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The Politics of Womanhood and the Poetics of Mothering *the Other* in Stockett's *The Help*

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Degree**

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Declaration of Authorship

We here by solemnly declare that the work we are going to present in this dissertation entitled:

The Politics of Womanhood and the Poetics of Mothering *the Other* in Stockett's *The Help*

The case of Literature and Civilization Master Dissertations at M'sila University.

is our work. It has not been submitted before to any other institution or university and all sources we have used and quoted from have been indicated by means of complete references.

Signature

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bakhar".

Signature

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Selam".

Dedication

In loving memory of my Father **Djelloul** and Mother
Fatiha.

To my beloved daughters **Farah, Abir** and **Dounia**.

To my supportive husband **Salim**.

To all my teachers who inspired me in Farhet Abbas
University, and Mohamed Boudiaf University.

Meriem

Dedication

To my beloved Father Larbi, to whom I wish a soon recovery from his disease.

To my kind and supportive mother.

To my inspiring husband **Mounir**, and children **Riyadh, Hamza, Selma and Younes**.

khitem

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We owe our families love for their support and encouragement.

Meriem and Khitem

Abstract

The present research delves in the politics of womanhood and the poetics of mothering the “*White Other*” in Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*. The study sheds light on the aspects of womanhood, solidarity and support of Black women in empowering each other in the face of the double oppression ensuing from the American Exceptionalism. The research is aimed at highlighting the important role the Black maids played in shaping minds, initiating the change and fighting the racial norms through mothering the others. To ponder the aspects of the Black females’ identity, the research makes recourse to an eclectic approach where notions of Walker’s Womanism and Spivak’s “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” intersect in order to glean understanding of how the voiceless can acquire a voice. On the other hand, the study resorts to other minor theories such as psychoanalysis- mainly trans-generational trauma - to back up the analysis. The work finds out that through mental and emotional support the black females strengthen their selfhood to alter their destinies. In a sense, writing is increasingly growing as an empowering tool that enables the Black females to voice their revolt, challenge the societal hierarchy and denounce the white supremacy. Interestingly enough, it is concluded that care giving, nurturing and mothering the others are means of activism that install the human norms while mothering and nurturing minds.

Key words: Womanhood, politics, mothering, Womanism, poetics, oppression, supremacy, support, maids, selfhood, Exceptionalism.

ملخص

تعمق هذه الدراسة في سياسات النسوية وسحر امومة الآخر في رواية "المساعدة البيتية" لكااثرين ستوكيت.

تسلط الدراسة الضوء على جوانب النسوية، والتضامن، ودعم النساء السود في تمكين بعضهن البعض في مواجهة الاضطهاد المزدوج الناجم عن الاستثنائية الأمريكية. تهدف الدراسة إلى إبراز الدور الهام الذي لعبته الخادمات السود في تغيير الفكر، وإحداث تغييرات في المجتمع، ومكافحة الأعراف العنصرية من خلال امومة الآخرين. للتأمل في جوانب هوية النساء السود، تتبني الدراسة نهجاً انتقائياً حيث تتقاطع مفاهيم "النسوية" لوالكر وسؤال "هل يمكن للتابع أن يتكلم؟" لسييفاك من أجل فهم كيفية اكتساب الصوت لمن لا صوت لهم. من ناحية أخرى، تستعين الدراسة بنظرية ثانوية مثل التحليل النفسي- الصدمة المتنقلة عبر الاجيال. وتتوصل الدراسة إلى أن النساء السوداوات يعززن هويتهن الذاتية من خلال الدعم النفسي والعاطفي للتغيير مصائرهن. يتزايد استخدام الكتابة كأدلة تمكينية مكنت النساء السود من التعبير عن ثورتهن، وتحدي التسلسل الهرمي المجتمعي، وإدانة عنصرية البيض. ومن المثير للاهتمام، أنه يستنتج أن الأمومة والعنابة بالآخرين هي وسائل للتغيير.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الانوثة، السياسة، الأمومة، النسوية، الشعرية، ، الاضطهاد، التفوق، ، الخادمات، من لا صوت لهم، ، الهوية الذاتية، الاستثنائية.

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General Introduction

In the land where the Statue of Liberty was erected, echoes of misery and sorrow of the minorities are still being heard. Centuries of injustice and hardships overshadowed the lights of the American society. In a specific moment in the history of the US, the black people were denied recognition as human beings, and even after abolition, the fight for liberty was still required.

It goes without saying that the white American society of the 60's and long before was segregatory, unfair, unjust and racist. The white American supremacy was obviously an everyday routine for the segregated blacks. They lived injustice as if it were the only choice they had, and it might have been the only way for them to survive. Danger, fear and the heavy feeling of sadness was carried inside their souls day after day.

Black American women bore the burden of being females and black, they were voiceless though they needed to be heard. They were regarded as inferior in the white American community and considered as people that the whites need to help and do all types of work, but at the same time, they were rejected. This was the white women's attitude and mind-set towards the black ones, who could neither claim for their rights nor revolt against the wrong behaviour of the white "masters".

A glimpse of hope shined in the sky of the black minority, after nearly being lost. These dehumanized people were granted liberty by the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment of the American Constitution on January 31, 1865. However, black Americans especially women were still victims of ongoing oppression and racism that took various shapes, sometimes hidden and other times shown, thus their existence was still impossible to deny.

This research aims at shedding light on the aspects of womanhood and the hardships Black women face in the segregatory white American society. On the other hand, the study endeavours to show how they tried to change their lives through acquiring a voice, writing about what was wrong, and denouncing injustice. It also focuses on how they mothered the white children and the vulnerable white females around them. Additionally, this work highlights how those voiceless women voiced their revolt against oppression.

The motivation for this research work comes from the important interest in American history and the unfair treatment of minorities, which has long attracted scholars to explore the hidden politics of oppression against marginalized people. Prejudices against Blacks have historically hindered their opportunities for a good life. Stockett's novel narrates the hardships and racist attitudes faced by African American women, portraying their struggles during the 1960s and showing that the experiences of Black females, have remained challenging over time. Black women, especially domestic servants, experienced dual oppression. This case study highlights various aspects of their hardships and how they managed to bring about change in their lives and the lives of those around them. Recent events, such as the death of George Floyd in 2020, have raised public awareness that the roots of racism still persist in American society. Moreover, oppression, injustice, and the unfair treatment of Black people continue to prevail. Watching the movie or reading the novel can motivate scholars to delve into the oppression and struggles of Black minorities.

Furthermore, this research tackles the aspects of womanhood and the poetics of mothering the others in the novel. Kathryn Stockett, who is the author of *The Help*, is an American novelist. During the 1960s, ninety percent of black women in Jackson, Mississippi worked as domestic servants in white people's houses. The author was born in Jackson too and was raised by a black maid whom she loved so much. Her work can be considered authentic because it delves into the social and economic conditions of black

women. Those black women working as maids are denied their rights, even the basic ones. The white housewives -though in need of their help- looked at them as being dirty and mistrustful women, thieves and liars.

Owing to those discriminating stereotypes, the Black and white racist separation was legalized in America by passing laws like the Jim Crow law that allowed the separation between the two races in most, not to say all places, in schools, universities, shops, buses and any public area. This unfair treatment lead to activist's movements and the upraise of the many silenced voices, it lead to the Civil Rights movement, thus some major leaders appeared at that era like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, who was considered as an icon and an ordinary Black woman who decided to have a voice and say "No", a "No" that changed the history of America.

Those poor maids in *The Help* felt the need to have a voice and to say a 'No' as said before. In order to grow and advance, they needed to free themselves from oppression and injustice. Their unique weapon was writing. Through it, change and healing embraced them. Thanks to the help of a young white lady named "Skeeter" that they discovered a way to breathe out all their sufferings and injustices. She was a journalist who witnessed the segregatory behaviour of her white community and felt disgusted from watching discrimination. She felt the need to free herself too from being obliged to follow her community's rules. Skeeter pushed the Black maids to react by journaling and documenting their lives in the white American houses, details were written and truth was no more hidden behind doors.

The major character is Aibileen Clark who is aged 53, a servant in the employment of the Leefolt family is a silent witness of their daily racist attitude, embodies a form of kindness and love: whatever the skin colour of the child she cares for. She loves those children as though they were her own. This tenderness is also due to the loss of her son, who died as a result of the racial prejudices.

When we have decided to do this research work about *The Help*, we found that some scholars have selected the same novel but their research were mostly about other gaps. We found Ms Aidel Ikram's work about 'Analysing the Whitewashing Syndrome: Revisiting Kathryn Stockett White Trichotomy in *The Help*' that focused mainly on the psychological scope of the study case. Moreover, we found the work of Fares Asia, her research study is: 'On the Nature of Prejudice in *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett: A Socio-Psychological Perspective' and it is about the socio psychological perspective of the blacks in the study case. Another study is a research submitted to "Ain Shams" University of Egypt entitled: "Anger in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*", by Doha Al-Sayd Mohamed. The latter explained anger in the novel as a cure to racism, since it could, according to the scholar, help the person reach the impossible. She clearly explains that anger cannot always be destructive, and it can be instructive.

Furthermore, Rehmana Ashref published an article on Academia.edu examining racism and its ideologies in the novel and how it changes historical realities. Also, Borhan Ali Mahbub wrote a discourse analysis on the "Anti- Black Racism in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*", in which he discusses the representation of racism in the novel and the white saviour narratives. In addition, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Civil Rights Literature*, the editor Julie Buckner Armstrong dedicates a whole chapter discussing the novel as a good portrayal of the civil rights movement and the realistically depicted setting of historical moments; at the same she stresses the importance of this novel as a historical material in secondary school with the illustration of the movie that helps in making history accessible for future generations.

Our work is different as we have a different gap which is how mothering the others changed minds and brought new perspectives to both Black and white females. It also depicts the politics of womanhood and their empowerment for each other in the case study. Black women -who used to be voiceless- can finally have a voice, even in the discriminating white society.

The scope of our dissertation is the politics of womanhood and the poetics of mothering the other in Stockett's novel. This work highlights the vital role of Black women in fighting the stereotypes and biases of racism in the American society through their testimonies, solidarity and community support. Moreover, it explores the artistic and aesthetic aspects shown through the maternal care and nurturing of the white kids or others.

The study's departure point can be seen clearly in the following main question:

How does the novel delineate the politics of womanhood and the aesthetic of mothering the others during the 20th century in the American society?

In order to reinforce this main question, we need to answer other sub questions which are:

- a) How does the Black literature reflect the painful story of slavery?
- b) What are the main character traits of black females that brought the change?
- d) How did the black maids voice their revolt?

The method that this research work used is an interdisciplinary or eclectic study where the concepts Womanism, Subalternity, and psychoanalysis intersect to provide a compelling theoretical background. On the one hand, Alice Walker's Womanism helps us to focus on the lives and worries of Black women. Womanists work to address injustices that have not been mostly recognized within radical feminism. It is used in this dissertation to address and analyse the unique experiences and hardships of the Black domestic servants in Stockett's novel. The other main method that helps delving in the novel and finding answers to the questions. Spivak's studies emerged in the 1980's within postcolonial studies, referring to individuals or groups who are oppressed. The main focus in the dissertation is exploring the experiences of the marginalized group of Black maids and Black women, as they were historically silenced and ignored for a long period of their lives. Later on, they had a voice through their writing.

The significance of this research contributes to enrich the academic works on gender oppression and the marginalized people by offering an analysis of the politics of womanhood and the poetics of mothering the other. It aims to shed light on the voices and experiences of these women, challenging and enriching the previous narratives.

This dissertation is divided into two main chapters. The first one -which is theoretical- tackles the historical context and the theoretical background of the study. Moreover, it provides a brief overview of the history of the African Americans, especially women; their quest to survive slavery to the contemporary era, focusing on their lifelong silenced revolt then voiced struggles. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the white people treatment of the black enslaved mothers, and how those black women learnt to be mothers not only for their own kids but also for every child they care for, in a spirit of universal compassion and love. In this chapter, Black women literature delineated and portrayed the history of the enslaved females and their hardships through their writings, mentioning samples of the slavery era visiting works of some Black writers like 'Harriet Jacobs' in literature, passing by other black female writers, through time without forgetting Alice Walker's works, also dealing with the Civil Rights movement and the role of Black women and their involvement in changing the history of the American society. As well as their help for the Black communities in fighting racism like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Lillian Smith, and Ann Bradeen. Finally, the chapter provides the theoretical framework introducing the approaches employed to examine this case study.

The second chapter deals at first with the politics of Black womanhood in *The Help*, and how Black women were treated, the portrayal of their lives, their sufferings, wounds and hardships. Also, the way they lived those injustices and evolved through their writings. We analyse the novel using an eclectic method. We also depict the poetry of mothering the others, changing minds and fates through compassion, kindness, and care. The novel is told through the eyes of three main characters and all of them are females. We analyse the particular and individual vision of each of them in tackling their issues and portraying their everyday lives in the racist white American community.

Chapter I:

**The Negro Female Slave, the Negro
Mother, the Afro-American Literature,
Womanism and Subalternity: Historical
and Theoretical Background**

Introduction

The land of dreams was shadowed by heavy clouds of darkness, slavery was born, and oppression over the minorities was burdening the soul of a nation. The Africans were forcibly brought to an obscure destiny where racism, oppression, and segregation became parts of their everyday lives. This new type of trade did not differentiate between men, women, and children. The Africans became the property of the whites. The souls and bodies of African American women were not only burdened by the oppression of servitude and enslavement, but also by being women enchain under gender supremacy. So as to understand the different stages that these resilient women went through in facing their sufferings and hardships, it is a necessity to delve in their history. Therefore, chapter I sheds lights on the historical background, dealing with slavery, highlighting the experiences of black African enslaved mothers and their lives. Furthermore, it deals with their oppression during the Abolition era, Reconstruction and the Civil War.

Another point to consider is the testimonies and narratives that have been written since the beginning of this inhuman trade and the arrival of the first African enslaved female till the 1960s. That's why; this chapter highlights the rise of Afro-American literature and the way it was used as a means to delineate the oppression and the struggles of these black women giving them a voice.

Last but not least, in order to scrutinize the novel, the study devotes a section to explore the theoretical framework that helps to decode the research problematic, in other words, Alice Walker's Womanism, Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and other minor approaches.

1. The Afro- American Women under Slavery and Racism

Human enslavement and exploitation were a practice dating back to the 17th century in the colonies and was legalized in various forms throughout history. The African American women and mothers faced horrors during slavery and were exploited physically, sexually and mentally.

1.1. Historical Background

It goes without saying that the Blacks' experience in America was strained with hardships, sorrow, violence, sufferings, separation and uprooting. All these experiences needed to be narrated and passed from a generation to another. At that time, it was not possible for all the enslaved people to write them down due to the fact that illiteracy was prevailing. Those people felt the need to voice their sufferings through oral traditions like storytelling, songs, spirituals and music. Few lucky literate slaves started their journeys as writers by narrating their slavery experience, portraying the horrors of the Blacks under the shadows of enslavement. Through times, writers described faithfully the evolution of the lives of the oppressed minorities in America.

Kathryn Stockett is one of those writers who tried to delineate the bitter experiences of the Black people during the 1960s. A period full of multiple discriminative laws like the Jim Crow Laws. At that time, the American society was segregatory and discriminative against minorities mainly in the South. Black African Americans' lives in the American society were hard, unsafe, and lacking opportunities. In order to understand the reasons behind injustice, unfair behaviours, and the origins of the issues, we need to delve in the past. Racism and segregation in the American society have roots in the past history of the colonies and the first settlements in the New Land.

a. America's First Enslaved Women

In the period of the 1619's, slavery began in the British colonies by with the arrival of the first Black African slaves who were brought by the Portuguese traders in the ship "The San Juan Bautista" that sailed from "Luanda", western coast of Africa. On their way to Veracruz, Mexico, the cargo of black slaves was seized by two English privateer ships, The White Lion and The Treasurer. About sixty healthy slaves, men and women, were carefully selected by the traders initiating the slave trade in the colonies. About twenty of them landed on the shores of Jamestown, Virginia where they were forced to work as labourers or house servants. Among them, there was an African woman who was the first female to be enslaved and robbed of her African identity and roots. Later on, she was given the Christian name Angela. This name was mentioned in most sources, but Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson preferred to revive her African identity by naming her "Oni". In a vivid description, they portray her saying:

A young woman stood on the shores of the new world. The place was Jamestown, Virginia. The year was 1619, the year before the arrival of the May flower at Plymouth Rock. We do not know this woman's name, but we will call her "Oni", she will be for us "not a number"-one of the twenty slaves who were the first to be brought to America-but the real woman she was .Oni may have been born in a town in west Africa, not far from the coast., where European Slave traders came to shop [...] *She may have been taken as the spoils of war or in a payment for a debt. It is possible; she was captured by a neighbouring tribe (16).*

This narrative shows how she was captured, brought and forced to accept this new harsh reality and take the burdens of a new life. Later on, nothing was registered about her since 1624. Gloria J. Browne – Marshall describes in her book, Angela's new life as a labourer in the Peirce family:

The world will not know if she escaped, married, or was killed in a raid by the enraged Powhatan. In March of 1622, the Powhatan attacked the colony. Dozens of Europeans were killed or wounded. A “List of Living and Dead,” the first census, revealed Angelo recorded on a census page dated February 16, 1624. Her name was later written as Angela.

Angela watched as more Africans arrived in the colony. She would see the seasons change and the first snow fall. She was referred in the records as a “Negro woman” who was raising farm animals. A servant in the household of Captain William Peirce along with three European servants (43)

As highlighted in the quote above, Oni was the witness of the arrival of hundreds of Africans. She was witnessing the change around her, trying to survive in this new hostile and oppressive environment. Oni and the other slaves represented the most important labour force in the colonies. They changed the lives of the white masters.

What is more, the black women enriched their owners and multiplied their wealth through their work and by replenishing the number of slaves. Not to mention the fact that the new growing Black community tried to resist assimilation through preserving their African culture and identity. “The survival of certain African customs was not an accident but instead resulted from “continual resistance; whereby the women in particular “took it upon themselves to preserve certain customs” (Collins 163). Besides they enriched the American culture with new traditions and customs. Thus, they helped in shaping a new different country through time. Hine and Thompson focus on the effects of this interaction between the two communities saying:

In these early years, some Black women came to identify with their new country and to participate in its economic, cultural and political reality ...others resisted fiercely their new condition in life. Still others died from the shock of their transplantation and the heartache of losing everything, they knew and held dear. (18)

The authors narrate that the new force of labourers was forced to adapt to this transplantation, but some of them did not survive the shock of being robbed of their freedom and were obliged to work for the whites.

b. Legalized Oppression: The Transformation of Africans into Property

The increasing number of black enslaved people created fear and suspicion among the American white population. In order to control and manage them, laws were initiated. Those codes, which were adopted later on by some colonies, varied from one to another. They made the slaves' lives harder.

