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Demystifying Violence: A Study of Resistant 'Self' Against Controlling Images in Afro-American Feminist Literature

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ABSTRACT

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The debates on the epistemic, cultural, and historical erasure of Black women in White feminist discourse have been historically established, revealing the racialized gender politics against Black subjectivity. Tainted with an overarching ideological stereotyping, the chief goal is to produce controlling images that marginalize and silence the Black community. This epistemic violence blurs the affective-referential realities of the Black society and needs a reconsideration to voice the voiceless. Engaging with the canonical Black feminist texts, i.e., *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison, the article argues that both Hurston and Morrison subvert and reposition violence not as a site of victimhood, but as a radical epistemic resource through which the Black women reclaim the lost voice and articulate a resistant selfhood. Through an in-depth intersectional feminist textual analysis rooted in constructivist worldview, the study theorizes violence as an epistemological framework, enabling Black women to resist and defy the Jezebel, mammy, and welfare mother—the imposed scripts of identity formation, and carve out an agentic niche for themselves. The study is important in unveiling the patterns of selfhood and seeks to challenge the traditional interpretations and reaffirm the Black women's consciousness against racist and patriarchal spaces.

Keywords: *White Feminism, Intersectionality, Resistance, Self, Controlling Images, Jezebel*

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White Feminism's Speechification and Patterns of Black Erasure

> *As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman [sic] in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend.*
>
> (Lorde, 1984, p. 117)

> *Have you read the grievances some of our sisters express on . . . being the only Third World woman at readings, workshops, and meetings? It is as if everywhere we go, we become Someone's private zoo.*
>
> (Minh-ha, 1987, p. 07)

Both Lorde and Minh-ha, through their theorization, critiqued the exclusionary approach towards Blacks and cautioned against the White women's flaunting of universalizing traits. Within such a framework, the Blacks are relegated to being a mere spectacle in the form of metaphorical human zoos. This raises a fundamental issue of whether White feminism stigmatizes the Black feminist stance or forecloses the Black voice. It is an undeniable fact that White feminism fails to adequately take into account the sexual, gendered, and racial stereotypes that Black women, since slavery, have been encountering. Feminism, seemingly, argues for liberation for all oppressed groups, as discussed by Eddo-Lodge, who claimed that feminism's goal is to "liberate all people who have been economically, socially and culturally marginalized by an ideological system that has been designed for them to fail" (2017, p. 181). However, this liberating purpose proved to be a fiasco as feminism, with every new wave, which was compartmentalized into inner contradictions.

In its infancy, feminism promised to establish and warrant a much-needed space, both political and personal, for females worldwide. Its progressive slogan of equality was mesmerizing; however, the same notion was thwarted when feminism was entangled by issues such as ethnicity and race, and was faced with internal contradictions in voicing only the white women's oppression. Later movements, such as #MeToo and #TimesUp, also expounded upon an untiring alignment with the 'whitening' of feminist politics. For instance, Williams (2019), in her article "How White Feminists Oppress Black Women: When Feminism Functions as White Supremacy," questions the normative prestige allocated to Whites even in debates on social justice. The way her voice was suppressed highlights a systematic pattern of silencing and ostracizing Black. As she states her experience with erasure during a conference in these words:

> The mic was taken from me, a woman of color, and handed to a White woman who had her own personal story of oppression to share. I was silenced … At the podium, the moderator affirmed her lifelong commitment to feminist ideals, while I was shamed into submission. This is White Feminism. (Williams, 2019)

Examples such as these set a precedent to valorize and envision the "white women victimage" only (Moon & Holling, 2020, p. 255) and hint at the centrality of the White discourse and the outsiders' status allotted to Black women. Moon and Holling call this "discursive violence" (2020, p. 1-2), where only Whites have the prerogative to decide who may speak and be believed. Broadly speaking, this concept closely aligns with the premise of the current study, which highlights epistemic violence as a site of knowledge-making and self-making.

Feagin's notion of the "White racial frame" (2013, p. 1) is an important thesis that elucidates the multiframing of Whites and Blacks. According to him, Whites retain a sense of superiority over Blacks in the context of individuals over collectives. The Whites are supposedly complex, privileged, dominant, and varied, whereas Blacks are artless, disenfranchised, subservient, and monotonous in their representation. This bifurcation, in the first place, erases, silences, and obliterates the very essence of black identity, and in the second place, shapes the social imaginaries, the institutional practices, and literary representation. Such discursive patterns led to the inception of controlling images of mammies, Jezebels, or welfare mothers for the othered section of society, i.e., Blacks.

