the strategies of feminism will reproduce and strengthen the subordination of people of color, which means that the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy indicates that antiracism will reproduce the subordination of women. These reductions present difficult political issues for those women of color (ibid. 1252). Moreover, Crenshaw explains how political strategies ignore and suppress intersectional issues:

> That the political interests of women of color are obscured and sometimes jeopardized by political strategies that ignore or suppress intersectional issues is illustrated by my experiences in gathering information for this article (ibid. 1252).

In communities of color, the politicization of domestic violence is more than often grounded in attempts to maintain the integrity of the community. It has got to the point, where some critics allege that feminism has no place in colored communities and that the issues are internally divisive, which

means that they represent the migration of white women's concerns into an irrelevant and harmful context (Ibid. 1253). This rhetoric denies the fact that gender violence is a serious issue in the community and characterizes any kind of effort to politicize gender subordination as a community problem (ibid. 1253). The issue of violence against women of color is not only devastating for the victims but also for the entire Black community. The recourse of violence to resolve the conflicts creates a dangerous pattern for children, who are raised in communities of color and contributes to other serious problems: "It has been estimated that nearly forty percent of all homeless women and children have fled violence in the home, and an estimated sixty three percent of young men between the ages of eleven and twenty who are imprisoned for homicide have killed their mother's batters" (ibid. 1255). While other forms of Black-on-Black crime, such as homicide and gang violence have been discussed within African American politics, ideas of patriarchy concerning gender and power preclude the recognition of domestic violence as yet another incident of Black-on-Black crime (ibid. 1255).

Furthermore, Crenshaw goes on to explain how race and culture contribute to the suppression of domestic violence in ways that have not yet been mentioned. Women of color are often resistant when it comes to calling the police because they fear that it might bring their private lives to the scrutiny and control of a police force that is hostile towards them (ibid. 1257). According to Crenshaw, there happens to be a more generalized community ethic against public intervention, which is a product of a desire to create a private world free from assaults on the lives of racially subordinated people. The home is not perceived only as a man's castle in the sense of patriarchy, but it can also function as a safe haven from the insults in a racist society (ibid. 1257). In this manner, there also happens to be a general tendency within antiracist discourse to regard the issue of violence against women of color as yet another manifestation of racism. This means that the relevance of gender domination within the community is reshaped as a consequence of discrimination against the male sex (ibid. 1257). Crenshaw states that it is possibly true that racism contributes to the cycle of violence against women, given the stress that men of color experience in a dominant society. Therefore, it is reasonable to explore the dynamics between racism and domestic violence:

> Racism is linked to patriarchy to the extent that racism denies men of color the power and privilege that dominant men enjoy. When violence is understood as an acting-out of being denied male power in other spheres, it seems counterproductive to embrace constructs that implicitly link the solution to domestic violence to the acquisition of greater male power (ibid. 1258).

The understanding link between racism and domestic violence is an important component of any kind of intervention strategy, which also makes it clear that women of color do not need to await the ultimate triumph over racism before they can expect a life without violence (ibid. 1258). However, it is important to mention that violence is not only an important issue within the colored community, even though this is interpreted differently within the white community. Strategies for raising the awareness of domestic violence within the white community often begin by citing the shared assumption that battering is a minority problem. Moreover, the strategy then focuses on demolishing this particular strawman, emphasizing that violence against women also takes place in the white community (ibid. 1258). According to first-person anecdotes and studies, battering cuts across ethnic, racial, economical, educational, and religious lines. However, such disclaimers only seem to be of relevance in the presence of the belief that domestic violence primarily occurs in minority or poor families (ibid. 1258-1259).

Efforts to modify the issue of violence against women challenge the beliefs that violence only takes place in the homes of "others" (ibid. 1259). With the use of examples regarding violence against women, Crenshaw refers to Senator David Boren. In one of his statements, Boren points to the displacement of "other" as the presumed victim of domestic violence, which works as a political appeal to only rally white elites (ibid. 1260). Boren further explains: "Violence against women affects not only those who are actually beaten and brutalized, but indirectly affects all women" (ibid. 1260). Today, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and colleagues are held captive by the fear caused by violence and held captive not for who they are and the things they do, but merely because of gender (ibid. 1260). Instead of focusing on how violence is disregarded when the home becomes "othered", Crenshaw states that Boren's strategy implicitly functions to politicize the problem solely in communities of dominance. The strategy then permits victims who are white and female to come into focus but does not do much to disrupt the patterns of neglect that granted the problem to continue as long as it was imagined to be a minority problem (ibid. 1260). Violence experienced by women from minorities is overlooked, but only to the extent where it gains support by whites for domestic violence programs in white communities (ibid. 1260).

bell hooks

When hearing her name, it becomes almost impossible not to connect it to Black feminism. hooks is most known for her feminist theory, where she recognizes that social classifications, such as race,

gender, class, and sexual identity are interconnected. During her career, hooks has published several books and essays about black feminist theory, which makes her a contributor to the evolvement of black feminism. With the publication of one of her most famous works within feminist theory *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), hooks has helped to change the understanding of not only black feminism but feminism in general during the 1980s. When her work was first published, it was welcomed and praised by feminist thinkers who searched for a new vision of black feminism. *Feminist Theory* is written in hooks' characteristic and direct style. Furthermore, it also embodies the hope that feminists can find a similar language to spread the word and in that way create a mass, global movement within feminism (hooks i**).**

Sisterhood: Political solidarity among women

"Women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression" (hooks 43). This is the opening sentence in the chapter, which indicates that women are victims of gender discrimination. Similar to other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by social and institutional structures. This is done by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress, and by the victims who are socialized to behave in ways that make them operate with the status quo (ibid. 43). According to hooks, the ideology of male supremacists encourages women to believe that women are valueless and that their only way of achieving value, is by relating to or bonding with men. Moreover, we have been taught that female relationships diminish rather than enrich our experiences: "We are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well" (ibid. 43). In this matter, hooks states that we as women must unlearn these lessons if we want to build a sustained feminist movement. By doing this, we will learn to live and work in solidarity (ibid. 43).

Women are divided into a number of different things, but the most common ones are sexist attitudes, class privilege, racism, and lots of other prejudices (ibid. 44). hooks believes that bonding between sustained women can only occur when these divisions are confronted and eliminated. The divisions will not be eliminated by wishful thinking or a romantic reverie about oppression, despite the value of underlining experiences all women share (ibid. 44). In recent times, Sisterhood as a slogan and motto no longer evokes the spirit of power in unity, and some feminists seem to feel that the shared unity among women is no longer possible due to our differences (ibid. 44). The idea of abandoning Sisterhood as a political expression of solidarity weakens and diminishes the feminist movement. According to hooks, there is no mass-based feminist movement that is going to end sexist oppression without a united front. It is therefore the women who must take initiative and

demonstrate the power of solidarity. As long as women are in the position to show that barriers separating women can be eliminated and that solidarity indeed can exist, women simply cannot hope to change and transform society as a whole (ibid. 44). A shift away from an emphasis on Sisterhood has taken place due to that many women were angered by the insistence on common oppression, shared identity, and sameness, and criticized the feminist movement as a whole: "The emphasis on Sisterhood was often seen as the emotional appeal masking the opportunism of manipulative bourgeois white women" (ibid. 44). Nevertheless, it was also viewed as a cover-up hiding the fact that women utilize and oppress one another (ibid. 44).

hooks further continues to talk about bonding, explaining how women were clever to reject a false Sisterhood based on shallow notions of bonding. Women are mistaken if they allow these distortions or even the women who created them, who now say that bonding between women is unimportant, to lead women to devalue Sisterhood (ibid. 45). According to an analysis by bourgeois women's liberationists, the basis for bonding is through shared victimization. This concept of bonding reflects the thinking of male supremacists (ibid. 45). The ideology of sexism teaches women that to be female means that you are a victim, and instead of denying this equation, women's liberationists embraced it, by making shared victimization the basis for female bonding (ibid.45). Furthermore, this meant that in order for women to feel that the feminist movement was relevant to their lives, they had to conceive themselves as victims: "Bonding as victims created a situation in which assertive, self-affirming women were often seen as having no place in feminist movement" (ibid. 45). Namely, this was the logic that led white women along with black men to suggest that black women were strong, and therefore they did not need to be active in the feminist movement. Due to this logic, plenty of white women abandoned the feminist movement when they no longer embraced the identity of being a victim. According to hooks, the women who were most eager to be considered a "victim", and who overpoweringly stressed the role of a victim, were more privileged and powerful than the rest of the women in society (ibid. 45).

Women who are exploited and oppressed daily cannot afford to look at themselves as "victims", because their survival relies on an ongoing exercise of whatever personal powers they possess. Therefore, it would be psychologically demoralizing for these women to create a bond with other women solely based on shared victimization (ibid. 46). Moreover, hooks goes on to explain that women bond with other women based on shared strengths and resources, and not by being victims. This is the type of female bonding, that the feminist movement should encourage because this is the type of bonding that is the essence of a true Sisterhood (ibid. 46). In order to develop political

solidarity among women, feminist activists cannot simply bond on the terms set by the dominant ideology of the culture. According to hooks, women must define their own terms, and not bond based on shared victimization. Instead, women could bond based on their political commitment to a feminist movement with the intention to end sexist oppression (ibid. 47).

For women to resist male domination, they must break their attachment to sexism, and they must work to reshape female consciousness: "Working together to expose, examine, and eliminate sexist socialization within ourselves, women would strengthen and affirm one another and build a solid foundation for developing political solidarity" (ibid. 47-48). Among men and women, sexism is expressed in the form of male domination, which then leads to discrimination, exploitation, or even oppression. Among women, male supremacist values are expressed through defensive, suspicious, and competitive behavior. Sexism is what leads women to feel threatened by other women for no reason, and sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men (ibid. 48). Moreover, sexism also leads women to belittle parenting work while inflating the value of jobs and careers. hooks states that an acceptance of sexist ideology is indicated when women teach their children that there are two types of behavior patterns, which is the role of dominant or submissive being (ibid. 48). In order to build a politicized, mass-based feminist movement, women must renew their efforts to help women unlearn sexism if they wish to develop personal relationships and a political unity (ibid. 50).