After the American revolutionary war, laws changed defining the African slaves as property or chattel. They were unable to move from a plantation to another without permits. As a result, any slave who violated these codes would be subjected to corporal punishment and torture.

The fact that some slaves fled to the Northern states in order to enjoy freedom and escape servitude; the Fugitive Slave Law was enacted in 1850, reaffirming that all blacks were slaves, and even the free slaves could be enslaved again without being able to prove their free status. It goes without saying that the case of Harriet and her husband Dred Scott is the best illustration of the implementation of those codes. This couple spent years suing for their freedom. The author Gwenyth Swain states that:

A newspaper of the time estimated that Dred would have garnered "about \$350" on the slave market. But his freedom and that of his wife and daughters was surely priceless. The family's freedom suit had lasted nearly eleven years, costing them sweat and tears and hundreds of dollars besides. Dred said it had given him a "heap o trouble," but it was worth all that trouble to have his family together and free. (80)

Having experienced slavery as an African American female and mother, Harriet Scott wanted to spare her young daughter to be subjected to the same condition. Hence, she took her family case to the court in an attempt to free her daughters from the harsh life and the oppression of slavery. Contrary to the expectation of the Scott family, the Supreme

Court rejected the Scott family's claim and did not relieve them from the burdens of slavery besides putting more stringent laws on the other slaves.

After the end of the Civil War, other unfair and segregatory codes known as the "Black Codes" were created during the Reconstruction era, in the period between 1865-1877 so as to control the newly freed slaves and exclude them from opportunities and rights like jobs, voting, obtaining weapons or testifying in the court. On the other hand, the U.S. Congress rejected those codes and tried to ensure the rights of the freed African Americans through acting the Civil Rights Acts of 1866- 1875, the Thirteenth, the Fourteenth, and the Fifteenth Amendments. Jean Allain (ed) states on the Congress action saying: "These three amendments provided a promise of freedom, equality, and political rights for former slaves and their descendants" (134). As the editor says those acts were a commitment and a promise to enable the free slaves with their rights which were not possible at that time and required a lot of sacrifices and time to realize. Unfortunately, none of these laws were enough to provide a decent life for the Blacks as most of them suffered from discrimination, and poverty. They were also denied participation in the nation's political life, specifically during Jim Crow Laws.

c. Black African Mothers under the Shadows of Slavery

The enslaved women were not allowed to enjoy the experience of motherhood. Their bodies, feelings and their children were under their owners' bondage and control. In addition, they were required to replenish the number of labourers and increase their profits depriving those mothers of having any type of relation with their new-borns. They were not allowed to form any kind of attachments with their children who were considered the owners' property. Frederick Douglass in his narratives describes faithfully his forced separation from his mother:

My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labor. For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result. (19)

Douglass tries to analyse why this inhuman separation inflicted on the mothers and their children and highlights that this act is done on purpose of hindering the development of the slave child.

Another hindering and destructive control over the Black women was not having the right to choose their partners or love them. The slave owners selected most of the time the strongest slave as a partner to the enslaved women so as to produce strong children. Harriet Jacobs in her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, portrays the dilemma a black woman could live in choosing a partner under the shadow of slavery.

Every minute I expected to be summoned to his presence [...] The next morning, a message was brought to me: "Master wants you in his study." [...] I stood a moment gazing at the hateful man who claimed a right to rule me, body and soul. I entered and tried to appear calm. I did not want him to know how my heart was bleeding [...]

"So, you want to be married, do you?" said he, "and to a free nigger."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll soon convince you whether I am your master, or the nigger fellow you honour so highly. If you must have a husband, you may take up with one of my slaves. (51)

This quote illustrates that the Black women were considered as the property of their masters and had no choice and no right to have a word with their owners' choice. Furthermore, the decision to be a mother was mostly not the choice of the black enslaved women, but the masters' choice too. For the slave owners, Black women needed to be controlled and manipulated as they were the source of the biggest revenue for their

capitalist business. Jennifer L Morgan mentions that the slave owners were planning and organizing human production:

The processes through which slave owners arrived at their understandings about the reach of their power were deeply implicated by their assumptions about women's bodies and women's work. In turn, exercising that power had wide-ranging ramifications for the women and men caught in the grip of New World slavery. As slave owners struggled to police the physical and political boundaries of their property and attach economic and social meaning to African women's bodies, women and men engaged in their own efforts to inscribe meaning onto their new lives. They chose partners and lost them to sale and disease, made babies and lost many of them, too. In other words, they struggled to impose their own meaning on a process of family formation that colonial slave owners defined only in terms of their own sense of familial and societal security. (124)

In order to survive this dehumanized control over their bodies and souls the Black African women tried to be wives and mothers, trying to simulate a life under servitude , creating a community spirit; therefore, most of the time these mothers and wives would find themselves separated and uprooted again. If it was not their children, it would be their husbands who would be sold to other owners in other plantations. Going further in their control over the Black female bodies, owners had techniques to increase their slaves' fertility. Dorothy Roberts explains some of those techniques to her readers:

...most *slave* masters used some techniques to enhance slave fertility. They rewarded pregnancy with relief from work in the field and additions of clothing and food, punished slave women who did not bear children, manipulated slave marital choices, and forced slaves to breed. (21)

The tricky slave owners manipulated the females by attempting them with delicious food and clothes as a reward if they got pregnant. Furthermore, they could be discharge them from working in the fields, at the same time the sterile females would be punished. Furthermore, the Black African mothers had to bear another role of raising and nurturing the whites' children that led to the neglect of their own children. Additionally, most of the time they were abused or raped by their masters or by the masters' sons. Most of the time

it was the overseers too-an overseer is someone employed by the slave owners to check and control the enslaved people work and to guarantee that they labour and do their duties in total obedience, he used violence to control and make the work go on . This violence was physical, emotional and sexual when it came to the black women. In the same context, the life of the Black women was full of violence and sexual abuse: “All slaves were subject to abuse and violence, but women suffered additionally from rape and sexual coercion, often at an early age. Although there is some evidence that a small number of men suffered similar abuses, this was a particular burden of women” (Lewis and Lewis 19). This quote illustrates the horrible reality of the black enslaved women who were physically and mentally abused by the white men around them.

The slavery codes worsened the black mothers’ situations as they were depriving them from their own children, thus some enslaved women in a despaired state took a difficult decision which was to free their children from a whole life of servitude by killing them. Those acts of killing their children had been immortalised in history. In the book *A Black women’ s History of The United States*, the writer states the situation of some black women:

Other Black women spared their children the yoke of slavery by committing acts of infanticide. An enslaved woman from Barnstable, Massachusetts, went to prison in December 1732, “on suspicion of murdering her Infant Child.” Because another enslaved person allegedly “assisted in privately burying the said infant,” local authorities had reason to believe that the enslaved woman was guilty. The infant had been buried for about two weeks before being discovered. Acts of infanticide or the murdering of one’s children was a form of resistance that some enslaved women chose to spare their children lives in slavery and to destroy the property of their enslavers. (Berry and Gross 32)

This quote shows some enslaved women rendering liberty to their children in the form of death, it might be a hard choice but for the lost women it was a way also to revolt against the oppression and violence they were living under slavery.

Literature was faithful in portraying this despaired act, the iconic Tony Morrison in her novel *Beloved* illustrates Sethe's choice to murder her children to keep them out of slavery. Morrison wanted to portray the atrocities of slavery which denied black mothers rights to feel love for their children. She digs into the psychology of motherhood when a mother and her children experience freedom through death. In the same context, in an interview with Toni Morison, she tells the following story:

That was Margaret Garner's story. There was a slave woman in Cincinnati named Margaret Garner who escaped from Kentucky; arrived in Cincinnati with her mother-in-law. The situation was a little different; I think she came with four others. And right after she got there, the man who owned her found her. And she ran out into the shed and tried to kill all her children, just like that. And she was about to bang one's head against the wall when they stopped her. (Hunter- Gault 27)

Morison narrates the story of a black mother called Margaret who in her despair ran away from her master, when she was going to be caught; she preferred to free her children from enslavement by killing them.

On the other hand, motherhood took form as the enslaved women in their distress created bonds with their own communities, forming families and connecting with the other black children in an attempt to replace their own children. They learnt to take care of one another, especially when a parent was dead or sold, an aunt or any family member would mother the others' children. Mothering the others was a key part in the lives of the black enslaved women.

1.2. Black Women's Struggle against Double Oppression

The Afro- American women's hardships were not limited to racism and enslavement, but also to another type of oppression which was the gender domination.

a. Before the Abolition Era

Black enslaved women's lives were full of pain, violence, suffering, and bitterness. Due to the fact that the majority suffered from inhuman working conditions and many types of diseases. Furthermore, sexual harassment, abuse and rape became part of their daily lives as Rachel Filene Seidman states that: "Between 1830 and 1860, most black women lived in slavery, performed heavy agricultural work and were object to the constant threat of rape by their masters" (253-254). In addition to that, their hard situation was shadowed under the code of property; no laws protected them from any type of exploitation and abuse.

The antebellum period was marked by the abolition of slavery in most Northern states, which encouraged the blacks to flee the oppressive Southern colonies that burdened them with more and more restricted and degrading laws. To their surprise, life in the North was not a paradise even there, the racist behaviours against them were omnipresent, especially in the working places. Black women faced double discrimination, being both black and women that deprived them from getting good work opportunities. They were offered only minor jobs as domestic workers. The editors of the book *Afro- American Women- Struggles and Images* focus on the difficult circumstances of the black female workers saying:

White women had no intention of working alongside black women; even if some of them did speak of sexual equality, most did not favour racial equality. Indeed, many northerners were hostile to free blacks and did not want to be in their presence at work, in their communities, or even in their churches [...] As a result, most women workers in the northern factories, like those in Lowell and Waltham, were white; black female workers were forced to concentrate their work efforts in domestic service. (Harley and Terborg-Penn 24-25)

Thus, the black females had only one choice but to work as servants in order to gain a living for themselves and their families. This type of job was so demanding and hard with very low wages. Some of the black women found other jobs like laundresses and seamstresses.

Meanwhile, with the emergence of the abolitionist and anti-slavery societies, many Afro-American men and women tried to join and work with them. Among the white activists was Lucretia Mott who advocated for abolition of slaves and for the racial equality. She spoke out against slavery. During an anti-slavery society that was held in Philadelphia in December 1833, she said “I have no idea of submitting tamely to injustice inflicted either on me or on the slaves. I will oppose it with all the moral powers with which I am endowed. I am no advocate of passivity.” (Quanquin 127-138). This quote reflects Mott’s commitment to equality, human rights and justice for Blacks and her promise to continue her fight against passivity and racism.

Furthermore, black women after being encouraged by those associations, played an important role in opposing slavery by participating in delivering protest speeches, signing petitions, sheltering and securing the runaway slaves, or pressing state legislators to pass laws that protected the rights of the fugitive slaves. However, their major participation was in raising awareness amongst the American public about the enslaved women’s experiences and their sufferings under the shadow of slavery. Due to the still existing prejudice against the blacks, the white women’s rights movements did not speak about the black women’s needs or allow them to become members in their movements. This fact is clearly delineated in the following extract:

The antebellum white women’s rights movement did not speak to the needs of black Women, and some women’s rights leaders even ignored their poorer white sisters. Black women were not often welcomed as members in the white women’s rights groups, as is clear from the antagonism toward the presence of Sojourner Truth and other black women who sought to become members of these groups. (Harley and Terborg -Penn 33)

In their request to voice up their basic needs, the black females were not satisfied in this movement. As a result, they joined their efforts to create a black female anti-slavery society in Salem, Massachusetts, where many ex-slave abolitionist activists such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs shared their personal experiences of forced slavery and managed to expose their daily horrors under servitude.

Many other well-known and less-known black women struggled to obtain their freedom and to end slavery in spite of the challenges they faced. Some of them wrote pamphlets and literary works, delivered powerful speeches, and dedicated their lives and their literary talents to help the enslaved and freed people to improve their lives. Among them Harriet Tubman, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Mari W. Stewart, Sarrah Mapps Douglass, and others.

b. During and after the Civil War

Under the shadows of discord and disagreement, the Civil War broke out on April 12, 1861, in the United States of America. Thousands of slaves were emancipated but the majority of them did not enjoy freedom till 1865. The chains of oppression did not free the enslaved women who lived different experiences during than black men the Civil War. Black men were forced to take part in the battle fields whereas women were obliged to carry the labour in the plantations and were exploited by their masters. Due to the tumultuous situation, some courageous black women were able to run away from the plantations and reach the Union lines, they were looking for freedom but as they were less fortunate, they found a harsh reality and terrible conditions. This is stated by Kellie Janelle Hedgers in her work:

Although the Union Army was often perceived of as an army representing freedom and higher moral purpose, the court martial records reveal a darker side. They reveal that sometimes black women found no safety behind Union lines; rather, they found themselves victims of sexual violence by white men and had little recourse to justice. Although outwardly the Union Army was devoted to abolishing slavery, the inner workings of its courts reveal that black women, supposedly protected by Lincoln's Lieber Code, were often sexually dehumanized by Union soldiers and military judges. (iv)

The black women's sufferings did not end with, but a new type of oppression and abuse was challenging them in the Union army.

After escaping from slavery and securing their freedom, the black women helped the Union soldiers in Southern regions through gathering military sensitive information about the movements of Confederate army. Some of the vital contributions of black women to the war were their work as spies, scouts and nurses. McDevitt Theresa mentioned in her book: "The greatest source of military and naval intelligence, particularly on the tactical level, for the Federal government during the war was the Negro." (McDevitt 254). Here the crucial role of black people was highlighted as effective participants in the war.

A prominent ex-slave was Harriet Tubman, known as the freedom fighter or "The Moses of Her People", risked her life and freedom to liberate the enslaved people before and during the Civil War. She was a military commander, a nurse, a cook, and a spy for the Union Army. In fact, she was the first American woman to lead combat troops into battles. The crucial role played by Tubman in the Civil War is confirmed by Berry and Gross:

Although Harriet Tubman is probably the most well-known Black woman in American history, some do not know about her brave efforts during the Civil War. After spending the early years of the war attending to the sick, Tubman received permission to create a spy network in 1863 to infiltrate the Confederate base in South Carolina. She quickly organized a group of men who knew the land and could navigate boats with ease. She became commander of her spy ring and developed a plan that led to the freedom of nearly eight hundred people. (63)

The role she played and so many others like her was so active and fruitful for the Union and the slave liberation. Additionally, the situation of the majority of black women worsened as they could not see the fruits of this emancipation for themselves or their families: "Black women fought and prayed for the Union cause and the cause of emancipation. But as the war continued, they grew weary of Union and Confederate

soldiers who destroyed property and threatened their lives" (Berry and Gross 60). As mentioned in the extract, black women found themselves lost and worried because of the war and the soldiers' aggressions on them; safety was missing in freedom too.

c. From the Reconstruction Era till Civil Rights Movement

After the bells of freedom rung on the American lands, and the enslaved became free, Afro-Americans were waiting to be recognized as full American citizens. They found that this freedom was mostly written on paper not a reality. Thus, the black women needed to stand up for their rights and to fight for their own liberty. Furthermore, they needed to face double segregation, racial and gender, as they did not have the same equal rights as men. They found themselves between the northern states that were not ready enough to forebear the decisions of this abolition, and southern ones that refused to coexist with the newly freed blacks and to welcome them. The plantation owners were not ready to let go the ex-enslaved people.

At that period the black women were struggling to find their lost families especially their children who were sold to other regions or plantations, to find a job so as to provide food and shelter for their families, and to have a decent life. They spent the first summer of freedom like a long journey looking for their beloved children or husbands, the exhausted women were leading a personal struggle not to let go their families from a place to another as stated by Clark Hine and Thompson: "... Every mother's son seemed to be in search of his mother; every mother in search of her children...Black men, too, searched for and found their wives and children." (201). This quote highlights the strong bonds between the mothers and their children; it was not only a physical harm that was inflicted on the enslaved women, but also a psychological one that only hugging her children would heal even after the long separation.

Most of the newly free people who used to be labourers had wanted to have their own land, where they could farm and live with their families. However, the southerners had their ways as they refused to sell land to blacks and offered them to work as labourers, also to live and work on their lands in exchange for part of the crop. Most of the black people took this kind of job as surviving was hard, but they found themselves caught in that system. However, black women found themselves working for long hours with their husbands in the fields.

In order to control the black women and men, the white southerners started a new policy of oppression through the Mississippi Plan by which they tried to spread insecurity and terror in the black communities. Some groups of white people were created to apply the plan. One of them was the Ku Klux Klan whose actions were full of violence, terror and inhumanity. It abused sexually, lynched and killed a lot of black men and women. The book of *Civil Rights Movement* describes the horrors of the Ku Klux Klan saying: “To redeem the South from this ‘nigger domination,’ whites terrorized and slaughtered blacks in what was called the Mississippi Plan. Vigilante groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, castrated, raped, and lynched thousands of black men and women” (DierenField 46). The narratives show the Ku Klux Klan as a black spot in the American history; it had no laws, no religion, and no limits in its acts. In addition, after the intimidation of the blacks, the white politicians tried to keep them away from voting. Meanwhile to aggravate the situation, the southerners created more stringent laws named the Jim Crow. DierenField explains the aim behind the Jim Crow Laws:

As the North retreated after Reconstruction, the South instituted a rigid caste system called Jim Crow, so named from a minstrel caricature of the 1830s.

In the Black Codes, lawmakers barred blacks from attending white schools, marrying whites, testifying in court, having a gun, or owning property. (47)

Those laws established borderlines between the blacks and the whites; blacks were not allowed to go to the same schools as the whites, they could not marry a white partner. Moreover, they did not have the right to possess a gun to protect themselves or to buy a house or any type of property. Later, the laws became more racist, classifying the black Americans as second-class citizens:

Southern states rewrote their constitutions to separate the races from birth to burial. Signs appeared reading 'white' and 'colored' for drinking fountains, toilets, telephone booths, and bus stations. Each race had its own hospital and prison; theaters consigned blacks to the balcony, which was nicknamed 'the buzzard's roost'; libraries were for whites only.