Jonsson (2016), in her article, "The Narrative Reproduction of White Feminist Racism," took British feminism from its horns and condemned the cocooned presentation of white authority that virtually hibernated and muted the autonomy of the Black race. By presenting a comprehensive analysis of three contemporary narratives: *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009) by McRobbie, *Why Feminism Matters* (2009) by Woodward and Woodward, and *Reclaiming the F Word* (2010) by Redfern and Aune, she sums up the idea claiming that all these texts succeeded to "ensure the continued centrality of white feminists to the story of feminism" (Jonsson, p. 57). The fact lays bare the proclamations of the global sisterhood and reproduces the hierarchies of race, culture, and power.

This structural as well as systematic oppression and exclusion is not only reflective of white supremacy but also of a dominated status. Within this parameter, the black position is a misfit painted as an ideological caricature that is often unnamed and uncited. The theoretical shift towards ethnocentrism within feminist discourse dignifies one group's struggle for gender equality, whereas the other group's desire for gender-cum-racial equivalence is deemed problematic. Thus, a radical need for change emerges owing to these disguised and cumbersome ideological depictions. Simultaneously, a theoretical intervention also arises from this discourse, which acknowledges these racist images unequivocally, yet rarely conceptualizes violence on racial grounds as an epistemic and resistant framework through which Black women assert selfhood and agency.

This racial hierarchy is vividly tied to the so-called gatekeepers of feminist theory, who are essentially White, and resulted in the "white fragility," a term

coined by DiAngelo in 2011 to refer to white supremacists' defensive strategies, such as anger, upsetting stress, and feelings of discomfort while encountering racial disparity and prejudice. DiAngelo, in her article, "White Fragility," questions Silva's theory of "color-blind white racism" (2018, p. 65) and posits that it erases the lived experiences of systemic racism. Simultaneously, this racist climate prevents society from grappling with the underlying racist problems and how race can have disastrous global impacts perpetrated by avowed racists (conscious propagators of racist thought).

Racial control and racial ideology run deep in Western society, which fails to perceive the widespread racial ditch and maintains that a race-free society is the chief end of feminism. Despite this assumed fairness, the Western discourse is replete with racial overtones, as discussed by Mikki Kendall, who tweeted in 2013 that 'Solidarity is for white women,' showcasing the white-centricity of feminist discourse. This ignorance towards assumed gendered racism is labeled as a "whiteliness" (Frye, 1983, p. 158) problem owing to false universalization. bell hooks, in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989), envisages this issue and explains how the denial of whiteliness results in further exploitation of the Black community. The very deconstruction of feminism is, thus, the Othering mechanism that fruitfully subjugates non-whites and the hegemonic Us/Them binary.

In her seminal work, "Difference: A Special Third World Women's Issue," Minh-ha catalogues the linguistic barrier of linguicism as a colonizing tool that compels colored women to be spoken for. Minh-ha contends, "[d]ifference is not difference to some ears, but awkwardness or incompleteness. Aphasia. Unable or unwilling? (Minh-ha, 1987, p. 12). According to her, this explicit validation for an institutionalized language within Western discourse is problematic as it forces non-whites to opt for the hegemonic linguistic standards with the undermining effect that they are excluded and erased from the feminist discourse. Western scholarship, building on the premise that Blacks cannot use proper English in their works, marginalized Blacks on linguistic grounds. Minh-ha urged her co-nationals to stop living on the margins and use their voice to assert their uniqueness and individuality. She avers, "You who understand … the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice – you know. And often cannot say it. You try to keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said" (Minh-ha, 1987, p. 12). The latter feminists, cognizant of the loopholes of linguicism, also protested against this and strengthened their understanding of the foreign language.

Black Feminist Theory as Retort: From Silence to Articulation

> *Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born female . . . . Before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness.*
>
> (bell hooks, 2000, p. 07)

White women are a great deal smarter and know more than the colored women, while colored women do not know scarcely anything.