Feminist movement to end violence

Violence against women has been an ongoing issue for decades. It is often assumed by feminist activists that this type of violence is different from other forms of violence because it is linked to the politics of sexism and male supremacy. This is connected to the belief in male supremacy that gives men the right to dominate women (ibid. 117). hooks believes that violence is linked to all acts of male domination in our society that appear between the dominant and the dominated, the powerful and the powerless (ibid. 118). Although male supremacy encourages the use of abusive force to uphold male domination of women, male supremacy itself is not the root cause of violence against women. Instead, the Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority is the actual cause of violence against women, as well as adult violence against children (ibid.118). This belief system is the foundation on which ideologies, such as sexist ideology as well as other ideologies of group oppression are based. Until now, the feminist movement has primarily focused on male violence, and as a consequence, this lends credibility to sexist stereotypes. The stereotypes suggest that men are violent and abusers and that women are victims and non-violent (ibid.118).

According to hooks, this type of thinking allows us to ignore the degree to which women,

together with men, accept the idea that it is acceptable for a dominant group to maintain power over the dominated with the use of coercive force (ibid.118).

Furthermore, this type of thinking allows us to overlook or even ignore the degree to which women exert forceful authority over others or act in a violent manner. Considering the fact that women are not allowed to commit violent acts as frequently as men, does not abolish the reality of violence against women (ibid.118). hooks suggest that we must see both men and women as two groups who support the use of violence if we want to eliminate it (ibid.118). The social hierarchy in white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy is one in which, theoretically, men are considered to be powerful, and women as powerless. In this matter, adults are powerful, children are powerless; white people are powerful, and black people and other non-white people are also powerless (ibid.118). People who were raised in a patriarchal household where male parents maintained control and domination by abusing women, as well as children, are aware that the problem was aggravated because women also believed that a person in authority has the right to use force to maintain it (ibid.118).

Violence against women in personal relationships happens to be one of the most obvious expressions of the use of abusive force to uphold domination and control over women. This type of violence showcases the actualization of hierarchy rule and coercive authority (ibid. 120). In contrast to violence against children, or white racial violence against other groups of different ethnicities, it is violence that is accepted and even celebrated: "Society's acceptance and perpetuation of that violence helps maintain it and makes it difficult to control or eliminate" (ibid. 120-121). In the precapitalistic world, patriarchy permitted men to rule women in their families, shape their identity, and even decide their fate. With this permission, men were allowed to batter their women with no absolute fear of punishment, and they could decide whom their daughters should marry and if they would write or read, etc. (ibid. 121). However, these powers were lost to men under the development of the capitalist nation-state in America. According to hooks, this meant that men no longer had complete authority and control over their women, which also meant that they lost control over their own lives. Nonetheless, they were controlled by the economic needs of capitalism (ibid. 121). As workers, men are daily fed with a fantasy diet of male supremacy and power, even though they are aware of the fact that they only have truly little power. Still, men do not rise up in arms against the economic order or make revolution, as they accept their dehumanization and exploitation out in the public world of work (ibid. 121). The reason why that is not the case is that they have been taught to expect that the private world, their homes, and private lives, will reinstate their sense of power. Furthermore, men are also taught that only they will rule, dominate and control the sphere of

their homes (ibid. 121). In addition, women's entry into the labor force has taken the dominant control over women away from men. Due to this, men rely on the use of violence to maintain and establish a sex-role hierarchy where they are in a dominant position (ibid. 122).

Patricia Hill Collins

Patricia Hill Collins is an American academic that specializes in gender, race, and class. Collins is especially known for her work on black feminism in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), where she describes the journey and explores the words and ideas of Black female intellectuals. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins includes the work of other Black feminist thinkers, such as bell hooks, Alice Walker, and Zora Neale Hurston, who also happens to be part of the work for this project. In addition, Collins is also a distinguished professor of sociology and African American studies at the University of Maryland and Cincinnati. This part of the theory section will examine two chapters from the second part of Collins's book, Core Themes in Black Feminist Theory, as they are going to account for important terms that will function as analytical tools for the two books. The two chapters are Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images, and Black Women's Love Relationships.

Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images

In this chapter, Collins talks about different sets of 'controlling images'[1], that instruct people on how to treat and perceive racial groups. The controlling images stem from the days of slavery, where the dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood. As both black and white women were important to the continuation of slavery, controlling images of black womanhood also functioned to mask the social relations that affected all women (Collins 72). In accord with the cult of true womanhood, "true" women possessed a total of four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (ibid. 72). White women and those of the emerging middle class were the only ones encouraged to aspire to the virtues. On the contrary, African American women encountered a completely different set of controlling images (ibid. 72). According to Collins, the first controlling image applied to African American women is the mammy, the faithful, obedient domestic servant (ibid. 72). The

[1] This term is similar to other terms from other theoretical traditions, such as stereotypes and hetero-images

mammy was created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and to explain black women's long-standing restriction to domestic work. Moreover, the image of the mammy represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate the behavior of all black women: "By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and "family" better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power" (ibid 72.). Although the mammy may be loved and may wield considerable authority in her White "family", she still knows her "place" as the submissive servant (ibid. 72). The image of the mammy is central to intersecting oppressions of gender, race, class, and sexuality (ibid. 73).

Regarding racial oppression, Collins states that controlling images like the mammy seeks to influence black maternal behavior. African American families who are familiar with the skills that are needed for black accommodation, black mothers are encouraged to transmit to their kids the diference behavior that many women are forced to present in their jobs as mammies (ibid. 73). By teaching black children their assigned place within the structures of white power, black women who incorporate the mammy image can potentially become conduits for perpetuating racial oppression (ibid. 73). Employing black women as mammies helps to support the racial superiority of white employers, encouraging especially white middle-class women to identify more closely with the race and class privilege afforded by their husbands, sons, and fathers (ibid. 73). Furthermore, the image of the mammy is viewed as the public face that whites expect black women to assume for them. The mammy also serves a symbolic function, as it maintains oppressions of gender and sexuality (ibid. 73). As opposed to the images of white women, the image of the mammy as the Other represents the oppositional difference between mind/body and culture/nature thought to distinguish black women from everyone (ibid. 73). According to Collins, the mammy image reinforces the ideology of the cult of true womanhood, one where fertility and sexuality are served:

> "Good" White mothers are expected to deny their female sexuality. In contrast, the mammy image is one of an asexual woman, a surrogate mother in blackface whose historical devotion to her White family is now giving way to new expectations (ibid. 74).

In spite of how loved mammies were by their white "families", domestic black women remained poor. The reason why they remained poor, is because they were economically exploited workers in a capitalist political economy (ibid. 74). Since the mammy image itself is not capable to control black women's behavior, it is bound to the creation of the second controlling image – the image of the black matriarch. This second image also fulfills similar functions in explaining the placement of black women in intersecting oppressions (ibid. 75). While the image of the mammy characterizes

the black mother figure in white homes, the matriarch symbolizes the mother figure in black homes. Where the mammy represents the "good" black mother, the matriarch – on the other hand – represents the "bad" black mother (ibid. 75). Identified as overly aggressive, unfeminine women, black matriarchs supposedly emasculated their husbands and lovers, which meant that the men either deserted their women or even refused to commit to marriage with the mothers of their children. The matriarch, also known as the strong woman, serves as a powerful symbol for both black and white women of what possibly can go wrong if the power of white patriarchal is challenged (ibid. 75). Black men reject marrying black women because they claim that black women are less desirable compared to white women because black women are too self-confident (ibid. 75). Just like the mammy, the matriarch is likewise central to intersecting oppressions of gender, class, and race. Taken together, both images leave African American women in an untenable situation.

Aside from the controlling images of the mammy and the matriarch, Collins further presents three controlling images. This next controlling image is referred to as the 'welfare mother'. The image of the welfare mother constitutes a class-specific, controlling image developed for poor, working-class women who use the social welfare benefits entitled by law. According to Collins, there was no need for this stereotype, as long as poor black women were denied the use of social welfare benefits (ibid. 78). The idea behind the welfare mother draws inspiration from the 'breeder woman', which stems from the era of slavery. During slavery, the image of the breeder woman portrayed black women as more suitable for having children, claiming that they were able to produce children as easily as animals (ibid. 78). Similar to the matriarch, the welfare mother is likewise labeled as a bad mother, but in contrast to the matriarch, the welfare mother is not too aggressive - on the contrary, she is not aggressive enough: "While the matriarch's unavailability contributed to her children's poor socialization, the welfare mother's accessibility is deemed the problem" (ibid. 79). This puts the welfare mother into a position where she is being portrayed as someone who avoids work by sitting around and collecting welfare. Due to this, the welfare mother represents yet another failed mammy.

Besides the other controlling images, the black lady later joined as yet another controlling image. However, this image may not appear as a controlling image, only a benign one (ibid. 80). The black lady is someone who stayed in school, worked hard, and because of this, she achieved many things in life. Like the mammy, the black lady is perceived as less feminine, because of their success in competing with men. The black lady has forgotten how to treat men due to their all-consuming jobs, and because of this, they cannot get men to marry them (ibid. 80). The last controlling

image is the jezebel, also known as whore or “hoochie”. This image represents a deviant black female sexuality that originated under slavery when black women were portrayed as “sexually aggressive wet nurses” (ibid. 81). Moreover, the jezebel's function was to put black women into the category of sexually aggressive women and provide a powerful rationale for sexual assaults by white men, which were usually reported by black female slaves (ibid. 81). Taken together, these images help to justify social practices that characterize the matrix of domination in the US.

Black Women’s Love Relationships

In this chapter, Collins includes black feminist and poet, Audre Lorde who states that deep feelings that arouse people to action make up an important source of power: “For Lorde sexuality is a component of the erotic as a source of power in women” (ibid. 150). Furthermore, Lorde suggests that the erotic power is located in women, but it is not solely women who experience these feelings alone. According to Lorde, men too can experience these feelings. Within capitalist marketplace relations, this erotic power is oftentimes sexualized that it becomes routinely misunderstood to a degree that makes people fear deep love (ibid. 150). The experience shared among African American women with pornography, prostitution, and rape manifests how erotic power becomes commodified and utilized by social institutions. Therefore, it is important to look at how black women hold on to this source of individual empowerment and use it to form love relationships with other people (ibid. 150). Further, Collins goes on to explain how all love relationships tap the energy of deep feelings, by implying that not all relationships are the same. These types of relationships can be arranged on a continuum from asexual relationships, to sexualized relationships - those where deep feelings find sexual expression, to those that only reflect “just sex” commodity relations of the capitalist marketplace (ibid. 151).

