

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of Ain Temouchent - BelhadjBouchaib



Faculty of Letters, Languages and Social Sciences

Department of Letters and English Language

**Depicting Sexism and Domestic Violence in
the Afro-American writings: Case Study
Sweat by Zora Neale Hurston**

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for a
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilisation*

Submitted by:

Miss Nour El Houda CHIKH ABDERRAHMANE

Supervised by:

Dr. Selma Belhamidi

Board of Examiners:

President: Mrs. Rayhan Houari

MAA

Ain Temouchent University

Supervisor: Dr. Selma Belhamidi

MCB

Ain Temouchent University

Examiner: Mrs. Samira Laoufi

MAA

Ain Temouchent University

Academic Year: 2022/2023

Dedications

To my dearest parents Mohamed and Zohra, I cannot thank you enough for all what you have done for me during this period of studies. Thank you for supporting and encouraging me each time I wanted to stop and you say you have to do it.

Special thanks go to my brothers Aymen, Chihebeddine, Abdelillah who had done the dishes for me during exams.

To my workmates Hakim and Walid for working at my shifts and days, when I was studying.

Last but not least, I want to thank me for believing in me and my capabilities and for all the hard work.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Selma Belhadmidi for her guidance and support during all the past five years.

My best regards to the jury members Mrs. Rayhan Houari as president and Mrs. Samira Laoufi as examiner. Thank you for taking the time and effort to help me bring my research into academic standards.

My gratitude go to Dr. Assia Benfodda for her huge help and Pof. Azzeddine Bouhassoune for his guidance and advice not to quit my studies.

To all my teachers in the English department.

To my classmates for their help and support mainly Ms. Djazia Benmokrane.

Abstract

African American literature has become an inevitable part of American literature and culture. It is only with the significant representation of African American literature that American society stands to be cleansed from the problem of racial discrimination. Zora Neale Hurston's short story *Sweat* is a story with different perspective. It revolves around the experiences of Black Women and their struggles with racism, sexism, and patriarchal violence. This revealed the violence toward women and women's resistance regarding the construction of a patriarchal society. This research deals with the aspects of the African American Renaissance in the field of literature and the birth of Black Feminism with the use of Huston's short story *Sweat* as a case study. It sheds lights and depicts black women suffer with racism, sexism and violence employing Black Feminist lens. In addition to addressing forms of resistance to their hard living conditions.

Key Words: African American Literature – *Sweat* – racism – sexism – Patriarchal Violence – Black Feminism.

Résumé

La littérature afro-américaine est devenue une partie incontournable de la littérature et de la culture américaines. Ce n'est qu'avec une représentation significative de la littérature afro-américaine que la société américaine pourra être débarrassée du problème de la discrimination raciale. La nouvelle « Sweat » de Zora Neale Hurston est une histoire avec une perspective différente. Il tourne autour des expériences des femmes noires et de leurs luttes contre le racisme, le sexisme et la violence patriarcale. Cela a révélé la violence envers les femmes et la résistance des femmes concernant la construction d'une société patriarcale. Cette recherche traite des aspects de la Renaissance afro-américaine dans le domaine de la littérature et de la naissance du féminisme noir avec l'utilisation de la nouvelle de Hurston « Sweat » comme étude de cas. Il met en lumière et dépeint les femmes noires souffrant de racisme, de sexisme et de violence ainsi que leur résistance à leurs conditions de vie difficiles. Cette recherche traite des aspects de la Renaissance afro-américaine dans le domaine de la littérature et de la naissance du féminisme noir avec l'utilisation de la nouvelle de Hurston « Sweat » comme étude de cas. Il met en lumière et dépeint les femmes noires qui souffrent de racisme, de sexisme et de violence en employant des outils féministe noir ainsi que de leur résistance à leurs conditions de vie difficiles.

Les mots clefs : Littérature Afro-Américaine – *Sweat* – racisme – sexisme – Violence Patriarcale – Féminisme Noir.

ملخص

أصبح الأدب الأمريكي الأفريقي جزءًا لا مفر منه من الأدب والثقافة الأمريكية. وحده التمثيل الكبير للأدب الأمريكي الأفريقي يمكن المجتمع الأمريكي من أن يتطهر من مشكلة التمييز العنصري. قصة زورا نيل هيرستون القصيرة "العرق" هي قصة ذات منظور مختلف. تدور أحداثها حول تجارب النساء السود ونضالهن مع العنصرية والتمييز الجنسي والعنف الأسري. كشف هذا عن العنف ضد المرأة ومقاومة المرأة فيما يتعلق ببناء مجتمع أبوي. يتناول هذا البحث جوانب عصر النهضة الأمريكية الأفريقية في مجال الأدب وولادة الحركة النسوية السوداء باستخدام قصة هيوستن القصيرة Sweat كدراسة حالة. إنه يسلط الضوء ويصور النساء السود يعانين من العنصرية والتمييز على أساس الجنس والعنف بالإضافة إلى مقاومتهن لظروفهن المعيشية الصعبة. العنف تجاه المرأة ومقاومة المرأة فيما يتعلق ببناء مجتمع أبوي. يتناول هذا البحث جوانب عصر النهضة الأمريكية الأفريقية في مجال الأدب وولادة النسوية السوداء باستخدام قصة هيوستن القصيرة "عرق" كدراسة حالة. يسلط الضوء ويصور معانات النساء السود من العنصرية والتمييز على أساس الجنس والعنف باستخدام ادوات النسوية السوداء بالإضافة إلى التطرق إلى اشكال مقاومتهن لظروفهن المعيشية الصعبة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب الأمريكي الأفريقي – "عرق" - العنصرية - التمييز على أساس الجنس –

العنف الاسري – الحركة النسائية السوداء

Table of Contents

Dedications	1
Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Résumé.....	4
ملخص	5
Table of Contents.....	6
General Introduction	09
Chapter One:	
African American Literature - A Historical and Theoretical Review -	13
Introduction	13
1.1. Historical Context	13
1.2. Introducing Feminism	15
1.3. Afro-American Feminism from 1900 to 1960.....	16
1.4. African American Literature	19
1.5. Black Women in African American and American Literature.....	21
1.6. Black Feminism	22
Conclusion.....	233
Chapter two:	
Black Women Empowerment	255
Introduction	255
2.1. Sexism	255
2.1.1. Definitions	255
2.1.2. Sexism and the Black Liberation.....	277
2.2. Gender Rules.....	288
2.3. Gender, Race, and Domestic Violence.....	30
2.4. Black Women Empowerment	33
Conclusion.....	34
Chapter Three	
Differentiating Sexism and Domestic Violence	36
in Zora Neale Hurston <i>Sweat</i>.....	366

Introduction	36
3.1. Zora Neal Huston the Black Feminist	36
3.2. <i>Sweat</i> by Zora Neal Huston	38
3.3. <i>Sweat's</i> Major Themes.....	39
3.3. Defying Sexism in <i>Sweat</i>	40
3.4. Domestic Violence in <i>Sweat</i>	43
Conclusion:.....	46
General Conclusion	48
Works Cited	50
Appendix 01	51

General Introduction

General Introduction

As any ethnic group in a specific nation, the afro-Americans suffered for centuries from social issues. Women mainly take the big part of these struggles since they are considered as the weak gender. Generally, these problems are about racism, patriarchy, sexism and domestic violence where women are abused either by their parents or usually husbands. All these factors led some of the intellectual black women to share their misery via their writings.