(Giddings, p. 61)

Feminism(s) as an advocacy movement accentuates women's agency and empowerment within the dominant ideological patriarchal structure. It delineates how women's treatment as "Other" paralyzes womenfolk from articulating their "self" in an apolitical way. However, the plural "S" in feminist theory is self-contradictory as it paradoxically reflects upon how feminist theory, over the years, has shed its temporal, proximal, and spatial positions of power in favor of a racialized tug-of-war bolstered by issues such as geographical space, class and color, and ultimately led towards the inherent discontinuities and contradictions from first wave to the third wave of feminism (Bailey, 1997, p. 17-18). The question of silencing on racial grounds bolstered the Black feminism to counter and articulate their thoughts.

As a counter-narrative to hegemonic practices of what was known as Morgan's global sisterhood, postcolonial feminism or Third World feminism gained ground to explicate how the women of color are doubly colonized and oppressed within the challenging social structures that either give prerogatives to the patriarchy or voices the mainstream feminism, i.e., white feminism. Since colonized women were, and are excluded from this traditional form of feminism, First World feminism consciously built the ontological and epistemological foundations around the experiences of white women cyclically, leading to what Moon and Holling dubbed as "discursive violence" (2020, p. 1-2). The introduction of the notion of race into the gender and sex-based debates of feminism marred the feminist stance and exposed its shortcomings. This tilted positionality or glorification of whiteness in feminism was harshly dealt with by black feminists who protested against this ideological perception and argued for the acknowledgement of sufferings and pains of blacks who are, on the one hand, compressed under the heavy foot of patriarchy; and on the other, presented as untouchable by their own community of feminists where a white would be exercising dominance, power and supremacy over a black.

Black Feminist Theory (BFT) critiques the determinacy and marginality established by the first and second waves, which identified themselves as 'white and educated' bourgeois women from the global North and confined themselves exclusively to the well-off strata, following the models set by Wollstonecraft and Beauvoir through their foundational texts. This and other related forms of Eurocentric beliefs of white women led black feminist consciousness "of intersecting patterns of discrimination" (Simien, 2004, p. 81). The theory postulated in Black feminism discussed the discrepancies in race, class, gender, and sex. It explicated how Black women's understanding of these concepts is tightly aligned with their upbringing and subjugation as colonized, uncouth, and ignorant beings.

Scholars such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Chandra T. Mohanty rebelled against the meta-narratives by turning their age-long 'silence' into 'articulation'. By proposing what Aamir calls "an alternativist pattern of discourse" (2018, p. 83), all these theorists pave the way for critiquing white imperial feminism. The very coinage of "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 1984, p. 51), which is "imperialist" (hooks, 1984, p. 92) in nature, played a vital role in shaping Black thought alongside the theory of intersectionality. The inclusion of intersectionality as a theory helped Black women get some public space, as it separated Whites and Blacks in terms of disparaging cultural identities. Crenshaw, through intersectional feminism, drew a dividing line between immigrants, the poor, and colored women and their devastating impacts on the psychological well-being of Black people.

Claudia Jones, a socialist feminist, came up with the idea of triple oppression, which is to Patterson's 'triple exploitation', a complex mix of cultural constructs of classicism, racism, and sexism. She, in a radical way, tackled this shadowy exploitation by claiming the idea of global emancipatory politics where the most downtrodden section of society, i.e., Black women, must be freed to set up their individuality. Giving autonomy to Blacks is synonymous with universal self-sufficiency for all women. She argued that real freedom is a matter of breaking loose the restrictive chain of a kind of what Elizabeth Cady Stanton refers to as a "triple bondage that man never knows" (Giddings, 1984, p. 61), or the triple jeopardy - racism, capitalism, and sexism, as we may put it.

Sojourner Truth, in being a victim of racial and gender discrimination, criticized allocating power to males as it would reduce women to mere objects and dehumanized beings. In her famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman" (hooks, 1981, p. 13) vehemently questioned the misrepresentation associated with black identity and addressed how the discriminatory patterns of slavery, colonization, and oppression are unconsciously rooted in African women. In fact, all these voices debated the escalating and essentializing tactics available in White scholarship and challenged its whiteness for creating an oscillating binary between the oppressed/oppressor. Since the first wave of the feminist movement was fashioned by Whites for Whites, it ceased to be an all-inclusive domain and catered only to the White community. Pointing to these idiosyncratic features, Aamir et al, in their article, "Human Rapacity and Mercy: Alternative Realisms in the Debates of Feminism," provide an apt critique of the "slogans of equality [and] empowerment" as mere "metaphors" (2021, p. 679) and caution against the so-called "feminist sloganeering" (2021, p. 684). In a way, these cacophonous White/Black feminist voices led to a disparity of opinions and mindsets, which caused more harm than good to the overall feminist stance.