The type of love that African American women feel for their parents, children, and siblings constitutes love relationships that are not considered sexual. However, love relationships that do encompass sexual expression constitute sexual love relationships (ibid. 151). For many black heterosexual women and men, dominant constructions of black female and black male sexuality oftentimes tend to limit the ability to form nonsexualized, loving friendships: “Love across the color line, where individuals of different “races” fall in love, or across social class categories muddy the waters between asexual friendships and sexualized love relationships” (ibid. 151). The type of love that black women feel for black men, is juxtaposed against what Collins calls ‘the tradition of trouble’. The ways in which black women used to express their love for black men were usually through music and poetry. Playful voices such as Billie Holiday, Jennifer Holliday, etc. identify

relationships between black women and black men as a source of strength, sustenance, and support (ibid. 152). According to Collins, many African American women repudiate feminism because they experience it as being anti-family and against black men. Black women do not want to give up on men, they simply want them to change (ibid. 152). For many years, black women have felt betrayed by black men because they don't treat them right: "More recently, Black women's troubles with Black men have generated anger and, from that anger, self-reflection" (ibid. 152). Understanding this love and tradition of trouble would require assessing the influence of heterosexist, Eurocentric gender ideology - especially ideas about men and women advanced by the ideal of the traditional family on African American men and women (ibid. 152).

Analysis

Before the actual analytical framework of the two novels, a small introduction will occur on how I wish to carry on with the analysis. The analytical framework of the two novels is going to consist of two main parts, where I wish to analyze the novels distinctly and in chronological order. Therefore, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will be the first novel that I am going to analyze, due to the fact that it was published before *The Color Purple*. Throughout the analysis, there will be a focus on inter-sectionality, power, religion, and the overall representation of black women. Furthermore, the work and terminology from the theory section will function as the main tools for the analysis, where theoretical key terms will be used for the different themes that are represented in both pieces. Even though the novels differ in relation to themes, it is important to mention the resemblance that the novels share with each other, as it will also be part of the analytical framework. Each part of the analysis will begin with a short summary of the books, followed by a representation of the different themes that will be used for each novel's work.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

As mentioned in the introduction, the first analysis will be of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, first published in September 1937. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not actually about God in that sense, but merely about the main character Janie Crawford and her journey to find a voice. On this journey, Janie becomes the victim in a dominant male world, where there is no place for a woman's voice, which is why Janie's three marriages do not have a happy ending. However, Janie's marriage to her last husband, Tea Cake, changes her perception of men, because Tea

Cake treats her better than her first two husbands. Despite the fact that their marriage does not end well, Tea Cake turns out to be the only man who gives Janie the chance to enjoy life without being a man's mule. Furthermore, this part of the analysis will deal with topics concerning intersectionality, an analysis of Janie's life, as well as an insight into how Hurston uses spirituality as an important aspect of the novel.

Narrative and structure

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a novel told through two voices, namely an omniscient third-person narrator and the novel's protagonist, Janie. The presence of a third-person narrator means that the narrator has access to the inner lives of all characters in the novel. The function of the narrator then becomes the observer who moves freely from character to character and observes each situation that takes place. The storytelling switches between Janie and the narrator, and unlike Janie and the other characters, the narrator is the only one who does not speak in a southern accent but uses standard English instead. Indeed, this helps the reader to recognize both voices distinctly and creates less confusion. As we are aware of the fact that the novel is a narrative that Janie is sharing with her friend Pheoby, her real-life story is told through flashbacks from the third-person narrator. Reversely, Janie's voice is only used in dialogues, and therefore these cannot be categorized as pure narration. For instance, as illustrated in the following example: "Well, how come yuh didn't come git me?"/"Janie, would you have come if Ah did?" (Hurston 124). In this example, we see how Janie's voice is used as part of a dialogue between herself and Tea Cake.

Essentially, the novel is known for its use of a southern, African American dialect also known as black vernacular English, which for many can be very difficult to read and understand. The dialog in the novel is told through a thick dialect to show how people spoke in the early 1900s, which makes the language unique and different from contemporary language. Hurston's choice to employ an African American dialect allows Janie to get her own voice despite the constant resistance from her husbands, especially Logan and Joe, who persistently try to prevent Janie from having a voice. In his book *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates discusses Hurston's use of language in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a "speakerly text", which is utilized through the employment of oral speech and its linguistic features. According to Gates, the speakerly text is one in which all other elements of structure are belittled, for the reason that the narrative strategy gives attention to its own matter of importance - an importance which is the privileging of oral speech and its linguistic features (Gates 193). Furthermore, Gates states that the narrative voice in the novel is a lyrical, disembodied, and individual voice: "For Hurston, the search for a telling form of language,

indeed the search for a black literary language itself, defines the search for the self " (ibid. 196). The use of direct speech in nearly every character distinguishes the dialectical narration that blends with the personalized thought-language, which is mostly established in Janie's voice, with the third-person omniscient narrator only to draw attention to their poetic and lyrical expressions – as well as the phonological and grammatical features (ibid. 196). In the following section, there will be an example that illustrates how Hurston utilizes both voices:

> Janie came back out front and sat down. She didn't say anything and neither did Joe. But after a while he looked down at his feet and said, "Janie, Ah reckon you better go fetch me dem old black gaiters. Dese tan shoes sets mah feet on fire. Plenty room in 'em, but they hurts regardless" (Hurston 57).

First and foremost, the example indicates who's turn it is to speak and how we as readers can distinguish between the two. Moreover, we also see an example of how some of the words in the direct speech are spelled phonologically, for instance, 'dem' and 'dese' as well as grammatical misspellings including 'sets' and 'hurts'. Thus, it is obvious that these are not spelled wrong by mistake but rather by purpose, as these words portray a characterization of the use of the southern, African American dialect that is used throughout the novel. However, Hurston's novel has received mixed reviews over the past decades, where different critics voice their opinion about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Thus, I wish not to unfold much about the reviews in this section, as they will be used as part of the discussion, one critical viewpoint is worth bringing up. The American author and musician, Richard Wright was one of many who criticized Hurston for her novel. Allegedly, Wright's thoughts on Hurston's novel were that it lacked focus on the issues of race as it instead focused on feminism. Due to this, Wright believes that the novel carries no theme and no message (Wright 25). Further critical reviews on Hurston will be discussed in the discussion section.

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is especially present when looking at traditional gender roles. The novel explores gender roles as one of its primary themes, especially the ways in which ideas about stereotypical relationships between men and women are used to empower men and disempower women. However, it is not only the men who believe in the traditional gender roles, where men are seen as strong and women as obedient. For instance, Janie's grandmother, Nanny, does not believe that black women can live an independent life without a man by their side, which is why she insists on getting Janie married. Nanny insists on getting Janie

married due to Janie's kiss with the young man Johnny Taylor, whom she kissed at the age of sixteen – an age when she started to feel sexual desires. Due to this incident, Nanny sees no other option but to marry Janie to the older and financially stable Logan Killicks: "Yeah, Janie, youse got yo' womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away" (Hurston 12). As a former slave, Nanny knows what it is like to live a life under brutally poor conditions, and therefore she does not care whether Janie loves the man that she is going to marry. For Nanny, it is the financial status that is most important, because she wants to make sure that Janie is going to have a good and financially secured life - hence why she does not believe that love matters in marriage:

> If you don't want him, you sho oughta. Heah you is wid de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road and… Lawd have mussy! Dat's de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love! (ibid. 23).

With this quote, Nanny is trying to emphasize that Janie should be thankful for what this marriage has brought her and that she should not worry about her missing love for Logan. In her marriage with Logan, it becomes clear that this is not the equality that she has hoped for. Janie believed that she would love Logan once they got married even though she refused to marry him in the first place: "Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant" (ibid. 21). It is obvious that Janie needs someone who can love and respect her – in contrast, Logan needs someone who can help him with the outside work on the farm. For Logan, the perception of love is giving Janie a mule to help him plow his 60 acres of land: "Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah'm talkin' 'bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im" (ibid. 27). Due to the fact that Logan is a farmer, he spends most of his time outside, whereas Janie spends most of her time on the inside taking care of the domestic work.

Janie believes that men and women have their own proper places in a marriage; the men should be outside taking care of the physical work, such as plowing, and women should be inside taking care of the practicalities, such as cleaning and cooking: "You don't need mah help out dere, Logan. Youse in yo' place and Ah'm in mine" (ibid. 31). According to Logan, women do not have a particular place because they are expected to be wherever their husbands need them: "You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick" (ibid. 31). With this statement, Logan establishes the general view of black women in relationships with traditional gender roles where men dominate women. Janie's way of responding back to Logan triggers him to

use his male dominance to show that he is in charge of her. The general portrayal of male dominance in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* shows how men used dominance over their women to make them feel less worthy because it constitutes the norm. According to Crenshaw, men consider their homes as a safe haven from the insults in a racist society, which is why they use their homes as a place to show that they are the ones who dominate (Crenshaw 1257). In addition, it is clear that both Logan and Janie have their own strong opinions about gender roles when it comes to marriage, and therefore they often tend to disagree with each other.

In the following example, Logan expects Janie to be of more help in the fields, as he wants her to help him carry the wood like his old wife, who allegedly had no problem with chopping and carrying wood: "If Ah kin haul de wood heah and chop it fuh yuh, look lak you oughta be able tuh tote it inside. Mah fust wife never bothered me 'bout choppin' no wood nohow" (Hurston 26). This way Logan increases the number of tasks that he wants Janie to do, such as cooking and cleaning, as well as chopping wood only to make life as easy as possible for himself. Furthermore, the example illustrates Logan's point of view of Janie, as it is obvious that he treats her as a house servant and not like his wife. Felling threatened that Janie might leave him, he begins to insult and belittle Janie in desperation only to save his pride in front of her.