Racial mores permitted whites to call black men 'Boy' or 'Uncle,' never 'Mr' or 'Sir.' Blacks were expected to walk in the gutter when whites came along. (DrienField 47)

The author scrutinizes the Jim Crow laws giving the smallest details of the segregation between the whites and the blacks. These laws had roots in the black Americans' daily lives widening the gap between the two races, at the same time strengthening the racist notions in the whites' minds generation after generation. Those laws aggravated the situation of the blacks denying them any opportunities to better their lives in the American society. Black women were denied their rights to a political participation like voting, and to have an education in schools and universities. This denial pushed some black women to react, revolt, and demand their rights. First, women were deprived of the right to vote, but later on it was granted only to the white women and denied to the black women. Black women's struggle to vote was not new but it was a fight that started under the laws of slavery by Sojourner Truth and some other black women. The fruit of this struggle resulted in granting all American women the right to vote in 1920 by the ratification of The Nineteenth Amendment. Unfortunately, most black women were victims of terrorist and racial acts as soon as they were granted that right:

All women gained the right to vote in 1920. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified. It states: The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. [...] The Black Woman became the target of political terrorism as soon as she gained the right to vote in 1920. She increased the political power of her community. (Browne – Marshall 192)

This amendment recognized that all American women without exception had the right to vote, but black women were stopped from getting this right through violence and the laws passed by many states in the US that discriminated against and limited the freedoms of all Afro- Americans. Both black men and women were terrorized to ask for their right and the ones who were brave enough were stopped by several conditions like a literary test, being a good citizen with no criminal actions, age and residency. So, on June 22, 1957, Louise Lassiter, a courageous black woman, decided to take action for the sake of all black women:

Louise Lassiter believed any test taken to vote was unfair. The State of North Carolina was far from concerned about literacy among its voters..., Lassiter fled out the forms to register to vote. She had a plan. Louise could barely breathe. It was a hot day and the White men stood with intimidating postures all around her. Louise knew the risk: unemployment and death threats. But she completed all parts of the form and waited. A literacy test was placed in front of her. She had rehearsed it all in her mind. Louise swallowed hard and said, no. She refused to take the literacy test. Then she told the White register of elections and all the White men standing around her that this test was a violation of her constitutional rights. (Browne and Marshall 194)

This incident shows the restrictions imposed on the blacks as most of them could not read or write, the court refused Louise's appeal stating the literacy test was neutral on race, colour or sex. Thus, several acts were passed like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, by which more rights were granted to the African Americans.

In order to advance and get opportunities, the blacks needed education; this was another part in their struggles. Black women were eager to get a quality education but there was no right of education in the American Constitution. Each state regulated its educational system and supported and helped its schools. Moreover, each state regulated its laws giving or denying this right. Hence, Black women had to ask for equality in education opportunities helping in bringing the change. Many black women took their cases to courts

asking for equality of education and rejecting the principle of ‘separate but equal’. One of the most famous cases was the case of Brown V Board; it involved many communities in Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington DC. This case resulted in the desegregation of public schools and was followed by other successes for the right of equity for the right of education. Another case was the one of Ruby Bridges, six-year-old black girl in her first grade, who needed the President Eisenhower to interfere and protect her in her first days in the elementary school of New Orleans. Not all the cases were successful, as some Black women could not be recognized their rights like the case of Autherine Lucy who applies for admission to the University of Alabama in 1952, but she was not accepted until the Supreme Court decided in favour of her case in 1955. When she attended classes in February 1956, riots were started:

When Autherine Lucy enrolled at the University of Alabama in February 1956, a mob waving Confederate flags pelted ‘the nigger whore’ with rotten eggs and shouted “kill, kill her”. University officials expelled Lucy after she blamed them for not keeping order. (Dierenfield 66)

Autherine was so brave in facing the aggressive and violent acts against her at university by the white students who refused her presence with them. She expressed her disappointment about the passive reaction of the university officials.

Furthermore, Black women faced another kind of inhuman treatment; they were deprived of their rights to be mothers through sterilization. What is surprising is the fact that they were not even asked for permission to be sterilised, but they were inflicted this punishing act only because of their race. The contrast is that during slavery, black women were not asked if they wanted to be mothers; they were denied the choice as their role was to replenish the number of the slaves. However, after the Abolition and later on they were denied the right to be mothers so as to decrease the number of black citizens. In the same context, Browne-Marshall sustains her claim about sterilization with some evidence and figures:

Black women, especially in the South, were sterilized in great numbers. By 1941, 70,000 to 100,000 women and girls had been sterilized, primarily women of color. Fannie Lou Hamer, the famous voting rights activist, wanted children. It was not until later in a childless life that she discovered a doctor had sterilized her. Fannie was a sharecropper in Ruleville, Mississippi. In 1961, she entered the hospital for a non-life-threatening medical procedure and was sterilized without her knowledge or consent. (167).

These incidents highlight the cruelty and criminality of the whites and the fact of giving themselves the right, the authority and the permission to deprive the black women of their personal basic human right. What is surprising is that the elites took part in such inhuman acts, and they did not respect their professional code of ethics.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement was on its zenith when activism became part of the black women's lives. Ruth Powell, a black woman activist, who decided to take individual stance against segregatory laws by sitting in cafeterias for whites, sometimes for hours just as a silent form of protest:

African American women employed a range of strategies in challenging the rules governing our subordination. In many cases Black women practiced individual protest against unfair rules and practices... What I believed was that all these little bits of agitation would go toward that vital ... awakening process" (Collins 175).

This act of protest from an individual woman delves into the courage and bravery of the women of that era in challenging the existing laws. Powell was not the only one, women activists were blossoming everywhere. The iconic Rosa Parks gained fame and recognition after her refusal to give her seat to a white passenger in the bus in Montgomery. Parks' activism did not start on December 1, 1955, but long before, through her struggle and investigation as being the secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):

Rosa Parks had become the secretary of the NAACP in 1943. In that role, she had investigated race- based employment discrimination, lynching, and assaults. Parks was the force that galvanized local advocates and national attention on the gang rape of Recy Taylor in 1944. It was the organizational structure – created for Recy Taylor, comprised of Black women activists, media sources, and religious groups in Montgomery – which led to the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Parks became the symbol of the movement. (Browne-Marshall 231- 232)

This quote highlights the important role that Rosa Parks played in the Civil Rights Movement. Many other leading figures were side by side with her and her sisters: Coretta King, Ann Robinson, Irene Morgan and so many sparkling names that marked history, not only the American history but the world history.

2. Black Women's Literature

Owing to the literary voices of Afro-American female writers, black women's experiences and hardships were unearthed, and became known to the readers. They have written about racial discrimination, exploitation, and oppression during slavery and Jim Crow's America. They even went further digging in the lives of their Afro-American sisters. Numerous literary works are considered as detailed historical records and real testimonies of what happened years and centuries ago. They are also enriching the mainstream American literature.

Despite the discouraging circumstances, the black intellectual elites were up to the challenge as they tried to showcase their power of the mind and prove their existence as a part of a different identity. Hence, they used literature as a powerful weapon for advocacy and social change.

Due to being the victims of a racist and a sexist society, the Afro-American women were suffering from both being black and the victims of gender segregation. In a similar vein, Alphy J Plakkottam mentions that: "African American women have been doubly

victimized by scholarly neglect and racist assumptions, Belonging as they do to two groups which have traditionally been treated as inferiors by American society: African American and women, they have been doubly invisible.”(15). All these circumstances, which created a sort of double invisibility in their society, pushed them to find ways in order to fight and resist these inferior statues imposed by the whites. Also, they were struggling against invisibility and inferiorisation as being black females in a racist male society. This double invisibility intensified the resistant cause.

African American female writers played a crucial role in setting the foundation of what came to be known as black literature whose aim is to resist prejudice and the white Americans’ rejection. Consequently, the female voices opted for rebellious characters in their writings that would depict the resilience of the African Americans to defend their identity and character by surviving similar systematic resistance. Patricia Hill Collins puts: “Black women's intellectual work has fostered Black women's resistance and activism” (25). Black female writers wanted to foster the development of the black female characters and their resistance; through creating powerful protagonists who can be able to fight racism.

a. Resilient Female Writers: Voicing Creativity under Oppression

The hindering circumstances such as labour, poverty, and illiteracy were powerful barriers to the creation of literature; however, the African Americans kept their literary traditions through different mediums. The Blacks created stories, poems, autobiography narratives, and other works both orally and written, and passed them down from one generation to the other. Thanks to these ways of self-expression, Afro-American women portrayed their experiences, and made sense of their world. Frances Smith Foster and Larose Davis have state that,

[...] not natural.” It was “the difficult miracle” that women of African descent living in the rough and non-literary world of colonial North America composed songs and poems, stories, essays, autobiographies, letters, and diaries, ... repeatedly singing for liberty . . . repeatedly lifting witness to the righteous and the kindly factors” of their day. (29).

This short extract sheds lights on the Afro- American women being shadowed under slavery, resisting oppression through numerous genres of literary works, and aiming at showcasing their sufferings and relieving themselves from the trauma of enslavement.

Additionally, Phillis Wheatley is an iconic literary figure, she was a poet, although there were many prominent figures, both male and females, in the world of black literature. In 1773, Phillis Wheatley published “Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral”. With this publication, she became the second African American and first Black American woman to publish a collection of poems. Williams mentions: “Another example of the neoclassical influence as the personification in Wheatley's poetry of such abstractions as virtue, recollection, imagination, and humanity.” (Williams (ed) 1320)

Wheatley was a flame of virtue and ethics, her poems highlighted the political and social issues of her era, giving a unique vision of the challenges existing in her time. Her poetry of an enslaved woman is a testimony of her struggle to voice out and articulate a different perspective on equality, virtue and justice. Her personality and vivid poems are still quoted and discussed provoking astonishment and amazement in the minds of many contemporary writers, like Alice Walker, who always write about her in their works. *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden* is rich with paragraphs showing the admiration of Alice Walker towards Phillis Wheatley:

What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself? This sickly, frail black girl who required a servant of her own at times—her health was so precarious—and who, had she been white, would have been easily considered the intellectual superior of all the women and most of the men in the society of her day. (147)

Walker expresses her amazement about this physically weak woman, but intellectually can be considered as superior to most minds of her era.

b. Literature as an Empowering Tool:

A wave of changes was brought during the abolition era, freedom was not the only change, but also a series of social, economic and literary ones. The newly freed Afro- American women found themselves emerging with echoing voices that challenged the previously written literature. Most female writers were writing their life stories; they focused on the injustice of slavery such as Frances W. Harper, Harriet Wilson, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Jacobs. One of the best-known African American writers was Frances W. Harper, some of her famous works, dozens of poems and a few prose pieces were previously written under slavery. Harper is acknowledged for her famous poem “The Slave Mother” which was written in 1854. The poet describes the feelings of a slave woman about to be separated from her son. The editors Meryamma Graham and Jerry W. Ward Jr. express their opinions about her: “One of the leading African American intellectuals in the nineteenth century, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper spoke and wrote against slavery, for its abolition, for the rights of women, and for political rights for all African Americans” (Graham and Ward Jr (ed) 196). This quote highlights the important position that Harper has in the Afro-American literature, being one of the first who expressed clearly the injustice of slavery and claimed a fair treatment for all the blacks.

Another star in the sky of the black literature is Harriet Wilson who was the first African American woman to publish a novel in the United States. *Our Nig or Sketches for the Life of a Free Black* was published in 1859, it portrays the hardships of northern free Slaves and the daily abuses against a black servant in a lower middle class white family settled in the free North. Moreover, it portrays another type of racism that is shadowed in

the free North. The female protagonist, Frado, experiences anti-black racism from the mother and daughter of the Bellmounts family. Despite being abolitionists, the white men of the family could not help Frado from the females' abuse. Alice Walker in the introduction of the book *Our Nig* says that this novel is so important because it shows one of the unique experiences of a black woman in the North before the Civil War:

...the novel is of "enormous significance" because it represents "heretofore unexamined experience." It is one of the very first full-length books written by an African American who was not a slave; it stands as a hallmark of literary history as the first novel published by an African American woman in the United States; and it subtly combines compelling storytelling with unflinching indictments of Northern anti-black racism."(Gates and Ellis (ed)10)

Walker focuses on the importance of this novel in enriching the black history and literature with a new unexplored issue denouncing the discriminational behaviours though it was believed that the North was a safe place for the black people.

Another prominent Afro-American woman and an antislavery activist, Sojourner Truth, whose original name was Isabella. She started writing in collaboration with Olive Gilbert, a white feminist. She wrote *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, which was published in Boston in 1850. Her "*Ar'n't I a Woman?*" speech was delivered in 1851, in which she was challenging the notions of racial and gender oppression and inequality by telling the audience about her combined strength: she was tall and strong as a woman. One of quotes from Truth's speech is mentioned in James Daley's work:

...that man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (7)

This extract shows Truth's hardship as a slave, as a woman, and as a mother who suffered from seeing her children taken as slaves; however, she says that a woman is equal to man and is as able as man in bearing physical tasks.

Additionally to the precedent literature figures comes Harriet Jacobs who was an abused slave both mentally and physically. Jacobs decided to heal her wounds by writing the story of her enslavement. Hence, she published in 1861, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* which is the first slave narrative written by a black woman by herself. Nicknaming herself Linda Brent, Jacobs portrays the sexual abuse of enslaved women in general and the distress and anxiety felt by enslaved mothers, who frequently experienced the loss of their children. In the book's preface, she expressed the aim behind writing her book saying:

...I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is. Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations. (Jacobs 26)

Through sharing her personal experiences, Jacobs wanted to highlight the inhumanity and abuse of the slave owners in the South, besides revealing the brutal and the horrible reality of their everyday life, stressing on sexual abuse and the humiliation of women. When Nell Irvin Painter introduced a new edition of her book in 1999, she mentions that:

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl makes three important points convincingly: It shows, first, the myriad traumas owners and their agents inflicted upon slaves. Bloody whippings and rapes constituted ground zero of the enslaved condition, but in addition, slaves were subject to a whole series of soul-murdering psychological violations: destruction of families, abandonment of children, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, humiliation, contempt. Jacobs details the physical violence so common in her Southern world, but she especially stresses the assault on slaves' psyches. (Jacobs 7)

Painter sheds light on the psychological effects of slavery and the abuse of the slave owners on the black women and their families. Slavery destroyed every precious thing for those poor vulnerable women denying them the right to belong to a family or a community. Those women were forced into exploitation day and night, mentally and physically. During the day, they were labourers or domestic servants whereas in the night, another type and abuse and exploitation would be subjected on them- sexual abuse. in the same context, Ramey Berry confirms that fact:

From abolition through the 1950s, large numbers of Black women were confined either to agricultural work or domestic service. Few could secure factory work, and domestic service imperilled Black women by leaving them vulnerable to sexual assault in white homes and to accusations of theft that could swiftly find Black women on the wrong side of white justice. (11)

From the abolition era and on, most Afro-American women had no choice in the job opportunities except working in the fields or maids in the white houses exposed to abuse and sexual harassment, sometimes even falsely accused of theft.

c. From Emancipation to Renaissance: A Rebirth of New Warriors

During the Reconstruction era, the Afro-American female writers dedicated their works to speak about the political situation of the black people, and the bitter experiences of the black community during the Civil War. They focused on the importance of literacy of their race. In her work, Anna Julia Cooper mentions that: “The education and elevation of black women is crucial to racial uplift …as they are the ones in charge of the education of the next generation” (554). This quote delves into the important role of the black women in shaping the future generations as their main role is education, that’s why Cooper stresses the importance of women’s education.

Furthermore, the black American women, in their attempt to resist the discrimination in education within the American society, were supportive to a new type of educational schools, named self-help institutions, where they learnt industrial skills to get better jobs qualities and opportunities for the blacks. In other higher institutions, blacks were taught how to become leaders. In the book, the editors Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn put that:

...black Americans had become increasingly supportive of self-help institutions. Faced with the prospect of "miseducation" or usually no education in public schools and universities, the black community accepted the challenge of establishing and/or sustaining both industrial schools to prepare the race for practical work and institutions of higher learning to produce race leadership... (97)

This saying proves that the black elite found another way to resist discriminative and racist acts that hinder the emancipation and development of the black community through providing a new type of education.

Besides, African American female writers and intellectuals like: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Gertrude Mossell, Anna Julia Cooper, Victoria Earle Matthews, Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Church Terrell, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman, Amelia E. Johnson, Gertrude Dorsey Brown[e], Ruth E. Todd, and Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson were activists who sought to be race leaders, orators, editors, teachers, academic, and professional women. All of them were striving to have the best positions as black women in their communities, refusing to be ignored, and wanting their abilities and potentials to be acknowledged. Those women have engraved their names in the history of America being the best representatives of their race. Most of them were influenced by Mathew's speech delivered at the 1895 Congress of Colored Women of the United States in Boston, in which she tried to speak about the concerns of her generation and that the black writers' literature is an engaged literature and that female writers had to

fulfil their social and political duties towards the black community. Matthew insisted that the black females' literature is "... a record of the past and can offer a vision of the future; it is typically American" (Graham and Ward 195). She insists on the vital role of the blacks' literature as being a testimony of the past narratives and events that can shape the future and preserve the black identity.

With the evolution of literature, the period between 1865 and 1910 marked the works of Afro- American women writers as contributions to the race literature in which they dealt with topics about slavery in the past and images of the future of their race, giving birth to magnificent and unforgettable heroes and heroines. Those writers wanted their experiences to be eternalized through their works as stated by Graham and Ward:

The issues at the core of these stories and novels are race, class, and gender. In many cases the problems are solved, and the mysteries unraveled. In their version of race literature, African American women writers ...contribute to the debate about the content of race literature, they tackle the sensitive topics of their time ... they create memorable heroines and heroes, and then subvert the generic boundaries of fiction. This generation of women intellectuals, activists, club- women, and writers know that their voices will have to be heard and only they themselves can shape and interpret their experiences. (202)

The fictional works of the black women created protagonists, both males and females that are unforgettable for readers, as they voiced their struggles and experiences of their era.

The African American literature passed by many periods; the golden one is the Harlem Renaissance. Its name is given after Harlem which was considered as the capital of the black world. This era was considered as an awakening one among African American artists, poets, and writers, "Harlem became the ultimate place of opportunity for creativity and the possibility of recognition, as well as extended opportunities to create" (Bracks and Smith 22). During the 1920s and 1930s, the works of black female writers differed from

male in many aspects as they portrayed special identities and experiences, reflecting the desire of black females to build their racial identities in a males' dominating environment.

