



THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOME SPECIFIC WOMEN WRITERS IN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to shed light on the role of the Afro-American women writers in literature and their role in incarnating the bitter social conditions under which blacks have lived in America. Through these women writers' literary works, they try to point out black's oppression, humiliation and ill-treatment at the hands of whites. They also stress Negro Americans' need to revolt against their oppressors. The research is going to concentrate on the history of Negroes' suffering in the United States. Therefore, a brief survey on blacks on blacks' pains, agonies and anguish during the period of slavery as well as that of racism is to be presented through the works of these women writers. This paper will clarify how blacks were captured in their motherland, put into cages as if they had been animals, and sold to white slave traders. Moreover, the researcher is illustrating the unbearable humiliations of Africans in slave auctions and the way they were prepared for the new stage of their dreadful future life. Afterwards, the torture, the brutalization and degradation of Negroes working on plantations especially in the South of America, are to be expose. Besides. The researcher will focus on these people's agony after the Civil War. Slaves' freedom actually proved to be a false dawn.

The Afro-American women writers could assure that Negroes faced racial segregation in almost all fields of life. They were isolated in ghettos where they suffered a lot from terrible housing conditions. Furthermore, they were not allowed to enter any of whites' institutions such as schools, hospitals, and even churches. These miserable men were also prevented from making use of all the facilities or the services of such places. The only alternative they were left with was to have their own institutions which, in fact, presented low-standard services. Negroes faced the ugliest feature of racism in the field of transportation. These people were forced to take the back seats in buses and trains. The American justice machinery, unfortunately, closed its eyes to their suffering and totally ignored their valid grievances but the Afro-American women writers stand against this oppression.

Introduction

In this paper, the researcher is trying to give a brief survey about the black feminist writers in America. The aim is to concentrate that both the black man and the black woman suffer deeply from racial discrimination. One tends to say that contemporary Black feminist writers are working within a well-established black literary tradition in which writers have consistently been concerned with how the black

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American survivors in the New World, as an individual and as a race. Hence the search for identity and the development of self arise out of this artistic and social concern.

To be a black woman artist, is to held the view that it was your responsibility to tell the truth about the deplorable conditions of the peoples of the world, in general, and your people, in particular. Black women contended that it was a sine qua non for an artist to thoroughly delineate the truth, even if it was bitter because there is always hope for a better future, the shaping of which should be the ultimate aim of the artist.

On the cultural intellectual philosophical level, the majority of Afro-American women writers have been influenced by Malcolm X / Malik Al-Shabaz. They "Afro-American women writers " used to refer to Malcolm X as "the great Malcolm X." Malcolm X /Malik Al Shabaz was a Muslim black nationalist who sincerely believe that Islam – with its spirit of moderation, toleration, justice, equality and universality – can heal society from its social and economic ills. Women writers have a great share in the consciousness – raising and pride – developing process among blacks. For they believe that the task for black people is to control themselves, defeat the enemy, and usher in the new era.

Afro-American literature and Black women writers have been ignored for years

It is self-evident that Afro-American literature in general, and Black women writers, in particular, have been ignored. For the past several years. Critics have generally concerned themselves with examinations of Western literary works. Lloyd W.Brown has asserted :

Let us interject here, without equivocation, that Wright, Ellison, and Balduim *are* enormously significant writers by all the connotations of that overworked word. However, the almost exclusive emphasis on *them*, even now during the academic renaissance, implies that the critic's awakening is little more than a somnolent reflex, an unthinking, automatic application of an elitist philosophy which has prospered for generations in the criticism of European and (White) American Literature.¹

On the other hand, the Black Woman's struggle for self-definition and personal respect parallels that of Black Women writers to identify their art during the twentieth century. One cannot deny that pre-twentieth-century Black women writers are treated only as contributors to the history of Black literature. Calvin Hernton writes :

Despite women writers such as Effie Lee Newsome, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Ann Spence, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Nello Larsen, Jessie Fauset, Dorothy West, Helene Johnson, and others, it has been almost impossible to read the critical works and general history of the New Negro / Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and get any impression other than "New Negroes" were entirely of the male sex.²

