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The Alienated Clara: Intersectionality Perspectives in Adrienne Kennedy's *The Owl Answers*

Clara yang Terpinggir: Perspektif Interseksionaliti di dalam Drama Adrienne Kennedy
The Owl Answers

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ABSTRACT

Critical works on Adrienne Kennedy's The Owl Answers have been limited to the domains of surrealism and to the frame of literary criticism which situate Clara, the protagonist of The Owl Answers within a psychological context. Many critics find that the play is a portrait of a black woman who is searching for home and belonging in a world of discrimination and inequality. Clara is often regarded as a mixed-raced woman of fragmented psyche who remains confused about her identity. Within the perspective of intersectionality, however, we contend that the study of Clara's character acquires new dimensions of analysis. This article addresses Clara's alienation within the scope of three intersectional categories of her identity: race, gender and hybridity. Clara tries her best to identify with her father's white legacy, but all her efforts have been futile. As she recognizes that she has no hope at all to belong to this legacy, she feels entirely frustrated. The tragic outcome of The Owl Answers owes to psychological trauma experienced by Clara. We interrogate the overlapping oppressions endured by Clara through a study of how these three interlocking categories combine to shape her alienation right up to the point where it causes her to take her own life.

Keywords: Clara; The Owl Answers; alienation; Adrienne Kennedy; intersectionality

ABSTRAK

Penulisan kritis mengenai drama Adrienne Kennedy The Owl Answers sebelum ini terhad kepada domain-domain surrealisme serta rangka analisis kesusasteraan yang menghadkan Clara, watak utama The Owl Answers kepada pemahaman konteks psikologi. Ramai penganalisis berpendapat bahawa drama ini menggambarkan potret seorang wanita Afrika-Amerika yang mencari tempat di mana beliau tidak terpinggir di dalam dunia yang penuh diskriminasi dan ketidakadilan. Clara kerap kali diperlihatkan sebagai seorang wanita kacukan yang mempunyai ketidakpastian mengenai identitinya sendiri, dan ini menyebabkan ia mengalami pergolakan jiwa. Namun demikian, apabila peribadi Clara dianalisa daripada perspektif interseksionaliti, dimensi-dimensi baru peribadi beliau dapat diketengahkan. Berikutan daripada tujahan argumen ini, artikel ini mempertengahan peminggiran Clara melalui skop tiga kategori interseksionaliti: bangsa, gender dan hibriditi. Analisa artikel ini bertujuan mempersoal serta menyerlahkan penganiayaan yang dialami oleh Clara dengan mengkaji bagaimana ketiga-tiga kategori interseksionaliti yang bertindihan telah membentuk peminggiran yang dialaminya. Untuk mencapai tujuan ini, artikel ini menggarap kaedah teoretikal interseksional untuk mengkaji dimensi peminggiran yang dialami oleh wanita-wanita kacukan Amerika-Afrika seperti yang terserlah di dalam drama ini.

Kata Kunci: Clara; The Owl Answers; peminggiran; Adrienne Kennedy; interseksionaliti

INTRODUCTION

One of the more notable plays by black American playwrights in the 1960s is Adrienne Kennedy's *The Owl Answers*. Unlike her contemporaries, Kennedy's approach towards feminist issues is markedly more intersectional. Through the suffering of the play's protagonist, Clara, the play reveals the intersectional axes of oppression present within her life, complicated by her own confused and ambiguous feelings about her racial hybridity. This ontological ambiguity is reflected in the shifting quality of the set which represents more than place, and in the masks figures who play more than one role. The play reflects the events of the period – the play was first seen in 1965, during the period of the Civil Rights Movement. Critics as varied as Sollors (2001), Barnett (2005) and Kolin (2005) point out that Kennedy's theatre of the 1960s contributed to the sea-change experienced by African-American drama. The autobiographical revelation reflected in Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* is therefore the outcome of a personal experience of a hybrid woman.