Sweat is a great example of this theme, it is a short story written by the afro-American novelist Zora Neale Hurston. The story is written in the 1920's talking about a hardworking lady 'Delia' who does the laundry for the white people in order to get money to feed her family and pay the bills, yet she has a miserable marriage life with her abusive husband Sykes who is jobless, unfaithful and depending on her money to take care of his mistress.

Hurston wrote the story in the time when feminism emerged and none can deny that most women were influenced by this new movement. At that time women started to realize their rights, defending themselves and being more independent. Although the novelist showed the main character as a weak, abused woman as a slave, she had a moral lesson behind it, she was patient, religious and wise waiting for the right time to take her revenge without losing all these years of tiredness and psychological exhaustion.

Though we are in the 21st century at the era of technology and civilization, domestic abuse still take place in many families. Delia as a black poor woman, who is sweating for her conjugal life, represents a billion of other women whose their stories are similar to hers. Arabic women are also abused, unlike any other ethnic women, they cannot get divorced easily (they are socially judged) and they have not any support from their families. The result is usually psychologically unhealthy children. The story in hand may help investigate issues related to women as sexism and domestic violence observed in my society.

The aim of this research is to show how women are abused physically and psychologically in a certain society such as the afro-American. We try to understand the reasons behind their submission. Women resistance will be highlighted too.

The short story *Sweat* by Zora Neale Hurston examines a number of important themes against a racially and sexually charged background. The narrative of African-American Delia In*Sweat*, a laundress who has been married to an abusive husband for fifteen years asks how self-identity development might affect the roles that women and African-Americans play in social and personal contexts. *Sweat* raises an intriguing discussion about the oppression and repression of women during the historical period in which it was written, as well as the developing identification of women with their gender and the limitations imposed by society based on race, gender, and class. However, it ignores the real reasons behinds that made these practices against women normal thing while not punishing men at all.

All these primary information about the tackled issues leads us to ask the following questions:

- 1- What makes Delia accept violence against her?
- 2- Is the violence of Sykes related to his gender power?
- 3- How are sexism and domestic violence depicted in the story?

In order to appropriately discuss the previous questions, the following hypotheses are suggested as possible answers:

-Firstly, Delia as any other married woman; wise and loyal; was being patient on her husband's abuse holding on a hope for a change. However, Delia's submission was quietly related to her religious beliefs and that sooner or later she will be rewarded for her patience.

- Secondly, Sykes was practicing his power on his wife since she is the weak gender as he always sees her, and like any other black man, he considered himself the powerful one.

- Thirdly, the story revealed two main issues that women suffered from, sexism is related to the inequality of genders that Delia faced in her marriage by giving the right to her husband to abuse her.

As such, this research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is a historical recall on the subject of slavery and the African American existence in the United States. It also takes a peak into the realm of African American Literature and Black Feminism. The second chapter is dealing with the main issues tackled in the research (sexism and domestic violence) and its literature focusing on the black feminism. The final chapter is discussing and analyzing the story while highlighting its major themes.

The research is conducted using the qualitative research method. In order to sufficiently extract the main aim of this work, a collection of scenes, dialogues, and descriptions were carefully extracted from the story. The research focuses mainly on data that supports the hypotheses above and guides answering the research questions.

Chapter One

African American Literature

- A Historical and Theoretical Review -

Chapter One

African American Literature - A Historical and Theoretical Review -

Introduction

African American literature flourished greatly in the beginning of the 20th century with the rise of the Negro movement. During that period, Black Americans sought to break free from the white stereotypes that have affected their perception of their African heritage. In addition, that period had an enormous impact on the rise of Black literature, including Black Feminism. African American women who faced both the oppression of being a female and having a black complexion, viewed feminism as an exclusively white concept that does not represent the struggles of Black women. Thus, they used literature in order to voice their complaints and tell their stories.

This chapter is concerned with the historical study of the transformation of American society from the age of slavery to anti-slavery and the rebirth of the new Negro community. For sure, women were the axis of the renaissance. The period witnessed the birth of many black names that reshaped the American literature.

1.1. Historical Context

In the mid-1500s, European mariners started bringing black Africans to America as slaves. This forced migration was unique in American history. The first African Americans arrived in America, Virginia in the 1619s. It is estimated that between ten million people or so who crossed the Atlantic Ocean before 1800, about eight and a half million were enslaved Africans. By the time the trade came to an end in the 1860s, an average of ten million Africans had been enslaved into the New World, while an estimate of two more millions died in the journey (Allen and al. 07).

David Blight states: “Slavery is not an aberration in American history; it is at the heart of our history, a main event, a central foundational story. Slavery is also ancient; it has existed in all cultures and in all times. Slavery has always tended to evolve in circumstances of an abundance of land or resources, and a scarcity and, therefore, demand for labor” (7). In its origins, slavery had little to do with race and much to do with economics. The Atlantic slaves’ trade flourished with the increasing need for labour in the sugar colonies and the cotton states. Settlers in the tropical parts of America such as the Caribbean islands had found a crop that was in massive demand, sugar. In 1600, sugar was a privilege reserved for the rich. By 1800, it became attainable for ordinary people to enjoy with their tea. The sugar trade was very profitable, but also very time and effort consuming. The plantation required a large labour force to plant, harvest, and process the sugar cane (BBC).

In order to ensure the best profit possible, plantation owners needed a labour force that is cheap, easy to maintain, and simple to replace. There were not enough British workers to meet the needs of expanding plantations. In addition, too few were apt to performing manual labour. Thus, the owners decided that enslaved Africans were the answer. Upon arriving to the American land, slaves often served for life and even passed that status to their children. They were excluded from basic human right such as marriage and proper housing. African slaves faced a situation known as the “social death”, they were outsiders who could not and should not ever be equal to their masters (Allen and al. 07).

As for African women, they had several options but unfortunately, they themselves had no saying on the decision. The women could work in cotton or sugar plantation, which means doing hard labour on the fields. They could work as a house servant for their masters. Alternatively, they could live in states such as Virginia or North Carolina and produce other slaves in order to maintain the number of stable slaves (Andrea 3).

The situation of the Negro Americans changed with the beginning of the American Revolutionary War. Due to the need of soldiers, Americans had to change their minds towards slaves in order to utilize them in the armed forces. The competition between the White working class and slaves and the beginning of the industrialization quickened the abolition of slavery. On the other hand, slavery flourished in the South thanks to the invention of the cotton gin. The new slavery was characterized by lesser brutality in order to prevent revolts. Nevertheless, slaves were not allowed to educate themselves nor get married. Mothers stated to run away or even kill their children rather than letting the white people turn them into slaves (Giddings 41-55).

At the end of the Civil War in 1865, slavery was finally abolished. Yet, the attitude towards Black people was not improving. In the 19th century several cases of the black people lynching occurred. Most of it was caused by the envy of the white people who were jealous of the success of a number of the Afro-American people. In 1892, Thomas Moss and two of his friends, Calvin McDowell and Henry Stewart were shot to death after opening a grocery store that generated much white resentment (Giddings 13). The racial attitude started to paint Blacks as brutal, ignorant, and uncivilized group. Thus, Blacks started to migrate towards to South where life is much better. There, the Black community started to thrive a bit by bit. Eventually, the Harlem Renaissance happened and Blacks were able to cultivate their own culture.

1.2. Introduction to Feminism:

Feminism is an interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism. Historically, feminism has evolved from the critical

examination of inequality between the sexes to a more nuanced focus on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality.