It seems that during the Harlem Renaissance (1917 – 1929) to the Black Arts Movements of the 1960s, the importance was only to the male writers. Hence, Black women writers struggle to identify themselves, and their art against racism and sexism for a long time. But on the other hand, none can deny that suffering which is derived from certain historical as well as contemporary variable circumstances, particularly of poverty, racism, sexism, self-destruction, and oppression, continues to be the Black women writers' motif throughout their works. That is why:

black women writers manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social and economic experience they have been obliged to share. The black feminist critic would find innumerable commonalities in works by black women.³

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One can assume that the pressures of life are so great against Black women. Hence, the works of Black women writers demonstrate the journey which starts with a complete loss of self till it comes to self-discovery, and acceptance. The works of Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Sarah Wright, Paula Marshall, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelous, Ntozake Shange, Carolyn Rodgers, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Langston Hughes, and Gwendolyn Brooks, dealing with female characters in search of role and meaning, explore how suffering, cultural pressures, marital life, movies, irresponsibility, and literature often impede growth and self-knowledge. Throughout Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the reader comes to know that it is certainly Pecola's father's rape of her that leads most directly to her eventual madness; although Cholly, the father, admits that he commits the rape to try to end some of his daughter's suffering, the idea of material life, irresponsibility and suffering has been clarified through Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. More important though, black women writers managed to carve an indelible place on the American Theatre, and to become on equal footing with American playwrights during the fifties, Elizabeth Brown-Guillory remarked:

Women playwrights before 1950 were full partners in the theatre's protest against conditions for blacks, whether in the form of race propaganda folk plays or historical dramas. Not until mid-century, however, would their voices reach beyond their communities into the highly competitive world of professional theatre⁴

One can safely say that Alice Walker as a black writer-focuses light on Black literary tradition. She presents miserable characters in her fictions, most of whom are Blacks and females; stressing different relations between Blacks and whites, and the dimensions of race, and of female concerns. She writes about women writers, stressing how:

Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, "the *mule* of the world," because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else - *everyone* else - refused to carry. We have also called "Matriarch "Super women", and "Mean and Evil Bitches". Not to mention "Castrates" and "Sapphire's Mama". When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted, when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty inspirational appellations, then stuck in the furthest corner. When we have asked for love, we have been given children. In short, even our plainer gifts, our labors of fidelity and love, have been knocked down our throats.⁵

Alice Walker explains how the African roots influenced the way Black females lived, and the way Black authors write, responded, and in general, related to their environment. Moreover, she describes the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that emerge from along tradition. It is noteworthy to say that there have been many recent studies exploring Black women's literature through cultural, historical, and feminist relative ness: utilizing both traditional and Marxist methodologies.⁶

One can safely say that feminist Black, writers have depicted the American experience of Black in general, and Black women, in particular, in a variety of environments and historical climates. This experience has been characterized by nearly four hundred years of struggle in the New World. One can "understand the Black woman to the extent that we are able to concrete, but also the historical collective experiences of all Black women." On the other hand, most critics of literature of oppressed peoples agree that the critical task cannot separate the literature from the historical context in which it was written. Hence:

There is no separation between life and writing. The danger in writing is not fusing our personal experience and world view with the social reality in which our inner life, our history, our economics, and our vision. What validates us as human beings validates us as writers. Not topic is too trivial.⁸

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The knowledge of the history of Black women reveals that they continue to live in an oppressive society hence, feminist Black writers believe that oppressed people need to know the circumstances of their oppression, no matter how painful the memory is. Paula Marshall, as a contemporary Black feminist writer, writes " If we are to have a sense of our total experience we have to mold for ourselves a more truthful identity. "9 One tends to say that, as a result of being in an oppressive society, the intensity of suffering experienced by the characters of contemporary Black writers, in particular, ranges from comic distress to bitterness, and tragic misery. They throw light on the paradigmatic of suffering humanity, ordinary people, most of whom are Blacks whose lives seem filled with more sorrow than joy.

It seems that the effects of Blacks' great immigration from the south to the north are more profound on Afro-American literature. At this point one must refer to Harlem, and to the intellectual and artistic movement that exploded in Harlem between 1917 and 1929 which was called then, as it is now, the Harlem Renaissance. In fact, it happened as a result of the large immigration of talented Blacks to Harlem in the years before the war. Harlem, New York, appears as a viable center of Negro cultural, intellectual, and political life. Alain Locke, a Black philosopher, has asserted : " Here, Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world but first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. "10 Manhattan which makes up a large part of New York city, and in which Harlem exists has attracted Black minorities whether they are West Indian, black Africans or American negroes. It also attracted blacks from all parts of the states. Some of these were country folk others were business men, professional artists, poets and mere workers. Each of these groups has arrived to New York with its own set of separate motives and worked to achieve its own ends. In Harlem, negro life seizes upon its first chance for group expression as well as self-determination. In other words, Harlem to the Black is like Dublin to the Irish.