The Owl Answers's narrative centres on the life of a black woman seeking communication and belonging in an unjust world. When Clara travels to England to seek her father, she finds herself caught in a narrow space between two legacies: African-American (black) and English (white). She tried her best to identify with English figures, as may be evidenced by the figures of Anne Boleyn, William the Conqueror and William Shakespeare who all seem to be speaking to her, but all her attempts were in vain (Kennedy 2001:29-31). Her consecutive efforts to identify with icons of English history and literature, reflect not only her need for belonging, but indicated her intense (and problematic) longing to relate to British society. Black women are besieged by the dual axis of racial and gender-based oppression. If the black woman is poor as well, this adds an additional axis to the oppression she suffers. Wilkerson (1992: 58) asserts that these intersectional categories of oppression become "forces strong enough to destroy the creative spirit or to make withdrawal from the world". Through Clara's character, Kennedy was able to depict vividly the challenges faced by a black woman in a world of increasing dehumanization and alienation.

The theme of hybridity in relation to the biracial black woman is also discussed in *The Owl Answers* through the image of Clara's parents. Like the

other plays written by Kennedy during that period, *The Owl Answers* depicts a protagonist undergoing a traumatic identity crisis. The narration of the play reveals a conflict in Clara owing to the manner in which she was severely repelled and completely dismissed by white society, as a black woman in England. Through the intersectional considerations of race, gender and hybridity, Clara experiences the oppression of alienation. Kolin (2005) writes that Clara's distortion of the self symbolizes the fragmented, disenfranchised persona of the African-American. Latifa, Ruzy Suliza and Anita Harris (2016: 130) also opine that,

Kennedy internalised the awareness of the suffering endured by the African-Americans. The legacy of imperialism, slavery and the consequences of this upon ontological [equilibrium] lead to the depiction of conflicted characters.

Clara of *The Owl Answers* is a good example of this intersectional suffering and is directly relevant to Kennedy's own experiences as a biracial African-American woman. Brown (2001:292) sees that through Clara's character, Kennedy presents a "powerful metaphor for the social (de) construction of racial and ethnic identities" which reflects the contemporary discussions of the "identity politics". Walseth (2016 a: 31) writes that Clara's situation reflects the "horror of the things" which surround her. Deploying a surrealistic method which includes the fluid spatiality of the stage directions and the overlapping personas of masked figures, Kennedy constructed Clara's character to epitomize the alienation suffered by African-American women due to intersecting and overlapping oppressions related to trauma and identity. A hybrid and biracial identity adds to the alienation experienced by the protagonist in this play.

Pursuant to the above, the present article investigates Clara's alienation in Kennedy's *The Owl Answers*. The implication for society in our findings include the various ways in which intersectional imbalances lead to alienation and the ways in which this alienation can have adverse effects on the human psyche, potentially resulting in deleterious life decisions, particularly amongst marginalised communities. Following from this, the current article presents the study of alienation in Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* through the critical approach of intersectionality. This study is anchored in the intersectional struggle against institutionalised racism experienced by African

Americans and is based on the theory developed by Crenshaw. We believe that an intersectional exploration of the theme of alienation in *The Owl Answers* will provide a new dimension to the study of Clara's character, whose pronouncements have been seen as anti-black and problematic.

The main objectives of the article are to explore the intersectionality of race, gender and hybridity in Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* and to examine the ways in which these three intersectional categories have cooperated to shape the alienated character of Clara. In order to achieve these objectives, the article seeks to discover the main intersectional categories employed by Kennedy in *The Owl Answers* and the ways in which these interlocking oppressions have shaped Clara's alienated identity.

THE OWL ANSWERS: BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The issues of oppression in *The Owl Answers* are depicted through the interlocking intersectional categories of race, gender and class – and hybridity results in the intersections. Clara is an African-American woman who works as a “school teacher in Savannah”, while spending “her summers in Teachers College”, but her life has taken a traumatic turn for the worse (*Owl Answers*: 33). This educated mixed-race African-American woman is a daughter of a black mother who cooked for Clara's white father. In the play, Clara travelled to England to attend her father's funeral, but she was prevented from entering the Chapel because of her race and her position.