Bracks and Smith highlight the important role and change the black females made for themselves, looking to be partners not followers in activism:

In the midst of this, black women redefined their roles as uneducated and submissive individuals and transformed themselves into partners in the struggle for equal rights and justice. A sense of pride regarding the black woman was presented in major black periodicals of the time, including Crisis, Opportunity, and particularly the January 1924 issue of Messenger, which announces its goal to "show in pictures, as well as writing, Negro women, who are unique, accomplished, beautiful, intelligent, industrious, talented, and successful.(22-23)

This illustration sheds light on the effective role of journalist in highlighting the females' black identity in its uniqueness and beauty, in their articles in their periodicals.

The black women's works delineate new refreshed female images which are different from the past literature, aiming at the reflection on the depth of their issues and the impact of the double oppression they suffer from as being females in a males' society and under the racist doctrine. Moreover, those female writers wanted to express their deep emotions and feelings showing their faithfulness to their real identities, rediscovering themselves through their writings. Because some of them were mixed –race female writers, this made them different. In their quest for their freedom and spiritual independence, their works became iconic in their individuality. One of these prominent figures was, Zora Neale Hurston who revolutionized the world of literature by changing the minds of readers about the biases of the American society against black females. In her works she highlights the black women's characters not as the stereotyped image portrayed in the writings of the white authors. She shows black females as real victims of prejudice and racism and the wrong the mainstream culture, racial and gender segregation were. For instance, in her work *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she tries to change the traditional image of the black

nannies and the women of ill reputation in the eyes of the whites and explains their true thoughts and aims. The nanny, in her novel, did not only want to work and to obey the white master, but also to live for herself and her family too. The best description of Zora Neale has been inscribed in her grave by Alice Walker in 1973, in her words: “Zora Neale Hurston. Genius of the South. Novelist Folklorist Anthropologist (1891-1960)” (Hurston 9). Walker recognised the ingenuity and the supremacy of Hurston’s mind over the other writer though she has been forgotten for a period of time; she was revived by Walker in many of her books.

Other major literary figures who contributed to the Harlem renaissance literature was Elizabeth Laura Adams. She was among the first Afro-American women that wrote about Catholicism. She expressed herself and defined her place. She wrote about her personal quest for spiritual fulfilment in a series of essays entitled: “There Must Be a God...Somewhere: A true Story of a Convert Search for God”. Another literary figure was Gwendolyn Bennett who was not only a poet, but also an educator, an artist, a short story writer, and an editor. Her poems were published in *Opportunity and Crisis* magazines during the 1920s. Some of her poems are recognized and became well known for expressing her pride for the black identity and culture. One of the poems is entitled “To a Dark Girl” and the other one is “Heritage”. Another poet that became famous during the Harlem era Gladys May Casely-Hayford, African by birth. Through her works, some themes are highlighted like the beauty of the African culture and its strength, besides feminism perspective, including some of her personal views honestly expressed. Amongst her most remarkable poems are “Creation” (1926), “Rainy Season Love Song” (1927), “Nativity” (1927), and “The Serving Girl” (1941).

d. Activism and Protest in Claiming Civil Rights

The oppressive Jim Crow laws during the 1950's and 1960's were prevalent in the American society, depriving the Afro-Americans from their basic rights which led to a movement of protest that was unique in its way. A movement that was inspired from the philosophy of peaceful protest of Mahatma Gandhi, resulting in the Civil Rights Movement. Demonstrations and protests were led by activists and black citizens in order to initiate a change in their society. Hence, the black writers, males and females, wrote to express feelings of self-worth, and to show the important role played by the African Americans in their society.

Thus, Black females' literature during this era reflects the multiple struggles they faced while fighting for recognition, equality, and respect. Most of their literary works focused on finding solutions to their issues, creating an influential audible voice, and achieving unity and consciousness among the blacks.

Furthermore, Afro-American women played pivotal roles in the Civil Rights movement as they acted as leaders, demonstrators, organizers, fundraisers, theorists, formed abolition and self-help societies (Atwater 539–542). Black women published newspapers, poems, and stories, and used fictional and non-fictional genres showing their treatment based on the colour of their skin. As well as being discriminated because they are African American women.

Lorraine Hansberry, Gwendolyn Brooks, Angela Davis, Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez, Carolyn M. Rodgers, Nikki Giovanni and other Afro-American female writers and artists were imaginatively and socially engaged in the Civil Rights Movement. Their active role was clear and effective in defending the black community's rights. Poetry was used as a main form of expression and criticism by African American poets to express their feelings

of discomfort with inequality and the conflicts of the Civil Rights Movement. One of those notable poets is Gwendolyn Brooks whose work dealt with everyday life in Black urban communities. She composed protest poems about 1950s political and racial turmoil as “We Real Cool” and “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed”, where she revealed a political consciousness and love of the Black culture and protesting the regular injustices inherited from the Jim Crow Era and the Civil Rights Movement. Femi Lewis states that:

Literary historian George Kent argues that poet Gwendolyn Brooks holds “a unique position in American letters. Not only has she combined a strong commitment to racial identity and equality with a mastery of poetic techniques, but she has also managed to bridge the gap between the academic poets of her generation in the 1940s and the young Black militant writers of the 1960s.” (2)

The quote above illustrates the important role played by Brooks in joining two generations of writers and poets as she had a unique way in mastering poetry and its techniques, crafting a new way in voicing poems with a deep resonance and interpretation for her readers enriching the mainstream American Literature. Furthermore, this outstanding poet tackled events connected with the Civil Rights Movement in her work “The Bean Eaters” (1960), in which she highlighted the murder of a Black teenager Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955, Rosa Parks’ arrest on a segregated bus, , and anti-Black violence in brave critical language.

Black female writers started to be fully recognized in the literary world and were granted awards like the famous playwright Lorraine Hansberry who was awarded the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1959 for her play, "A Raisin in the Sun". She succeeded in showcasing segregated housing policies during this time in history and the black families’ suffering while searching for stability and integration in the American society. A sample from her plays presenting a discussion between a mother and her son:

Mama: Oh—So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it's money. I guess the world really do change...

Walter: No—it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it."
(Hansberry Act One, Scene Two)

Hansberry's play is a reference to Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem." in which she explores the race-restricted housing topic when Walter is offered a bribe to get his family to move out of their neighbourhood.

A new concept emerged on the surface of the black political life which was "Black Power". It called for the rejection of racism and racists and everything that had a relation with them. Black female writers unified their efforts under the "Black Sisters" that denotes solidarity among them, highlighting their common fight and reinforcing ties and relations between them and their community. "Black Sisters" symbolizes unity, resilience, and empowerment in the fight against discrimination. Another female movement was the "Aesthetic Sisters" which explored the black identity and life through arts and literature. Sonia Sanchez is an important Black Arts poet, who likes other artists, expresses herself in poetry in an aesthetic style. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu describes Sonia Sanchez as:

[...] is one of the most recognized individuals associated with the Black Arts Movement. During that time, Sanchez emerged as a fresh and fierce voice that embraced black speech and sought to tell the truth about the black condition. Both qualities have remained part of Sanchez's work, now spanning more than three decades. She has authored a dozen books of poetry, three children's books, and several plays and contributed to or edited more than twenty anthologies. (764)

The author sheds light on the work of Sonia Sanchez that kept glowing for more than three decades and being recognized as one of the most brilliant poets, playwrights, and novelists. She has brought a fresh breath in Afro- American literature.

e. Contemporary Literature, from 1970s till Present Time

As the Black Arts Movement receded in the mid-1970s, African American women writers and poets started to rise such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, Sherley Anne Williams, and Gayl Jones. Their work was marked a significant shift in African American literature, where the female writers who came in the 1970s and continued to flourish in the 1980s and 1990s shifted their attention to the African American communities' current issues. Furthermore, white oppression was no more regarded as a problem that needed their focus; their primary interest became centred on the concerns of Afro-American culture: they offered personal narratives of their community, and they gave voice to women and children.

It goes without saying that Toni Morison the an American novelist and college professor, famous for her art and ability to delve in the Black female experience and identity through her writing, vividly portrays the Afro-American female's experiences through centuries in her remarkable literary works that made her recognised as one of the best writers of the world, for that she was awarded the Nobel Literature prize in 1993. In an interview entitled "Toni Morrison, In Her New Novel, Defends Women" published in 1987, in New York Times Morrison insisted on the importance of being an African American woman and writer saying:

I've decided to define that, rather than having it be defined for me...."In the beginning, people would say, 'Do you regard yourself as a Black writer, or as a writer?' and they also used the word woman with it - woman writer. So, at first I was glib and said I'm a Black woman writer, because I understood that they were trying to suggest that I was 'bigger' than that, or better than that. I simply refused to accept their view of bigger and better. I really think the range of emotions and perceptions I have had access to as a Black person and as a female person are greater than those of people who are neither. I really do. So, it seems to me that my world did not shrink because I was a Black female writer. It just got bigger. (Rothstein 17)

It is clear that Toni Morrison defines herself as black woman writer, showing her pride of her Afro- American identity, adding to that she emphasized that she is a woman writer, highlighting the importance of the two facts in shaping her identity and work.

In Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the concerns of poverty, the beauty myth, abuse, and the "color aesthetic" when blacks valued less black over dark skin- a type of segregation between blacks based on the darkness of their skin- were themes dealt by the writer. Another remarkable work by Morrison is *Sula* (1973) where she portrays the friendship between two African American women growing up in the 1920s and 1930s. both were struggling with their identities and seeking freedom.

Another prominent American female novelist, dramatist, and screenwriter Suzan-Lori Parks who is one of current's American theatre voices. In 2002, she became the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Her work *Venus* (1996) and other works depict the meaning of race, poverty, adultery, and societal classes within contemporary American culture.

Delving in the contemporary era cannot be achieved without mentioning other major black female writers: Paule Marshall and Maya Angelou. Marshall narrates about self-discovery of black female characters, and she includes in her writings race, gender, and social and economic issues in the capitalist culture. She wrote five novels and two collections of short stories like *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969). Her works were recognised and rewarded by a Guggenheim Fellowship Award, the Columbus Foundation American Book Award, and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship owing to her skill in giving birth to the hope of renaissance for the black female identity through holding of cultural heritage and social relationships.

Alike Paule Marshall, Maya Angelou achieved worldwide success and fame through her literary works. Her first published work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) received broad public praise for tackling major themes mainly racism, sexism, and searching for home. She wrote numerous autobiographies describing her life in an artistic way. She used her mastery of language and speech to delineate her identity as well as describing the experiences of those women like her.

In an interview with the writer Judith Patterson, Maya Angelou said, “I will not allow anybody to minimize my life, not anybody, Bradley not a living soul—nobody, no lover, no mother, no son, no boss, no President, nobody.” (416). In this quote, Angelou summed up her personal conviction and fearless identity as a result of a lifelong hardship, oppression, and abuse. She rebuilt herself from a state of weakness to a state of strength.

Summing up, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Paule Marshall are contemporary writers who portrayed history in genius and magnificent ways, they do not limit their work to one era but transcend from the slavery to the Jim Crow era, passing by the Civil Rights Movement, arriving to our postmodern age. In their long journey through time, they erased all types of frontiers between the eras mentioned before, reviving the works of their old comrades and sisters. “Afro-American woman remained an all-pervading absence until she was rescued by the literary activity of her black sisters in the latter part of the twentieth century” (Evans 4). Furthermore, this era is marked by the blooming of numerous novelists, poets, dramatists and artists who enriched the African American and the world literature like Elaine Jackson, Angela Y. Davis, Aicha Rahman, Barbara Chase- Riboud, Barbara T. Christian, Nikki Baker, and Alice Randall.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

This research work requires the use of different theories as an eclectic method is applied. Alice Walker's Womanism, Subalternity and psychoanalysis approaches are of great help in accomplishing this work.

a. Womanism and its Pioneer Alice Walker

The rights of the black community were ignored by the white Americans. Afro- American literature focused on racial discrimination and narratives about it, neglecting the females' double oppression. Hence, Alice Walker, as a Black feminist, innovated a new revolutionary literary trend, Womanism through which she tries to honour the identity of the black female and highlights her struggles.

Alice Walker defines the term womanist: "Womanist is to feminist as purple [is] to lavender," (XII). She means that Womanism is not different from feminism; it is just like how the colour purple is close to lavender. Womanism focuses on the experiences and viewpoints of Black females, whereas feminism is a wider movement urging gender equality.

In an interview for the *New York Times* Magazine in 1984, Walker was asked about the origins of the term Womanism; her response was as follow, "I just like to have words that describe things correctly. Now to me, 'black feminist' does not do that. I need a word that is organic, that really comes out of the culture that really expresses the spirit that we see in black women. And it's just... womanish."(qtd in Bradley 24). Here Walker wants to explain the term Womanism is more faithful to black female identity as she said, "more organic".

Thus, Womanism offers a space for Black feminists who have been silenced and ignored by the American society. Walker tried to focus on the importance of the oral cultural heritage from which her female characters find their strength and continuity, and on the concerns and conditions of women of colour, mainly Black women. She wanted to highlight their sufferings, and struggles; and at the same time to celebrate their empowerment, strengths and their unique experiences. Furthermore, Walker in tackling issues of race, gender, and class, she is seeking social change and justice that should exist in every community. In the same interview, she adds:

I do not choose Womanism because it is better than feminism; I choose it because I prefer the sound, the feel, the fit of it; because I cherish the spirit of the women and because I share the old ethnic American habit of offering society a new word when the old word it is using fails to describe the behavior. Only a new word can help it more fully seen." (Bradley 24)

In her attempt to justify her choice of the term 'Womanism', Walker values and appreciates the women's spirit and experiences. After examining and delving into the entire history of the Afro-American people, starting from slavery to the era of civil rights protests, Walker created the new term when the existing ones failed in describing what really exists in the community so as to offer better understanding and clarity.

Under the umbrella of Womanism, Walker published her iconic novel *Color Purple* in 1982 which explores several themes like racial and gender oppression, the female solidarity, and self- empowerment. The novel won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction. This novel has provoked great resonance since its publication. In order to explain why Walker chose the colour purple, Long Shi mentions in her paper "*Womanism and The Colour Purple*" that:

[...] the Color Purple reflects the social cultural concept of Walker, especially the concept of harmonious coexist of Womanism. From the gradation of politics, The Color Purple is a novel reflects "American prosperities". Womanism in The Color Purple has an active function to the development of the black racial consciousness and national reconciliation."
(653)

The author tries to shed light on the importance of Womanism in blacks' racial consciousness and improving the socio- political spheres of the black community.

By initiating this term, Walker revolted against the exclusion of both working – class women and women of colour. Womanism, as a movement, “offered a way to expand the horizons of feminism by taking into account race and socioeconomic class as well as gender.” (Kaz Weida 5).

Womanism, during the 1980s and 1990s, gained more popularity than feminism due to its inclusiveness as stated by Montelaro in his book, *Producing a Womanist Text*:

This contrast of hues in Walker's definition is consonant with her political intention to demonstrate the crucial difference between the terms 'womanist' and 'feminist': according to the semantic analogue she constructs, an exclusively white, bourgeois feminism literally pales in comparison to the more wide-ranging, nonexclusive womanist concerns represented by the rich and undiluted color purple." (14)

Montelaro seems to stress on the point that by the emergence of Womanism, feminism became more defined by its white rich members.

Additionally, numerous prominent African American female writers like Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker insisted on the fact that racism became part of feminist, and how feminists never perceived coloured women as women, but as a completely different species. In Walker's opinion, “The reason for it was the desire of the white feminists to avoid assuming responsibility for the lives of colored women and their children so they denied them the rights they had” (374). Here Walker wants to focus on the fact that feminism neglects black women and children, intensifying their invisibility in the American society, denying them their rights and refusing to take responsibility in advocating their case.

Owing to its broad framework and the ability of giving a voice, a viewpoint to black females, as well as the unity of the black, Womanism has developed a lot and is accepted by most of the people not only in USA but also in Africa and Latin America. A lot of prominent female writers and scholars identified themselves as womanists rather than feminists and used Womanism as a pattern in analysing the texts of women from ethnic minorities or economically undeveloped countries. "The impact of Womanism goes beyond the United States and many women scholars and literary critics have embraced it as an analytical tool" (Nnaemeika 7). According to the writer, Womanism gained worldwide position and respect due to its inclusiveness.

Patricia Hills Collins highlights another side of Womanism, As she states, "many black women view feminism as a movement that at best, is exclusively for women, and, at worst, dedicated to attacking or eliminating men ... Womanism seemingly supplies a way for black women to address gender-oppression without attacking black men" (11).

Unlike feminism that focuses its attention on females' issues, eliminating males' existence in the females' world, Womanism delves in the issue of gender, inequality and oppression without creating animosity with men.

To sum up, Walker's Womanism has become a universal movement that functions successfully against discrimination, oppression, or any kind of behaviour that disgrace an individual or a minority because of racial, gender, cultural or class differences.

b. Subaltern: *Can the Voiceless Have a Voice?*

Can the subaltern Speak? A question introduced by the critic and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her revolutionary essay written in the 1988. Spivak is a pioneer of the postcolonial approach in analysing literature from previously colonized regions. In her work and theories, she is influenced by well-known theorists, politicians and activists like Frantz Fanon, and the Indian leader and peace activist Mahatma Gandhi, without forgetting the Palestinian American scholar Edward Said. She is from Indian origins; she studied in India at first then completed her studies in Britain then in the United States.

The term “Subaltern” is defined by Sahed as a military term used for officers under the rank of captain. It is borrowed from Gramsci to refer to any oppressed person (59). Another definition is given by Dharma raj: “Lexically, the English word subaltern came from the Latin word, subalternus which implies an under-other” (36- 38). He explains that a subaltern is a person who is under the others, meaning inferior to them. In other words, the subaltern is related to the oppressed or marginalized groups. Spivak used this term to speak about people who are kept in inferior positions owing to their age, gender, class or other factors.

Furthermore, the subalterns are denied of their rights and opportunities to take part in political or societal debates, so they become invisible and cannot represent themselves in politics, or other vital domains. Spivak in her essay tries to delineate the importance for the subalterns to represent themselves.