> A whole lot of mens will grin in yo' face, but dey ain't gwine tuh work and feed yuh. You won't git far and you won't be long, when dat big gut reach over and grab dat little one, you'll be too glad to come back here (ibid. 30).

Logan's way of responding to Janie illustrates how he uses his male dominance to prevent Janie from leaving, especially by reassuring her that she will return back to him as he is certain that she will never find a man like himself. In other words, Logan tries to manipulate Janie due to the fear of feeling emasculated, which would then prove his lack of dominance. However, it did not take much time before Janie met her second husband, Joe Starks, to whom she made a promise that she would elope and start a new life together. Like Logan, Joe (Jody) likes to think highly of himself and expects Janie to think of him in the same way. In Green Cove Springs Joe got himself elected as the town mayor, because the town, according to Joe, needed someone who could tell the people what to do:

> There was something about Joe Starks that cowed the town. It was not because of physical fear. He was no fist fighter. His bulk was not even imposing as men go. Neither was it because he was more literate than the rest. Something else made men give way before him.

> He had a bow-down command in his face, and every step he took made the thing more tangible (ibid. 47).

This is an indication of Joe's extraordinary self-control that grants him access to dominate and have power over Janie and the rest of the town. The most obvious object of this control is Janie who has become a victim of his male dominance. Due to his position of power and control, Joe lives up to the traditional/stereotypical gender roles, which is especially expressed in his way of behaving towards Janie. At the opening of Joe and Janie's new store, people wanted to hear a few words from Janie after Joe made a little announcement. Nevertheless, Joe turned down the suggestion and insulted Janie in front of the other people with a statement suggesting that Janie is not suited to make a speech: "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (ibid. 43). By making this statement, Joe shows that he finds it easy to belittle Janie in front of other people and that he does not care about her feelings. The fact that Janie does not stand up for herself to Joe portrays her as weak and fragile, which is also how Hurston presents the overall portrayal of how men and women inhabit separate roles.

Moreover, Hurston displays how men use their superiority over women as an attempt to force dem into roles of submissiveness. An example of this takes place when Joe forbids Janie to indulge in conversations with the men on the porch because he does not want her to talk after trashy people, as it is not the proper thing to do as the wife of a mayor: "You'se Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can't see what uh woman uh yo' stability would want tuh be treasurin' all dat gum-grease from folks dat don't even own de house dey sleep in" (ibid. 54). Another reason why Joe is not pleased about the idea of Janie talking to the men on the porch is because of his jealousy. Janie was forced to wear a head-rag inside of the store to prevent the other men from looking at her hair. Even though she found it very uncomfortable, Janie had no other choice because of Joe, who had made it very clear that she was not allowed to show off her hair in the store. One night Joe caught one of the men at the store and saw how he brushed the back of his hand across Janie's loose end of her braid without Janie knowing: "Joe was at the back of the store and Walter didn't see him. He felt like rushing forth with the meat knife and chopping off the offending hand. That night he ordered Janie to tie up her hair around the store" (ibid. 55). This is a significant example of how Joe controls Janie through the use of his male power, which makes it obvious that he enjoys finding himself in the role of the male-dominant in their marriage.

Janie's marriage to Joe has made her understand that Joe is never going to love and respect

her the way she wants to be loved. Joe never married Janie out of love, he only married her so that she could be his appendage and nothing more. In joe's opinion, women need to be told what to do because they cannot think for themselves and therefore they need a man's mind to think for them. A time came when Janie realized that she had to fight back against Joe. As a result, Joe slapped Janie in the face in the kitchen: "he slapped Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains before he stalked on back to the store" (ibid. 72). Janie's decision to fight back and stand up for herself is the reason why she got physically abused as a punishment for stepping over the line. The use of physical abuse is very common in relationships with traditional gender roles, where men exert their dominance over their women by using violence and in worst cases raping them. Furthermore, this makes Janie a victim of sexism because of the physical abuse and because she lives in a marriage where the male gender is intrinsically superior to the female gender. Ever since Janie realized that she needed a voice to stand up against Joe, she ultimately rebelled against Joe's suppression of her. By doing so, Janie knocked down his secure sense of his own power and destroyed his will to live. Joe's death did not come as a surprise to Janie or the rest of the town, and even though she was upset that he was gone, she was happy about the idea of finally being a free woman: "Tain't dat Ah worries over Joe's death, Pheoby. Ah jus' loves dis freedom" (ibid. 93). The night after Joe's funeral Janie burnt every one of her head rags and walked around the house with her hair in a thick braid, which is an indication of Janie's final release from Joe's male dominance. However, it did not take long before Janie engaged in a new relationship with the young and poor Tea Cake.

In comparison to Logan and Joe, Tea Cake is the only man who loves Janie, and therefore this relationship revolves around mutual love and affection, which is something that was missing in her marriages with Logan and Joe. Only with Tea Cake, does Janie begin to discover what it means to determine her own gender roles and to have the freedom to explore the gender roles. In addition, this is in sharp contrast to her marriages with her two previous husbands. Tea Cake does not seem to have predetermined views on gender roles between husbands and wives, hence why Janie has the opportunity to explore both gender roles. This is especially evident in chapter 14 when Tea Cake encourages Janie to shoot with a gun: "Every day they were practicing. Tea Cake made her shoot at little things just to give her good aim. Pistol and shut gun and rifle" (ibid. 131). Moreover, these are weapons that are typically associated with men because they are perceived as strong and powerful. However, this is not Tea Cake's understanding and therefore he wants to show Janie that she – despite her gender – can also handle a weapon. It would be possible to argue that Janie's freedom

could emasculate Tea Cake because her role as the woman of the house no longer only revolves around female chores but also chores that are most frequent for men: “Sometimes she’d straighten out the two-room house and take the rifle and have fried rabbit for supper when Tea Cake got home. She didn’t leave him itching and scratching in his work clothes, either” (ibid. 132). With this statement, Janie is allowed to hunt, which is a role traditionally performed by the male. Also, she still cleans his clothes and cooks dinner for him, which are viewed as activities that are typically performed by women. As this is in sharp contrast to Janie’s previous perception of the traditional gender roles from her previous marriages, it allows her to discover new sides of herself.

Reversely, Tea Cake takes part in the female gender role by helping Janie out with dinner which is evident in the following statement: “Then Tea Cake would help get supper afterwards” (ibid. 133). This is a significant example of equality between a husband and a wife who complement each other by taking part in both gender roles. This free flow of gender roles between Janie and Tea Cake reveals that Tea Cake does not live up to the stereotypical gender roles. However, due to the fear of losing Janie to another man, Tea Cake’s behavior starts to change and affects his relationship with Janie. More specifically, jealousy becomes a constant aspect of their marriage, which ultimately turns into domestic violence:

> Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss (ibid. 147).

With this statement, we see how Tea Cake uses violence to respond to the threat that another man, Mrs. Turner’s brother, could potentially be the one to win the endearment of Janie. Moreover, Tea Cake and his friend Sop-de-Bottom do not see women as humans but as property and as something they can whip in order to reassure their ownership. This means that Janie is not a person - she is objectified as something that is in the ownership of Tea Cake. The use of violence against Janie is Tea Cake’s only way of reassuring her that she only belongs to him, which puts Janie back to being the victim of physical abuse. Sop-de-Bottom thinks that Tea Cake is a lucky man because he gets to see every place where Tea Cake has put his hands on Janie: “Uh person can see every place you hit her. Ah bet she never raised her hand tuh hit yuh back, neither” (ibid. 147). Moreover, this illustrates that both Tea Cake and Sop-de-Bottom have accepted Eurocentric gender ideology concerning femininity and masculinity and have made sure to maintain it (Collins 160). Also, it is important to keep in mind that the violence takes place in a relationship where love is still present, as might be

one of the reasons why Janie does not react to the abuse by Tea Cake. In addition, this illuminates how power as domination, in this incident gender oppression structured through gender ideology together with class oppression, has managed to annex the power of the erotic in Tea Cake and Janie's marriage (ibid. 160).

According to Tea Cake, he would never beat up Janie for no reason, but because of Mrs. Turner's brother, Tea Cake uses the power of male dominance to show that he has ownership over Janie: "Ah didn't whup Janie 'cause *she* done nothin'. Ah beat her tuh show them Turners who is boss" (Hurston 148). Janie and Tea Cake's marriage is a representation of the link between power and sexuality and the potential for domination. Due to this, these are some of the most prominent themes that Hurston puts her focus on throughout the novel. The sudden switch in Tea Cake's personality makes Janie realize that she is back to being the submissive wife, similar to what we experience in her marriages with Logan and Joe. Moreover, this proves that even a great and selfless love cannot guarantee a complete absence from social hierarchies, where the male is granted a position on top and the female at the bottom of the hierarchy. More specifically, this means that Janie – even in her most pleasing moment of love - is not free from the oppressive aspects of her marriage that serve to make her live under male oppression.

The life of Janie

Thus far the analysis has focused on examples that demonstrate how the novel presents intersectionality in all of Janie's marriages. From this, I have come to realize that Janie has spent most of her life fighting for herself to grow into a strong and independent woman. Growing up without a mother and a father, Janie's life has revolved around her grandmother who has been looking out for her until the day she passed away, and therefore she has not had any other family to depend on besides her grandmother. Janie's grandmother had a house in the backyard of the white family that she was working for, which is also the place where Janie was born. As she spent most of her childhood together with the white family's kids, it made Janie think that she was one of them until the day when she looked at a picture and realized that she could not recognize herself: "Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me' " (ibid. 9). Up until this situation, Janie thought of herself as white and it was only when she saw the picture that she realized she was colored. This kind of thinking illustrates the issue of race that categorizes Janie as the other. For six years Janie has been a stranger to herself, as she has

never known her racial identity. Therefore, the picture becomes a real-life moment where Janie sees a reflection of herself, like looking into a mirror, to discover her real skin color: “Aw, aw! Ah’m colored!” (ibid. 9). Janie’s statement shows that the realization of her reflection in the picture shocked her since she has never perceived herself as a black person.