One has quoted extensively from *The New Negro* by Alain Locke to focus more light on the Harlem Renaissance and the writers of that period, and to explain what Harlem did mean at that time, between 1917 and 1929, to many Black women and men. One can safely say that it was this emergent group of Afro-American professionals, creative artists, educators, and intellectuals that helped to form and establish not only the Harlem Renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s as well. It is worth saying that during the Harlem Renaissance the reader can acknowledge Black female writers of the 1920s and 1970s who, like most middle – class women of pre-Depression America and unlike contemporary Black feminist writers, chose to make their heroines upper-middle class, and Black women light-complexioned. Moreover, through their characters' search for their identity, the writers limited themselves only to Black middle-class. Among Black women writers of the 1920s who focused attention on this image of the Black women were Jessie Redmon Fauset and Nella Larsen. They described Western standards of beauty at that time, during the 1920s and 1930s, " when black intellectuals in their struggle for independence glorified all things African and disdained all things European ".¹¹ And although Jessie Fauset was the only Black author who published more literary works during the Harlem Renaissance than any of her contemporaries, she " seldom mentions the depressing conditions under which most turn-of-the century blacks lived in her works. Her fiction is peopled by characters who are " trying for a life of reason and culture, culture in this case being Western refinement. "¹²

Throughout her *The Chinaberry Tree*, Jessie Fauset was much more concerned with depicting the Black middle-class man who " is not being pressed too hard by the Furies of Prejudice, Ignorance, and Economic Injustice ".¹³

Fauset explained why she chose to create the characters, particularly the heroines, she did ; she wrote that this work is about " those breathing spells in-between spaces where colored men and women work and live and go their ways in no thought of the problem. What are they like them ? So few of the other Americans

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know. "15 After the decline of the Harlem Renaissance, Black authors still depict Blacks as having " no thought of the problem ", and if they have, they are powerless. W.E.B. DU Bois, a great Black thinker, wrote :

It is as those one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it ; speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development ; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world. It gradually permeates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear ; that some thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. They get excited ; they talk louder ; they gesticulate.¹⁵

Dubois has asserted that Blacks, at that time, are hopeless, and powerless. In fact, the Black female characters as being depicted by Black women writers show a resignation to force whose oppressive weight is far greater than the intensity of the women's dreams for their own lives. Pauline Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and Men Copeland in Alice Walker's *The Third life of Grange Copeland*¹⁶ enhance the understanding of the theme : the poor women who are burdened by their own race, color and creed.

Looking back upon two Black female writers of the 1920, Jessie Redmon Fauset and Nella Larsen, One can declare that throughout their literary works they have tackled the idea of the search for identity, but their works in fact are about the problems of self-determination with a narrow kind of focus: they highlight " the cultural dilemma of middleclass mulatto women. "¹⁷

Bernard W. Bell has asserted that " By stressing the genteel tradition and everyday rituals of the urban black elite, Fauset limits her presentation of truth and reality to the class of people she knew best. "18 Nella Larsen has tackled the problem of the search for identity among Blacks in one of her major works, and she focuses attention on the idea of reconciliation but, like Jessie Redman Fauset, she neglects the difficulties of racism and poverty among Blacks. In *Quicksand* (1928), the heroine, Helga Crane, is concerned with " the things which money can give such as leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings, Things, Things, things " One tends to say that Helga did not want money to buy " a brownstone house " like Silla in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, but her quest is for " Leisure, attention ".¹⁹ It seems that the idea of Black female writers of the 1920s, of reconciliation at that time. Hence throughout their works, their characters overcome color prejudice, and both characters : the dark-skinned and the fair-skinned have been cleverly ingratiating and accommodating.