Spivak says that the subalterns cannot be heard even if they can speak. “The voice of the subalterns cannot reach to the ears of the elite people. In a word, the subalterns cannot speak” (104). This quote shows that the subaltern cannot be well- represented and if they are represented, the message will not be heard.

In her essay, she explains that women are marginalized more than men as they suffer from being on the margin of social, political and economic life, by the oppressors and by males. “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Riach 12). She insists on the fact that the subaltern has no records of his history as it has been written by the colonizer. Moreover, she insists on the position of females as they are more shadowed and silenced than males. In the work *Post Colonialism, Gayatri Spivak and the Subaltern*, the writer mentions that:

In this essay she exposes the irony that the subalterns have awakened to a consciousness of their own rights by making practical utterances against unjust domination and inequality. She denounces the harm done to women/Third World women and non-Europeans. She wants to give voice to the subalterns who cannot speak or who are silent. She focuses on speculations made on widow sacrifice. She attempts to restore the presence of the women writers who have been submerged by their male peers. She investigates women’s double colonization. (Ambesange 341)

The scholar highlights Spivak’s analysis of the situation of women as living in a double colonization, meaning double oppression, women are silenced in the Third World and living under domination and inequality.

Graham k. Riach adds that Spivak’s work came as a reaction to the effects of colonisation and that it is a call for revolt against the colonizers long term control before and after independence:

Spivak’s essay was an early contribution to a new wave of critiques about the aftereffects of colonialism. Many European colonies, among them India, Ghana, and the Republic of Congo, gained their independence between the 1940s and the 1970s. Historians, such as the academics of the Subaltern Studies Group, and theorists, such as Edward Said and Spivak started to consider what colonialism had done to former colonies. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is a furious response to the ideological power that the West continues to hold over the countries it once ruled—the way the West continues to impose its ways of thinking. (23)

Additionally, Spivak's interdisciplinary method is both innovative and so different from the previous scholars in the point that she combines different approaches. In her essay, she uses deconstruction, feminist and Marxist approaches in a postcolonial framework. Each approach deals with specific concerns. The deconstruction approach deals with the nature of reality through the use of language and its construction or use by the author. On the other hand, feminism approach helps her in her work to concentrate on how women are being marginalized, whereas the Marxist focuses on economy and the discrimination and inequalities between societal classes help in delving in history and in realizing an understanding of the study cases. In her scholastic work Spivak helps to make a unique connection between classes, gender and race and here she realizes an improvement in intersectionality. This term is introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw who states that marginalization and oppression cannot be understood in isolation.

Thus, Spivak explains the notion of intersectionality as the heavy impact of colonization continues to affect the oppressed and the marginalized through cultural effects and tools:

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shows some ways in which the legacies of colonialism continue to affect us. For Spivak, colonialism's oppressive ideology is reproduced through cultural means. She demonstrates that the supposedly disinterested stance of Western scholarship in fact reproduces the logic of colonialism, in which one party is superior to another. For Spivak, even intellectuals who seem to disapprove of hegemonic structures of society ... reproduce those structures themselves by generating knowledge about the oppressed. (Riach 23)

In her essay, Spivak focuses on the point that even if the subalterns are represented, this attempt would lead to the denial of the existence of those oppressed people, they would be more marginalized, even if the elite represent them this would not give them a fair opportunity to be heard. Spivak mentions the complexities of representation voicing the marginalized groups: "The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry

lists with women a pious. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribe task that she must not disown with a flourish" (308). She argues that the subalterns are denied the means to express themselves effectively and to be heard, their speech can be interpreted or filtered by those who pass it. She also mentions that women's problems in global discussions are listed, neglecting the reasons behind this oppression. Thus, those discussions and listing of the issues cannot lead to a meaningful change. Spivak points out that female intellectual hold the responsibility to challenge the existing power that silences the subaltern voices.

Conclusion

Taking everything into consideration, African American females went through different stages in their self- defining journey. Starting from their enslavement, passing by their right to liberty, they lived hardships and faced challenges to be recognized as American citizens. On the whole, right from the beginning, literature was used as the most empowering tool to write their history at first, then to portray their renaissance and their claim for their rights. Contemporary period brought changes in the claims of the black female writers for their identities and existence. To fulfil the aim of this research, an eclectic method intersecting Womanism, Subalternity and psychoanalysis.

Chapter II:

**The Aspects of Black Womanhood, Black
Maids' Character and their Politics of
Change, and the Poetics of Mothering the
Others**

They were women then

My mama's generation

Husky of voice-Stout of

Step

With fists as well as

Hands

How they battered down

Doors

And ironed

Starched white

Shirts

How they led

Armies

Head ragged Generals

Across mined

Fields

Bobby-trapped

Kitchens

To discover books

Desks

A place for us

How they knew what we

Must know

Without knowing a page

Of it

Themselves (Walker, lines 1-26. 160-161)

Introduction

The case study *The Help* has a polyphonic structure that means many narrators are presented side by side in the work. This novel presents three main female characters living in the Jackson society, Mississippi during the period of the 1960s. Two of them are black, Aibileen and Minny while Skeeter is white. The latter questions her white society's behaviours and attitudes towards the black maids. In her struggle to understand her society's segregating doctrine and the effects of the Jim Crow Laws, she starts a project that would give a voice to the black maids. The black helps would publish a book of testimonies and narratives. As a result, strong friendship relations and bonds are created between the three main characters of the novel. Along the novel, the readers would hear their voices and understand their struggles. Furthermore, the novel portrays aspects of the politics of womanhood and the poetics of mothering the others.

The style and language of each narrator is clearly identified. Each one has a unique way in narrating her side of the story, and the Black vernacular is predominant in both characters Aibileen and Minny whereas Skeeter's style and language is more sophisticated. This chapter delves into the aspects of womanhood, showing how the black maids are treated in the Jackson society, and portray the poetics of mothering the others in her work.

1. Aspects of Black Womanhood

a African Purple Females' Generosity and Spirituality

The Help gives a chance to the American black maids to express themselves and to have a voice. That is to say, those Afro-American maids, in the novel, navigate their narratives through portraying the oppressive Jackson society and the white women's control over them. In addition to their resilience in standing up again and facing all the challenges, the discrimination of the Jim Crow Laws, and the Exceptionalism rooted in the American society, those black women show how strong they are. They are fascinating with noble qualities such as generosity, loyalty, care giving, love and compassion. Aibileen as one of the main characters is embedded with a lot of wisdom and strength, at the same time with a lot of love and compassion towards her community, the children she cares for, and her friend Minny, who expresses her admiration for Aibileen showing how strong their friendship is. Minny expresses her admiration for Aibileen:

I guess I got to go," I say, even though I'd rather spend the rest of my life right here in Aibileen's cozy little kitchen, having her explain the world to me. That's what I love about Aibileen, she can take the most complicated things in life and wrap them up so small and simple, they'll fit right in your pocket. (Stockett 313)

Minny finds refuge from everything that annoys her in her friend's embracing care and kitchen. For Minny, Aibileen is home, she is fascinating, loyal and caring. "Black women used their kitchens to engage in cultural transmission. By practicing certain rituals, customs, and habits, they exhibited a measure of self-definition..."(Baxter and Satz 233). The editors state the idea of Althea Tait that focus on the space of the kitchen as a place where women and black mothers pass traits and values of the black identity.

Womanism is delineated through the characters of the black maids in the novel, showing the exceptional identity of the Afro- American women as Alice Walker describes them, "I am committed to exploring the oppression, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women... for me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world" (qtd in Crayton 54). Exploring and portraying the oppression of the black women is one of the main gaols that Alice Walker is committed to portray in her iconic works. Being the founder of Womanism, she delves into the lives of black women, their hardships, their history, and showing how fascinating they are.

In the same context, one of the aspects of Womanism is spirituality, which is highlighted in the character of Aibileen. This latter is a very spiritual woman who has developed a passion for writing prayers, being so generous to include every day one of her friends in her prayers. She is really gifted with compassion and love of others. This side of her character is better expressed in her own words:

I scan down my prayer list. My Mae Mobley got the number one rung, then they's Fanny Lou at church, ailing from the rheumatism. My sisters Inez and Mable in Port Gibson that got eighteen kids between em and six with the flu. When the list be thin, I slip in that old stinky white fella that live behind the feed store, the one lost his mind from drinking the shoe polish. But the list be pretty full tonight. And look a there who else I done put on this list. (Stockett 23)

This quote illustrates how generous and thoughtful is Aibileen, she devotes her time after work to pray for people around her and those who need her prayers. As if Stockett extracted from the thoughts of Alice walker who mentions in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*: "...black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held" (154). Aibileen can be seen as one of these unique women with a strong spirituality but are not conscious about the power they possess.

According to Minny and some black women, Aibileen has such sincerity and power in her prayers that people she prays for get results. Aibileen said, “We walking home from the one o’clock service. Minny say, “Rumor is you got some kind a power prayer, gets better results than just the regular variety”. “Say what?” (Stockett 23) This conversation between the two friends shows how this kind-hearted woman’s prayers always got raised. Her goodness gained her respect and an outstanding position among her community and friends.

b. Black Sisterhood and Support: Minny and Aibileen

Aibileen and Minny, two of the main characters of the novel, have special bonds, not only of friendship but also of sisterhood. In hardships and crises, people discover each other’s value, and this is the case with Aibileen and Minny that proved how faithful they are to each other during problems, sorrow, weakness, and hard times. Minny never lets Aibileen face her struggles alone. Aibileen son’s sudden death left her lost in melancholy and despair. As she described her state in the novel, “A bitter seed was planted inside a me. And I just didn’t feel so accepting anymore” (Stockett 3). This bitter seed is despair, grief and depression after the sudden horrible death of her son Treelore and the way his body was thrown, as if trash, by his white employer. This despaired mother said that she could not accept this anymore, meaning racism and segregation.

Nobody could help her through this bitterness except Minny, this strong friend who is needed to be beside anyone in distress. She was there for the old, sad Aibileen; she visited her every day since the death of her son, sustained and helped her both morally and physically. Aibileen described her state of despair and hopelessness and how Minny was there for her in the following illustration from the novel:

That was the day my whole world went black. Air look black, sun look black. I laid up in bed and stared at the black walls a my house. Minny came ever day to make sure I was still breathing, feed me food to keep me living. Took three months fore I even look out the window, see if the world still there. I was surprise to see the world didn't stop just cause my boy did. (Stockett 3)

Minny was feeding her friend, making sure she was alive and not dead, and thanks to Minny's compassion, even in the simplest acts, Aibileen stood again and regained her strength. This special empowering relationship sustains the two black maids' strength. In her narration, Aibileen confirms that her friend's existence spreads a feeling of resilience and fortitude around her:

She always been a strong woman, always fighting. After Treelore died, she carry supper over to me ever night for three months straight. And every day she say, "Nuh-uh, you ain't leaving me on this sorry earth without you," but I tell you, I was sure enough thinking about it. (28)

This faithful friend's presence is healing Aibileen as if she is a sun light enlightening her black world, Aibileen was seeing everything black. Minny's strong words resonated in Aibileen's ears calling her back to earth. Minny begged her not to let her alone in this unfair earth.

Aibileen was devastated and so hopeless, seeking death to reconnect with her beloved son; she lost her desire to live on this earth and even tried to commit suicide:

I already had the rope tied when Minny found it. The coil was Treelore's, from back when he doing a science project with pulleys and rings. I don't know if I's gone use it, knowing it's a sin against God, but I wasn't in my right mind. Minny, though, she don't ask no questions about it, just pull it out from under the bed, put it in the can, take it to the street. When she come back in, she brush her hands together like she cleaning things up as usual. (28)

What keeps her going on are the strong words full of love and kindness said by Minny and even her silent understanding that were bringing her back to life again. Moreover, reciprocity characterises Aibileen's and Minny's friendship. Minny finds her friend whenever she needs her help; she is the advisor, the trustworthy secret holder and the voice of wisdom. This is how Aibileen is to Minny.

In the same context, the professor of African American studies, June Jordan, talks about a young, traumatized woman in one of her reports: “She needed refuge for battered wives and personal therapy and legal counsel. She needed a friend” (Andersen and Collins 63). She describes the situation of a woman abused by her drunken husband; Jordan mentions that this woman needs a refuge from all this violence, a therapy, and most of all she needs a friend. It goes without saying, Aibileen is all of these qualities to Minny, she is her refuge, therapist and friend.

After losing her job, Minny found herself facing persecution from different fronts. Her former employer Hilly Holbrook was spreading lies and rumours about her as being a thief and a bad cook. As a result, nobody wanted to hire her again. Aibileen was so worried to find a new job for her. Hence, the opportunity was given to Aibileen who didn’t hesitate to lie for the sake of her friend. She convinced Celia Foote- a white housewife- to hire Minny, describing her as one of the best cooks and helps in Jackson. She told her: “I know somebody real good. She known for her cooking and she look after you kids too. She even got her own car to drive out to you house” (Stockett 25). The strength of her care and love to Minny gives Aibileen the force to lie and to put her life and work at risk, pretending to speak on behalf of her employer Elizabeth Leefolt, she says:

I get an idea. I say, “Hold on, what’s that Miss Leefolt? Uh-huh, I tell her.” I put the phone back to my mouth and say, “Miss Celia, Miss Leefolt just walk in and she say she ain’t feeling good but for you to go on and call Minny. She say she call you if she be needing help with the Benefit. (Stockett 50)

Even though Aibileen is a spiritual woman, she does not feel any guilt when she lied to Miss Celia about Minny. On the contrary, she is proud of herself to take the opportunity to help her friend. “I feel nothing but delight at the devil in me. I am lying and I don’t even care.” (Stockett 50). For the sake of supporting and helping her brave friend, Aibileen had no choice but to act quickly even though she cheated on Miss Celia.

Despite her apparent strength, Minny is forced to bear humiliation, not only at work, but also at home by her abusive husband. Aibileen's moral support and wise words enlightens her path through the hardship she is going through in her personal life. She has the ability to explain things, to wisely analyse troubles to Minny:

I guess I got to go," I say, even though I'd rather spend the rest of my life right here in Aibileen's cozy little kitchen, having her explain the world to me. That's what I love about Aibileen, she can take the most complicated things in life and wrap them up so small and simple, they'll fit right in your pocket. (Stockett 549)

Minny is never bored listening to her friend as if she is a source of hope, power, and energy. Furthermore, Aibileen is portrayed in the novel as a clear voice of wisdom and support especially to her friend Minny. In many occasions, Minny's husband was violent and abusive with her. In one occasion, he tried to kill her as he was fired from his job because of her. He heard about her participation in the project of the book. With reference to Paula G. Allen, the increase of violence against women is a result of various sociological factors such as oppression, racism, poverty, hopelessness, emasculation of men, and loss of male self-esteem (Anderson and Collins 73). This is the case of Minny's husband who uses violence as a means to show his anger from the oppression and racism he is living in.

After running away from her house, Minny phoned Aibileen as she is the closest person to her. She wanted to tell her that she could no longer bear this violence. In a state of anger and rage, she decided to take revenge from her abusive husband. Here, she voices her need to break down the chains of oppression. With a calm voice through the phone, Aibileen tried to calm her down, she guided her acts and mind so as not to kill Leroy, also not to be the reflection of the whites' expectancies towards her as a Black person:

She let out a long breath into the phone. “No,” she say. “I can’t. I done took this long enough.” And I start to hear Minny Jackson come back into her own self again. Her voice is shaking, I know she scared, but she say, “God help him, but Leroy don’t know what Minny Jackson about to become.”

My heart jumps. “Minny, you can’t kill him. Then you gone be in jail right where Miss Hilly want you.”

Lord, that silence is a long, terrible one.

“I ain’t gone kill him, Aibileen. I promise. We gone go stay with Octavia till we find a place a our own.” (Stockett 765)

Aibileen is the mind when Minny’s anger overlaps her due to her abuse, exploitation, and her husband’s merciless behaviour. She said that she could no longer bear this injustice and unfair treatment. In her book, *Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women*, Hooks points out: “sisterhood [...] it was about to care for one another and be in solidarity” (130). It is clear that the strong bonds between the two friends empower Minny to stop being voiceless and to seek her independence from this male oppression. Collins emphasises the importance of sisterhood in strengthening black women:

Black women's efforts to find a voice have occurred in at least three safe spaces. One location involves, Black women's relationships with one another. In some cases, such as friendships and family interactions...As mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends to one another, African-American women affirm one another. (116)

Collin’s quote delineates the bravery and courage that Black women initiate in each other to get rid of oppression and start the change in their lives.

c. Black Community Mutual Help and Solidarity

Solidarity and assistance are a clear trait in the Black community. This existed as a way to fight back slavery, helping any one in need. This is clearly depicted in the case study. The black maids support each other to face any distress as if they are one body and one soul, longing to see the others out of misery.

Aibileen's neighbour, Ida Peek, is the best illustration in the novel of the community support that made Aibileen's backyard as a source of food for both of them. Her fresh vegetables and jars save Aibileen from hunger due to the low salary she gets from her work:

Ida ain't got no backyard to speak of what with all her husband's junk—car engines and old refrigerators and tires. Stuff he say he gone fix but never do. So I tell Ida she come plant on my side. That way I don't have no mowing to tend to and she let me pick whatever I need, save me two or three dollars ever week. She put up what we don't eat, give me jars for the winter season. Good turnip greens, eggplant, okra by the bushel, all kind a gourds. I don't know how she keep them bugs out a her tomatoes, but she do. And they good. (Stockett 33)

This sharing spirit between neighbours and community members is also evident in the fact that Aibileen lets her neighbour use her backyard as if they are the same family. As stated by Alice Walker, black people helped and supported each other as they had nobody else to rely on:

In this small story is revealed the condition and strength of a people. Outcasts to be used and humiliated by the larger society, the Southern black sharecropper and poor farmer clung to his own kind and to a religion that had been given to pacify him as a slave but which he soon transformed into an antidote against bitterness. Depending on one another, because they had nothing and no one else, the sharecroppers. (16)

According to Alice Walker, through this act of help, the blacks found an antidote against these feelings of oppression, neglect and injustice, they learnt how to heal and support one another through solidarity.