In the backdrop of White imperial feminism and the miniature stature imposed upon Blacks, it is very significant to investigate how the trajectory between dominant Whites, downtrodden women of color, and resistance against unjust

exploitation is conjured up by Black feminist writers. Trinh T. Minh-ha's account of racist dehumanization and de-individualization in Western academia is quite pertinent, as through these tactics, Western society lands in the center with Black society at the periphery.

Patricia Hill Collins, in her ground-breaking book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment,* debated over how the media, as well as society, uses controlling images to monitor and curtail the growth of black women. In this context, she identifies how the dominating ISAs (i.e., school, Church, media, state, and even family) portray "African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas" (1990, p. 69) and as ideological and political tools. The depiction of these images reveals a set of social expectations and delegitimizes Black women's emotionality and agency.

The very presentation of these images received widespread critical acclaim and is embedded in all areas of the Western canon. To Collins, the very cult of domesticity entangles women to become a symbol of white-inspired "angel in the house" (a phrase borrowed from Patmore's poem with the same title) along with idealistic traits of true women, which are "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (Collins, 1990, p. 72). As a consequence, this ideal White image contrasted with all women of color as they could not fit in the criteria of this cult and became marginalized, humiliated, and powerless, justifying "U.S. Black women's oppression" (Collings, 1990, p. 5). In one of her chapters in the same book, "Controlling Images and Black Women's Oppression," Collins elucidates, "the dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of four interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (Collins, 1990, p. 72). Thus, these images reiterated the ideological purview of the patriarchy and indoctrinated the old thoughts.

Alice Walker's popular term "womanist" (1983, xi-xii) was appropriated by most Black women writers and thus, ushered in a new literary trend where they questioned the racial discrimination, sexual oppression, emotional exploitation, and demeaned stature that was centuries old and transported as part of dominant white culture. The very essence of imperial language, coercion of (Black) females by (White) females, and bizarre caricaturing as part of tradition appeared as the main tropes to be dissected. Thus, the African legacy alongside the voices of resistance was cultivated by these writers, including Anzaldua, Angelo, and Walker. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) got tremendous recognition as it critiqued the conventional sexist binaries about women's roles in marriage. It also insists on the importance of female self-actualization. The novel is appreciated for insisting on female freedom and imaginative space.

Keeping in view the ideologically constructed representation of Black women, this paper aims to provide a detailed account of how Black feminists retorted and wrote back to the dominant white problem and documented their resilience in the face of subjugation. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston is "a woman's search for her authentic self" (1937, p. 14), whereas *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison focuses on delineating the hurtful impacts of racism expressed through an irrational craving for whiteness. Both stories epitomize the intense struggles that the female figures go through in their coming-of-age phase. At the same time, they not only interrogate the harms that these constructs cause, but also vouchsafe the Black protagonists' resistant mode through which they negotiate and shatter the discursive constructions.

Adopting an intersectional feminist methodology, the study employs textual analysis as a method to read the narrative strategies, dialogues, character arcs, and the role of ideological discourse. Using an interpretivist paradigm, the study foregrounds the race/gender binary system that supports the patriarchal power structures and silences and disempowers the female society. The study offers a theoretical intervention by conceptualizing violence not merely as an oppressive tool, but as an epistemic framework that reconfigures the Black consciousness to articulate their resistant selfhood. Through an exploration of themes, symbols, and dialogues, the contested literary representations of violence and resistance are revealed to lay bare the questions of identity, power, and agency.

Violence as Epistemic Resistance in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)*

Their Eyes were Watching God was written around the 1960s and published in the 1970s, which was a turbulent period for Afro-American who were victimized for being ugly. To counter this, the "Black is Beautiful" movement emerged, dispelling the notion of ugliness. However, the writer, through this story, leaves the message that beauty is not a matter of color (say white or black); rather, each individual must be valued above this ethnicity. Using Janie Crawford, Hurston charts the evolution of Blacks from objectified bodies to self-articulating subjects.