The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement sought at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism includes political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that recommends gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Although the terms "feminism" and "feminist" did not gain massive use until the 1970s, they were already being used in the public parlance much earlier; for instance, Katherine Hepburn speaks of the "feminist movement" in the 1942 film *Woman of the Year*.

1.3. Afro-American Feminism from 1900 to 1960

The fight to vote marked the beginning of the 20th century. While White women dedicated much of their time and effort in order to gain political recognition, Black women were mostly excluded from the movement. The first decade of the 20th century provided a fertile ground for the spread of the Jim Crow system of segregation. The Jim Crow system began in Tennessee in 1881 when the law allowed the railroads to have the first class for the coloured and white separated (Robinson 105-123).

The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People was founded in 1909. It is considered to be one of the most durable interracial civil rights groups. The Alpha Suffrage Club was founded in Illinois in the 1913s. The enemies of Black women were racist politicians and some white suffragists. After failing to co-operate and feeling excluded from the main stream white women's campaign, the Negro women started their own campaigns and special suffrage departments (Giddings 119-131).

By the year 1916 the National Association of Coloured Women was able to grant scholar ships loans for black women in a first of a kind event. It also helped women who migrated from the South to find employment. Before the WWI, the Afro-American women were excluded from many jobs because of the inflow of the European immigrants. The employers preferred the white female immigrants to the Afro-American women. That caused the movement of the Afro-American women to other fields of work, mainly housekeeping and cleaning jobs (Jaynes 124-135).

The year 1919 was characterized by the rise of the defiance among the black people, especially among the black students who insisted on taking courses they liked rather than those ones recommended by the government. Zora Neale Hurston was one of those students. On the labour front, black women were excluded from the program of the First International Congress of Working Women (1919) which included the points such as the equal pay for equal work. Despite several attempts to lunch their own organizations such as the Coloured Women's Division or Black YWCA, white women and national boards always shut them down (Giddings 145-158).

In order to practice the right to vote, Black women had to compete with white women as well as men. They were forced to face sexism and racism on the same front. In the South, Black women had to wait for long hours even to register and were severely harassed in the process. In 1921 the Afro-American women organized the Anti-Lynching Crusaders¹ and tried to find supporters among the white women but they again met with a refusal. The 1920s were in the name of success of white feminists – The Equal Rights Amendment and Birth Control Movement. For the black women the racial equality was still the topic number one (Giddings 171-181). The Afro-American women were ashamed of their race and started to use skin lighters and hair straighteners. That gave the opportunity to C. J. Walker who became

¹A group of women dedicated to stopping the lynching of African Americas. Before the Anti-Lynching Crusaders was founded all these group of Crusaders were involved with churches that helped them learn how to lead with gender problems and power.

the first black woman millionaire thanks to her success in the cosmetic field. Her success gave way to numerous contributions to Black education and the Welfare System (Giddings 197).

The 1930s Great Depression endangered the position of Black women in the job market. They were also excluded from the women empowerment organizations, which meant they had to fight on their own as Blacks and as women. In 1935 Bethune² realized her dream about the organization which would be the roof of all black women's organization and found the National Council of Negro Women. She together with Aubrey Williams and Eleanor Roosevelt helped to organize the Federal Council of Negro Affairs. Thanks to her, the implementation of special funds was possible. That fund served as a financial help for the black youth who attended colleges. In addition, despite creating a great percentage of the working force, every attempt to better the Black women's working conditions was met by refusal (Giddings 200-236).

With the entry of the United States in 1941 into the Second World War, women were much needed to fill the labour demands and operate factories. However, Black women had it much harder than white women did. They had to wait until white women had their jobs before demanding their own. Finally, Philip Randolph³ came up with the idea of the March on Washington. The result of that action was the Executive Order 8802 in 1941 which prohibited discrimination in hiring workers in nation's defence industries, other war related work or in government contracts on the bases of race, creed, colour or national origin (Sitkoff 11-12).

In the 1950s, many white women saw their fulfilment in becoming homemakers. They started to drop out of colleges and professional work. Additionally, Black women seized the

²**Mary Jane McLeod Bethune** (1875 –1955) was an American educator, philanthropist, humanitarian, womanist, and civil rights activist. Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women in 1935, established the organization's flagship journal *African American Women's Journal*, and presided as president or leader for a myriad of African American women's organizations including the National Association for Colored Women and the National Youth Administration's Negro Division. She also was appointed as a national advisor to president Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom she worked with to create the Black Cabinet

³**Asa Philip Randolph** (April 15, 1889 – May 16, 1979) was an American labor unionist and civil rights activist. In 1925, he organized and led the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first successful African-American-led labor union. In the early Civil Rights Movement and the Labor Movement, Randolph was a prominent voice.

opportunity and started to succeed in fields such as dancing, singing, film and writing. They also attended colleges with larger numbers and started professions. Such improvement gave rise to tension between the black men and women (Giddings 243-249).

1.4. African American Literature

Before understanding the origin of African American literature, it is important to know the main issues of that period. The issue of race and tensions of colour pushed African Americans to use writing to establish a place for themselves in that community. Black people were perceived and even perceived themselves as ugly and inferior to the white race. They often suffered from different forms of racial discriminations even within their communities and households thanks to this view. The search for equality becomes an essential reason that has led to the development of African-American literature. Additionally, due to the issue of race, blacks were forced to use writing to prove themselves in American society

African American literature presents a wide range of writings from the colonial period to the present. It is related to different literary periods:

- The colonial period (1746-1800), slaves described their life in Africa before and after slavery.
- Antebellum period (1800-1865), where many black people discussed their experiences as slaves.
- The reconstruction period (1865-1900), where black writers focused on slavery as a major theme in their writing. It was a period that focused on producing literary works like stories, poems, and sermons that called for equality (Sobhi 10).
- Harlem Renaissance (1900-1940) centered at Harlem in New York where blacks gathered and claimed their rights through different artistic productions.
- The protest movement (1960-1969) which included protest against racism.

- Contemporary period (1970-present).

Traditionally, the Harlem Renaissance is regarded as the Golden Age for African American Culture and Literature. “It is a movement in music, art, literature and politics from the early 1900’s to 1940’s, emphasized the importance of freedom- political, economic, social and artistic - for African Americans” (Smith and Jones 163). This is a period when blues and jazz flourish. African Americans have written about their origins and called for equality.

During the period between 1900 and 1940, the demand for human rights increased. African American soldiers risked their lives in the First World War (1914-1918) for the sake of freedom. After their return, many African Americans called for the civil rights. The leaders of Harlem Renaissance were young artists and writers of the new generation. They wanted to prove their qualities and were proud of being blacks. They were trying to stay out of the political issue (Smith and Jones 163).

African American writers represent novelists, short story writers, poets and playwrights. African American Literary Realism (1865-1914) was the first main literary movement to be representative of the lack experience. In this period, black authors did not focus on main stream realism which exposes race relation in the South to maintain the white audience. The main realistic authors were Chesnut, Pauline Hopkins and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Thus, black writers produced a literature that portrays blacks as deserving equality with whites. As a result, they mixed between romance and realism (Jarrett 189).

African American Naturalism found its greatest number of practitioners in America shortly before and after the turn of the twentieth century. Naturalism had shown African American writers such as Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. These writers tried to avoid rebellion, anger and protest. They were influenced by the philosophy of naturalism

which helped them to develop their own versions of human rights. They attempted to liberate their fellow human beings from rules imposed on them.