Not surprisingly, the black sisters like the slave mothers are present for the children of Yule May, who was unfairly imprisoned and left her kids behind without resources to finish their studies at university- which was her dream. The black maids donated all the money they got from their testimonies to Skeeter for the twins of Yule May, showing how generous and supportive they were to each other. Aibileen expressed how the black maids in a silent way put the money they gained from the book in a shoe box for the twin's college studies, "The yellow Dr. Scholl's shoebox is on the counter behind her, still full of envelopes. Except for Gretchen, all ten women have asked that the money go toward Yule May's boys' education" (Stockett 458.459). This delineates the ten maids' sense of community. The idea of mutual help and solidarity between the African American communities is tackled by Collins:

In order to survive, the family network must share the costs of providing for children. Privatization is less likely when survival depends on rapid circulation of limited resources. African-American families exhibit these fluid public/private boundaries because racial oppression has impoverished disproportionate numbers of Black families. But they also invoke the Afrocentric worldview that offers alternative definitions of family and community. (67)

A new definition has been given to the black family as being synonymous of community help that transcends the borders and the limits. The family is no smaller, but it can be a large community. Any member who needs a support, especially in poverty, finds help from the other members.

2. Black Maids' Character and their Politics of Change

Being part of the American society of the sixties, and living under oppression and control is not an easy experience for the Afro-American maids. Even though the separating and unequal laws and the Exceptionalism of the American society imposed a lot of hardships and insecurity on Aibileen, Minny and the other helps, all these craft their characters and resilience in facing personal, professional and societal challenges.

a. Aibileen: The Symbol of Wisdom

Aibileen, the first narrator in the story, is portrayed in a way that makes readers appreciate, respect, and even feel a lot of sympathy for her character right from the beginning. This strong, brave, wise and resilient maid was hesitating to take part in the book project proposed by Skeeter, because she was scared and afraid from being part of the people who can bring the change. This is evident in her discussion with Minny about her answer to Skeeter concerning the book:

I did. I tell her she crazy,” Aibileen says. “I ask her, what if we told the truth? How we too scared to ask for minimum wage. How nobody gets paid they Social Security. How it feel when your own boss be calling you ...” Aibileen shakes her head. I’m glad she doesn’t say it. (Stockett 229)

The reader can understand that Aibileen is expressing her fear and scare about even asking for higher wages. The maids’ fear hinders them from giving their testimonies about the racist attitudes of the Jackson society. Skeeter wants a change and the maids are frightened to take part in it.

After delving in this discussion, the readers feel the strong relation between the two friends who know each other well. Minny helps Aibileen to see clear in herself, she tells her that it is evident that she wants to speak up, and that Aibileen is contradicting herself, as her inner self wants to bring the change whereas her submissive self wants to stay hidden because of the oppression she is used to live in:

"We don't want a change nothing around here," Aibileen says and we're both quiet, thinking about all the things we don't want to change. ...that's when I see it. We've been friends for sixteen years, since the day I moved from Greenwood to Jackson and we met at the bus stop. I can read Aibileen like the Sunday paper. "You thinking about it, ain't you," I say. "You want a talk to Miss Skeeter. (Stockett 229.230)

Minny encourages her friend to take the decision and accept Skeeter's proposal in participating in the book project. As they start writing testimonies, she tells Skeeter that she wants to write by herself so as to help in the narrative. Moreover, to have a voice and show that the subalterns and the minorities can talk and are best represented by themselves. Also by taking this decision, Aibileen wants to get out of the crowds of millions of black women that are gifted and talented, but are hidden under the shadows of submission and oppression. As well illustrated by Alice Walker in her quote:

How they did it—those millions of black women who were not Phillis Wheatley, or Lucy Terry or Frances Harper or Zora Hurston or Nella Larsen or Bessie Smith; or Elizabeth Catlett, or Katherine Dunham... I found, while thinking about the far-reaching world of the creative black woman, that often the truest answer to a question that really matters can be found very close. (149)

Walker is wondering how these weak black women used this creativity under domination and repression, silencing their ingenuity for a long time, and stopping their self-expression. It requires a lot of bravery and courage to face ones' fears. Thus, Aibileen takes the opportunity that is offered to her and decides to free her talent in writing. Moreover, she demonstrates a lot of strength and bravery in taking the decision to express herself in the book and to write her part by herself, reminding readers of the minorities' struggles in the past, fighting for self-expression in their quest to be recognised as fully well – confirmed writers:

Hour after hour, in Aibileen's kitchen, she reads her writing and I type, the details thickening, the babies' faces sliding into focus. At first, I'm disappointed that Aibileen is doing most of the writing, with me just editing. But if Missus Stein likes it, I'll be writing the other maids' stories and that will be more than enough work. If she likes it ... I find myself saying this over and over in my head, hoping it might make it so. Aibileen's writing is clear, honest. I tell her so. "Well, look who I been writing to." She chuckles. "Can't lie to God." (Stockett 270)

Skeeter has never met a black woman who can write, but Aibileen surprises her with her ability to write in a clear and a good way. At the beginning, she did not accept that she would be only typing, but later she changed her mind when she saw the quality of Aibileen's work. Through writing, Aibileen discovers that she is a gifted author; she is always comfortable with words. In writing her prayers on her notepad every day, this keeps her hopeful. The idea of writing was initiated by her schoolteacher who advised her to keep reading and writing every day. "You're the smartest one in the class, Aibileen," she says. "And the only way you're going to keep sharp is to read and write every day. So I started writing my prayers down instead of saying them. But nobody's called me smart since" (45). The teacher shows Aibileen the most empowering tool that helps her along her life and prepares her to be the skilful and gifted writer she has become. In the same context, Walker wonders how it was possible for the black women to shell their creativity decades after decades till it turned into a pearl even though writing and reading was a punishable crime under slavery:

How the creativity of the black woman was kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write? And the freedom to paint, to sculpt, to expand the mind with action did not exist...Then you may begin to comprehend the lives of our "crazy," "Sainted" mothers and grandmothers. The agony of the lives of women who might have been Poets, Novelists, Essayists, and Short. (147)

This creativity and ingenuity of black women has maintained them alive through centuries, keeping their identity and uniqueness. Walker questions herself and the readers, in her book, how grandmothers and mothers managed to preserve this talent through time and under double oppression.

Viewed from a psychological lens, Aibileen's teacher and her important role cannot be ignored in shaping and empowering her and the other students, the encouragement and continuous help with the supportive words can change the lives of people.

Additionally, Aibileen's resilience against the oppression and her attempt to free herself and her sisters – the maids- from the voicelessness helps her to convince them to take part in the project, and bring them with her to the shores of self- expression. Her sense of leadership enables her to persuade Minny to be the first to take part in the narratives. The importance of leadership for black women is highlighted by King and Ferguson in their work:

The legacy of struggle is the core impetus for black female leadership and feminism. This energetic struggle has been aimed at eliminating and transcending racial and social oppression by transforming societal relations and controls. Voice is a tool aimed at striking down the mythology of demeaning stereotypes and reinventing black women through acts of individual and collective self-expression. (34)

They state that by having strong leaders, black women can voice their struggles and reinvent themselves through self and collective expression. In initiating change, they free themselves from stereotypes and prejudice.

As soon as Minny decides to take part in the book, Aibileen expresses her happiness about this decision to Skeeter because Minny will certainly give them a fresh breeze of strength and hope that the project is going to work. Also Aibileen knows that when they join efforts, they will be empowered.

Despite the racial norms in their exceptionalist society, a strong relation of friendship and sisterhood is created between Aibileen and Minny. Solidarity, cooperation and mutual aid are portrayed along the story between the two characters. Aibileen has no boundaries of race or prejudice against Skeeter being white. She declares this clearly in a

self- talk, “A few times this week, I thought about maybe putting Miss Skeeter on my list. I’m not real sure why. She always nice when she come over” (Stockett 44). Skeeter’s kindness and fairness wins Aibileen’s trust and love; as a result, she lists her in her prayers- just privileged and close people can be listed in somebody else prayers.

By the end of the novel, readers can witness how fruitful this relation has become, fulfilled with loyalty and thoughtfulness. Aibileen does not act in a selfish way by asking Skeeter to stay in Jackson after the book publication, but instead, she acts in a supportive way and encourages her to go to New York. In a discussion between them, Skeeter wonders if it is alright for her to leave, Aibileen encourages her to do so as to start a new life. “Are you sure it’s alright? If I leave you, with everything so [...] “Go to New York, Miss Skeeter. Go find your life.” She smile, blinking back the tears, and say, “Thank you” (761). Skeeter is worried about her friends’ security when she leaves. Surprisingly, though strong relation has been created between them, there are still barriers; Aibileen calls Skeeter ‘Miss Skeeter’ in a formal way as if it is not allowed for her to call a white person by his or her name. This can be put in a nutshell, meaning rationalized racial etiquettes. The historian Ronald L. F. Davis explains this notion as follow:

Blacks were expected to refer to white males in positions of authority as "Boss" or "Cap'n"--a title of respect that replaced "Master" or "Marster" used in slave times. Sometimes, the white children of one's white employer or a prominent white person might be called "Massa," to show special respect. If a white person was well known, a black servant or hired hand or tenant might speak in somewhat intimate terms, addressing the white person as "Mr. John" or "Miss Mary."(1)

This quote may explain why Aibileen has not omitted the title of ‘Miss’ when calling Skeeter. It is no more a matter of borderlines, but a matter of wounds.

On another facet of the silent Aibileen, a new side of her freshly empowered character is discovered. She finds the courage to confront the strongest representative of the racial laws, Miss Hilly. She creates a voice by expressing herself, no more silent and submissive, but strong and resilient. The following conversation between both of them shows readers Aibileen's courage in facing Hilly and defending herself and her friends:

And your friend, Minny? She's got a nice surprise coming to her. I'm calling Johnny Foote and telling him he needs to fire her right now."

"Miss Hilly." I say it loud and clear.

I say, "I know something about you and don't you forget that."

She narrow her eyes at me. But she don't say anything.

"And from what I hear, they's a lot a time to write a lot a letters in jail." I'm trembling. My breath feel like fire. "Time to write to ever person in Jackson the truth about you. Plenty a time and the paper is free."

"Nobody would believe something you wrote, Nigra." "I don't know. I been told I'm a pretty good writer." She fish her tongue out and touch that sore with it (Stockett 770)

As a reaction to the testimonies book, Hilly tries to threaten Aibileen saying that she would send her wrongly to jail and fire her friend Minny from work. Surprisingly, Aibileen reacts and voices out her anger against that machiavellian person. She expresses herself in a smart, calm and a strong way- even though she is trembling inside- and she wins the argument against Hilly. Aibileen finds a weapon that frees her from the cage imposed by the white supremacy. This weapon is writing. She is proud of herself and her writing, threatening Hilly with it.

All in all, Aibileen's character shows that a black woman can be a hero in her own life and in the lives of others. She empowers her community through her wise and brave deeds.

b. The Rebellious, Brave and Frank Minny

A magnificent, attractive, unique character, Minny, this so special black woman is overwhelmed by her individual struggles for self-identity. She claims recognition and respect from her husband, each time he uses violence or is being abusive towards her, she feels broken into parts. Her fragility after being beaten can be felt by the readers. When she is with Aibileen, her strength and self-empowerment brings her back to resistance. Minny is always questioning herself why she always accepts to let her husband Leroy control and abuse her through his violent acts:

People probably assume I don't care if he finds out—oh I know what people think. They think big strong Minny, she sure can stand up for herself. But they don't know what a pathetic mess I turn into when Leroy's beating on me. I'm afraid to hit back. I'm afraid he'll leave me if I do. I know it makes no sense and I get so mad at myself for being so weak! How can I love a man who beats me raw? Why do I love a fool drinker? (Stockett 721)

Though Minny is seen as a strong vigorous woman, in her home she is so submissive and vulnerable. In front of her husband, she is like a slave beaten by a master. Minny may have a weakness towards her husband as she loves him and could not live without him; she is scared to be alone. Even though Minny is a victim of domestic violence and the uncontrolled anger of her husband, she did not react for a long period of time and was passive in her attitude towards this physical abuse. Black women have inherited the type of trauma that is passed from one generation to another, this can be called the mothers' wounds, and past experiences affect the way these women react to violence, domestic harm and oppression. They have feelings of fear and guilt due to some social norms about gender different positions in the family; the woman has to be submissive and silent and can be helpless in changing her situation. Steve Biko states in his book, *I write What I Like*: “At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realisation by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (63). He highlights in this quote

that the strongest weapon that can be used by the oppressor is the mind of the victim. The oppressed mind creates feelings of low self-esteem and recognizes the right of the oppressor to oppress him or her. This is the case of Minny in the novel; in spite of being brave and courageous she accepts to be abused by her husband. In her narrative, while her husband was beating her, Minny wondered what she would have become if Leroy did not hit her each time:

One time I asked him, “Why? Why are you hitting me?” He leaned down and looked me right in the face.

“If I didn’t hit you, Minny, who knows what you become.”

I was trapped in the corner of the bedroom like a dog. He was beating me with his belt. It was the first time I’d ever really thought about it.

Who knows what I could become, if Leroy would stop goddamn hitting me.
(Stockett 721)

Minny questioned herself what she could have become if her husband does not beat her all the time. By the end of the novel, she discovers that she is a strong woman who can out speak her rights and can empower her sisters and be a voice that enlightens their way and protects them. She challenges the traditional norms in her society, which expect from her to be obedient and submissive as a black woman. Surprisingly to all, without hesitation, she takes a decision to free herself from her husband’s oppression and abuse. Her friend Aibileen encourages her to flee from her husband who dared to try to kill her by arsonsing their house and locking her in the bathroom. The brave Minny manages at the end to run away from her miserable fate forever. Screaming out her tiredness and exhaustion from this enslaving wifehood:

“I can’t take this no more, Aibileen. I can’t do this—” She break down crying into the phone.

It’s the first time I ever heard Minny say that. I take a deep breath, knowing what I need to do. The words is so clear in my head and right now is my only Chance for her to really hear me, standing barefoot and rock bottom on the gas station phone. “Minny, listen to me. You never gone lose your job with Miss Celia. Mister Johnny told you hisself. And they’s more money coming from the book, Miss Skeeter found out last night. Minny, hear me when I say, You

don’t have to get hit by Leroy no more.”

Minny choke out a sob.

“It’s time, Minny. Do you hear me? You are free.” (Stockett 764)

It goes without saying that Aibileen, as usual, supports and empowers her friend by telling her the right thing at that moment, reassuring her that everything would be fine, and she would have enough money to support her family without Leroy. The scholar Safia Ouarti mentions in her dissertation entitled, “Womanism and the Reconstruction of the Self in Walker’s *The Color Purple*”:

Emphasizing female solidarity and bonding in addition to highlighting the intensive effect the surrounding females have on the protagonist mainly aim at encouraging women to support each other and challenge the patriarch social structure which is forced on them by men. Walker believes that the self-determination process can be more facilitated by females’ friendship and solidarity. Actually, in *The Color Purple*, friendship plays an important role in ameliorating and fostering the self-esteem of the female as an individual that has valuable status in her community. (Ouarti 41)

The scholar states that Alice Walker encourages black women to face any type of low self- esteem and worries in order to free themselves from the control of their oppressors, and at the same time to gain control over their own destiny and life.

In another situation, Minny’s strength is challenged. After being fired by Miss Hilly and accused wrongly for theft, she decides to take her revenge by offering a chocolate pie, a special one with her discharge. She proves that she can dare to do what no other black maid can do:

... as I put that pie down on the countertop, Miss Hilly smiles, thinking it’s a peace offering, like that’s my way a showing her I’m real sorry bout what I said. ...Two big pieces. She stuff it in her mouth like she ain’t ever eaten nothing so good. Then she say, ‘I knew you’d change your mind, Minny. I knew I’d get my way in the end.’ And she laugh... ‘Mama can have some if she wants. Just a little piece, though. What do you put in here, Minny, that makes it taste so good?’ “I say ‘That good vanilla from Mexico’ and then I go head. I tell her what else I put in that pie for her.”..Say, ‘Well, Hilly, that’s what you get, I guess. And I wouldn’t go tattling on Minny either, or you’ll be known all over town as the lady who ate two slices of Minny’s shit.’ (Stockett 595)

The readers may deduce that Minny's act of revenge towards Miss Hilly is harsh and unexpected. She could have done it without telling her, but her bravery, courage and sickness from the racist acts empowered her to outspeak her anger through acts and words. She decides to give a voice to herself, no more obedient, no more silenced, but voiced and listened to. In Minny's case, the reader can find out that the subaltern can speak, that is to say that voicing one's revolt against oppression cannot be only said but also done through actions.

Minny's revenge proves that Leroy was not wrong about his expectations concerning his wife who showed that she is not a weak black woman as expected from her. On the contrary, instead of begging for mercy from Miss Hilly, Minny voices her anger and surprises her with that pie. Minny's impulsive revenge is so effective and with an enormous echo. Hence, Hilly after this incident deprives her from entering any white house in the Jackson society, by giving her a bad reputation as a thief and a bad cook. The pie incident is a secret to be kept but at the same time through deciding to mention it in the book, Minny protects and empowers her friends. In a discussion with Aibileen, Minny explains why they have to write about the pie (The Awful Terrible):

What if we put the Terrible Awful in the book," Minny asks. "We can't, Minny," Aibileen says. "It'd give us away." "But if we put it in there, then Miss Hilly can't let anybody find out the book is about Jackson. She don't want anybody to know that story's about her. And if they start getting close to figuring it out, she gone steer em the other way." "Law, Minny, that is too risky. Nobody can predict what that woman gone do." "Nobody know that story but Miss Hilly and her own mama," Minny says. "And Miss Celia, but she ain't got no friends to tell anyway." (Stockett 643)

Aibileen does not understand why her friend wants to mention this so dangerous act, and finds it risky. Later on, it becomes so clear for her why Minny decided to write about it as her main purpose is to protect Aibileen, Skeeter, and the other maids not herself. Aibileen is overthinking about Minny's act and testimony about the pie, in a reflection she says:

...And I see it then, the worry she's trying to hide. But why? I wonder. Why she hiding that from me? The more I look, the more I start to understand what's going on here, what Minny's done. I don't know why I'm just now getting this. Minny made us put the pie story in to protect us. Not to protect herself, but to protect me and the other maids. She knew it would only make it worse for herself with Hilly. But she did it anyway, for everybody else. She don't want anybody to see how scared she is. (Stockett 749)

Aibileen deduces that the black women's generosity, thoughtfulness, and bravery are proved in Minny's scarifying act for the sake of protecting and empowering her sisters. Moreover, the best portrayal of Minny's unique character trait is done by the editor of the book, Elaine Stein. Even though she did not meet her, she is mesmerized by Minny's narratives. She says that she likes Gertrude Black, Minny's nick name in the testimony book. "Gertrude is every Southern white woman's nightmare. I adore her" (Stockett 386). Minny's reaction is full of happiness; it is the first time that a white woman praises her not for cooking but for her smartness.

c. Constantine, the Absent Present Character

Constantine is the absent present character, she is not a narrator, she does not take part in the book, but she is the one who initiated all this big change. Most of the time, she is being narrated about by Skeeter, other times by Aibileen, the secret holder.