Reference must be made here to several themes that encompasses Black literature, and which are produced by Black women. In this connection, Mary Helen Washington explains ; " the conflicting relationships between mothers and daughters, the alienation between black women and white women, growing up black and female ... the antagonisms between black women and Black men, and the intimidation of black women by the American standards of physical beauty ".²⁰ added to this is the impact of racism and sexism upon Black women which distinguishes Black women's writing.²¹ Another feature of literature produced by Black women writers is the concentration on a mother, grandmother, foremother or female ancestor for guidance in their writings, rather the male ancestor. Joanne M. Braxton has asserted :

The ancestral figure most common in the work of contemporary Black women writers is an outraged mother. She speaks in and through the narrator of the text to " bear witness " and to break down artificial barriers between the artist and the audience. ..., for the Black woman artist in the presence of this female ancestor, who passes on her feminine wisdom for the good of the " tribe ", and the survival of all Black people, ... The outraged mother embodies the values of sacrifice, nurturance, and



personal courage-values necessary to an endangered group. She employs reserves of spiritual strength, whether Christian or derived from African belief.²²

In this respect, Toni Morrison writes :

It seems to me interesting to evaluate Black literature on what the writer does with the presence of an ancestor. And these ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide it a certain wisdom.²³

It seems that the dominating feature of the Harlem Renaissance writers, particularly contemporary Black feminist writers is the voice of the spiritual and real foremother : from unknown African mothers whose words return only as echoes in stories to immediate foremothers who have helped keep alive the ancestors' " notion of song ".²⁴ In fact, it is through the values and traditions learned from their foremothers that Black feminist writers attempt to reflect and redefine their culture – worthy of mention here, is that Zora Neale Hurston was " the only writer in the 1920s, and 1930s, from a southern background who evaluated her southern exposure, realized the richness of her racial heritage, and built her fiction on it. "²⁵ Hurston also " enlists the power of storytelling to defend herself against the gossip and disapprobation of the townsfolk."²⁶ It is throughout the protagonist Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes were Watching God* that Hurston has depicted Black folk culture in a good way. The reader comes to see how Janie's grandmother directs her entrance into adulthood. Janie, through her grandmother's advice, comes to find love and self-identity only by rejecting that life which is shaped by bourgeois values. But we should bear in mind that " Hurston did not portray blacks as victims, stunted by a racist society. Such a view, she believed, implies that black life is only a defensive reaction to white racism. "²⁷

Another important aspect which has been revealed in the writing of twentieth century Black women writers in maintaining their identity is their depiction of their African roots during the Harlem Renaissance as well as the present time. It is Zora Neale Hurston, the Harlem Renaissance writer, who is the spiritual – literary foremother of many contemporary Afro-American women writers. She is " The only female of the period to receive substantial recognition but only as an eccentric who wrote folktales and ran around measuring Negro Heads. "²⁸ Moreover, Hurston drew upon " the rich oral legacy of Black female storytelling and mythmaking that has its roots in Afro-American culture. "²⁹ However, most critics admit that Hurston's achievement and her works will be used as an illustration of how the Black woman was developed by Renaissance writers. "³⁰

Blacks' misery and poverty portrayed throughout specific literary works

On the other hand, One have Kristin Hunter who uses big cities, like Philadelphia, where she was born, to depict Blacks' misery and poverty. It is throughout Hunter's works that she has portrayed the Blacks' struggle and the journey to find out the Black self. Her idea of reconciliation is that either to survive or to escape the ghetto. By survival, Hunter means that Blacks should confront all problems ; as inhabitants of urban environments ; they confront a scarcity of job opportunities, inadequate housing, and hostile police forces. Throughout her literary works the characters show the desire for and effort to achieve upward mobility, regardless of the racial problems. Darwin Turner writes, Rather than following some recent writers who promote black literature for black people, Mrs. Hunter has interested herself in the inter relationships of white and black Americans and in the emotional crises of urban Negroes. "³¹

On the other hand, Kapai emphasizes the significance of Paula Marshall's art . She explains :

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She (Paula Marshall) is equally proud of her black heritage but believes that her art should be devoted to showing the inhabitants of the world.³²

Marshall is interested in the interrelationships of white and Black Americans. Seen in this light, the writings of Alice Walker express how Black writers have devoted considerable attention to the development of self in its relation with other races. Walker writes, " I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the whole survival of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of Black women."³³ Besides, as a Black revolutionary artist, Morrison employs her art to solve the social and psychological problems that have faced Blacks in America. She has asserted :

We bear witness and reveal that world, and that life, and those people, not in the perfection and heroism alone, but also in the ugliness. Then one can sift take out the experiences that can be valuable, and move to the next step.³⁴