Hurston's narrative is a slow, yet steady movement from accepting violence as destiny to resisting it for the ultimate attainment of self-efficacy and autonomy. The author stages Janie Crawford's journey as a metaphor to expose the recurring entrapment of Black women both within White as well as intra-racial patriarchal structures. Janie's adolescence phase presents her blindly following the parameters dictated by the people around her. For instance, she is a baffled young girl whose nanny, representative of White ideals, claiming "de white man is de ruler of everything" (Hurston, 1937, p. 29), wants Janie to get married since only marriage can vouchsafe her a secure, protected future and "achieve certain middle-class values" (Hurston, 1937, p. 28). Janie internalizes this dominant patriarchal image and assumes that her marriage will place her on "higher ground" (Hurston, 1937, p. 57), which gets shattered as soon as she receives objectified treatment from Killicks.

Both characters, i.e., Killicks and Starks, employ typologies of domination, characterized by silencing, surveillance, and objectification. By way of exercising an overarching ownership over Janie, they successfully shatter Janie's marriage dream, which figuratively hints at the death of her selfhood under the patriarchal standards.

The typical stereotyped controlling image of mammy and welfare mother is presented right from the beginning, where Nanny, who was once a slave, was raped by her white master; she still succumbs to this matrix of domination and expects the same traditional gender performativity from her granddaughter. Janie's intra-racial marriages under the delusion of security and financial stability end up in chaos since she is treated as an object of physical desire and the male gaze. The very silencing and domestication of her feminine part is crystal-clear when Logan Killicks and Jody Starks exert their power over her by dint of cultural constructs, and she is literally non-existent, with no entity of her own. Starks, for example, utters, "Muh wife don't know nothin' bout no speechmakin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's ah woman [,] and her place is in de home" (Hurston, 1937, p. 78). Killicks' command shows the subversion of the feminine psyche, which affects "not only her appearance but also her identity and sense of self-worth" (Hurston, 1937, p. 35). The domineering White authority of Janie's owner exemplifies "encoded oppression" (Henderson, 1989, p. 7) that turns her into a nonchalant entity by dint of which she is even denied the right to speak and is silenced. According to Henderson, "silence is an important element of this encoded oppression" (1990, p. 124), and as Janie's voice is curbed, it points to an institutionalized oppression perpetuated by the society around her.

Janie's objectification is established in the first few pages of the novel where men x-rayed her body from head to toe, thinking of her as a "pretty doll-baby" (Hurston, 1937, p. 61), victimizing her of male gaze and leaving her as a sexual whore-a jezebel image. Her stepping into womanhood is also equated with the shattering of her dreams as the novel states, "Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (Hurston, 1937, p. 57). And how the townsmen enjoyed some "good-natured laughter at the expense of women" (Hurston, 1937, p. 118). In fact, the author theorizes violence, anger, refusal, and the psychological rupture as tools for affective resistance and agency.

As the story progresses, Hurston uses several spatial metaphors for Janie, such as the horizon, the pear tree, and the muck, which is tantamount to Janie's growing awareness of her self-image. The final act of Janie shooting Tea Cake is not an expression of revenge or tragedy, but rather constitutes an embodied refusal to patriarchal norms and standards. It also acts as an ethical tool of self-preservation and a symbolic rupture from gendered violence. It is in this context that the current study seeks to study Janie not as a tragic figure, but as a conscious individual, filled with agentic vigor that helps her reclaim her interpretive control over her existence.

The dialogue, "she called her soul to come and see" (Hurston, 1937, p. 243), highlights Janie's perceptive clarity that she achieves via a violent self-assertion.

Through the portrayal of Janie, Hurston wanted to project an accurate model for Black women seeking voice and a real self. Since White feminism did not cater to the gendered racism that Afro-American women faced, writers such as Hurston and Morrison girdled up to present how the females, after going through the dark night of the soul, are able to transform themselves into empowered, self-reliant, and eloquent beings, who are radically different from the timid, disempowered, and passive females of that time. The key difference lies in raising their voice of anguish and the banner of protest against the chauvinistic patriarchy and the White feminist discourse that objectified and stereotyped the physical as well as intellectual side of the once colonized slave women.