Being a child of mixed race makes Janie’s birth a result of race victimization. This is connected to the issue concerning Janie’s parents, because her father was a white rapist, and her mother was the child of a white slave owner and a black slave woman. Nevertheless, Janie never had a relationship with her mother because she ran away and therefore she did not know her very well, except for the stories Nanny told about her. It was this way that Janie found out that her mother was raped at the age of seventeen and that her father was white: “Dat school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long, and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before day” (ibid. 19). This example illustrates that Janie’s mother was a victim of abuse and sexism by a man who took full advantage of her for the sake of his pleasure. In this case, it is relevant to refer to one of hooks’ statements regarding violence between the powerful and the powerless (hooks 118). In this matter, it is evident that Janie’s father is the powerful and Janie’s mother the powerless because he uses his male supremacy as an excuse to take full advantage of her. The fact that Nanny and Janie’s mother were also victims of abuse and male domination, shows that all acts of violence are linked to men, which makes them the prime example of sexist stereotypes that suggest that men are violent and that women are victims and non-violent (ibid.).

At the beginning of the novel, Janie struggles to find out who she is and what she wants, but as she starts to open up, we come to find out that she wants independence and someone to love. As most of the analysis has established thus far, neither love nor independence is important for any of Janie’s three husbands, due to that they have a completely different perception of marriage and gender roles. This is most evident in her marriages with Logan and Joe who denies her the right to do what she wants and therefore treat her as property. Besides controlling her, these men have purposely kept Janie away from anything that could be a potential threat to themselves, such as feeling emasculated and not being able to dominate her life. In particular, Joe does not let her participate in much other than being in the store all day, which means that he excludes her from the rest of the community. Only when Janie realizes that she has a voice, does she stand up for herself from all the men, and by doing so, she starts to develop together with the construction of her identity: “She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them” (Hurston 72). We first notice that Janie’s independence starts to grow when she leaves Joe. Due to the way he treated her,

Janie gradually begins to gain an inner strength, which grows even more when Joe becomes sick. Not only does she gain strength, but she also becomes more independent.

As Joe's bad health only got worse over time, it eventually meant that he had to stay in bed all day and stay away from work. At this time, Janie and Joe slept in separate rooms after the incident where he slapped her in the face had taken place: "The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never went back inside the bedroom again" (ibid. 71). During his last days of being alive, Joe denies Janie to come to visit him in his room, which she only chooses to ignore. In the room, Janie begins to reveal things to Joe that she has never confronted him with:

> You done lived wid me for twenty years and you don't half know me atall. And you could have but you was so busy worshippin' de works of yo' own hands, and cuffin' folks around in their minds till you didn't see uh whole heap uh things yuh could have (ibid. 86).

With this statement, Janie confronts Joe about their marriage and how she has felt ignored by him over the last couple of years, which he has spent on himself and his work. In this case, it is worth arguing that Joe never accepted Janie for who she was, as he only married her because he needed someone who could obey him and his decisions. Ultimately, Janie finds strength in Joe's death as she comprehends that he was the one who took her freedom away. After many years as passive and submissive, Janie returns to Eatonville as a strong and powerful woman walking down the street in her overalls. The overalls represent Janie's development and function as a new symbol of her identity: "What she doin coming back here in dem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? – Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in?" (ibid. 2). Remembering what Janie used to look like when she was married to Joe Starks, the people of Eatonville started to make killing tools out of laughs with their burning statements about the way she was dressed. Also, the overalls function as a symbol of equality between Tea Cake and Janie. Considering that overalls used to be an outfit that only men would wear, Tea Cake does not prohibit Janie from wearing the same clothes as him because it never bothered him when she did something that was considered to be unusual for her gender. Regardless of what happened between herself and Tea Cake, Janie never stopped expressing her love for him: "He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace" (ibid. 193). With this statement, Janie realizes that Tea Cake gave her more than she could have ever imagined and that he will always be with her no matter where she is. Ultimately, she got to live out her dream with Tea Cake, and now she feels at peace.

Spirituality

Zora Neal Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* on her trip to the Caribbean in 1636 as she was collecting the ethnographic materials for a new book that she later published as *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (Jennings et al**.** 29). *Tell My Horse* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* articulate Hurston's analysis by examining the conceptions of sex, race, nature, and African spirituality also known as voodoo. In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston describes some of the most important aspects of the voodoo religion: "Voodoo ritual and belief offer black women an alternative spiritual model that counters the colonial hierarchies that operate within the denigration of black women as nature incarnate" (ibid. 29). Moreover, nature and female sexuality is considered sacred in the voodoo religion, and much like the Caribbean black women, who are formatted by different kinds of voodoo rituals, Janie practices her rituals through her voodoo vision of the pear tree. The employment of the pear tree symbolizes Janie as a representation of her dreams and aspirations, as well as her relationship with nature, which is illustrated at the beginning of the second chapter: "*Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered*, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches" (Hurston 8). In this example, Hurston describes Janie's relationship with nature by using the tree as a metaphor for her life. Janie uses the pear tree as a place where she can explore the connection between herself and the natural world, along with love and sexual desire. Thus, the vision of nature as a place of fertile possibility persuades Janie to experience herself as a sexually fulfilled woman:

> She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight (ibid. 11).

In this paragraph, Hurston describes Janie's first sexual experience through the imagination of Johnny Taylor. From a symbolic point of view, the tree and the bees represent nature as a sacred place where Janie is free from the real world. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning the erotic language in this paragraph and how the tree, through the erotic language, represents Janie's sexuality. Finally, these examples demonstrate how Hurston uses Afro-Caribbean spiritual beliefs throughout the novel.

The Color Purple

This part of the analysis is going to focus on the novel *The Color Purple*, first published in 1982 by Alice Walker. First and foremost, the analysis is going to open up with a short summary of the novel, and secondly, it is going to introduce the topics that will be the focus points of the overall examination of the analysis. To begin, Walker's novel is mostly known for its portrayal of the female black life in the United States during the 1930s - a time when men dominated women because they believed that they were superior to the female gender in every possible aspect. Among others, the novel addresses issues of sexism, rape, and physical abuse, which is especially expressed through the protagonist, Celie, who is a young, poor, and uneducated girl living in rural Georgia with her family. From the first chapter of the novel, Celie starts writing letters to God because it helps her survive the sexual abuse of her stepfather, Alphonso, who started to abuse Celie at the age of fourteen. Besides her stepfather's physical abuse, the novel focuses on Celie's arranged marriage to Mr.___ and her relationship with some of the other black female characters, especially her younger sister Nettie, to whom she also starts to write letters in the hope of finding her.

Firstly, the analysis will examine the novel's narrative and structure. Secondly, the analysis will look into the intersectional parameters in the novel and examine how this affects Celie and some of the other women. Additionally, there will be an analysis of Celie and her relationship with Mr.___, followed by an analysis of the relationship between Celie, Shug, and Sofia where the main focus is going to be on sisterhood. In relation to sisterhood, there will be an examination regarding controlling images, where I wish to look at some of the reasons why black women are labeled through some of these images. Lastly, I will examine the title and look into the symbolism of the color purple.

Narrative and structure

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel, which is written as a set of letters through the use of a first-person narrative. The structure is composed of short chapters that explain Celie's life in America and later switch the point of view to Nettie's life in Africa. The first half of the novel illustrates letters by Celie that she addresses to God where she talks about her life and the people in it. Furthermore, the second part of the novel showcases an exchange of letters written between Celie and Nettie. Walker's use of the epistolary structure is combined with diary entries, which gives the reader a sense of immediacy. Moreover, Walker's use of two first-person narrators means that the novel deals with themes told from two viewpoints, which allows the reader to interpret the narration

through more than one perspective. In this matter, it is also important to mention that the novel uses internal focalization, meaning that the narrator says what the character knows. Despite the fact that both Celie and Nettie are equal, one would argue that Celie is the main protagonist in the novel as her story comes across as more personal, but also in relation to the number of letters that Celie has written in comparison to Nettie, proves that Celie is the main protagonist. In essence, Celie's letters to God function as a safe space for Celie where she is able to express her thoughts and emotions without being judged. At the beginning of the novel, Celie initially addresses her letters to God to search for answers to why she has become the victim of sexual abuse. Later on, Walker removes Celie from this style of narrative to a simpler narrative that does not revolve around her past but rather about the people that are part of her present.

Nonetheless, Walker puts her readers on a test in regards to her use of the implemented dialect, which means that the readers are required to figure out the meaning in order to get a full understanding of the story. The language in the novel is written in black vernacular English, which for many can be very difficult to understand, hence why the reader is put up for a test while reading *The Color Purple*. Black vernacular English is also known as African American English, which is: "a variety of American English spoken chiefly by African Americans" (Merriam Webster). This type of dialect is characterized by having its own sound and vocabulary system, which is different from those of Standard American English. The use of black vernacular English is especially evident in Celie's letters, where the expressive writing style draws upon the heavy dialect. For instance, if we examine the following example, it is clear to see that the language is marked by black vernacular English: "But I don't have to ast Sofia" (Walker 176). In this example, the word 'ask' is spelled phonetically to mimic the sound of the speech to make it sound more realistic. The next example is going to showcase yet another feature of black vernacular English: "She say, My first step from the old white man was trees" (ibid. 176). Here, the plural form of the verb 'says' has an irregular ending, meaning that "she says" becomes "she say", which shows that the rules of grammar in black vernacular English are different from the rules of Standard American English.

However, one will notice that the language in Celie's letters is different in comparison to the language in Nettie's Letters. Walker portrays Nettie's character as someone who is clever and educated, hence why the language, contrary to Celie's, is expressed through Standard American English. This is especially evident in her writing skills where she has a tendency to use more complex and formal words: "We made fun of them, but we were riveted on their adventures, and on the ladies' telling of them. They were so staid looking. So proper" (ibid. 211). If we compare the

language in this sentence with the language in Celie's letters, it shows that Nettie is more refined in her language, thus making it easier to read and understand. Whereas Celie's use of dialect is much more difficult to understand as it represents the language of her community and social status, Nettie's American English shows that she speaks correct English, which represents her status as an educated woman in American society. Moreover, this proves a variety in Walker's use of language throughout the novel, where she removes Nettie from the dialect of black vernacular English. Instead, she uses Nettie's educational background to show that school has taught Nettie to speak standard English and for that reason, she does not speak in a black dialect like the rest of the characters in the novel.