Dealing with the feminist Black writers' movement as a cause, we cannot deny that Black women writers shed light on Black roots, tradition the influences of African culture on Black America, and Blacks' suffering against racism and sexism. Hence, they help the reader to come closer to the Black identity because " in order to understand what a person is and the way he views the world, one must have some awareness of this experiential background, especially as it includes experiences with home, family, immediate neighborhood, and the agencies of both cultures which directly affect the person's life ".³⁵ But the most important question here is : Can one consider Black literature as a universal one ? Larry Neal in his new famous " The Black Arts Movements " explained :

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community, there are in fact and in spirit two Americas ... one black, one white. The Black artist takes this to mean that his primary duty is to speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of Black people. Therefore, the main thrust of this new breed of contemporary writers is to confront the contradictions arising out of the Black man's experience in the racist west "³⁶

Larry Neal believes in this double-consciousness : " two Americas ... one black, one white. In this respect color used to be seen as determinate of a person. Moreover, it indicated status both socially and culturally. Whites were seen as the educated and the accepted ones, while Blacks were seen as inferior. In order to gain acceptance in a white-dominant society, Blacks tended to behave like whites ; and this is the duty of Black writers, particularly the contemporary ones, to direct the reader's attention so that the two races are residents of two separate worlds ".³⁷

Black writers can achieve a certain degree of universality through depicting their own tradition and culture, thus, reminding their own people of the pain and sorrow that are connected with the great amount of suffering which they have endured. Robert A. Bone comments, " like any other writer, the Negro writer must achieve universality through a sensitive interpretation of his own culture. "³⁸ Throughout the works of contemporary Black feminist writers, one tends to say that they have achieved universality through portraying Blacks' personal, spiritual, social, economic and political life in the New World. But because the New World was not the choice of the Black man ; contemporary Black feminist writers stress the search for black cultural tradition, throughout their works. unless, is that Black feminist writers undertake a search for their own values and identities as males and females. They show a sociological understanding of contemporary Afro-American life, and focus light on the main problems in the New World. Above all, the idea " very much of the literature created by black American writers in the twentieth century is unknown to the general reading public and little known even to the students of American literature. "³⁹ has been changed. Nowadays, there have been a great

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number of well-known Black American writers whose works have been translated into several foreign languages. Nellie Y. McKay explains : " Toni Morrison [as a black lady] is read in several foreign languages including German, Spanish, French, and Italian Currently, all her works are available in German translations and enjoy wide circulation in that country. "⁴⁰ McKay's words, in fact, reject the idea that Afro-American literature, in the twentieth century, is unknown, and underlies, to some extent its universality.

Contemporary Black feminist writers' works, and in general Afro-American literature, have, in fact, survived and prospered. One can safely conclude that behind the superiority of Euro-American literature, Afro-American literature, and in particular " Black women's realities, concerns, and analyses are being brought to world attention today by their political activism globally, and by their artistic and written expression. "⁴¹ Thus Black American women writers have been able to spread their dilemma, communicate their ideas and express their aspirations to the entire world.

As described by scholars like Dorman and Jones:

Slavery, undermined the stability of the black family, emasculated the black male and created a matriarchal society, and fostered feelings of inferiority and self-hatred in blacks that produced serious personality problems. In sum, slaves and their descendants, denied participation in the dominant white culture and were unable to develop their own culture, existed in a kind of culture void, and by and large were unable to develop into mature and well-adjusted persons.⁴²

Benjamin Quarles, a historian and a leading authority on Black participation in American wars, states :

All slaves were included with the idea that the whites ruled from God and that to question this divine right-white theory was to incur the wrath of heaven, if not to call for a more immediate sign of displeasure here below.⁴³

The most difficult aspect of slavery was in fact, its impact upon the Black woman. One can assume that the knowledge of the Black woman's history in America makes it clear that she has emerged out of a history of oppression. A Black woman was brought to America to increase profits by breeding more Black slaves ; she was forced to give birth every year and her child was sold to increase the owner's wealth. They also saved as " body toys " for their white masters, thereby preserving the status of " Lady " for the white woman. As early as 1667, the State of Virginia passed the strictest law governing the status of children of Black women in the United States and thus by implication, the Black woman's status as well. Such a law which indicated that the offsprings of an Englishman and a Negro woman would be free according to the condition of the mother ; but usually such conditions forced them to slavery as we will understand according to Giddings, and if any Christian would commit fornication with a " Negro " man or woman, he would pay double the fines for committing the former act. Giddings states :