Madness as a Response to Epistemic Violence in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye (1970)*

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* revolves around the objectification of the Black community, where the White complexion is deemed the only acceptable standard of beauty. Black is associated with the erasure of "self" through repugnance, abnegation, and finally annihilation. Instead of romanticizing the process of beauty adoration, Morrison exposes how it infiltrates a child's consciousness. The protagonist Pecola Breedlove's receding into madness is an indication of the injustices women of color experienced in the suffocating racist ideology of White masters.

Foregrounded against a story text used in American schools, *The Bluest Eye* draws on the figures of Dick and Jane to be imitated as normative role models, thereby exposing the stark contrast between an idealized White life and the marginalized Black community. The story is discursively woven into the fabric of the plot to elucidate the racial tension surrounding both the characters and the racial mindset of the mid-1950s. The story of Dick and Jane is repeated thrice, the first one as an accurate specimen of White standards; the second, having no punctuation and capitalization is symbolic of MacTeers family (i.e., Claudia hating White dolls) retaining some love and affection between them; the last version is a chaotic mess with zero punctuation and spaces, making it a jumbled-up frame of Breedloves family (i.e., Pecola's burning desire to have blue eyes) suffering owing to race and gendered identity.

Pecola's wish to have blue eyes and her alleged attempts at disappearing signal the internalization of the White gaze. This discloses how whiteness is a racialized concept, culturally constructed and validated through the white gaze. Whiteness is associated with purity, innocence, family bonding, and love; in contrast, blackness is a symbol of impurity, corruption, disintegration of family relations, and hatred. Janie reacts to patriarchal violence through her embodied

actions, whereas Pecola's resistance is knitted against her psychological fragmentation.

In her article, "Blue Eyes as Black Youth Redress in *The Bluest Eye,"* Abusneineh highlights how Morrison's portrayal of Pecola speaks up for the detrimental effects of race as well as highlights race as a redeeming element of her personality i.e., her wish to eat and consume anything that is white, hinting at her devouring and cannibalistic tendency to recover back herself from what is imposed upon her by the society around her. The blue eyes, thus, "represent a remedy for the structural violence that she experiences – poverty, domestic violence, and hunger" (Abusneineh, 2018). Nonetheless, the violence that Pecola once internalized, is metamorphosed into an embodied agency after she gets consciousness of the racial boundaries set by the surrounding society.

Morrison avers that she wanted to delineate "how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female" (1970, p. 160). I argue that Pecola's body becomes a site of convergence for violence, shame, and desire. In fact, her madness, which is generally read as a defeat, can also be read against the desperate need for psychic survival. This is owing to the societal failure, as it fails to offer her any panacea. Both Janie and Pecola are able to find a transformation of character in the form of redefining their self which is at times taken as a controlling image of stereotypical mammies, welfare recipients, matriarchs, Jezebels, or underrated and taken as a symbol of the white male gaze. This redefinition is closely tied to the resistance in the face of ideological oppression. For Janie, the very act of polyandry is a form of resistance since in each relationship, she wanted to accomplish her dream of true love and self-identity. In the case of Pecola, this resistance is epitomized through her yearning for blue eyes, as only after having these, she believes that she would be able to exercise her agency by challenging the dominant, controlling images of Blacks. In both cases, this is achieved through violence, i.e., Janie killing her husband in self-defense and Pecola killing her sanity by becoming mad. Thus, violence is not to be translated as destructive; rather, a means of constructing a new independent identity.

The very seeds of Pecola's wish for beauty were planted even before her birth, as her mother Pauline wanted to have a fair-complexioned baby to survive as per white society's ideals; "but Lord she was ugly" (Morrison, 1970, p. 98). This created in Pecola an inferiority complex that led towards her unquenchable thirst for blue eyes. Not only are these, but Geraldine and Maureen are also hyphenated as wishing appropriation into white culture by escaping blackness. The objectification of females is also apparent when the whites discussed Pauline's delivery, stating, "these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses" (Morrison, 1970, p. 97), reminiscing of Black controlling images.

The novel's division into four seasons is highly emblematic and can be read symbolically. The first season, i.e., of autumn, is taken to be the first year when Pecola was raped by her father, Cholly, which substantiates her status as a Jezebel. Instead of comforting her, the folk women and her mother, Pauline, resorted to the use of violence against her. The beating by her mother left her disillusioned in family relationships and a victim of a torn personality. According to hooks, "in patriarchal society, men are encouraged to channel frustrated aggression in the direction of those without power–women and children" (2004, p. 145). This projection of anger against patriarchal superiority is self-evident in both Janie's and Pecola's cases. Pecola shows greediness towards milk, which can be translated as the beginning of her self-awakening. Yet this was not sufficient to give her empowerment over her environment and society.