African American Modernism is a core period between World War I and World War II. It benefited from the diversity of immigrant cultures. Artists were inspired by African, Caribbean, Asian and European folk cultures and embedded these exotic styles in their works. The Neorealism Movement (1970s- present) included a variety in African American literature. All the genres were presented. The most known African American women writers of the twentieth century are Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor (Jarrett 745).

1.5. Black Women in African American and American Literature

African-American literature has been progressed by the work of black women; it played a vital role in the literature of the time. However; from Wheatley Phyllis in the slavery and freedom era to Lorraine Hansberry during the civil rights movement, the black female literary renaissance has created a generation of black women challenging race and gender by writing.

Many American writers contributed to describing racism in the American society, amongst them Francis Harper Lee who used literature as a tool to talk about the oppression against African American women in her book *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Another writer is Alice Walker who portrayed the struggles and hardships of Black people and how they came to overcome them. For these writers and many others, the portrayal of African American women was a necessary theme to discuss in order to give readers powerful insight into sinister issues such as race, gender and social class.

1920 was the start of African-Americans in New York City exactly in Harlem. Women artists of the Harlem Renaissance faced different issues like racial prejudice which disarm their success to train and to be taken seriously as working artists and the famous example is

Zora Neal Hurston who is called the genius of the Harlem Renaissance. Barbara Christian claimed: “African-American women were successful in expressing their own ideas and feelings and were also pivotal in the development of the black novel”, they search for the literary chance to make a change in their situations and for recording their pursuits.

1.6. Black Feminism

Feminism is a social, political and literary movement that seeks to grant the right of women as well as present their experiences through feminine lenses. African American women were initially brought to the New World as savage slaves whose only job was to obey orders from a white master. During the enslavement period, some of them worked as servants for white women, and even the end of slavery, the common attitude towards them allow women to only maintain jobs in housekeeping for white people. Thus, white women developed a superior sense towards black women, never to regard them as fellow women. Patricia Hill Collins explains:

Traditionally, many U.S. White feminist scholars have resisted having Black women as full colleagues. Moreover, this historical suppression of Black women’s ideas has had a pronounced influence on feminist theory. One pattern of suppression is that of omission. Theories advanced as being universally applicable to women as a group upon closer examination appear greatly limited by the White, middle-class, and Western origins of their proponents. (06)

African American women were in a dilemma because they were marginalized in the community and had to fight on both sides, for race liberation and gender liberation. So they created what they called Black Feminism.

Black feminism is a literary school that argues that the black female is struggling against sexism, social oppression and gender stereotypes. It is a movement that neglects the inequalities between women based on historical heritage. Patricia Hill Collins is one of the famous feminists who argue that black women had no choice but to specify feminism to themselves and step up to unjust classification. Because mainstream feminism has brought no rights to black women, they have been excluded from participating in all social, economic and political activities carried out by feminists organization.

Harlem Renaissance literature was a Female case more than Male's case. Marita Bonner, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen and Zora Neal Hurston were behind the appearance of the new literary genre Black Feminism which signifying a renaissance of new African-American woman entity. Septima Clark describes this transformation: "I used to feel that women couldn't speak up, because when district meetings were being held at my home . . . I didn't feel as if I could tell them what I had in mind . . . But later on, I found out that women had a lot to say, and what they had to say was really worthwhile. . . . So we started talking, and have been talking quite a bit since that time" (qtd in. Collins 07).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed historical and theoretical aspects necessary for the intended analysis. Racial exploitation is a central theme in the American history that has rooted itself strongly inside the cultural scheme. However, with much determination, African Americans were able to create a stand for themselves within the society. Black women on the other hand, were faced with a much harder fight that require them to face both the racism of the wider white society in addition to the sexism of their own Black community. In response, Black Feminism was created in order to tell the stories of the most marginalized and victimized African American women.

Chapter two

Black Women Empowerment

Chapter two

Black Women Empowerment

Introduction

African American Women had a long history of slavery and oppression. Moving on the 19th and 20th century, the issue of slavery turned into the social attitude of racism. In addition, Black women also suffered oppression from their male partner due to social and economic factors that play into the African American psyche. Thus, this chapter will discuss the main gender based and race based discriminations that Black women had to fight through.

2.1. Sexism

2.1.1. Definitions

The term “sexism” refers to the ideology or attitude that reflects the inferiority, marginalisation, and lower competency of the other gender or sex. It is often applied with such stereotypes of masculinity and femininity to justify the inherited superiority of one gender upon the other. Sexism is highly related to the cultural definitions of men and women and the role they should play in society. Such hierarchical thinking can be conscious and hostile, often a result of resentment toward the other sex. Alternatively, it can be unconscious due to socially adapted norms and behaviours. Although sexism can affect all people, the term is generally used to mean sexism against women.

Sexism relies on the binary definitions of masculinity and femininity that categorise people’s abilities and interests based on their sex, and thus, determines their social roles. In a patriarchal society, the man holds the main power and is in control. On the other hand, the woman is considered subordinate and is dominated and oppressed. This subordination manifests in the traditional social role given to women, she is expected to devote herself solely to her home, family, husband and children. Sex discrimination is therefore a difference in treatment based on sex, which disadvantages the individual or limits their access to

opportunities available to other members of society. While men thrive in exploring different options and opportunities, women are limited to an ancient life structure that most often renders them useless in today's time and age.

Masculinity refers to the social expectations of being a man. Masculinity is constructed and defined socially, historically and politically, rather than being biologically driven. It is the defining characteristics links to aspects of power, dominance, intelligence ...etc. Femininity, by the same spectrum, is the social expectations of being a woman. It is the idea about the roles, behaviours and attitudes considered appropriate for women and girls. Such traits include vulnerability, subordinations, and fragile nature... etc.

Masculinity often displays the superiority of men to women. It shapes the conception of a 'masculine self' and its place within society i.e. to be 'harsh', 'cruel' with and 'superior' to women. Masculinity, or male sexism, evaluates women as 'negative' and men as 'positive'. Sexist oppression is performed on women based on being a female. Feminist theory devotes a great deal of interest and scholarship to the causes generating domestic violence. It puts a stress on the fact that men use techniques, both physical and non-physical, to gain control over their partners. Feminists also admit explicitly that the force, which empowers men to exert control and even to afflict violence on their women, is the "patriarchal social structure" that is built on sexism.

Such discriminations between men and women points at gender as a situational accomplishment. For instance, "Human males are often more aggressive than females ... However, such behaviour may depend on cultural stereotypes that males should be 'masculine' and "tough" while females should be 'passive' (Jones and all. 318). Feminist theory devotes a great deal of interest and scholarship to the causes generating domestic violence. Sexism supports and fosters male violence against women. Thus, the central motivating factor of male violence is his desire to gain control over "his" woman.

2.1.2. Sexism and the Black Liberation

Bell Hooks in, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, asserts, “had surveys been taken among black women in the thirties and forties and had they been asked to name the most oppressive force in their lives, racism and not sexism would have headed the list.”(4) However, hook’s owned lived experience during this time as a black feminist, allows for a comprehensive picture that paints both black male sexism and white female racism as equally oppressive.

Black women were victims of sexism within the black liberation movements that marked the 19th and 20th century.

Black female activists did not receive the public acclaim awarded black male leaders. Sexist role patterning was as much the norm in black communities as in any other American community. It was an accepted fact among black people that the leaders who were the most revered and respected were men. (Hooks 5).