Throughout the play, Clara longs for her father's British heritage, and has problematic associations with her own heritage as a multiracial African-American woman. Clara's desire is to become heir to an English heritage, augmented by her readings of imperialistic British histories and literature. Clara's aspiration to embrace the white culture of her father is revealed each time she tries to identify herself with “SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR, CHAUCER AND ANN BOLEYN” (*Owl Answers*: 30). When Clara recognizes that she has no hope to belong to this heritage at the end of the play, she decides to end her life by committing suicide. Clara is condemned outside and inside: outside by her father and inside by the black family who had earlier adopted her. Kolin (2005: 54) writes that through:

Kennedy's multivalent symbolism, Clara becomes completely displaced from self and family. Rejection by the outside white world coalesces with the abjection she suffers inside.

The displacement mentioned by Kolin is evident in Clara's problematic identification. Clara's identity is problematized from the very moment she was born because she is dubbed a “Bastard” (*Owl Answers*: 29). Her sense of loss increases when she travels to England. In England she is entirely alienated; alone in a place which refuses her completely. Clara loses her sense of self and is thrown into an ontological conflict which leads to deleterious results.

PREVIOUS CRITICAL WORK ON *THE OWL ANSWERS*

Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* provides a wide scope for Clara's characterization through the various identities she has been given. For instance, she is identified in the play as, “She [sic] who is Clara Passmore who is the Virgin Mary who is the Bastard who is the Owl's world” (*Owl Answers*: 29). In the play, “the characters change slowly back and forth into and out of themselves, leaving some garment from their previous selves upon them always to remind us of the nature of ... Clara” (*Owl Answers*: 29). Clara has been given these identities deliberately and symbolically to refer to specific issues. These names present psychological symbols for her identity, and through them Clara presents various and intricate ideas of the life of a black woman. In many ways, Kennedy follows through on her theme of the multiplicity of fractured identities in this play, as with *The Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964), which was written a year before *The Owl Answers*.

In 1965, *The Owl Answers* was a thought-provoking work, as it displayed the multi-layered aspect of racial tensions and subsequent oppression in a white-dominated America. The play addressed the deep racial agony which was the major issue of the sixties civil rights period. Brown (2001: 291-292) believes that *Owl Answers* represents the complexities of racial heritage. Brown describes the inner conflict inside Clara's mind mirrors the struggle of African-Americans as a whole. Brown also observes that the conflict inside Clara's mind is actually a reflection of the conflict in Kennedy's mind. Brown asserts that the *Owl Answers* depicts

profound autobiographical aspects. Kennedy herself confirms that playwriting was a good instrument in her hand to question her identity (Kolin 2005:49). Clara is chained to psychological matters imposed on her by nature; she is a “victim.... of the sour-racial prejudice” (Valgemae 1971: 229) who is seeking her identity as a black American woman. In his review concerning Kennedy’s work, Williams (1993) finds that in *The Owl Answers*, Kennedy delves into the combined aspects of the individual through Clara’s character. He asserts that *Owl Answers* is a reflection of the black-white conflict and Kennedy has succeeded in depicting this conflict through Clara’s character.

Brown (1996) points out that through Clara’s character, Kennedy presents a revolution of black women against social and political oppression. Furthermore, Clara depicts the individual’s struggle within the self and internalized social. Kennedy mingled dialogism in the formal structure for the sake of focusing on the psychic scene to manifest the outstanding conflict between Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourses and mythologies. In other words, Kennedy explores the fragmented self in a struggle with itself and with society. Cervenak (2005) observes that Adrienne Kennedy’s surrealist theatre extends a philosophical discussion in relation to the after-effects of slavery. Kolin (2005) agrees with Cervenak that Kennedy’s dramaturgical experiment entices audiences to the surrealistic subconscious world of Clara which

complicates the issue of racial identity. The surreal component of this play may be seen in the framing of events within the subway car, encompassing the past and the present, as well as the manifestation of multiple personas, a theme Kennedy revisits in more than one play.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the current article we investigate the theme of alienation in Kennedy’s *The Owl Answers* through an intersectional perspective. As such, this study builds upon Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality and Seeman’s (1959) debate of the meanings of alienation. We will examine the interlocking considerations of race, gender and hybridity to show how intersectionality of these aspects can shape the oppressive system which seizes Clara’s personality and prison her in alienation.