From Being to Self: Violence as a Tool of Resilience against White Patriarchal Racism

Janie Crawford's dependency syndrome ends when she comes out of the distressing relationships she had had with two of her husbands.

> Here, finally, was a woman on a quest for her own identity and, unlike so many other questing figures in black literature, her journey would take her, not away from, but deeper and deeper into blackness, the descent into the Everglades with its rich black soil, wild cane, and communal life representing immersion into black traditions. (Hurston, 1937, p. 24-25)

The passage reveals how Crawford's self-defense alongside Pecola's psychological rupture may appear divergent, yet emerge as significant confrontations in the face of structural violence. In the case of Logan Killicks, her complaint of requited love emotion to Nanny expresses how anguished she felt in her married relationship, where she is nothing more than a ceremonial toy. In a state of disillusionment, she elopes with Jody Starks, the mayor of Eatonville. Janie's fragility and vulnerability are exposed soon as she realizes that being fixated on white Culture, Starks sought to turn her into a big woman (Morrison, 1970, p. 82), i.e., the white woman and a trophy wife, a status symbol for him to move on.

The words of Nanny, "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (Hurston, 1937, p. 47), are the first to raise this awakening in her, as she was having the seeds of rebellion in her and could not accept an inferior status. What she demanded from her husbands was not financial security, but their treatment of her as a normal, equal individual with passions and sensitivity. Female objectification under the umbrella of white patriarchal ideology is evident in Janie's painful revelations of distressing relationships, just what Nanny had told her that colored women are like "branches without roots" (Hurston, 1937, p. 48). Animal and nature imagery evoked to stress female status underpins degradation, dehumanization, and conformist norms that women were expected to stick to. The mule image is associated with obedience, the binary of master/slave, and Black female stereotyping so much so

that they "become a chain on the American women, preventing them from developing individuality, and from pursuing their personal happiness" (Wu, 2014, p. 1053). The inculcation of animal-like images into female consciousness serves to demean and devalue the feminine essence, which is why all the female characters in the story behaved in a coy and modest way.

Janie's failed marriages could not rescue her feminine side. Though the process of self-autonomy started when, on Starks funeral, the writer lists Janie's feeling of undertaking "her great journey to the horizons in search of people; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her" (Hurston, 1937, p. 131) and led her to marry a third time with Tea Cake, who is caring and acts like a teacher teaching her shooting, fishing and playing checkers. Yet, Cake's masculine dominance in the form of taking control of Janie's money and slapping her in public leads to her disillusionment with male society, resulting in her rebellion. In the words of Hurston, "something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered" (Hurston, 1937, p. 111). This sowed the seed for her self-worth, and apparently, she seems all composed, but her inner world, with the birth of a new woman, was topsy-turvy. Throughout the story, Janie's quest to find her own voice and identity is met with harsh reactions from the male institution of marriage. Her hair, skin tone, and voice are blurred into one objectified territory, and she resonates all the controlling images described by Collins.

Janie's insight about women's worth helps her to retort back to all the men who made fun of her age. She stands like a warrior, dauntless and courageous, to stop body shaming and reproaches Jody not to mix up her actions with her looks. Her direct eye-to-eye contact symbolizes the resurrection of her "womanism," and the townsmen figure out this spark of resilience in her, including Starks, who realizes how "Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible" (Hurston, 1937, p. 120). He curses himself for lacking the strength to show his possession over her, and the desire of controlling a female is smashed down. In a state of bewilderment, he strikes Janie off from his store. After Stark's death, the male society reminds her of her feminine duties and is told: "Uh, woman by herself is uh pitiful thing. Dey needs aid and assistance. God never meant 'em tuh try tuh stand by theirselves. You ain't been used tuh knockin' round and doin' fuh yo'self, Mis' Starks. You been well taken keer of, you needs [sic] uh man" (Hurston, 1937, p. 131). The patriarchal society, with its dictated norms, becomes a spokesperson for the controlling images narrated by Collins.