The circle of denigration was virtually complete with this law, which managed to combine racism, sexism, greed, and piety within its tents, while fornication with a black man or woman was unchristian and so carried a great fine than interracial lesions, children born of a black woman, no matter who the father was, would inherit her status which was rapidly becoming synonymous with that of a slave.⁴⁴

No one would deny that racism and sexism as well as slavery, helped in shaping the Blacks' mentality in America. Even when slavery ended, the plight of the Black woman did not significantly improve. She moved from slavery into the system of sharecropping ; under comments : " If she was permitted a husband, he was not allowed to protect her so that she was left defenseless against sexual onslaught by other males on the plantation. "⁴⁵ The society did not allow Black men to protect their women.

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Between the 1880s, and the second decade of the twentieth century, more than two million Afro-Americans did leave the south and immigrated to northern and western states. This recent immigration to the north produced dramatic social changes, which signified more than a confrontation with the White World ; it implied a transition in social classes. One tends to say that it is society itself with its political, social and economic experience which has forced Black writers to basically live in the same way and under similar pressures and to share similar themes throughout their works.

Many Black women writers concerned with depicting the effects of slavery, racism and sexism insofar as they affect the interpersonal relationships of the individuals. These women writers' works question the Black woman's relationship to Western civilization and the effects of that civilization upon the Black family in general. It would seem that these works portray social and political problems within the Black community to try to find solutions. "problems are solved by moving ahead. Images have power to shape and control our lives. "46

In American culture there is an accepted phrase for the stereotype : WASP ; this acronym stands for : White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. For most Americans this is the ideal standard of living. Since early in life, Blacks realize that they are different people ; simply because they sometimes understand history too well, see their parents' reactions, or suffer themselves from discrimination. Most Blacks see their Blackness as a stigma : they suffer from racism within themselves.

In the literary works of the Black women writers, especially those which depict the Black people's life in the New World during the first half of the twentieth century : at a time when it was clear that superiority was to white Americans and the majority of Black Americans were well below the poverty line, runs an interest in portraying the Black's Sense of alienation and confusion in the New World. This is how social critics describe the situation.

" Through the pre- 1960 period, the black class structure was often described as being pyramid shaped, with a large lower class, a small middle. In contrast, the white class structure was described as being diamond shaped, with a small lower class, a huge middle class, and a small upper class. "47

Throughout the majority of the Black women writers' works, the old generation is blamed for not accepting itself as Black living in America : trying to imitate whites and hating their children simply because they are Black and " Ugly ". They live in the New World with two souls.

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American World, ... a world which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of a Lways looking at one's self through the eyes of others, ... one never feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro ; two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings ; two warring ideals in one dark body. 48

One can safely say that the Black Americans suffer much ; Blacks are alienated from their roots, and frustrated by the discrimination encountered from direct contact with whites. Throughout the major works of the Black women writers, the authors highlight the fact that the causes of alienation come from within as well as from without, and they are making an attempt to help the Black self.

Black thinkers status in America

The three following different quotations from three different Black thinkers will serve to depict Blacks' status in America during the twentieth century : as portrayed by Black feminist writers throughout their works. In 1903 Dubois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* that :



The history of the American negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon.

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In 1970 Lerone Bennett described the Blacks' status in America saying :

We must abandon the partial frame of reference of our oppressors and create new concepts which will release our reality, which is also the reality of the overwhelming majority of men and women on this globe. We must say to the white world that there are things in the world that are not dreamt of in your history and your sociology and your philosophy.⁵⁰

Furthermore, in 1985 Beverley Bryan explained :

Some Black people forget about their culture and bring up their children with this society's values, so that they know nothing about their history. Black people need to be more positive and more together. If we're not together here in this culture, then there's no future for us.⁵²

In order to explain Blacks' status in America during the twentieth century, we have quoted extensively from three different Black thinkers who depict their confusion at that time. It can be safely said that the majority of Blacks, in America, live in a state of " double – consciousness " as a result of the historical forces that have shaped their personality, and mainly because in most cases they could not accept themselves as being " Blacks " living in the New World. One are inclined to agree on these points with Dubois, Bennett, and Bryan that Blacks should be " both a negro and an American ", to " create new concepts ", and " to be more positive and more together ", to maintain " better standard of living in America. One tends to say, that reconciliation is the second phase of the thematic development : which is the shift from rejection, subsequent alienation to acceptance and reconciliation.