Stimulated by two impulses, we utilize the theory of intersectionality to examine the theme of alienation. The first of these two impulses is that intersectionality equips us with visions on the importance of Kennedy’s *The Owl Answers* in meeting the prevailing forms of oppression which push to alienation. The second impulse is that intersectionality prolongs the understanding of the black women’s complicated experience of interlocking ways of repression.

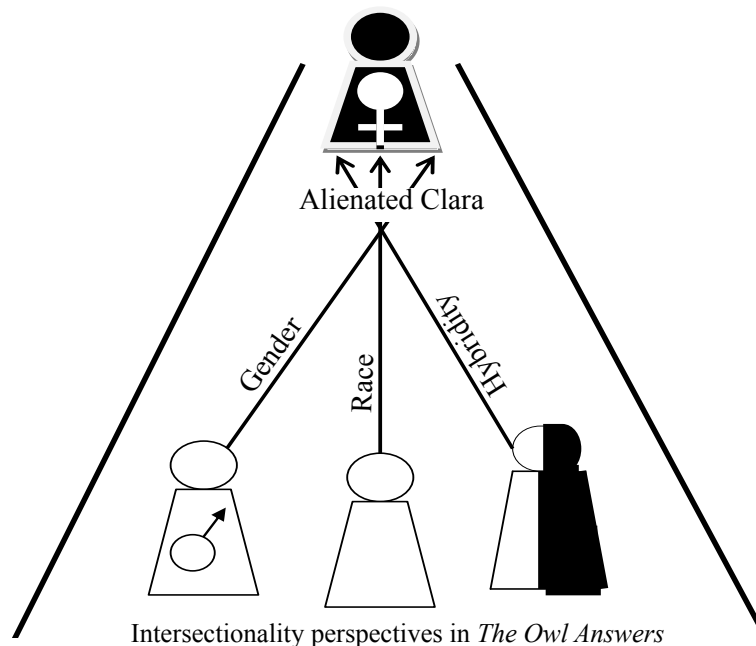


FIGURE 1. The Conceptual Framework of this Study

Negative aspects of alienation which affect the individual's psychology form the crux of the discussion. Some of these aspects include anger, despair, and desperation. In such cases of alienation, suicide is the probable result; Clara's case in the current article is the best example. Based on Seeman's "Meaning of alienation" (1959:784), in his "social-psychological point of view", he identifies five types of alienation. 1. "powerlessness", 2. "meaninglessness", 3. "normlessness", 4. "isolation" and 5. "self-estrangement". Building on this view, Clara's alienation in *Owl Answers* may be analyzed through Seeman's framing of the dimensions of alienation. Such sense of alienation can entirely capture the individual and may lead to suicide.

Like most of the characters in Kennedy's plays, Clara is the victim of alienation. The source of her alienation emerges from the fact that she is a woman who belongs to African-American heritage. As an African-American woman of colour, she is doubly oppressed by patriarchy and by white supremacy. Alienation in *The Owl Answers* reflects the condition of Clara's mind which leads to the moment of shatter and drives her to end her life. Intersectionality is primarily connected to black feminism and arose from Crenshaw's theory which is grounded in her own intersectional experience as an African-American. Crenshaw's (1989) analysis is encapsulated in her groundbreaking article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex". Crenshaw confirms that the overlapping between race and gender should not be marginalized, and these categories should be investigated together in any study of oppression and empowerment. Crenshaw suggested intersectionality to investigate the various cultural and biological categories, like race, gender, sex, class, ability, and many other sides of identity, which interlock on numerous levels. Accordingly, Alexander-Floyd (2010: 814) points out that scholars from various fields of the globe start to look for ways of employing the "unique insights" provided by the approach of intersectionality. Dharmoon (2011:241) confirms that the paradigm of intersectionality provides a framework "within which worldviews and theories are built and which has ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions". This framework allows scholars and activists to understand the varied ways in which these categories operate and contribute towards imbalances that are both ontological and epistemological. Intersectional

considerations impact not just a person's self-identity but their perception and understanding of the world around them. It leads to desires and impulses that impact their choices in life. This may be observed in the identity crisis experienced by Clara in *The Owl Answers*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In *The Owl Answers* the relationship of race, gender and hybridity is very important because each of these categories fosters and enhances the other in unveiling the system of oppression upon Clara's character. Dharmoon (2011: 234) writes that when "race and class are considered in relation to gender", there may sometimes arise an "imposed stability to the trinity" that may miss "the variations that arise from different contexts" of what Dharmoon calls the "race-class-gender trinity". However, within the context of Clara's hybrid existence as a mixed-race woman, this "imposed stability" cannot be maintained and we argue that the racial and class-based instability further exacerbates the gendered oppression experienced by Clara, thereby leading to ultimate alienation.