Constantine in her everyday conversations with Skeeter influenced her when she told her that she has the choice to do what she believes in. As a result, this notion changes everything about Skeeter's future:

"Ever morning, until you dead in the ground, you gone have to make this decision." Constantine was so close, I could see the blackness of her gums. "You gone have to ask yourself, Am I gone believe what them fools say about me today? " She kept her thumb pressed hard in my hand. I nodded that I understood. I was just smart enough to realize she meant white people. And even though I still felt miserable, and knew that I was, most likely, ugly, it was the first time she ever talked to me like I was something besides my mother's white child. All my life I'd been told what to believe about politics, coloreds, being a girl. But with Constantine's thumb pressed in my hand, I realized I actually had a choice in what I could believe. (Stockett 114-115)

Constantine teaches Skeeter not to believe in everything said by her white community, and not to think that she can be defined by her whiteness or by being a daughter, instead she can be herself, having the right to a choice and to make a change. Hence, Skeeter revolts against the whites' norms and Exceptionalism in the Jackson society by showing the world the truth of this racist community and wrong deeds through the book.

Another side of the black woman strong identity is delineated through Constantine's self-respect. Her decision to leave definitely Skeeter's family so as to preserve her dignity is due to Skeeter's mother transgression of the border lines. Therefore, she decides to vanish and disappear from the existence of this white family, contradicting the whites' norms about the submissive mammy. Collins showcases the whites' norms as follow:

The first controlling image applied to African-American women is that of the mammy-the faithful, obedient domestic servant... By loving, nurturing, and caring for her white children and ...family... better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group perceptions of the ideal Black female.... (Collins 91)

The illustration above shows that even Constantine voices her revolt through silence and her decision to leave. Silence is also a voice used to express oneself.

Miss Charlotte Phelan told Skeeter about what she said to Lulabelle: "I told Lulabelle the truth. I told her, 'Your daddy didn't die. He left the day after you were born. And your mama hadn't been sick a day in her life. She gave you up because you were too high yellow. She didn't want you'" (Stockett 638). By doing so, she thought that the obedient Constantine would not react that way, and that she never thought Constantine would leave to Illinois with her daughter.

Besides, evidence of the supportive character of Constantine is portrayed through an incident, the one of the cigarette. She acts like a good friend to Skeeter when she keeps her secret and protects her from her mother's punishment:

So I'd slip into the backyard and sit in the tire swing, with the huge old oak tree concealing me. Or, late at night, I'd hang out of my bedroom window and smoke. Mother had eagle-eyes, but she had almost zero sense of smell. Constantine knew immediately, though. She narrowed her eyes, with a little smile, but said nothing. If Mother headed to the back porch while I was behind the tree, Constantine would rush out and bang her broom handle on the iron stair rail. (Stockett 117)

Here, it is clear that Constantine was not judgmental about Skeeter and she was protective too even from her mother. This is a friend's attitude.

3. The Poetics of Mothering the Others

Motherhood is a unique relation between a woman and her child, a relation that needs a continuous care, love, nurturing, teaching or educating him or her. This mesmerizing relation would be shaped, strengthened and flourished through time. In *The Help*, the white mothers are housewives, who are expected to stay at home and take care of their families, houses and children. So, in order to fulfil these tasks, they need the help. Surprisingly, the mothers' role is delegated to the black maids, not only they help, but they also do everything at home. In an attempt to define the concept of mothering the others, Baxter and Satz mention Stanlie James's explanation:

Stanlie James has described this form of nurturing as "other mothering," which can also include being nurtured by others on an individual or community level. She describes other mothering as an "acceptance of responsibility for a child not one's own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal". Regardless of who raises the child or children...(15)

Other mothering according to him is the acceptance of taking the responsibility to look after a child even if he is not your own.

Stockett's main objective behind writing the novel is acknowledging the sacred role of the black maid who mothered her. In the end of her book, Stockett writes in her own words:

...I wondered an awful lot what my family would think of it, and what Demetrie would have thought too, even though she was long dead. I was scared, a lot of the time, that I was crossing a terrible line, writing in the voice of a black person. I was afraid I would fail to describe a relationship that was so intensely influential in my life, so loving, so grossly stereotyped in American history and literature. (Stockett 783)

The author's decision to write this novel is to describe this unique relationship she had with her nanny Demetrie. At the beginning, she was worried about her family's reaction to this narrative and was also afraid of being unsuccessful in describing this relation. Moreover, in the voice of Skeeter, she spoke about the glorified mammy by the white people, but she questioned how no one ever asked that mammy how she felt. "I felt compelled to continue, "Everyone knows how we white people feel, the glorified Mammy figure who dedicates her whole life to a white family. Margaret Mitchell covered that. But no one ever asked Mammy how she felt about it" (Stockett 189). Stockett via Skeeter seems to be wanting to talk about that black woman who raised white children and gained their love; however, no one asked about whether those nannies were satisfied about their situation in Jackson community or not. She embodied her beloved mammy Demetrie in the character of Aibileen.

a. The Nurturing and Protective Mother: Aibileen

During her life, Aibileen raised seventeen white kids; she was like a mother to them. Mae Mobley is her favourite; she does everything to this kid. “Taking care a white babies, that’s what I do, along with all the cooking and the cleaning. I done raised seventeen kids in my lifetime. I know how to get them babies to sleep, stop crying, and go in the toilet bowl before they mamas even get out a bed in the morning” (Stockett 1). Aibileen’s work is not only limited to helping, but also submerging the kids with love, affection, and compassion. Right from the beginning, she felt in the relationship between Mae Mobley and her mother something wrong:

But I ain’t never seen a baby yell like Mae Mobley Leefolt. First day I walk in the door, there she be, red-hot and hollering with the colic, fighting that bottle like it’s a rotten turnip. Miss Leefolt, she look terrified a her own child. “What am I doing wrong? Why can’t I stop it?” It? That was my first hint: something is wrong with this situation. (Stockett 8)

Miss Elizabeth called her daughter by the pronoun ‘it’ as if she has not existed yet, or not recognizes her existence in a subconscious act. This attitude astonishes Aibileen the fact that Mae Mobley’s mother does not personalize her daughter as if wanting her to be invisible. As a result, Aibileen tries to rescue the girl and fills the emptiness left by her absent present mother. Mae Mobley becomes so attached to Aibileen that she would not let her go by the end of the day. Aibileen describes the girl’s reaction whenever Aibileen decides to leave:

By the time she a year old, Mae Mobley following me around everywhere I go. Five o’clock would come round and she’d be hanging on my Dr. Scholl shoe, dragging over the floor, crying like I weren’t never coming back. Miss Leefolt, she’d narrow up her eyes at me like I done something wrong, unhitch that crying baby off my foot. I reckon that’s the risk you run, letting somebody else raise you chilluns. (Stockett 2)

Miss Leefolt is never happy with the strong relation between the two, but she did nothing to remedy and take her role back. Through time, the relation between the maid and the girl becomes stronger and this pushes Aibileen to consider taking care of Mae Mobley a sacred duty, she takes the role of her mother. All along the novel, she tries to protect the child from sadness, loneliness and neglect: “She laugh, dance a little happy jig waiting on me to get her out. I give her a good hug. I reckon she don’t get too many good hugs like this after I go home” (Stockett 13). For Mae Mobley, Aibileen is her source of love and happiness. Whenever she sees her, she expresses her joy. Furthermore, Aibileen always criticizes Miss Leefolt’s cold attitude towards her daughter, in a self-talk she says, “...she was a woman who spent her time either sewing or dressing herself up, put in makeup and leaving her child behind, “If the fool would just pay her child some attention...” (Stockett 37). In the same context, Alice Walker highlights the importance of care and positive words in the development of a person: “It does not surprise me, personally, that scientists now are discovering that trees, plants, flowers, have feelings ... emotions, that they shrink when yelled at; that they faint when an evil person is about who might hurt them” (Walker 166). Here, Walker uses a metaphoric expression, as she is not talking about flowers, but about females; for her flowers are females.

When taking care of Mae Mobley, Aibileen is also mothering the mind as if perpetuating a type of a motherline from her teacher to her, then to Mae Mobley. Andrea O’ Reilley in her book *Tony Morison and Motherhood* mentions how mothering the mind helps in empowering the others and in supporting the change:

Collins’ definition of other mothers extends to the work we do in the academy. Other mothering in the community is the foundation of what Collins calls the “mothering the mind” relationships that often developed between African American women teachers and their Black female and male students. We refer to this as mothering in the academy, and see it as work that extends beyond traditional definitions of mentorship. It is a sharing of self, an interactive and collective process, a spiritual connectedness that epitomizes the Afrocentric values of sharing, caring and accountability. (8)

Aibileen mothering the minds is evident in her words to the girl; she tries to plant seeds of hope and self-acceptance in a standardized society. Mae Mobley according to the white community's standards is fat and ugly, even her mother does not accept her physical appearance, but Aibileen knows how to heal her all along the story, "I hold her tight, whisper, "You a smart girl. You a kind girl, Mae Mobley. You hear me?" And I keep saying it till she repeat it back to me." (Stockett 164). Aibileen is not only nurturing this child but also teaching her to respect and love herself. She repeats the same words every afternoon, trying to change the negative words and gestures said and done by Miss Elizabeth. She never gets tired of repeating the same kind words, not focusing on the physical beauty but on the beauty of the soul and mind. "Ever afternoon, me and Baby Girl set in the rocking chair before her nap. Ever afternoon, I tell her: You kind, you smart, you important. But she growing up and I know, soon, them few words ain't gone be enough" (Stockett 353). Aibileen is worried about the fact that if those words would be enough to empower this little girl. In the same context, Baxter and Satz mention O'Reilly's idea about motherline: "...the motherline, as O'Reilly describes, is the physical and narrative linkage between the Black female ancestors and their descendants" (Baxter and Satz 232). Aibileen according to O'Reilly's description is continuing the motherline to Mae Mobley; she is not only mothering her, but also passing some aspects of the black identity through the motherline, she aims at empowering and protecting Mae Mobley as if she is her own child. Aibileen transcends any race borders when mothering the little girl: "The focus of black motherhood, in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect, and more generally empower black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete. (O'Reilly 19).

In the same mainstream, King and Ferguson in their work mention the power of transgenerational leadership passed from one generation of women to another trying to break down stereotypes and healing the wounds of oppression through different acts of self-expression. Aibileen through monitoring and mothering Mae Mobley is healing her through playing, singing, hugging and teaching her positive words to repeat every day after her:

The merits and voracity of black womanism and leadership are without question. They are transgenerational phenomena and a survivor's legacy, despite the mainstream societal insistence on black female invisibility and subjugation. To counter stereotypes, the voices of black women leaders tell true, heal, sing, decree, lament, testify, admonish, scream, and thunder as an expression of power, presence, and connection. (36)

The authors insist on the crucial role of black females to cure the wounds of oppression, and neglect through words and acts.

In addition, Aibileen goes further in her teaching and instilling equality principles and the acceptance of the others by introducing notions of activism and changing racial norms in the girl's mind:

She said black means I got a dirty, bad face." ...Miss Taylor. After all the time I spent teaching Mae Mobley how to love all people, not judge by color. I feel a hard fist in my chest because what person out there don't remember they first-grade. teacher? Maybe they don't remember what they learn, but I'm telling you, I done raised enough kids to know, they matter. (Stockett 714- 715)

This quote shows the racist attitude of Miss Taylore, representing the white segregatory community. She is attempting to ruin what Aibileen has planted in Mae Mobley, ignoring that all humans are important and equal regardless their colour. In addition, Aibileen is teaching the little girl about great black people like Rosa Park and Martin Luther King, and she insists on correcting some misleading racist notions taught by the white teachers like Miss Taylore:

You lose!" she says. "Now come on, we're playing Back-a-the-Bus and your name is Rosa Parks."

"Who taught you those things, Mae Mobley?" Mister Leefolt say and Baby Girl whip her head around with eyes like she seed a ghost. (Stockett 752-753)

The reader can see that Mae Mobley reacts smartly in an attempt to protect her friend as she lies to her father by saying that it is her teacher who taught her about Rosa Parks. At the same time, this shows how aware she is about some racial issues- her love for Aibileen pushes her to lie to protect her.

Even though Aibileen is besieged by a lot of discriminative and oppressive acts and words from Elizabeth and her friend Hilly in different situations, she never forgets her role and responsibilities towards Mae Mobley; only a mother can act that way. The day Hilly and Elizabeth decided to confront Aibileen with her deeds- the book of testimonies- she did not care about what they were saying though she was scared, she found the strength to hug the ill girl, took her to the kitchen, gave her medicines and reminded her again of the magical words:

And then she say it, just like I need her to. "You is kind," she say, "you is smart. You is important."

"Oh Law." I hug her hot little body to me. I feel like she done just given me a gift. "Thank you, Baby Girl."

"You're welcome," she say, like I taught her to. But then she lay her head on my shoulder and we cry like that awhile... (Stockett 773)

These simple words and this tender hug delineate how those two persons are attached to each other and immersed themselves in a mutual love- a mother and a daughter love.

From a social lens, Aibileen plays an important role in making a smooth change through her mothering the mind of Mae Mobley, she is practising a type of activism.

One day, a wise Martian come down to Earth to teach us people a thing or two," I say. "Martian? How big?" "Oh, he about six-two." "What's his name?" "Martian Luther King." She take a deep breath and lean her head down on my shoulder. I feel her three-year-old heart racing against mine, flapping like butterflies on my white uniform.(Stockett 519)

Aibileen through story telling is rooting values and supporting change, initiating new ideas in the mind of the little girl. In the mainstream, the writer Andrea O'Reilly in her book *Toni Morrison and Motherhood*, highlights the importance of other mothering in shaping the community and in the development of a new generation that would be active in the transformation of social norms:

The practices of other mothering and in particular community mothering serve, as Stanlie James argue, “as an important Black feminist link to the development of new models of social transformation”. Black women’s role of community mothers, as Collins explains, redefines motherhood as social activism. (22).

This statement confirms that activism is an important role that is delineated to the black maids in *The Help*; they are instilling seeds of change inside the nurtured children.

b. Monitoring and Mothering the Mind: Minny

Another side of mothering the others is delineated through Minny. She is a mother of five kids and pregnant with the sixth, she finds herself mothering an adult, the young beautiful and sensitive Celia Foote. She feels a need to help, care, nurture and teach her cooking as if she is her mother. Through the events of the story, a special relation flourishes between them.

Celia does not know how to manage her big house, cook, or wash clothes and iron them. Mothering Celia is a new experience for Minny as she has never been asked to monitor a white woman, “Miss Celia nods. “But you’ll teach me to cook right, won’t you?” I Say even though I’ve never told a white woman what to do and I don’t really know how to start” (Stockett 82). Celia is despaired to learn how to cook for her husband; she feels that Minny is her rescuer. Meanwhile, the black maid does not refuse to help her:

Real careful, I lay the dark meat in the pan. It bubbles up like a song and we watch the thighs and legs turn brown. I look over and Miss Celia's smiling at me

“What? Something on my face?”

“No,” she says, tears coming up in her eyes. She touches my arm. “I’m just real grateful you’re here.”

I move my arm back from under her hand. “Miss Celia, you got a lot more to be grateful for than me.(Stockett 84)

Through her teaching, Minny affects Celia who feels so grateful to have this dedicated help with her.

Surprisingly, the readers feel that for Celia, there are no borderlines between them, that’s why she wants to show her affection and gratefulness to Minny. This latter, due to her previous experiences and prejudices against the whites, refuses to erase those lines. Furthermore, she shows a lot of patience and care in her teaching to Celia without expecting a reward.

Minny is a real support in the most difficult situations that Celia went through. She helped her through her miscarriage after finding her half dead; she acts like a mother for her and does what should be done to save her life. Celia was despaired after losing her fourth baby; no one was by her side except Minny.

Minny influences Celia through mothering her mind; this is a priority for her. She tries to convince Celia to take Skeeter as a friend, as she feels that they may have things in common. On the other hand, Celia has prejudices against Skeeter who was dismissed from the League:

Well, no. But if all those girls don’t like her, then she must be ... well she ...”
Her words trail off like it’s just hitting her what she’s saying.

Sickened, disgust, disbelief—... “Minny?” Miss Celia says behind me.
“Ma’am.”

She keeps her voice quiet. But I hear the shame in it. “They didn’t even ask me in the house. They made me stand out on the steps like a vacuum salesman.
(Stockett 554)

The silent reaction of Minny makes Celia understand many things. Minny mothering her mind is done in a soft way; messages are told in an illicit way, both of them can understand what is not said. Celia knows that she is judgmental about Skeeter, and that her white friends are not as good as she thought. Fortunately, Celia becomes aware of some of many things like the incident of visiting Elizabeth's house and being not accepted, not welcomed and kept outside. Later, Minny helps Celia to get rid of the bad feelings of shame and disgust provoked by Hilly's arrogance and rude manners towards her. Minny supports Celia in gaining back her self-esteem, dignity and self-respect. In the same context, in the book entitled: *Toni Morison. The last interview*, she talks about the motherline and explains how principles and values are passed from a generation to another: "...those women who had—I mean, incredible things happened to those people. They never knew from one day to the next about anything. But they believed in their dignity, that they were people of value, that they had to pass that on. And they did it" (Moyers 22). Minny is one of those exceptional women respecting the motherline in her mothering to Celia; she shows to her the importance of dignity and at the same time pushes her to stand up for herself, be active in her house and do some gardening:

The way Hilly looked at me ... like I was nothing. Like I was trash on the side of the road."

"But Miss Hilly don't count. You can't judge yourself by the way that woman see you."