It is throughout their works that contemporary Black feminist writers depict the Blacks' process of maturing which ultimately leads to reconciliation in the New World. This they manage, by depicting the different stages of Blacks' status and confusion in America. It seems that the contemporary Black writers have returned to Zora Neale Hrston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), which Robert Hemenway regards as " one of the most poetic works of fiction by a black writer in the first half of the twentieth century, and one of the most revealing treatments in modern literature of a woman's quest for a satisfying life ".⁵²

Throughout the literary works of Black feminist writers, we will come to realize that when Blacks face a moment of self-illumination, they discover their spiritual identity and at the same time, they start blaming each other in different ways. When they face a moment of self-realization, they realize the close relation between themselves and the Black community. Blacks are shown to be at their best when they are close to their surroundings, when they are in an ultimate reconciliation with society. Throughout the literary works, one will come to see that most characters are, at first aloof, but later aware of the real motive for rejecting themselves as Blacks and rejecting society. One tends to believe that in their rejection of society there is a state of isolation and alienation, but at the same time, their rejection of themselves and of society is a step towards their ultimate reconciliation. Many black women writers believe strongly that the modern dilemma is in the Blacks' rejection of themselves as " Blacks ". Their message is primarily social ; human binding throughout their literary works, and as considered the possibilities of social reconciliation as well.

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Like W.E.B. Du Bois, Many black women writers believe that the mental evolution of a Black character comes when the character realizes that it should not be measured according to whites' opinion. Although we cannot accept the word " enemy " as descriptive of the relation between Blacks and whites, there is some truth in Du Bois' statement, Blacks should be proud of their own history. Blacks should not submit to the idea of *superiority* and inferiority as their destiny. They should rather evolve with the times because time changes. One can safely say that Black women's idea of reconciliation focuses on the idea of love : first the Black individual should love himself as a Black, should live in peace with himself. Only then, the individual can come to an understanding of the world around him.

The search for identity and other struggles for existence hold an important place in modern literature. In this respect, it is Black literature that devotes a good deal of attention to portray Blacks who are searching for their own identity in the New World. Being Black and female, makes Black feminist writers search for their own personal values and identities. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the quest for of an individuality and self-contentment is a common theme among contemporary Black feminist writers. After all, one tends to admit that they are the only ones capable of reflecting Black women's feelings.

Conclusion

This article attempted to expose how some black women writers tried to reflect the sordid social circumstances in which Negro Americans have lived both during the period of servitude as well as that of racial segregation. These women writers clarified this point through their literary works. As a matter of fact, their remarkable literary works tried to bring to light blacks' pains and agonies at the hands of the proponents of racism. In these literary works, the writers encourage these miserable colored people's to revolt against their oppressors. This study focused on the historical background of Afro-Americans' suffering either as slaves or free men, on one hand, and the conditions under which black women writers have lived as well as the development of their career as writers, on the other.

Moreover, the research attempted to pinpoint the main issues raised in the women's works and the technical devices used to emphasize the themes discussed. At the same time, this paper tried to provide a brief survey of African Americans' persecution throughout the period of slavery. These people were submitted to different types of humiliation, brutalization and anguish. The article focused on these people's pains and agonies because of the dreadful happenings which befell them since they were taken away from their home land Africa up to the stage when they were sold in auctions in America. Then, the study clarified how all the promises of equality and liberty made by the political American leaders both before and after the American Civil War were broken.

After their emancipation, blacks were never treated as free American Citizens. These miserable men faced the ugly features of racism in the fields of labor, education, religion, transportation and health. They were forced to get isolated in poor districts where they were stifled by sordid social conditions. They had to construct their own institutions. As a result, there were black churches, schools, and hospitals. Negroes were subjected to daily humiliation and oppression. They were harshly suppressed and were prevented from complaining even in a low voice. The researcher attempted to show how black women writers could reflect how slave songs and dances were the real seeds of the tree of the Afro-American literary works. At last, the researcher reached certain findings which he would like to explain. For further research, there should be considerable emphasis on the dramatic techniques deployed by the writer to convey and affirm his views. Moreover, a word-by-word analysis should be applied to probe the depths of Afro-American women writers' literary works



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