GENDER

The records of feminist criticism with its various trends and approaches debate one simple fact. This fact is concerned within the ways in which man looks at this Othered entity: woman (hooks 1992). The two categories of race and gender need to be interrogated jointly in order to probe the amount of oppression experienced by African-American women. Anthropological studies have inspected the ways in which patriarchy centres man as the fundamental self and woman as a subsidiary. Therefore, the African-American woman is doubly oppressed. Theorists of intersectionality, especially Crenshaw (1989; 1991), Collins (1989), and McCall (2005) confirm the importance of "interlocking" relationship of the various categories of oppression in any discussion of empowerment. Wilkins (2012:174) comments that scholars have widely examined race and gender as social structures, build and performed at both levels the macro and micro. These imposed categories delineate unequal social arrangements. Problematized identities arise from the merging of both imposed and chosen meanings.

In the issues of persecution and empowerment, Crenshaw (1991) affirms that intersectionality discusses the “interacting” of “multiple dimensions” in the experiences of black women. Crenshaw confirms that in the social tally, the black woman is located at the lower place in hierarchy of subjugation. In her studies, Crenshaw (1991) concludes that the suffering experienced by black women are almost definitely the result of the intersection between racial and gender-related oppressions. Crenshaw (1991: 1244) asserts that such suffering cannot be explicated within the argument of “either feminism or antiracism”. Both dimensions must be investigated together within the perspective of intersectionality. Crenshaw finds that much of black women’s agony comes from the intersection of gender and race.

RACE

Racism is a product of imperialism. In *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon (1952: 9) entirely concentrates on the origin of “inferiority complex”, which comes from a huge “psychoexistential” complex derived from the “juxtaposition of the black and white races” (Fanon 1952: 5). Fanon perceives this complex is a result of plenteous aspects of colonialism and racism. The already Othered black individual finds herself doubly Othered because of her sex, and this is an essential part of understanding the ways in which intersectionality works in order to explain the ways in which this Othering leads to alienation. As the suffering of black women comes almost from “interlocking” kinds of race and gender, Crenshaw (1991: 1243) explains this intermingling through “focusing on two dimensions of male violence against women-battering and rape”. In *The Owl Answers*, Clara’s very birth is the subject of controversy and confusion, as the identity of her birth father is nebulous and seems to shift from the Reverend Passmore who adopted her, and William Matheson, her biological father – and the reason for her ontological strife and trauma. It is suggested by her mother’s narrative that Clara’s father imposed his gender, race and class-related privileges to overpower Clara’s mother sexually. This is a suggestive metaphor for the ways in which black women are oppressed by white supremacy.

Since her very conception is the site of intersectional violence and oppression, Clara’s entire identity and ontology is challenged and in

question, and this is very powerfully represented by her multiple identities in the scenes that seem to unfold from the subway car. The name “Bastard” which is affixed to Clara from the onset already sets her apart and alienates her from the norms in both moneyed White society and within the context of the African-American community. Because of her mother’s traumatic pregnancy, Clara’s mother places a high value on virginity. Her mother explains: “When I see sweet Marys I cry for their deaths, Clara. The Reverend took my maidenhead and am not a Virgin anymore and that is why you must be Mary, Always be Mary, Clara” (*Owl Answers*: 37). However, Clara, the Owl, is no virgin, and has been previously married. She has been riding the subway in a search for something – perhaps not love so much as a certainty that she does not find. The figure of the Owl therefore is symbolic as an intermediary between worlds but also as an eldritch symbol of Clara’s mother’s pain and trauma. This may be seen in the following passage:

Clara, you were conceived by your Goddam Father who was the Richest White Man in the Town and somebody that cooked for him. That’s why you’re an owl. That’s why when I see you, Mary I cry. I cry when I see Marys, cry for their deaths.” (*Owl Answers*: 32)