Unfortunately for Black women, taking a place in the fight for freedom in any front means being objected to oppression. To participate in the feminist movement would mean she would be a victim of racism while to participate in the black liberation movement would mean she would be a victim of sexism. Either way, black women essentially supported causes that ended up pushing her into the role of designated other.

African patriarchy functioned independently long before it collided with European patriarchy. However, according to Hooks, it is important to recognize that “there has always been a greater emphasis on the violent acts of black men in American society, as it diverts attention from away from white male violence” (108). Over the decades, the black man

(father, brother, and husband) abused the black woman simply because she was a woman. It is true that Black men faced the pain of racism, but they have also inflicted pain on their wives and children and contributed to their suffering.

The experiences of black women and black men are not uniform, as black liberation discourse has often suggested. Actually, the experiences of black men and woman are vastly different as suggested explicitly by the fact the persistence of African patriarchy in America. Unable to acclaim a position neither in the black liberation movement nor within the lines of the Feminist fight, Black women had to construct their own platform to voice their concerns.

Initially, the main goal of the early abolitionists and black suffragists' movements was to eliminate slavery, which they credited as the primary cause of oppression. In reality, Black activists saw racist slavery and disenfranchisement as emasculating because it created conditions that disallowed black men from assuming authority over their wives. Asserting, "The most damaging impact of slavery on black people was that it did not allow black men to assume the traditional male role...of protector and provider" (McKissak 153). This was apparent when black men were granted the right to vote in 1869 and Frederick Douglass reportedly said, "This hour belongs to the Negro," to which Elizabeth Cady Stanton replied, "Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?" (McKissak 153). The unwillingness, on the part of black male activists at the time, to include black women in the fight for suffrage revealed that, "black male leaders were not against granting women access to political rights as long as men remained the acknowledged superior authorities." (Hooks 91).

2.2. Gender Rules

In defining gender rules, Amy M. Blackstone states: "Gender roles are based on the different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender" (335). Thus, gender rules are

the product of the individual's interaction with his environment. In order to function as a unit of a certain society, one must adhere by the behaviours the said society has seen appropriate to his sex.

Gender is constructed in individual, interactional, and structural ways to create environmental constraints and opportunities that usually benefit men more than women. In most societies, the distinction between men and women is a virtues and natural categorization. The differences between the two genders are perceived as fundamental reflections of the long lasting division of labour between men and women. This distinction is, without a doubt, highly constructed of the embodiment of masculinity and femininity within the social organization (West and Zimmerman 128).

Gender roles are the roles that men and women are expected to occupy based on their sex. Traditionally, women are seen as more nurturing than men. This qualifies them to take on the responsibility of raising and caring for their families and households. On the other hand, men are given the role of the leaders. Because men are substantially more physically strong than women, they are in charge of protecting and providing for their families. However, every system has its positive and negative impacts. Unfortunately, this division of labour indicates that women must stay confined at their homes with limited connections and knowledge about the diversities of the world. To ensure such an enclosure, societies made sure to breed women into being non-aggressive, passive and submissive. This socialization -in fact- is responsible in brainwashing women to believe in their own deficiency, inability and inferiority, and hence, in their crucial subordinate position.

Likewise, culture demonstrates that one sex as the embodiment of weakness and the other the embodiment of strength. To this day, this sex-based categorization portrays itself in many if not all major aspects of one's life. For instance, at work, many jobs operate on the bases of men and women performing different tasks and receiving different benefits based on

their sex. Many corporations operate from a perspective that favours traditional beliefs about gender roles by, for example, offering parental leave benefits only to mothers and denying such benefits to fathers. Women are more likely to be expected to work as secretaries, and men are more likely to be expected to work as managers and executives ... etc.

Although gender roles are not all based on unfair and irrational judgements, the majority of them are more in the benefit of men than of women, making them possible reasons for sexism and bad outcomes for women. The previous division of housewife and breadwinner dichotomy, despite being productive in many cases, it carries a significant risk for women. Since the man maintains the economic control over the house, the woman often ends in poverty if that marriage dissolved. In addition, women are obliged to transfer even the smallest decision to the judgment of her husband since he is the one paying the expenses. Meaning that, with time, wives end up with little to no control over their lives and their marriages.

2.3. Gender, Race, and Domestic Violence

There are large differences in the quality or context of committing violence when regarding the sex of the subject. Gender differences in committing violence do not occur to show that men are more likely to commit physical assault to women for being bodily stronger, but the fact is that men exert all forms of violence the most.

As discussed previously, sexism is a core aspect of gender rules and patriarchy. While patriarchy has different issues, violence seems to be one of the most prominent approaches to assert dominance. For Hooks, Cobble and D.S. Black women were made to feel and believe that what was important and crucial was “survival”, and therefore, personal dignity should be sacrificed. This is perhaps what resulted in deriving their submissiveness to their men. They attempted to strengthen their men’s self-esteem and to help promote their sense of leadership. They tried to fight against the existence of racism and thus ignore, or neglect, sexism (90).

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour in which a person uses coercion, deception, harassment, humiliation, manipulation, and/or force to establish or maintain power and control over his or her intimate partner. Intimate partner violence is not relatively exclusive to one gender, race, religion, or ethnicity. However, within the American society, African Americans experience domestic violence at a high rate in comparison to the other communities. According to the 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, approximately 41% of Black women have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime compared to 31% of White women, 30% of Hispanic women and 15% of Asian or Pacific Islander women (Breiding 8).

It is well documented that race is not a factor in who may be involved in situations of intimate partner violence. However, racism does play a role in the lack of access to resources that would assist African Americans, and how both African American victims and perpetrators are treated and perceived by the criminal justice system. The most riveting factors that perpetuate domestic violence in the African American community are poverty and racism. Poverty as manifested through racial discrimination limits the access African Americans have to a quality education, jobs, and a safe environment in which to raise their children. The social stresses associated with the lack of economic security, for certain people and communities, are a severe ethical travesty in American society.

Crenshaw states that race, gender, and class are considered to be the three factors that identify women of colour together with poverty (1246). Being a woman of colour is what makes it difficult for them to achieve the same things as white women, who, because of their colour, are able to position themselves on a higher hierarchy scale. This means that women of colour are situated differently in relation to white women when looking at the social, economic, and political worlds (1250).

Women of colour do not experience racism in ways similar to men of colour, 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 (Crenshaw 1252). Additionally, in communities of colour, 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 coloured 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 (Crenshaw 1253).

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 colour 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 (1257). Crenshaw states that it is possibly true that racism contributes to the cycle of violence against women, given the stress that men of colour 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 colour 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. (Crenshaw 1258)

Black women were victims of oppression in the hands of all the other groups (white men, white women and black men). In this sense, they suffered a double victimisation; they were "victims of victims" and fell within the vicious circle produced by the whites' oppression upon them, and their men: their men who should be their natural protectors.

2.4. Black Women Empowerment

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.

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” (Hooks 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 behaviour. Sexism is what leads women to feel threatened by other women for no reason, and sexism teaches women to be sex objects for men (Hooks 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 behaviour patterns, which is the role of dominant or submissive being (Hooks 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 (Hooks 50).

African American women suffered a lot from racism and this suffering was doubled because they were women and black. This terrible suffering was not accepted no more by black women and also some white females, because both races became aware about the inequality and the unjustified maltreatment they were undergoing because they were black and female. Hence, this superior and inferior relationship between white and black races

which is based on colour had to be changed because black women no longer tolerate such suffering. These women decided to break their silence and to fight for their race and to their situation with the help of some and white women in term of solidarity against the whites' prejudice and racist rules that were practiced over them. African American women wanted to be treated as any human and never accepted their blackness to be used as a reason to humiliate them at the hands of the white race. Black women, with the help of some white females, decided to take action in order to end this separation between the two races based on the skin colour and to seek social equality.