It is only after when Cake behaves irrationally after being bitten by a rabid dog in an attempt to save her from drowning, that Janie feels compelled to stand against the societal norms and rise above all chains. His physical attack on Janie leads her to shoot him, and this symbolizes her final detachment from the patriarchal world. She becomes a symbol of a liberated Black woman who was

independent in making her choices in life. She shuns all forms of violence, oppressive sexual apparatuses, and racism to chart her own way in life. The last sentence of the novel, "She called in her soul to come and see" (Hurston, 1937, p. 243), documents her spiritual awakening against the body/soul binary and cultivates her image as a self-sufficient individual having empowerment and autonomy.

Use of narrative style is a debated area in the novel. The use of vernacular and free indirect discourse, the movement from third person to first and third person, is elaborated as "Janie's journey from object to subject … awareness of self in Janie" (Hurston, 1937, p. 246). Her crushed subjectivity is reposed when she unhesitatingly shoots Cake and acts like a Black warrior fighting inside a White community to find her true self. The foreword to the novel shows how Janie denied being treated like a Jezebel and would continue living her life on her own terms by discovering many profound layers of herself.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia alone stands high in front of the racialized discourse of beauty. She remembers how they all had "the universal love of white baby dolls" (Morrison, 1970, p. 144). Claudia's hatred for Shirley Temple and angst against beauty standards is visible in the lines stating "I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls" (Morrison, 1970, p. 23). The ruining of dolls not only exemplifies anger but also deconstructs the obsessive notion of worshipping beauty beyond bounds. The anti-racial sentiments conveyed through Claudia hint at the demystification of the doll ideology, and thus, Claudia serves as a foil to Pecola in that the latter is unable to resist effectively through her discourse and actions.

The only resistance in the form of violating her sanity testifies to her hatred and loathsome attitude towards Whites. She prays to God to "make (her) disappear" (Morrison, 1970, p. 40) to turn her ugly visibility into absence. On the other hand, Claudia uses her invisibility to discover her aversion to white child stars. Upon asking for candy from a white shopkeeper, she expresses how his "white male gaze" objectified her beyond the level of "human recognition" in a disgusting, distasteful, and angry way. "She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So, the distaste must be for her, her blackness" (Morrison, 1970, p. 43). Maureen also taunts her ugliness, stating, "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" (Morison, 1970, p. 48). This consciousness of Black identity turns her into a victim not only of White society, but even her own community, who, taking liberty of her ugliness, mock her. Soaphead Church, whom Pecola begs for blue eyes, also believes: "here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty" (Morrison, 1970, p. 174), giving the final verdict that beauty only means whiteness.

Pecola internalizes her ugliness and emotional violence gets catharsis in the form of madness; Claudia, contrastingly, battles and upholds her self-respect since only through fight and rebellion could they sustain their confident self-image.

Similarly, maternal controlled image as stereotypical mammies is shattered when Claudia's mother's voice drones on leaving her emotionally weak, Geraldine's love for cats more than her son and Pauline's physical beating of Pecola after rape and when her legs are burnt - all symbolize how the writer intentionally breaks away the Black stereotypes and presents females capable of perpetuating violence on their kids to get some self-identity different from the traditionally imposed one. This is pictured as an emotional oppression that all mothers go through in patriarchal culture, where family functions as an ideological state apparatus where love and care are sucked, and pain and suffering are projected, leaving them devastated. Across both novels, violence functions as a critical threshold for the negotiation of protagonists' selfhood. The trajectory of Janie, Pecola, and Claudia, by employing embodied resistance to counter patriarchal power, by internalizing the madness to defy the beauty ideology, and by articulating a counter-discourse, respectively, illustrates the discursive individualities of the Black women through which they disrupt the racialized gender oppression.

Finally, we may see that both Hurston and Morrison reconfigure female subjectivities by challenging the controlling images that are embedded within the White racial frame. The paper aimed to highlight how violence as an affliction is refashioned as an epistemic tool of confrontation, and that is why the texts can be read beyond the victimhood paradigm. The female characters, in both novels, redefine themselves from being powerless to empowered figures by blurring the binaries and coming up with the liberated image of Black racialized identity. In both cases, violence as a tool of resistance gives females a sense of identity and authority over their actions. Though the rebirth is achieved at the cost of some drastic, violent decisions, it plays a significant role in transforming them from the intriguing pain they suffer to the opening up of new vistas through which they could understand their affiliation to their souls as well as the community around them.

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