Clara’s mother imparts upon her a deep fear of sexual congress, an awareness of the fact that she is in-between two social and racial groups. She grows up fearful of being like her mother. This deep fear is an important component of her alienation and propels her decision to commit suicide when the black man tries to seduce her during the last moment of the play. Clara’s awareness of this vulnerability of her gender is clear through the inner confusion inside her mind:

He came to me in the outhouse, he came to me under the porch, in the garden, in the fig tree. He told me you are an owl, ow, oww, I am your beginning ow. oww, and I ran to the outhouse in the night crying oww (*Owl Answers*: 35).

In *The Owl Answers*, there is a seducer identified only as “Negro Man”. He first attempts to seduce her on the New York subway platform and fails. Close to the end of the play, the “Negro Man” puts her down in a Harlem hotel room on a burning bed. Clara faces his sexual overtures with a knife covered in the owl’s “blood and feathers”, which are her own.

SHE, fallen at the side of the altar burning, her head bowed, both hands conceal her face, feathers fly, green lights are strong. Altar burning, WHITE BIRD laughs from the Dome. She Who is Clara..... suddenly looks like an owl and lifts her bowed head, stares into space and speaks: "Ow... oww" (*Owl Answers*: 42)

The play ends with this image of Clara. The burning bed, the owl feathers and the knife that Clara wields ineffectually in self-defence are all suggestive and symbolic of the powerlessness Clara feels as she fluctuates in-between identities. Part of this powerlessness is related to Clara's awareness of the vulnerability of her gender. But there is also a definite Oedipal complex happening here in which Clara almost idolizes the idea of her rich white father, and looks for him in the men she seeks out on the subway. Curb (1992:145) describes the burning bed as Clara's "funeral pyre".

The events within the subway are suggestive and troubling. In one of her conflicting testimonies, it appears as though Clara is seeking out men during her "summer in New York" in order to assuage her inner conflicts in relation to racial and socio-economic identity but this seems to be at odds with the metaphoric imagery of the Owl, and the post-traumatic reactions exhibited by Clara (Kennedy 2001:37). Curb (1992: 145) tackles this discrepancy head-on by looking at the spectre of rape. Curb writes that the prompting sexuality in the play reminds us of "Leda's rape by Zeus in the form of a swan". Clara is seized, suggestively, in an assault and painful rape which "initiates her into the dark, carnal, nonhuman world of owldom" (Curb 1992: 145). Patsalidis (2015:14) points out that *The Owl Answers* is about "construction and deconstruction" of a Black female who is trapped between her many identities which "establish the economic and ideological code of the play". This helped Kennedy to scheme a heterotypic "space in terms of what is real" in the play.

In some cultures, the owl represents wisdom, and in some other cultures, it is a symbol of death. In the play, Kennedy uses both meanings. Kennedy blends these meanings within the repetitive and onomatopoeic language of the play; "ow, hoo, who?" in order to leave the interpretation of "owl" open to audience (Walseth 2016, a: 16). In his discussion about the significance of "owl" in the play, Adolphsen (2016: 67) argues that in contrast to the caged bird in the play, the owl may refer to freedom. Therefore, when Clara metamorphoses into an owl by the end of the play, she embodies the in-between-ness of the bastard identity she has been desperately trying to escape throughout

the play. Finally, Clara espoused a new kind of "sanity". Although Clara's final transformation is "ambiguous", there is one certain thing in it that is linked with her future happiness. "Kennedy's play shows both what happens when an individual wears the mask, and the tough, revolutionary possibility that ignites when it is taken off" (Adolphsen 2016: 68)

The Owl Answers reveals the issues of intersectionality in connection with the reasons behind alienation. Kennedy's play reveals the multiple axes of oppression that work to seclude the black woman from her society and even from herself. The sense of alienation is repeated in Clara's conversations over and over with a strong tethering to the both themes of gender and race:

Bastard they say, the people in the town all say Bastard, but I—I belong to God and the owls, ... till Reverend Passmore adopted me they all said Bastard... They all said who ever heard of anybody going to London but I went. I stayed in my cabin the whole crossing, solitary. I was the only Negro there... I met my father once when my mother took me to visit him and we had to go into the back door of his house...but the past years I've spent teaching alone in Savannah. And alone am almost thirty-four, ... (*Owl Answers*: 36)