Literature was and still is one of the most effective and wide spread methods to tell the Black female story. For decades, many names stood up for the different inequalities that were happening inside and outside the African American Community. Kathleen Puher asserts:

African American woman depicts heroic struggles and gallant role models who have helped their sisters not only to endure but to prevail. Cut off from support systems in mainstream culture, they have turned to one another [...] the practice of women relay on one another for direction and strength crops up with notable regularity in the novels of African American women. (519)

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter is concerned with discussing the different factors that contributed to African American women's subordinations and oppression. The patriarchal structure and sexist environment of the Black community in addition to the racist attitude of the dominant white community are the leading factors for the suffering of Black women. As the chapter demonstrates, the gender rule and social oppression was to create their own platforms using tools such as literature and fighting political only way for Black women to resist discrimination.

Chapter Three
Differentiating Sexism and Domestic Violence
in Zora Neale Hurston *Sweat*

Chapter Three

Differentiating Sexism and Domestic Violence

in Zora Neale Hurston *Sweat*

Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston an Afro-American's most distinguished short story *Sweat* published in 1926, revealed the violence toward women and women's resistance toward the construction of patriarchal in the African American community during the turn of the 19th century. Through her writings, Huston developed independence and challenged the old-fashioned belief that encouraged women to remain oppressed. The title *Sweat* is a challenge to the sexist standards that many people takes against women's labour. Since *Sweat* generally connects with physical and hard labour often performed by men. Women's labour is regarded as of a domestic and light nature. Thus, the primary purpose of the story is to defeat the popular assumption that women have it much easier than men do.

This chapter is concerned with pointing out the sexism and double standards African American women had to endure during that period of history. In addition, it seeks to depict the wrongful acts of violence against women and highlight its effect on the characters in the story.

3.1. Zora Neal Huston the Black Feminist

Hurston was a foremost African American Writer who was notable in a predominantly black cultural movement, the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. She was born on January 7, 1891 and brought up in Florida, the place that plagued with sexism and racism during that period had by chance happened to be the themes that shaped most of her works. Her father sent her to school in Jackson vile, Florida after the death of her mother when she was 9 years old, than she used to work as a nanny and housekeeper.

Although Hurston claimed to be born in 1901 in Eatonville, Florida, she was, in fact, 10 years older and had moved with her family to Eatonville only as a small child. There, in the first incorporated all-Black town in the country, she attended school until age 13. After the death of her mother (1904), Hurston's home life became increasingly difficult, and at 16 she joined a traveling theatrical company, ending up in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance.

As for her educational life, she enrolled in Morgan Academy in Baltimore, Maryland in 1917. A year later, she graduated and moved to Howard University from 1919 till 1924. Zora implicated a scholarship, which allowed her to transfer to Barnard College, where she wins her degree in 1928. She studied human culture (Anthropology) and Folklore at Columbia University under Franz Boas from 1928 to 1932. Afterwards, she was afforded a Guggenheim fellowship for collecting folklore in Haiti and traveling to the British West Indies.

By 1935 she had published several short stories and articles, including the infamous *Sweat*, as well as a novel *Jonahs Gourd Vine* and a well received collection of black southern folklore *Mules and men*. By 1937, Zora published her Master work *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and in 1938 *Tell My Horse*, her study of Caribbean Voodoo practices, than in 1939 an other novel, *Moses, Man of The Mountain*.

In 1942, Huston profiled in *who is in America, Current Biography and twentieth Century Authors*. Despite her this large collection of works, she did not receive substantial financial benefits for any of them. Instead, upon her death in the year 1960, her neighbours had to take up collections to hold her funeral. She was buried in an unmarked grave for 13 years until the year of 1973 when Alice Walker travelled to Fort Pierce to place a marker on the grave of Zora who had inspired her own work.

Zora Hurston was a world-renowned writer and anthropologist. Hurston's novels, short stories, and plays often depicted African American life in the South. Her work in anthropology examined black folklore. Hurston influenced many writers, forever cementing her place in history as one of the foremost female writers of the 20th century.

3.2. *Sweat* by Zora Neal Huston

'Sweat' is a short story by American writer Zora Neale Hurston, first published in literary magazine *Fire!!* in 1926. The story centres on Delia; at the beginning of the story, we learn that she is a washerwoman in a small central Florida town. Delia's husband, Sykes, does not have a job and is abusive. He resents the fact that Delia has to wash the clothes of white people and often berates her for it. He terrifies Delia by playing on her fear of snakes, and he beats her frequently, something that started two months after they were married.

Most of the men in the town despise Sykes and his treatment of Delia. They often talk about how she has lost her youth and shine because of his actions. Yet, none of them is prepared to face Sykes with these accusations. Instead, they all grow mute whenever they spot him approaching. It is a strange case of bad men allowed to remain bad by all parties. All throughout the story, no reason was provided for why no one offers Delia help despite knowing what she goes through with her husband and him being a womanizer hated by all other men.

Delia decides she does not need Sykes in her life, since he is a good for nothing husband, but remains married to him. While Sykes has decided to seek his freedom with his mistress Bertha. Sykes plots to kill Delia by hiding a rattlesnake in her washing basket. However, in a twist of fate, Sykes himself is bitten by the snake. As Sykes lies dying, Delia sits contemplatively under a chinaberry tree, ignoring Sykes' pleas for help, and waiting for him to die.

3.3. *Sweat's* Major themes:

Before engaging in the analyses of the major themes of the story, one must acknowledge the tone in which it is written. Oftentimes, thanks to the omniscient narrator, we are inside Delia's head and have a front row seat to her thoughts, feelings and emotions. The use of such storytelling provides the reader with a deeper connection with the protagonist and allows for the understanding of her feeling on a much personal level.

Huston also uses a suspenseful tone in dealing with events that requires anticipation. Such as when Delia mistakes Sykes bullwhip for a snake. From that point onward, the reader learns that Delia's biggest fear is snakes, and that her husband is an abusive man who intentionally terrorises his wife.

The story's title, "Sweat," seems straightforward. The story takes place during summertime in Florida, when it is hot enough to make a reptile break a sweat. The fact that Delia is a manual labourer gives us the idea that she probably sweats a lot, too, washing all those clothes all day. There is also this line: "Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat! (Huston 08). Sweat is also a reminder of the not-so-clean things in Delia's life—namely, her husband Sykes. If it were not for him, she'd probably work less *and* cry less. Interestingly enough, by the end of the story, Delia has a rare moment of rest waiting under the tree, while the sweat has been washed away, cleaned up, and removed.

One of the major themes of the story is marriage. It is unclear why Delia has remained married to her abusive husband for 15 years. Although a lot of speculations could be provided. The story serves a medium to help women in Delia's situation look at themselves from the third person perspective, and maybe, change their lives and not wait for a snake.

"Sweat," like many of Hurston's stories, focuses on a very specific sector of society—Southern, working class African Americans. Another distinction to this micro-society is the

fact that we never see white people—we barely even hear about them. We know that Delia does their laundry, but she never talks with them or about them. That being said, we think it's pretty daring of Hurston to have purposefully left out a specific part of society (the white majority) to focus on the minority.