Intersectionality

The most prominent aspects of intersectionality in *The Color Purple* are those concerning gender roles, race, and sexuality. The novel portrays a stereotypical view of male and female gender roles in relation to the hierarchy scale, which grants the male gender its position of power and dominance and women as passive and submissive. As mentioned, Celie comes from a home of abuse and sexual oppression that during this time period was normalized because of the norm constituting traditional gender roles: "First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it" (Walker 3). This example brings up themes concerning sexual oppression along with incest as Celie's stepfather tells her to get used to being sexually abused. Moreover, this indicates how Celie's stepfather finds pleasure in taking full sexual advantage of his daughter without feeling guilty for his actions. The abuse makes Celie an obvious victim of sexism for the reason that her stepfather has taken full control of her body, which brings Celie into a powerless position. As a result, Celie got pregnant twice by her stepfather who removed the children without Celie's permission, leaving Celie with the thought that the kids were sold or even killed. Alphonso's abusive behavior towards Celie is one way in which Walker depicts the issues of sexism. The idea that one person can treat the other person poorly and from a superior point of view because of gender, shows that men looked at women as the weaker gender and therefore treated them as a piece of property.

Furthermore, Alphonso's sexist behavior continues until his death, but a significant example of his poor behavior is the day he decided to negotiate a marriage with Celie to Mr___: "But I

can let you have Celie. She the oldest anyway. She ought to marry first. She ain't fresh tho, but I specs you know that" (ibid. 9). Mr___ 's intention was never to marry Celie because he does not find her as attractive as Nettie, but Alphonso does not want to give Nettie away to Mr___ as she is too young. Despite her look, Mr___ agrees to marry Celie only to have someone to take care of his children since his old wife had passed away: "Mr___ say, That cow still coming?" (ibid. 13). The fact that Mr.___ refers to Celie as a cow shows that he thinks poorly of her and in that way makes her inferior. In their marriage, Mr.___ does as he pleases with Celie where he beats her like an animal and treats her like an object: "Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr___ say, Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn" (ibid. 23). According to Mr___ these are sensible reasons that justify an excuse for his poor behavior towards Celie. Needless to say, Mr___ 's behavior makes him live up to the traditional gender roles, especially when he beats Celie as punishment whenever she goes against him. Celie's reaction to the physical abuse is very different from the other women, who, unlike Celie, fight back to avoid sexist treatment. Celie on the other hand remains passive and submissive as she chooses to stay in her social position and as a result, this portrays Celie as weak and fragile.

In her marriage with Mr___, Celie develops a form of defense mechanism that functions to mentally protect her from the physical abuse. This appears in the following example where Mr___ beats the children with a belt: "It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man" (ibid. 23). Saying that she is a tree - unable to speak and move - prevents her from reacting to the beating, because she is afraid that Mr___ will potentially hurt her as well. In this matter, it would be relevant to include Crenshaw's statement regarding help from the police, as it is similar to Celie's case. In situations involving domestic violence, women are resistant to call for help from the police, due to the fear of potentially bringing their private lives under the control and scrutiny of the police (Crenshaw 1257). Even though the novel does not indicate that Celie considers calling for help, it is still relevant to mention that she, like other black women, would also be resistant to calling for help.

Unlike Celie, Shug Avery, Mr___'s lover, appears as the complete opposite in comparison to Celie's character. What distinguishes Shug Avery from Celie is that she does not allow anyone, especially not a man, to control her. Instead, she allows herself to live in freedom and not by the norm concerning the traditional gender roles. The relationship between Shug Avery and Mr___ is quite unusual because it deviates from the traditional gender roles and at the same time creates a big contrast between Mr___'s marriage with Celie. The main reason for the contrast in Mr___'s

relationship with Shug Avery in comparison to his marriage with Celie is that Shug Avery is the only woman he has ever loved: "I love Shug Avery. Always have, always will. I should have married her when I had the chance" (Walker 53). In the novel, Walker presents Shug Avery as the woman that all men want and as the woman all women despise. Shug Avery knows that Mr___ will always choose her over Celie and therefore she is not afraid of losing him. In this matter, it is Mr___ who appears as the weak and powerless whereas Shug Avery appears as the strong and powerful. Moreover, this type of relationship is similar to Harpo and Sofia's where we likewise experience a deviation from the traditional gender roles. As the son of Mr___, Harpo is used to a life where the man is always in charge of everything, and since this is inexact in his own marriage, Harpo struggles to adjust to his role as the man of the house as Sofia constantly challenges him.

Sofia challenges Harpo in many different aspects, but the utmost is that she does not allow him to put her into the role of being passive and submissive, which is what bothers Harpo the most:" But not Sofia. She do what she want, don't pay me no mind at all. I try to beat her, she black my eyes" (ibid. 60-61). With this example, it is clear that Sofia does not let Harpo subdue her, and when he does, she fights back. Ever since he was a young boy, Harpo has observed the marriage between Celie and his father, due to this, Harpo struggles to find out why Sofia does not obey him in the same way Celie does with Mr___: "When Pa tell you to do something, you do it, he say. When he say not to, you don't. You don't do what he say, he beat you" (ibid. 60). With this statement, Harpo refers to the ways in which Mr___ subdues Celie who, unlike Sofia, does not resist, because she is afraid that he will punish her even harder. Celie admits to Sofia that she is jealous of the fact that Sofia knows how to fight against a man. However, Sofia does not fight because she enjoys it, she does it because she had to protect herself from the men in her family:

> All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. She let out her breath. I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me (ibid. 39).

This example is a great way of establishing the fact that Sofia is a fearless woman, but at the same time, she is also mindful of the power relations that distinguish men from women as she grew up in a household with traditional gender roles. Thus, Sofia refuses to accept the power relations in her own marriage, which is why her marriage with Harpo is a constant battle for power. In this case, it is possible to argue that the constant fights between Harpo and Sofia portray Harpo as weak and powerless. Sofia emasculates Harpo by depriving him of his male dominance, which means that he

does not live up to the traditional gender role of the male dominant. The general representation of gender roles in their marriage is that Sofia appears as masculine and Harpo as feminine. We see several examples of both characters in roles of the opposite gender. In letter 28, Celie captures Sofia in the middle of work on the roof of Sofia and Harpo's house: "I go visit Sofia, she still working on the roof. The darn thing leak, she say. She out to the woodpile making shingles. She put a big square piece of wood on the chopping block and chop, chop, she make big flat shingles" (ibid. 62). In this incident, Sofia proves that she is not afraid of what used to be considered a man's job and hard work in general. This happens to be one of several examples that present Sofia from a masculine point of view.

Reversely, Harpo has taken on the role of what used to be considered a woman's job. This is expressed through his enjoyment of doing domestic work, especially when it comes to cooking and cleaning, and taking care of things around the house. In fact, Harpo seems to enjoy domestic work more than Sofia, who, unlike Harpo, likes to be out in the fields and fool around with the animals (ibid. 57). In comparison to Harpo, Mr___ has never washed a dish in his entire life or done anything that is considered to be a woman's job. Mr___ believes that a man's only way of making his wife listen to him is through a good sound of beating: "Well how you specs to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating" (ibid. 35). It is no secret that Mr___ holds on to the stereotypical mindset concerning traditional gender roles, and therefore wants to make sure that Harpo maintains the same mindset. Also, it is worth mentioning that Mr___ himself comes from a home of oppression, which explains his controlling and abusive behavior towards women. Mr___'s father is the reason why Mr___did did not marry Shug Avery, as she did not live up to the expectations to be a submissive wife. As a result, Mr___ got married to a woman named Annie Julia because she was the woman that his father wanted him to marry: "I didn't want her. I wanted Shug. But my daddy was the boss" (ibid. 245). This shows that Mr___ himself used to be a victim of intersectional oppression, which is similar to the way in which he tries to control Harpo and teach him how to use violence as punishment with women. However, Sofia rejects living by the rules of a man and the overall stereotypical beliefs that were set to suppress the lives of black women. In fact, it is Sofia's refusal to be controlled and belittled that makes it impossible for Harpo to live up to the traditional gender role of the male dominant.

Moreover, the novel also exposes issues regarding race. The most prominent victim of racism is Sofia, who faces the consequences of being a black woman during a time when only whites

were allowed to have a voice. When considering that the novel takes place in the rural South of Georgia, we understand why racism was a big issue for African Americans - especially women. A prominent example would be when the mayor and his wife ask Sofia to work for them as their housemaid. Alas, the conversation turns into an altercation as Sofia begins to talk rudely at the mayor's wife – as a punishment, the mayor slaps Sofia in the face for disrespecting his wife (ibid. 81). Subsequently, the situation escalates when Sofia starts to attack the mayor for slapping her in the face, but what she did not realize was that her actions almost got her killed: "They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just about the color of a eggplant" (ibid. 82). This incident sentenced Sofia to twelve years of work in jail because the police charged her with assaulting the mayor and his wife. The only reason why they assumed that Sofia would be interested in working for them as a maid, is because she is black and a woman, hence why Sofia got angry and offended. Therefore, it is safe to say, that Sofia's anger functions as resistance against racial discrimination. Unlike Sofia, the mayor, and his wife got to walk away as free people, not solely because of their positions in the social hierarchy but because they are white. No matter the situation, Sofia would never be able to get a fair chance against a white man because of her gender and the color of her skin, which proves that Sofia is a victim of intersectional oppression. In addition, this incident is also connected to the issues regarding political intersectionality, as the police disregard that the mayor slapped Sofia in the face, which means that they deliberately ignore intersectional issues concerning Sofia's case. When Sofia got out of jail, she was forced to take the job as the housemaid for the mayor and his wife. One day Miss Millie, the mayor's wife, asked Sofia to teach her how to drive a car, but when Sofia sat on the seat next to Miss Millie it became a problem: "Finally she say, Sofia, with a little laugh, This *is* the South" (ibid. 97). With this statement, Miss Millie makes sure that Sofia is aware that she cannot sit next to her, because she is black and therefore she has to get in the backseat of the car. The main reason why Sofia cannot sit next to Miss Millie is due to the Jim Crow laws that prohibited black people from the same rights as white people.