In *The Owl Answers* Kennedy displays the alienated self of the mixed-race woman muddling through the question of identity in a world of discrimination and injustice. Consequently, this leads to the great failure in claiming the culture of her dead father. These figures rejected her claim severely in the following racial conversation:

The conversation continues in a racially perjorative

She: We came this morning. We were visiting the place of our ancestors; my father and I. We were wandering about the gardens, my father leaning on my arm, speaking of you, William the Conqueror. My father loved you, William

They: (Interrupting). If you are his ancestor why are you a Negro?
Yes, why is it you are a Negro if you are his ancestor?
Keep her locked there.

She: You must let me go down the Chapel to see him
(*Owl Answers*: 30-31).

tone which reveals the prejudices of British society as experienced by Clara:

If you are my ancestor why are you a negro, Bastard? What is a Negro doing at the Tower of London, staying at the Queen's House? Clara, I am your Goddam Father who was the Richest White Man in the Town and you are a schoolteacher in Savannah who spends her summers in Teachers College. You are not my ancestor. You are my bastard. Keep her locked there William (*Owl Answers*: 33).

Clara is unable to have a positive image about herself without the support of her father's society, yet there is no space for a black woman in this society. All of Clara's attempts to associate with the representatives of her father's white patriarchy fail. These representative characters are tools through which the issue of intersectionality oppression is revealed. In her confused mind Clara imagines her African-American heritage through masks -- this is executed by the three figures who wear white masks. When these figures peel their masks, they show their darker skin colour. The masks in this play stand as a metaphor for the Clara's conflicted feelings in relation to her racial hybridity and how this ambiguity can lead to its own sense of alienation – Clara is very obviously seeking and the multiplicity of herself may be seen in these masked characters who overlap with one another. When these masked characters asked Clara why she is so confused and when the “Negro Man” asked if she is sick, she said:

No, I am not sick. I only have a dream of love. A dream [of].... communications, God, communications, I was the only Negro here They took him away and would not let me see him..... I must get into the Chapel to see him. I must I call God and the Owl answers..... From my Tower I keep calling and the only answer is the Owl, God. I am only yearning for our kingdom, God (*Owl Answers*: 40-41)

The masked characters in *The Owl Answers* represent a racial and cultural significance in relation to the “minstrel show” in relation to the Jim Crow era of segregation legislation. Kelley (2007) indicates that the “minstrel show” was a group of white men who painted their faces with black colour and started to imitate African American songs. The sequence of the “minstrel show” was in the late 1800s, as the legislators of the southern states in the USA had passed Jim Crow Laws. The Jim Crow Laws represented a real segregation for African Americans in the south. According to these Laws the African Americans had been socially isolated from the whites. This isolation is an important element of the racial axis of oppression that afflicts Clara's existence.

HYBRIDITY

Clara's problem lies with the particularly intersectional nature of her alienation, especially as a mixed-race individual with a hybrid identity. Clara fails to identify with her father's European

legacy in the same way that she fails to identify with the masked figures. In his article about the meaning of alienation, Seeman (1959: 789) confirms what Erich Fromm (1955) previously observed, that alienation is an experience of the individual who endures a displacement and relegation which push to “self-estrangement”. It is clear that Seeman's hypothesis here is about the way an individual is estranged from specific ideal human condition. In the *Owl Answers*, Kennedy has given Clara multiple names to increase her confused identity on one side and to indicate Clara's lost soul on the other side. With no specific identity, Clara reflects the experience of a multicultural woman who finds herself marginalized in this world. Therefore, we see that the self-alienation sense forges Clara in such a confused psychic state and pushes her to commit suicide at the end.