3.4. Defying Sexism in *Sweat*

Historically, the art of writing has been classified as a masculine feature. The ability to write has historically been seen as derived from male sexuality and akin to all things masculine. Just as maleness is associated with all things superior and femaleness associated with things inferior as well explained in the stark binaries of logo centric thinking, females are on the opposite side of the binary when it comes to writing (Jones228).

Therefore, women were long excluded from writing, “If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power” (Gilbert and Gubar 67). This opinion might be seemingly confirmed with the dearth of female writings from the earlier times. However, one must feel the extreme lack of access to education afforded at that time to women, the left outs of which are felt even today. As Virginia Woolf argues in “A Room of One’s Own,” as “certainly, there were women in the past with great passion and creativity that were barred from writing due to societal norms” (47-48).

Hurston makes subtle arguments as a talented author writing on the issue of female inequality in marriage in her short story *Sweat* to forward the cause of feminism. As a strong and independent woman the protagonist Delia finds herself at the receiving end of the patriarchal society that strongly privileges men and denigrates women.

There is also another important facet that the story deals specifically with race. Hurston is not only promoting feminism but specifically black feminism. The story comprises

many African American characters and makes only minimal reference to whites. Like Hurston, not only is the protagonist Delia underprivileged by gender, she is underprivileged by race. "Sykes is similarly underprivileged by race but in his relationship with Delia he is dominant in the relationship because of his gender" (Huston 3).

Throughout *Sweat*, Hurston explores the various ways in which sexism is manifested and she shows with a literary genuine its devastating effects on the lives of women. One of the most striking examples of sexism in *Sweat* is the character of Sykes, who embodies the abusive and oppressive husband. Sykes constantly belittles and demeans Delia, both emotionally and physically. He mocks her for her hard work and refers to her as "a common nigger woman." This derogatory language reflects not only his disdain for her but also the broader societal view that devalues the labor of Black women.

Sykes's infidelity is another example of sexism in the story. He spends Delia's hard-earned money on his mistress, Bertha, and even brings Bertha into their home. This blatant disrespect for Delia's feelings and her role as a wife is indicative of the gender dynamics of the time, where women were often expected to tolerate their husbands' infidelity.

Delia's struggle for independence and self-respect in the face of Sykes's abuse is a central theme in *Sweat*. She is determined to maintain her self-esteem and financial independence through her work, which is in desolate contrast to Sykes's laziness and reliance on her earnings. This challenges traditional gender roles and highlights the resilience of women in the face of adversity.

Another subtle form of sexism can be seen in the way the townspeople view Delia. They gossip about her failed marriage and her husband's behaviour, but they rarely intervene or offer her support. This indifference to her suffering reflects a broader societal acceptance of domestic abuse and the tendency to blame the victim rather than the abuser.

In *Sweat*, Zora Neale Hurston paints a vivid picture of the sexism and misogyny that women, especially Black women, faced in the early 20th century rural South. Through the character of Delia and her turbulent relationship with Sykes, she highlights the oppressive power dynamics that existed in marriages and communities during that era. The work serves as a powerful critique of the patriarchy and a testament to the strength and resilience of women in the face of sexism and abuse.

In this literary work, Delia's character represents firm strength and resilience as she confronts implacable sexism and abuse. She persists in her assiduous work, aiming to achieve financial independence and self-respect. Delia's resolution to assert herself and her refusal to let society restrict her to traditional gender roles directly confront the oppressive gender norms of Hurston's era. Her character stands as a powerful illustration of a woman who faces and ultimately rises above the sexism and misogyny she experiences in her life.

Hurston and her works perhaps of being marginalized are still read and celebrated today. While much more progress is expected in the field of literature for women, for African Americans and for African American women, Hurston stands as an exemplary figure and hers is a success story to serve as a reminder of the progress in the field of literature especially by women and black women. Though her gender and race has influenced the content of her short story *Sweat*, yet her skill as a writer transcends both gender and race. Apart from representing a strong black female voice Zora Neale Hurston's fiction also creates ultimately meaningful and beautiful literature.

Sweat alludes both to not only Delia's toil which supports her economically in a society that provided little employment opportunities to black women but also to the physical and emotional abuse Sykes imposed on her. That way Hurston's short story *Sweat* is represented as a female empowerment text about women overcoming her abusive husband. As David Headon in his book *Beginning to see things really* admits, the story "forcefully

establishes an integral part of the political agenda of black literature of this century... Hurston places at the foreground feminist questions concerning the exploitation, intimidation, and oppression inherent in so many relations” (Headon 37).

3.5. Domestic Violence in *Sweat*

Delia was oppressed by her husband Sykes. He abused Delia for fifteen years. Delia has to endure emotional or psychological and physical abuse and made against to Sykes. It can be seen from the quotation below:

She squatted in the kitchen floor beside the great pile of clothes, sorting them into small heaps according to colour, and humming a song in a mournful key, but wondering through it all where Sykes, her husband, had gone with her horse and buckboard. (Hurston 01)

This explains the poor life of Delia. She worked hard without stopping to make a living for her family every day even it was a Sabbath day where people went to worship and vacation, the circumstance emphasizes how she struggles to work hard. She ponders his misfortune every day because she has to face many difficulties that she experiences every day. In the real situation woman got treated every day will feel pressured and overwhelmed. Woman will feel like a fooled who has to do things she should not do. Bad circumstances force a woman's condition to suffer to work tirelessly and incessantly. This event illustrates the reality that occurs in people's lives. However, this emotional abuse has a significant impact on women mental and emotional well-being.

Delia married Skyes and two months after the wedding he beat her for the first time and she stayed with him. Even through times she knew he had another woman she was still there working hard and supporting the both of them. As the marriage progress he finally started taking her money to pay for the rent of his latest Mistress Bertha.

Sykes treated Delia like a weak object and was easy to play with. This incident shows the actions of abusers in general who only want the body of a woman. After he got what satisfies his lust, abusers will enjoy oppressing women. In fact some men want women only as satisfying lust only. After satisfying his lust, men will treat women roughly with physical violence. This happens because a man feels powerful over a woman.

Delia's work-worn knees crawled over the earth in Gethsemane and up the rocks of Calvary many, many times during these months. She avoided the villagers and meeting places in her efforts to be blind and deaf. But Bertha nullified this to a degree, by coming to Delia's house to call Sykes out to her at the gate. (Huston 05)

This quote describes Delia's distresses and struggles with her husband's unfaithfulness. In addition to being physically abused, she is also publicly humiliated by her husband's mistress. This causes Delia to have deep psychological scars in addition to her physical ones. Therefore she suffers from social isolation which is itself another form of violence.

Again abusing her financially by taking her hard-earned money to spend it on his mistress is representing another form of domestic violence. Economic abuse is a tactic widely used by abusers and manipulators to maintain their victims trapped in the toxic relationship.

In "Sweat," Hurston clearly and directly condemns domestic abuse. Her condemnation functions in two ways. First, she depicts Delia and Sykes' marriage as being wrecked by Sykes' emotional and physical abuse. Second, she uses the viewpoints of other men in the town to *also* criticize Sykes' behavior. In this way, Hurston does not allow abuse to be portrayed as the inevitable product of a patriarchal society. Instead, she shows it, quite simply, to be evil, and as something that can't be explained away or justified.