Furthermore, the novel refers to other elements concerning racism and white supremacy. For instance, when Mary Agnes, Harpo's new girlfriend, agreed to go to jail to try to get Sofia out, she meets with the white prison warden. For the occasion, Mary Agnes dressed like a white woman, to try to make it easier to negotiate with the warden, who is in fact Mary Agnes's uncle. The situation takes a turn when the warden begins to lay hands on her and then chose to rape her in his office. The warden sees nothing wrong in raping his own niece, who unlike him is black, and

therefore thinks that his white supremacy gives him the right to rape her. Yet again this brings up themes concerning incest as we experienced with Celie and the trauma she experienced when she was raped by her stepfather. Ultimately, this indicates that *The Color Purple* defines racism as white supremacy against black inferiority.

The life of Celie

Thus far, the analysis has focused on intersectional parameters and examined how these have affected Celie and some of the other women. Ever since her adolescence, Celie has been the victim of sexism and physical abuse, and because of this Celie's role as a black woman has turned into the state of being passive and submissive. Nevertheless, Celie is constantly reminded that she is ugly and stupid by both her stepfather and Mr___, who purposely try to subdue her with hurtful comments. With these comments, Mr___ and Celie's stepfather devalue her worth only to make her believe that she is worthless, which explains why her self-esteem is affected by insecurity. Celie's stepfather never cared about her feelings and things that she was passionate about, such as going to school: "The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never care that I love it" (Walker 11). Besides taking advantage of her body, Alphonso takes away Celie's dream about getting an education because he thinks that she is too dumb to stay in school. Instead, he puts all his hope into Nettie. This way Alphonso deprives Celie to get a chance to become successful and experience the world through different aspects outside the home.

Eventually, Celie decides that her only way of surviving the abuse is to make herself invisible and silent from anything that Mr___ tries to do to her. In this way, Celie becomes a powerless object in her marriage with Mr___, as she is aware that he treats her more like a slave and less as a wife. The reason why Celie is hesitant to resist and fight back is due to her lack of self-esteem that she needs in order to gain a sense of self where she can use her voice and be independent. Slowly, we notice a change in Celie's behavior after she starts to spend more time with Shug Avery, who encourages Celie to become a strong and independent woman like herself – one that is not afraid of standing up against a man's words. Moreover, Shug helps Celie to discover the reason for Nettie's silence, as it turns out that Mr___ has been hiding Nettie's letters to Celie in his trunk. Once Celie found out that Mr___ had been hiding her letters from Nettie, she instantly rebelled against him: "Naw, I think I feel better if I kill him, I say. I feels sickish. Numb, now" (ibid. 129). Celie is mad at Mr___ for hiding the letters from Nettie for so many years because he has given himself the right

to deliberately violate her privacy. Reversely, Mr___ hides the letters from Celie to hurt both her and Nettie, as Mr___ is still angry about how he never got to marry Nettie, and therefore he punishes Celie by hiding the letters from her. Moreover, the letters prove to have major importance for Celie because they help her find out that her children are safe and alive, which gives Celie renewed hope for a better future (ibid. 133).

Furthermore, it is also interesting to look at Celie's relationship with God as well as her perception of him. In the first letter in the novel, Celie addresses the letter to God, which she continuously do in most of the letters. The reason why she addresses the letters to God is that he is the only one that listens whenever Celie needs someone to talk to during the most difficult of times. However, in a discussion with Shug Avery, Celie states that God is like any other man, and since she already has issues with the men in her life she's now also having issues with God: "Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgitful and lowdown" (ibid. 173). With this statement, Celie states that God is no different from the men that she knows, and therefore there is no difference between being a man or a God since they all treat women the same. Further, Celie continues to express her dissatisfaction with God to Shug who tries to persuade Celie into looking at the good things that God has given her: "He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love you to death" (ibid. 173). For Celie, none of this seems to matter as she is also aware of all the bad things that God has given her, such as a crazy mom, a lowdown dog of a stepfather, and kids that have been taken away from her. In this case, Celie believes that the world would be a different place if ever God choose to listen to colored women (ibid. 173). On the basis of this, it is obvious that Celie considers herself a black woman that will forever be trapped in a racist and sexist society.

Unlike Celie, Shug has a less complicated understanding of God and the way he looks: "Yeah, It. God ain't a he or a she, but a It" (ibid. 176). With this statement, Shug helps Celie to realize that God has no race and no gender, whereto she further states that God does not look like anything. However, Shug has a strong belief that God is everything that ever is, ever was, or ever will be, and once you feel that you have found It (ibid. 176). Shug is in many ways a major inspiration to Celie, not because of her wild singing career, but because she helps Celie to become a strong and independent woman. Also, she makes Celie aware of her self-worth and that she should not allow herself to be controlled by a man. Towards the end of the novel, Celie decides to leave Mr___ because she wants to go and live with Shug in Memphis. Mr___ pretends that he does not care that Celie is leaving him, but his reaction portrays the complete opposite: "You ugly. You skinny. You

shape funny. You too scared to open your mouth to people. All you fit to do in Memphis is be Shug's maid" (ibid. 186). As he realizes that Celie is in fact going to leave, Mr___ deliberately hurts Celie by attacking her personal character. Yet again we experience Mr___ as someone who takes pride in belittling women only to prove to himself that he still has his male dominance. However, Celie no longer feels intimidated by Mr___'s male dominance, which is why she made the decision to finally leave the man who has been treating her like a slave. Not only does Celie let go of Mr___ and the patriarchal society, but she also breaks free from being an oppressed woman.

The biggest reason for Celie's transformation is symbolized by the pants, which make her grow into an independent businesswoman: "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time" (ibid. 194). The contrast between the Celie that used to do domestic housework and the Celie that has become a successful businesswoman, is a much happier and more confident Celie who no longer has to depend on a man, as she has proven that women can also be successful and independent. When considering the time in which the narrative is set, pants were perceived to be unusual for a woman to wear, which is why she decides to make pants that are suited for both women and men, and at the same time free herself from gender stereotypes. Due to this, it would be possible to argue that the pants are a symbol of release from sexism and patriarchy, and a symbol of Celie's release from Mr___.

Controlling images

This part of the analysis will focus on the different sets of controlling images presented by Collins. When looking at the controlling images in relation to the novel, it is evident that some are more relatable than others. For instance, the mammy, the matriarch, and the jezebel happen to be the most prominent when it comes to the female characters in *The Color Purple*. In this matter, the analysis will mainly focus on Celie, Sofia, and Shug since they are most suited for these particular images. The most prominent example of the mammy is Celie, as she appears to be the character that comes closest to representing the image of the mammy. Celie's role in her marriage with Mr___ is to cook, clean, and take care of his children while being an obedient, domestic servant: "He tell me, Wash this. Iron that. Look for this. Look for that. Find this. Find that" (Walker 25). According to Collins, these are elements that characterize the image of the mammy (Collins 72). Moreover, this illustrates that Celie has accepted her position regarding the traditional gender roles by being a house slave while also being sexually and mentally abused by her husband. Another important aspect of the

mammy in relation to Celie is how she is perceived as being less feminine and asexual in comparison to some of the other women, such as Shug Avery for instance: “Shug got looks, he say. But what you got? You ugly” (Walker 186). Moving on to the second controlling image, Sofia is the character that comes closest to representing the image of the black matriarch.

Out of all the women in *The Color Purple*, Sofia is the one that appears to be the most aggressive and masculine. Also, Sofia’s way of emasculating her husband Harpo proves that she is a great example of a matriarch. According to Collins, the matriarch symbolizes black mother figures in black homes, unlike the mammy who symbolizes black mother figures in white homes (Collins 75). Due to this, it is possible to argue that Sofia is in fact characterized as both the mammy and the matriarch due to her job as the maid at the mayor’s house, where her job is to take care of his children. The job as a housemaid prohibits Sofia to spend time with her own children at home since the matriarch is expected to spend more time with the other family, which results in less time with the matriarch’s real family. Additionally, this fits accurately with Sofia’s situation. Her time spent away from her own children and husband is caused by her actions as the matriarch. In addition, Sofia’s overly aggressive behavior towards the mayor and his wife is yet another example that proves Sofia’s character to be the closest to the image of the matriarch.

In the end, Shug Avery appears to be the closest female character in Hurston’s novel to present the image of the jezebel**.** According to Collins, this image represents black women as sexually aggressive while also being referred to as whore or hoochie (Collins 81). Shug enjoys being in the center of attention, especially around men, who likewise enjoy giving her attention because of her daring look and flirtatious personality. Due to this, Shug is considered a loose woman by some of the characters, as she is known to be a woman who finds pleasure in sleeping around with different men: “Celie, he say, you have my sympathy. Not many women let they husband whore lay up in they house” (Walker 53). Old Mr___’s comment regarding Mr___’s intimate relationship with Shug Avery shows that he considers her to be a loose woman who is not affected by the thought of sleeping with a married man. Namely, this indicates that Shug Avery represents the image of the jezebel. As we have established that Celie, Sofia, and Shug represent three different controlling images based on sexist and racist notions, we become aware that Walker portrays her characters in different ways to show how African American women were perceived during the time in which the novel is set.

Sisterhood

If we look up the word sisterhood in the dictionary, we come to understand the real definition of the word: “A strong feeling of friendship and support among women who are involved in action to improve women’s rights” (Cambridge). In *The Color Purple* Walker gives power to the female characters through their bonding with each other, which is especially evident in Celie and Shug Avery’s friendship. Celie and Shug Avery’s friendship symbolizes hope to overcome oppression in a world of male dominance. However, at the beginning of the novel, Shug Avery did not allow Celie into her personal life, instead, she treated her poorly and like a house servant. The following example illustrates Shug Avery’s bad behavior towards Celie, which is expressed through her cruel words: “You sure *is* ugly, she say, like she ain’t believed it” (Walker 44). The pain of hearing someone call one ugly is not as painful to Celie, because she cares too much about Shug to be upset. Slowly, Shug Avery begins to change her behavior with Celie as she realizes that Celie takes good care of her even when she is being awful towards her. Celie later discovers the power and importance of friendship through Shug Avery’s love and care, which is something that she has never experienced before.