One of the meanings of alienation discussed by Seeman (1959: 790) is “to be something less than one might ideally be if the circumstances in society were otherwise-to be insecure, given to appearances, conformist”. In *The Owl Answers*, Clara kept longing to identify herself with her father's white heritage but she failed. This longing to identify with white characters shows the internal conflict inside Clara's mind. Kennedy conceives of Clara as a person with multiple names to show that she is a collection of many identities (*The Owl Answers*: 35-39). Hybrid protagonists with multicultural histories may also be individuals with splintered and multiple identities. This is often exacerbated by conditions of trauma, as experienced by Clara. Clara for instance, cannot escape her personal, intersectional history as a woman. The moment she recognizes that she has no hope at all to belong to a legacy she cannot escape from, Clara feels entirely alienated. This failure in integrating her many selves leads to an emotional torture.

Merton realizes that the individual's “rebellion” is one of the main signs of alienation as it leads “man outside the enviroing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new...social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards” (qtd. at Seeman's 1959: 789).. According to this argument of alienation and turning back to our earlier investigation of intersectionality, *The Owl Answers* shows the sense of alienation through the intersectional oppression of Clara. Collins (1989: 749) confirms that “One key reason that standpoints of oppressed groups are

discredited and suppressed by the more powerful is that self-defined standpoints can stimulate oppressed groups to resist their domination". We may conclude that Clara's committing suicide at the end of the play is a type of refusal against her "structural intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1991: 1245).

Seeman (1959: 790) finds that the lack of the essential "satisfactions" may lead to a lack of "self-rewarding" which is resulted in the loss of identity. This loss of identity certainly leads to alienation. Tener (2004: 730) writes that "In *The Owl Answers*, the owl is the controlling metaphor". Tener comments that on one level, this metaphor represents "evil omens and darkness" but on the other hand, "in association with the fig tree, it anchors the heroine's identity with the sexual world of her black and white parents and her many self-images". The dual nature of this metaphor is particularly apt for a depiction of Clara who contains overlapping identities: she is a mixed-race "Bastard" (*Owl Answers*: 29), the adopted daughter of Reverend Passmore, the pure Virgin Mary, and the "owl" of her forefathers. Clara is all of these characters and she is none of them as well; her fragmented psyche is a result of her alienation.

In his discussion of "self-estrangement", Seeman (1959: 790) clarifies that any comparison with the ideal human "reflects the original interest of Marx in alienation". Alienation from this perspective means the loss of the essential meaning of life. Marx studied alienation through the independent entity of the self in the material world. Hegel relates alienation to the consciousness of identity (Foster 2000). In her infinite longing to identify with the white legacy of her father, Clara indicates an implicit rejecting of her blackness (*The Owl Answers*: 30). Clara's confrontation with the "other" characters reveals the roles of intersectionality categories in shaping her alienated character. Her struggle to find a meaning of her existence reveals a deep insight into the psyche of a black woman. Clara's alienation is therefore a reflection of all black women's alienation included Kennedy. Scholars of intersectionality believe that black women's anger is a form of objection against their gender and racial disadvantages.

Harnois (2010: 72) writes that "it is the everyday experiences or "lived conditions" of black women that foster an intersectional understanding

of oppression". Clara is struggling all the time with these everyday trials and tribulations. On the one hand, she escapes the ghost of rape which her masculine community symbolizes. On the other hand, she cannot withdraw herself from the world of humiliation and marginalization as a black woman. Consequently, Clara feels that she is not able to escape her alienation. The intersectional aspects of her alienation pushed her towards suicide as a tragic endpoint to her lifelong struggle. Clara could not achieve the independence and salvation she was struggling for. Her suicide is an unfortunate form of protest against her alienation caused by the aforementioned multiple axes of oppression. Her suicide rings loud as a warning in this play of the ultimate and fatal goal of all forms of alienation, the utter negation of self.

CONCLUSION

Kennedy is one of the most significant African-American woman dramatists who has depicted experiences of intersectionality with far-reaching consequences in the African-American community. Kennedy frames femininity and blackness within a theatrical context to depict the ways in which they are excluded from the dominant discourse of America. Through Clara's character, Kennedy draws a clear image of alienation and investigates the issues of race, gender, hybridity. The intersectionality theory demonstrates the ways in which the "interlocking" system of oppression drives Clara to alienation and thrusts her to her tragic fate. Confused and "fragmented", Clara could not face the intersectional oppression of her life. Clara's suicide at the end of the play represents a psychological resistance against black women's oppression.

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