Near the end of the story, as Delia finally tells Sykes to leave after his years of emotional and physical abuse, she says: “Ah hates you tuh de same degree dat Ah useter love yuh.” Delia makes clear here that she married Sykes for love, and the story makes clear that she only ever acted out of love: she worked hard to provide for her husband, she meekly obeyed him, she endured his beatings, and she did not fight back against his constant infidelity. Sykes, though, never ceased to beat her, to berate her, to play tricks on her, and to hate her all the more, it seems, for enduring his abuse. At no point in the story is it ever suggested, by anyone other than Sykes, that their marriage is wrecked by anyone other than Sykes. His emotional and physical abuse is always held front and center as cruel, unjust, and evil.

None of the men in the village at any time suggests that Delia deserves or somehow caused Sykes’ abuse of her. They do not shame Delia, or claim that she is deficient in some way. It is quite the opposite: the men blame Sykes and see his abuse of his wife as unacceptable. In fact, Joe Clarke, the store owner, speaks up to define the dynamics of Sykes’ particular kind of misogynistic attitude as one that brings unhappiness. He compares sexist men’s abuse of their wives to a man chewing sugarcane: they use up all the sweetness, then resent the bitterness and damage their abuse has created. Clarke asserts that men like Sykes know what they are doing, and hate themselves for it, and then hate the women they abuse as a way to protect themselves. The other men then all agree. However, despite their wisdom about abuse and condemnation of its practice, one could argue that these men then don’t do enough to intervene. When Sykes shows up to the store, they do all leave, essentially shunning him. But they never step in, and no one ever tries to protect Delia.

Hurston’s short story entitled *Sweat* indicates that perseverance helps to go through the miserable years as represented by Delia Jones’s experience of facing her abusive husband, Sykes Jones. Sykes’s insecurity as a jobless husband is covered in rudeness, cruelty, and

mocks besides having another woman. For fifteen years Delia applies elements of perseverance, such as fearlessness, choice, discipline, clarity, life is life, just like me, and patience. She could survive against Sykes's domestic violence in the forms of physical abuse, psychological abuse, and threats of violence. Even Sykes's terror of rattlesnake, through at first has the potential to paralyze Delia due to her fright of snakes, could be overcome by Delia's growing fearlessness and clarity to observe the scary moment. Finally Sykes's arrogance, self-confidence, and evil plan made him be bitten by his poisonous rattlesnake previously set up to put Delia's to death. Delia's was free from her abusive husband at last. Her perseverance led her to a free life in the house she sweated so far to own and keep it.

Conclusion:

When looking at *Sweat* through feminist and historical lens, Hurston explains the idea of a sexist society fully exploiting and breaking down women until they dispose them. To conclude, Zora declines to sustain the stereotypical roles of black women and does not toughen sexist modes of oppression. Instead she inspires black women to defy sexism by not permitting themselves to become victims and by presenting how those who abuse women get what they deserve.

Zora Neale Hurston provides a poignant and distressing portrayal of domestic violence. Through Delia's character and her tumultuous relationship with Sykes, the short story sheds light on the often hidden and deeply ingrained issue of abuse within intimate partnerships. Delia's journey, from victimhood to empowerment, serves as a testament to the strength of survivors and a call for awareness and change in addressing domestic violence.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

Black women had a far tougher battle to wage since they had to contend with both the sexism of their own Black community and the racism of the larger white culture. Black Feminist was developed in reaction in order to share the experiences of marginalized and harmed African American women.

The main causes of the suffering of Black women are the patriarchal system, the sexist environment within the Black community, as well as the racism within the dominating white community. As the chapter makes clear, Black women were only able to fight against discrimination by building their own platforms utilizing resources like literature and political activism.

Hurston explores the idea of a sexist society full of men exploiting and demeaning women until they are disposed of in *Sweat* when read from a feminist and historical lens. To sum up, Zora refuses to perpetuate the stereotypes of black women and does not make sexist forms of oppression more severe. Instead, she encourages black women to challenge discrimination by preventing them from becoming victims and by showing how those who mistreat women receive justice.

In this piece of literature, Delia's character embodies unwavering fortitude and determination as she faces relentless sexism and abuse. She continues her diligent labor, with the goal of attaining both financial independence and self-esteem. Delia's determination to assert herself and her unwillingness to be confined by societal expectations of traditional gender roles directly challenge the oppressive gender norms prevalent during Hurston's time. Her character serves as a compelling example of a woman who confronts and ultimately overcomes the sexism and misogyny that sheen counters in her life.

Zora Neale Hurston offers a moving and troubling depiction of domestic violence. By using Delia's character and her tumultuous connection with Sykes, the narrative reveals the frequently concealed and deeply rooted problem of abuse within close relationships. Delia's transformation from a victim to an empowered individual serves as a tribute to the resilience of survivors and a plea for greater awareness and reform in addressing the issue of domestic violence.

Works Cited

- Alen, Brenda and al. *Slavery and Justice*. Brown University, 2006. Pdf.
- Andrea, Meluchová. *Afro-American Feminism* . OLOMOUC, 2010.
- BBC. *Reasons for the development of the slave trade*. s.d.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z22nfg8/revision/1>. 2023.
- Blackstone, Amy. "Gender Roles and Society." Miller, Julia R, Richard M Lerner and Lawrence B Schiamberg. *Human Ecology: An Encyclopedia of Children, Families, Communities, and Environments*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003. 335-338.
- Blight, David. *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* . Southern Poverty Law Center , 2018.
- Breiding, M.J. *Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization*. Washington, DC: National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Lence Survey, 2002.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. «Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.» *Stanford Law Review*. Stanford Law Review, 1991. 1241-1299.
- Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. HarperCollins e-books, 1984. ISBN 978-0-06-179370-7.
- Gilbert, Sandra M et Susan Gubar. «The Madwoman in the Attic.» *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* . Cambridge : Blackwell, 1986.
- Headon, David. *Beginning to see things Really: The Politics of Zora Neale Hurston* . London: Routledge, 1985.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminism Thought*. Éd. Second Edition. New York and London: Routledge, 2000.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a Women? Black Women and Feminism* . South End Press, 1981.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Sweat*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1977.
- Jarrett, Gene Andrew. *A companion to African American Literature*. Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom: Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture , 2010.

- Jaynes, Gerald. «Blacks in the Economy from Reconstruction to WWI.» Scott, William R. et William G. Shade. *An African-American Reader-essays on African-American History, Culture and Society*. Washington, D.C: Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2005. 124-135.
- Jones, Ann Rosalind. «Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'écriture Feminine.» *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986.
- Puher, Kathleen. «Healers in Naylor's Fiction.» *Twentieth Century Literature*. Hofstra University, 1994.
- Robinson, Armstead. «Full of Faith, Full of Hope: African American Experience from Emansipation to Segregation .» Willaim R, Scott et Shade William G. *An African-American Reader-essays on African-American History, Culture and Society*. Washington, D.C: Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2005. 105-123.
- Sitkoff, Harvard. *The Struggle for Black Equality 1954- 1992*. New York : The Noonday Press , 1993.
- Smith, Rochelle and Sharon L Jones. *The Prentice Hall Anthology of African American Literature*. U.S.A: Prentice Hall, 2000.
- Sobhi, Abd Al Hakim. *African American Literature from The Seventieth Century Till The Ninetieth Century*. Tlemsen : University of Tlemsen, 2017. PDF.
- West, Candace et Don H Zimmerman. «Doing Gender.» *Gender and Society* (1987): 125-151.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986.
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

Appendices 01



Zora Neal Huston (1891- 1960)



The Short story 'Sweat' Cover page