In addition, Walker portrays power as an important source of acceptance, which she depicts through Shug Avery’s friendship with Celie: “Sugar, she say one day when Shug home, don’t you think it be nice if Celie could talk proper? Shug say, She can talk in sign language for all I care” (ibid 194-195). With this example, Walker illustrates how Shug Avery is not embarrassed that Celie does not speak properly – instead, she accepts Celie for the person she is despite her flaws. Furthermore, Walker illustrates the important aspects of female friendships based on the depiction of confidence, emotional support, and acceptance. Growing up, Celie never experienced genuine love in her family, because years of oppression did not allow for such a thing to be present. Instead, Celie’s childhood was filled with traumatizing sexual assault, as abusive behavior became more normalized in comparison to love. The lack of love that Celie received from her family, brought her closer to Shug Avery’s unconditional love and support.

Additionally, Celie’s traumatizing past brought her and Shug Avery even closer and became the foundation for their powerful sisterhood. Sofia, on the other hand, is likewise an important person to both Celie and Shug Avery because they help each other to break free from a life of oppression. Shug and Sofia help Celie to open up her eyes to new discoveries, from showing her that women too can stand up for their rights, to helping her figure out who she is as a person through the discovery of her sexuality, which she first discovers during her intimate moments with Shug Avery. Shug Avery engages in a conversation with Celie that revolves around sexual desire because she

wants Celie to explore her sexual organs. Celie, on the other hand, is not thrilled to engage in that type of conversation since her look on sex is the diametrically opposite of Shug's. This is due to Celie's bad sexual experiences with Mr___ who only sleeps with Celie for the sake of his own pleasure, and never for her sake: "He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (ibid. 74). With this statement, we come to find out that Celie despises sex because Mr___ makes her feel worthless and invisible. However, Shug Avery manages to convince Celie to look at her sexual organs through a mirror, to discover what it looks like (ibid. 74). This situation makes both Celie and Shug act like teenage girls, giggling and making sure that no one else finds out about it: "And us run off to my room like two little prankish girls. You guard the door, I say" (ibid. 74). This example allows us to come closer to Celie, in that she shows how comfortable she is with Shug in her presence and therefore she feels that she can be her true self around her. Moreover, Celie and Shug Avery's friendship is the symbol of true sisterhood. According to hooks, we as women have in the past decades been taught that relationships among women diminish our experiences, while also being taught to perceive women as natural enemies (hooks 43). The relationship between Celie and Shug Avery proves that women are not each other's enemies - instead, women should focus on building a sustained female bond with each other to break free from the stereotypes that are labeled on the perception of sisterhood.

Representation of the color purple

This part of the analysis wishes to examine the meaning behind the title of the novel by looking into what purple as a color represents. The title itself is intriguing in that it makes one want to read the book right away. However, one would also have to know that the title does not simply refer to the color purple, instead, it is the symbolic aspect of the color that is crucial for the meaning of the title. The first time we hear someone mention the color purple is when Celie is out shopping for a new dress with Mr___'s sister, Kate, who thinks Celie's clothes look old and used. As Celie walks into the store, she thinks about the colors that Shug Avery would wear: "Somethin purple, maybe little red in it too" (Walker 21). In this incident, Celie imagines Shug Avery dressed in the color purple as something that reflects Shug's personality, namely elegant, beautiful, and liberated. Thus, Celie search for something to buy in purple but without any luck, which indicates that Celie is not yet a liberated woman. Instead, she finds plenty in red, but due to the fact that Mr___ will not pay for her to dress in red, as it would make her look too happy, Celie's only choice becomes a selection of dull

colors, such as brown and navy blue (ibid. 21).

In essence, purple is typically associated with wealth and power, which explains why Celie wears brown and blue clothes, as they represent her social status as an oppressed African American woman. With Shug's help, Celie becomes independent and aware of her power, which she later uses to start her own pants company. For the first time in her life, Celie is making money on her own which allows her the opportunity to free herself from a man, who otherwise would prohibit her from becoming independent, the reason being that men feel threatened by women's success as it results in the fear of becoming emancipated. In addition, Celie chooses to design her pants in the colors purple and red as she finally has the opportunity to not only dress herself in purple but other African American women as well. As a color, purple represents many different things, like for instance in the Western world purple represents power, elegance, and dignity, which fits with Celie's transformation from being passive and submissive to becoming strong and independent. In this case, the color of the pants illustrates Celie's way of gaining dignity and elegance. Furthermore, purple also represents spirituality, which is relevant to Walker's portrayal of Celie's perception of God. From a spiritual point of view, the color purple represents all the good and beautiful things that God has created for everyone to appreciate. However, Celie was never introduced to the good things in life as her awful past prohibited her from seeing the beauty of God's creations. Shug addresses Celie's past by motivating Celie to enjoy her life the way God has imagined for all his people: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (ibid. 177). With this example, Shug tries to make Celie realize that God creates all sorts of different things, such as the color purple to give his people something to appreciate and make them happy. As she manages to open Celie's eyes through a positive perception of God, Shug motivates and renews Celie's hope for a better life.

Discussion

The purpose of this project was to examine the representation of black feminism in black female literature. Through the analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* it is evident, that both novels illustrate black feminism through intersectionality whereby they seek to portray the struggles of being an African American woman in a male-dominated society. Earlier research on the two novels suggests that intersectionality is based on the notion that humans are simultaneously situated in several social structures, which interact in ways that are complicated (Ajibogwu). The results from the analysis revealed that the characters from the two novels are caught in a system of oppression, which is especially evident in the portrayal of the main characters Janie and Celie. Despite their similarities, *The Color Purple* seems to depict the issues concerning physical abuse, such as rape, to a deeper extent in relation to *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* The physical abuse in *The Color Purple* is used to draw a realistic scenario of African American women's relationships with men, and how they used their male dominance to punish women. This was especially evident when Celie's stepfather assaulted her, as he believed that his gender allowed him to subdue her under any circumstance. As this is only one example among many others, it still manages to showcase the struggle of African American women during the 20th century, who were the victims of many years of intersectional oppression, and that way portrays a realistic representation of women in the rural American South. Moreover, Walker's portrayal of feminism is most evident through the relationship between Celie, Shug Avery, and Sofia, as they use their abusive pasts to create a strong bond in their sisterhood. In this case, *The Color Purple* is more inclined toward the stereotypical portrayals of the controlling images than in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, due to the female characters' representation of the mammy, the matriarch, and the jezebel. Although it would also have been possible to analyze *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with the controlling images, the result of the analysis would not be broad enough to distinguish the same images, as the novel merely revolves around one female character, namely Janie. Since the depiction of the stereotypical images is not used to the same degree in Hurston's novel, it could be possible to discuss whether or not Hurston made a deliberate choice to not present Janie from a stereotypical perspective. Therefore, it could be stated that Hurston protects Janie from the stereotypical images that many African American women have been labeled with ever since the early days of slavery. This way Janie's character supports the empowering image of African American women.

On the contrary, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* depicts the struggle of Janie's life while being in a dominant relationship. This alludes to the several themes that have been established throughout the analysis, where some of the most prominent are gender roles, power, independence,

jealousy, feminism, and freedom. However, the project has already been laid up for a discussion in some of the previous sections (look under "structure and narrative"), concerning the themes and Hurston's lack of focus on race in the novel (Wright 25). The critical review by Wright is one of the reasons why Hurston's novel received poor public attention and failed to become popular among African Americans. Furthermore, it can be discussed whether or not Wright's critique was an attempt to scare Hurston by criticizing her work to think that she has failed as an author. A rational reason could be that the use of female heroines was unusual in literature during the time in which the novel is set, which is potentially why Wright was critical of it. More critical reviews have been written about *Their Eyes Were Watching God* although from a different perspective, such as Long Shi who has explored the oppression of racialism in the novel. Shi points to the struggles of racial issues in relation to Nanny, as she is the only character that was once enslaved: "They think they are superior to blacks. They can command the black to do anything. The miserable and harsh status of blacks can be exposed completely. They have no choice but to listen to whites' command" (Shi 2). Shi's review of the novel stands in contrast to the one by Wright, which shows that Hurston's novel has been perceived from many different points of view over the past decades. In addition, this allows the novel to open up for further discussion in terms of the message of the novel, which, according to Wright, Hurston has failed to attempt (Wright 25).

Conclusion

I would like to begin this section by repeating the main purpose of this paper, which was to examine the representation of black feminism in black female literature, namely, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color purple* through the theoretical framework by respectively Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins. From examining Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* it is evident that both novels draw attention to black feminism. Both authors manage to create a realistic picture of the everyday struggle of African American women in American society during the mid to late 20th century. As this was a time when racism and segregation were at their zenith, the lives of African American women were challenged by white supremacy. In Hurston's novel, this is depicted through Nanny's character, where she uses her past to illustrate the reality of being a young black woman during the time of slavery. Although Hurston refers to the issues of racism, it is evident that she does not portray it as a central theme in the novel. Instead, I have discovered that Hurston chooses to focus on Janie's life

as a person rather than her life as a woman of color in American society. When comparing this with Walker's *The Color Purple*, I have reached the conclusion that Walker focuses on the issues of racism primarily through the aspect of Sofia's character. Sofia's race and gender make her the prime target of racial oppression, which is why she is forced to work for a white family.

Crenshaw's theory highlights the core aspects of intersectionality, namely race, gender, and class as the main components to describe African American women in terms of their social status. When comparing this to *The Color Purple*, it is evident that this resembles the narrative regarding the difference between African American women and white American women, since they came from better-situated backgrounds, which provided them with a higher and more secure social status. Due to this, I have concluded that African American women were forced to live their lives through intersectionality because of their race and gender. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that the female characters from the two novels, and African American women in general, had to live under the rules that constitute the norm regarding traditional gender roles. In *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* traditional gender roles represent Janie and Celie's roles as passive and submissive, while the role of the men illustrates power and dominance. By doing so, these two novels share a similar theme of African American Women where they focus on the representation of African American women's lives in the rural South during the mid to late 20th century.

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