"I'm not right for this kind of life... (Stockett 589)

In her journey of self-recovery, Celia is questioning things so as to heal her wounds, she does not understand why Hilly dislikes and treats her badly. Hence, Minny explains everything to her by telling her about the pie incident. Like a therapist, she explains to Celia that there is nothing wrong with her and it is only Hilly's feelings of pride and supremacy that pushes her to act that way. Minny's few strong words mother Celia's mind and change her idea of surrendering in front of Hilly, "But I want you to know, if you leave Mister

Johnny, then Miss Hilly done won the whole ball game. Then she done beat me, she beat you ... “There ain’t many people left in this town that she ain’t beat” (Stockett 595). Sometimes words can heal people, what Minny says to Celia changes things inside her and pushes her to stand up again and fight for herself, “THE NEXT MORNING, I find Miss Celia’s finally managed to get herself out of bed, wash her hair, and put all that makeup on again. It’s cold outside so she’s back in one of her tight sweaters” (596). Celia starts her healing and self-respect journey, by doing the things that she thought herself unable to do. For example, she decides to cut down the mimosa tree which she hates so much, besides planting roses that might grow by next spring, “Lady, you done lost it this time.” The rain is pouring down all over Miss Celia, but she doesn’t care. She starts chopping at that tree. Leaves are sprinkling down all over her, sticking in her hair” (Stockett 597). Cutting the mimosa tree for Celia symbolises freeing herself from oppression, societal norms and discrimination. She decides to start a new life far from all the past obstacles and prejudices. Minny in her monitoring does not intend to control Celia as a vulnerable person, but she wants to uplift her. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins develops this idea further:

Such power is transformative in that Black women’s relationships with children and other vulnerable community members is not intended to dominate or control. Rather, its purpose is to bring people along, to—in the words of late-nineteenth-century Black feminists—“uplift the race” so that vulnerable members of the community will be able to attain the self-reliance and independence essential for resistance (Collins 132).

According to Collins, mothering the others is not an act of controlling but an act of support, in an attempt to enhance fragile members of the community.

In mothering the other, every day Minny shows Celia basics of cooking, meanwhile she is mothering her mind through teaching her to be self-reliant and to think critically so that she can get out of this dependence on the others and learn how to resist oppression.

After her awareness about the falsity of the white norms about classes, Celia goes further in her reaction. She decides to take revenge from Hilly by writing down on the check of two thousand dollars the expression of 'For two-slice Hilly' - informing Hilly that she knows about Minny's pie. Through this unexpected action, Celia voices up her revolt against the oppressor, she shows that the subaltern can have a voice. At the same time that Minny is reading Celia's note on the check, the mimosa tree falls down. Minny is astonished that the seeds she planted in Celia's character flourished so quickly:

I shake my head and look down at the newspaper. That's when I see Miss Hilly's note tucked underneath it and Miss Celia's check for two hundred dollars. I look a little closer. Along the bottom of the check, in the little space for the notes, Miss Celia's written the words in pretty cursive handwriting: For Two-Slice Hilly.

I hear a groan and see the tree crash to the ground. Leaves and dead fronds fly through the air, sticking all over her Butter batch." (Stockett 598)

Stockett chooses to mention the fall of the tree just after the check note in order to make the reader visualize the scene and hear the sound of the falling tree on the ground to symbolize the voice of anger, freedom and rebellion against racism.

On the other hand, Minny in mothering her own children has a different experience; she seems unable to have an easy contact with them. Mothering is not obvious in her own family as if she is performing tasks of nurturing them. In the mainstream, Trebilcot describes the role of some mothers as being selfless, trying to provide everything to her children, putting their needs first:

A final relevant feature of the childrearing job itself is that mothers are obliged to subordinate their personal objectives and practice "selflessness"— putting the needs of others first, devoting themselves to the day-to-day well-being of other family members, loving and giving "unconditionally (44).

In other words, Minny and her children are psychologically distant as emotions are not expressed; love is not evident except in providing them with a living- money and food.

In her house, this brave woman is without a soul. This can be the result of either the domestic violence or mother wounds as a consequence of slavery's hindering heritage.

Minny's experience in mothering her own children seems not a successful one as it may be the result of a transgenerational trauma that brings a lot of wounds from the past enslaved generations, as it is stated in the book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*:

...but for the most part parenting is one of a myriad of skills that is passed down generation to generation. What do you think gets passed down through generations if what was experienced were lifetimes of abuse at the hands of slave masters and other authorities? What do you think the result would be if generation after generation of young men were not allowed the power and authority to parent their own children? What do you think the result would be if education was prohibited for generations? What do you think the result would be if the primary skills that mothers teach their children are those associated with adapting to a lifetime of torture? (Degrugy 91)

This quote highlights the negative and harmful effect of slavery and the submission of slaves to their masters, the torture and abuse of enslaved mothers, and the forced separation both physical and emotional between mothers and children. All these resulted in transgenerational trauma that makes some black mothers fail in having a healthy relation with their own children. They are unable to express their feelings of love, or teach them to become fully flourished adults. This is the case with Minny who suffers from this syndrome.

c. The Aesthetic of Constantine's Mothering the Other

Constantine's mothering Skeeter was unique in its way; she planted seeds in her character, she taught her that self- love is important and that she should not believe in people's judgements about her. At the age of thirteen, she taught her the most important lesson in her life. After being insulted as ugly, Constantine knew how to contain Skeeter's sadness and pain, and turn it into an empowerment that shaped her life and future:

Constantine ... pressed her thumb hard in the palm of my hand,...“Ever morning, until you dead in the ground, you gone have to make this decision.”

...“You gone have to ask yourself, Am I gone believe still felt miserable, and knew that I was, most likely, ugly, it was the first time she ever talked to me like I was something besides my mother’s white child. All my life I’d been told what to believe about politics, coloreds, being a girl. But with Constantine’s thumb pressed in my hand, I realized I actually had a choice in what I could believe. (Stockett 114)

Skeeter here, after her discussion with Constantine and the thumb pressure on Skeeter's hand made this latter realize that she had the freedom to choose what she could believe in. Through this discussion, Constantine revolutionized most of the norms rooted by the whites in Skeeter's personality; she not only freed her from their racist affirmation and beauty standards, but also taught her that the choices are all hers. Ferguson and King claim that there is a sort of motherline that any mother or care giver can pass to another woman:

[...] any woman who serves as a source of Motherline knowledge constitutes a link in this intergenerational chain. Women who pass on values of an African- centered worldview, women who help daughters learn to read the social clime, heal from dominant culture oppression, fashion a culturally grounded identity, form and carry out resistance aimed at a particular social context or institution are the Motherline. (47)

This above – mentioned quote confirms that any woman can pass values that help healing from the dominant principles of supremacy and oppression; they transfer the acquired knowledge from generation to another creating a typical pathway to highlight resilience and self-esteem. This notion of mothering the other and the motherline are evident in Constantine being mothered by her father then passing this motherline to Skeeter through certain behaviours. In her turn, Skeeter tried to follow on with the motherline by initiating the idea of change in the black maids' minds. Moreover, Constantine was acting like a therapist or a mother spreading positive affirmations to her daughter. Right from the next morning she met Skeeter, she started her therapy saying praising words. She told Skeeter: "Good morning, beautiful girl!" I'd sit at the kitchen table and tell her what I'd dreamed. She claimed dreams told the future (Stockett 115). Constantine, through teaching Skeeter that changes are possible, was transforming social norms and creating a different future for the upcoming generations in her society.

From time to time, Skeeter's memories about Constantine and their relation upraise in her mind remembering how Constantine was to her, "It was having someone look at you after your mother has nearly fretted herself to death because you are freakishly tall and frizzy and odd. Someone whose eyes simply said, without words, you are fine with me" (Stockett 117). Constantine was to Skeeter a real mother as Charlotte Phillan, Skeeter's mother, did not accept her because she was not fitting in the standards of her community.

On the other side, Constantine had a distinct experience with her own daughter Lulabelle who has a white complexion (pale) as described by Aibileen. The white social norms did not facilitate their existence together. Constantine felt the need to give her daughter a better childhood and life; she did not want her to live the same experience as her. Constantine's father was white while her mother was black. Being the fruit of this relation, Constantine could not enjoy her rights as the daughter of a white man in the

Jackson society. Thus, she thought that Lulabelle with her white complexion would be segregated against if she stayed with her mother. Aibileen explained to Skeeter the reasons behind Constantine's choice, she states: "...she just couldn't handle it. Being Negro with white skin ... in Mississippi, it's like you don't belong to nobody. But it wasn't just hard on the girl. It was hard on Constantine" (Stockett 627). Aibileen described the girl's situation in a faithful way saying (belonging to nobody) this means she was neither accepted by the whites nor was she acknowledged by the Black people, their hardship cannot be imagined, everybody needs a belonging. Aibileen followed on with her description of their situation: "She ... folks would look at her. White folks would stop her, ask her all suspicious what she doing toting round a white child... Even colored folks ... they treat her different, distrustful, like she done something wrong." (627). If Constantine decided to raise her own daughter, she would have inflicted her not only with a double oppression but with a third one, if we can say triple oppression; being a black not accepted by the blacks, also having a black mother that is not acceptable by the whites, the other oppression would be a female in a male's society.

Hence, Constantine chose to make the sacrifice for the sake of empowering her daughter as if she wanted to give her a new identity in a way shadowing the black identity, freeing her from oppression. Here, the action reflects the memory of the old practice done by the enslaved mothers who used to kill their new-borns not as a savage act rather than a freeing one. Toni Morison in her novel *Beloved*, mentions a similar case when Sethe decided to kill her newborn so that it does not go through the same suffering as her. Seemingly, it is a criminal act, but in depth it is a mother's sacrifice to save her child from the horrors of slavery. Similarly, Constantine decided to make this sacrifice as if it was a personal suicide, refusing to live the situation again. She inflicted on herself a sort of amnesia trying to forget about her daughter and putting her love and care in mothering her nurtured child Skeeter.

Conclusion

Overall, Stockett's choice of Aibileen as one of the main characters delineating through her the main notions of Womanism, making the readers remember Alice Walker's mother in her work *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Aibileen whenever in touch with the other characters helps in empowering them, flourishing and blossoming their characters' traits. She helps them find their pathway in life and break the chain of oppression. The characters suffer from double oppression, being black and women in Jackson society. Constantine, Aibileen and Minny play the most important role in shaping the personality features of the reared children. Mothering the other is one of the main themes delineated through the novel. Stockett presents this poetic aspect of the black women as care givers who plant the seeds of respect of the other, regardless of their race and gender. Additionally, the maids empower the children by teaching them that they can make the change in their communities, and they can make their own choices in life.

General Conclusion

This research paper delves into the aspects of womanhood and the poetics of mothering the other in the novel *The Help*. An eclectic method was used focusing on Alice Walker's Womanism and Spivak's the Subaltern.

This work begins with an illustration of the historical context depicting the hardships of the African American women since the arrival of the first enslaved women till the contemporary period. It highlights the different aspects of the experiences of those women delineating their struggles, resilience, empowerment without forgetting their achievements and contributions to the American society in spite of the fact that they lived under double oppression.

It goes without saying that racial injustices, the brutality of slavery and the unfair Jim Crow segregation inflicted the black women with unbearable horrors and hardships. Their narratives depicted the roots of the injustices and unfairness of slavery and the after-abolition era. Moreover, finding refuge in literature, autobiographies and narratives of the black women's lives, black female writers used a strong weapon that would break the heavy chains of enslavement and oppression. Harriet Jacobs, Sojourner Truth, Toni Morison and Alice Walker are pioneers in the black literature; they shape the minds, bring the change and give testimonies for the upcoming generations.

Their outstanding works served as powerful testimonies to the triumphs, fights, and injustices in the Afro- American women's lives, shedding light on the shadowed sides of their identities. Their literary masterpieces aim at offering insights into the intersectionality of the races struggles, gender oppression and the clash between classes in the American society.

It is undeniable that through her work Stockett gives a voice to the voiceless showing that the subaltern can talk. This is illustrated through the black maids, mainly Aibileen, who found their strength and empowerment through their writings, giving a voice to their deep struggles and sufferings portraying their demands for a vital change. Hence, any change cannot be attained only through activism but also by rooting and planting the seeds in the white young generation. Furthermore, mothering the others is another major tool used by the black caregivers to the white kids. Through mothering them, seeds of equality, justice and fairness are blossoming in the kids' personalities. Mae Mobley and Skeeter characters bloomed through the novel, and this is clear through their deeds and words that delineated the fruits of Aibileen and Constantine care giving. Both succeeded in planting the seeds of positive change that would create a different society where people would have a choice in accepting or refusing segregation norms imposed by those who view themselves as being better than the others, oppressing the minorities, the vulnerable and the less fortunate categories.

Furthermore, the reader of this research can acknowledge how hard the life of the silenced and marginalized women looks like, he can also delve inside their evolution and the change they brought in the people around them through mothering and empowering the others.

The research highlights the way the progressive change in the characters is brought from silenced and voiceless women to resilient and outspoken ones.

The Help, though written by a white writer, achieved the purpose behind its writing, recognizing the role of the black caregivers in mothering the white kids and bringing the change to the white oppressive society.

The best words to overlap the pivotal role played by the Afro- American women in marking history through their resilience, their challenging characters and their request for a fair change in the oppressive American society of the sixties can be illustrated in an expressive and impressive poem written by the iconic poet and writer Alice Walker.

The poem that has been used as an epigraph in the beginning of the chapter illustrates the strength and celebrates the intellectual contribution of the African American women from Alice Walker's mother previous generation. It represents too the black maids in the case study who through their politics of womanhood and mothering the others contributed to making a positive change in their society.

Our findings show that Kathryn Stockett is highly influenced by Alice Walker's Womanism, that's why the novel is rich with these aspects. On the other hand, mothering the other is the main theme in the novel and its poetic aspects enrich its narratives.

All in all, the problematic is answered through this research which shows Stockett's success in delineating her main themes which are mothering the other, empowering females and giving voice to the voiceless. However, a possible further area of research may be investigated concerning empowering black males in the novel as an aspect of Womanism. What is remarked is that black males are overshadowed; the only male presence in the story is the oppressive Leroy. Additionally, investigating in the reasons behind the neglect of mothering the black children needs further studies.

Glossary of Terms

Black Arts Movement: The artistic sister of the Black Power movement.

Black Codes: Southern state laws enacted after the Civil War that greatly restricted black mobility, economic opportunity, and political expression.

Black Power: A slogan that rejected the civil rights movement's goals of non- violence and integration in favour of self-defence and self-determination.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954): Crucial Supreme Court decision that invalidated 'separate-but-equal' public schools.

Chattel: The slave is legally rendered the personal property (chattel) of the slave owner.

Civil Rights Act of 1866: This first civil rights law declared that all native-born Americans were citizens of the United States, regardless of their race, colour, or previous condition.

Civil Rights Act of 1957: This first civil rights law since Reconstruction established the Justice department's Civil Rights Division and a federal Civil Rights Commission.

Civil Rights Act of 1960: Authorized federal judges to appoint referees to help blacks register to vote and provided criminal penalties for violence that obstructs school desegregation.

Civil Rights Act of 1964: Sweeping legislation that prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and in hiring, allowed government agencies to withhold federal funds from any program permitting discrimination, authorized the attorney general to file suit to desegregate schools and recreational facilities, and exempted anyone with a 6th grade education from literacy tests for voting.

Double invisibility: This term refers to the compounded marginalization experienced by individuals who belong to multiple minority or disadvantaged groups.

Exceptionalism: The belief that something is exceptional, especially the theory that the peaceful capitalism of the US constitutes an exception to the general economic laws governing national historical development

Fifteenth Amendment: This 1870 constitutional amendment prohibited racial discrimination in voting.

Fourteenth Amendment: This 1868 constitutional amendment made blacks citizens and guaranteed them 'equal protection of the laws.'

Intersectionality: A set of theories that make the case for how oppressive institutions, which are racist, sexist, homophobic and classist, work together and so cannot be examined in isolation.

Jim Crow: A nineteenth-century minstrel character whose caricature of black culture became identified with segregationist practices in the South.

Ku Klux Klan: A white terrorist organization against integration.

Lynching: The murder of 3,500 blacks by angry whites, often by hanging from trees.

Machiavellian: It is an adjective derived from the name of the Italian Renaissance political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli. It describes someone who is cunning, manipulative, and willing to use deceit or immoral tactics to achieve their goals.

Marxism: A political philosophy that opposes racism and favours socialism to prevent worker exploitation. According to Marxist thought, social conflict caused by economic factors is the driving force behind society's processes and structures.

Montgomery Bus Boycott: The first large-scale protest of the modern civil rights movement.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP): The oldest, largest, and best-known civil rights organization whose legal and political efforts resulted in major successes in desegregating American society.

Psychoanalysis: A set of psychological theories and techniques created by the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, which suggests that a struggle between unconscious and conscious processes determines human behaviour.

Pulitzer Prize: A prestigious award given in the United States for excellence in journalism, literature, and musical composition. Established in 1917 by provisions in the will of Joseph Pulitzer, a newspaper publisher, the prize honours outstanding achievements in these fields such as fiction, drama, history, and poetry.

Racism: The practice of discriminating against ethnic groups different from one's own.

Reconstruction: The federal government's attempts after the Civil War to restore the defeated Confederate states to the Union and to assist the former slaves.

Thirteenth Amendment: This 1865 constitutional amendment abolished slavery in the United States.

Voting Rights Act of 1965: This federal law banned literacy tests and intimidation at the polls, and dispatched federal registrars to locales where voting totals fell below 50 per cent of those eligible.

Womanism: The meaning of Womanism is a form of feminism focused especially on the conditions and concerns of Black women.

Selfhood: This term refers to the quality or state of being an individual, distinct from others. It encompasses aspects like self-awareness, personal identity, autonomy, and the continuous sense of self over time.

Subaltern: The term comes from Antonio Gramsci, who made the word current. It refers to the people who don't give orders; they only receive orders, people who were not working-class folks or victims of capitalism.

Subaltern studies: They aim to uncover the histories of groups that within the colonial and nationalist archives went deviated mainly to the margins or were undocumented altogether.

Source: These terms are extracted from the internet.

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Kathryn Stockett's Biography

Kathryn Stockett was born in 1969, and was raised in Jackson, Mississippi. After graduating from the University of Alabama with a degree in English and creative writing, she moved to New York City, where she worked in magazine publishing for nine years. She currently lives in Atlanta with her husband and daughter. She is working on her second novel.

Her novel *The Help* was published in 2009, is set in Jackson, Mississippi, in the early 1960s and explores the relationships between African American domestic servants and their white employers. The novel became a bestseller due to portraying of racial issues in the American South. The novel became successful and led to a two thousand eleven movie directed by Tate Taylor. The film brings more fame to the novel.

Stockett lives in Atlanta, Georgia and keeps writing and have many literary communities, but still *The Help* remains her most successful literary work.