



**POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN:
THE SALT EATERS BY TONİ C. BAMBARA,
THE HANDMAİD’S TALE BY MARGARET E.
ATWOOD, AND LARA BY BERNARDİNE A.
EVARİSTO**

**2025
PhD THESIS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATUERE**

Savanna Hatem Khalil AL-SHAMARY

**Thesis Advisor
Prof. Dr. A. Serdar OZTURK**

**POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN: THE SALT EATERS BY
TONI C. BAMBARA, THE HANDMAID'S TALE BY MARGARET E.
ATWOOD, AND LARA BY BERNARDINE A. EVARISTO**

Savanna Hatem Khalil AL-SHAMARY

Thesis Advisor

Prof. Dr. A. Serdar OZTURK

T.C.

Karabuk University

Institute of Graduate Programs

Department of English Language and Literature

Prepared as

PhD Thesis

KARABUK

April 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	1
THESIS APPROVAL PAGE.....	3
DECLARATION	4
FOREWORD	5
DEDICATION	7
ABSTRACT.....	8
ÖZ.....	10
ARCHIVE RECORD INFORMATION	12
ARŞİV KAYIT BİLGİLERİ.....	13
SUBJECT OF THE RESEARCH	14
PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH	14
METHOD OF THE RESEARCH.....	16
HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH / RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	17
SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS / DIFFICULTIES	18
1. INTRODUCTION	20
1.1. Postcolonial Theory	22
1.2. The Persistence of Female Oppression is a Turning Point	28
1.3. Postcolonialism and Feminism: The Critical Discourse.....	32
1.4. Double Colonisation.....	36
1.5. Intersectionality in Postcolonial Feminism.....	47
2. WOMEN’S SUFFERINGS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF PATRIARCHY AND COLONIALISM	63
2.1. Endless Women’s Efforts Across The Globe, Challenging Oppressive Systems	64
2.2. Intersectionality of Patriarchy and Colonialism in <i>The Salt Eaters</i> , <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> , and <i>Lara</i>	79
2.3. Close Analytical Reading	101

3. WOMEN VICTIMS OF SOCIAL OPPRESSION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S <i>THE HANDMAID'S TALE</i>	109
3.1. Worldwide Events Behind The Handmaid's Tale Masterpiece	112
3.2. Women's Rights in the Shadow of the Gilead Republic.....	122
3.3. The Rebellion of Individuals Against Gilead's Oppressive Laws	128
3.4. Intersections of Oppression: Feminist, Psychological, and Postcolonial Perspectives.....	134
4. THE FEMINIST JOURNEY CHALLENGES THE RESTRICTIONS: IDENTITY, DIASPORA, AND GENDER IN <i>Lara</i> BY BERNARDINE EVARISTO.....	153
4.1. Postcolonial Feminism and the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Identity	155
4.2. Diaspora and the Complexity of Belonging in <i>Lara</i>	159
4.3. Intergenerational Trauma and Colonial Legacies in <i>Lara</i>	163
4.4. The Role of Language and Verse Form in Feminist Resistance in <i>Lara</i>	167
CONCLUSION	185
REFERENCES.....	196
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	207

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that in my opinion the thesis submitted by Savanna Hatem Khalil AL-SHAMARY titled “POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN: THE SALT EATERS BY TONİ C. BAMBARA, THE HANDMAİD’S TALE BY MARGARET E. ATWOOD, AND LARA BY BERNARDİNE A. EVARİSTO” is fully adequate in scope and in quality as a thesis for the degree of PhD.

Prof. Dr. Abdul Serdar OZTURK.

.....

Dissertation Advisor, Department of English Language and Literature.

This thesis is accepted by the examining committee with a unanimous vote in the Department of English Language and Literature as a PhD thesis. July 29, 2025

Examining Committee Members (Institutions)

Signature

Chairman : Prof. Dr. Abdul Serdar OZTURK (KBU.)

.....

Member : Assoc. Prof. Dr. Harith Ismael TURKI (KBU.)

.....

Member : Prof. Dr. Sinan YILMAZ (KBU.)

.....

Member : Assoc. Prof. Dr. Adesanya ALABI (Kapadokya Ü.)

.....

Member : Assist. Prof. Dr. Zamire IZZETGİL (MUNÜ)

.....

The degree of PhD by the thesis submitted is approved by the Administrative Board of the Institute of Graduate Programs, Karabuk University.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zeynep ÖZCAN

.....

Director of the Institute of Graduate Programs

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and all information included has been obtained and expounded in accordance with the academic rules and ethical policy specified by the institute. Besides, I declare that all the statements, results, materials, not original to this thesis have been cited and referenced literally.

Without being bound by a particular time, I accept all moral and legal consequences of any detection contrary to the aforementioned statement.

Name Surname: Savanna Hatem Khalil AL-SHAMARY

Signature :

FOREWORD

*There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not
live single-issue lives.*

Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches

This study arises from a thoughtful engagement with stories of resistance, perseverance, and transformation woven into women's lives across the postcolonial landscapes. It demonstrates academic dedication and critical reflection motivated by my desire to amplify silenced voices and explore how literature functions both as a mirror and a map for feminist awareness. A complex and long journey of creative empathy, critical thought, and deep academic inquiry gave birth to this dissertation. The decision to study *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* was deliberate; it was a conscious choice based on the texts' ability to reflect gendered experiences shaped by the legacies of colonisation, patriarchy, and displacement. These novels, written by women from diverse historical and cultural backgrounds, continue to resonate with everyday struggles and ongoing hopes.

Using a comparative framework, I aimed to elucidate the intricate connections between identity, gender, and diaspora, and how these are integrated within postcolonial feminist thought. In these works, the protagonists are not merely characters; they embody confrontation, navigating oppressive systems with courage and depth. This study also serves as an academic tribute to the transformative influence of literature on which feminist theory is founded. It shows that storytelling becomes an act of survival and that in reclaiming any voice, it advances the pursuit of justice. To all interested persons—academics, students, researchers, and indeed all those engaged at the crossroads of feminism, literature, and postcolonial critical studies—I share this study with humility, hoping that it may spark reflection, foster dialogue, and contribute meaningfully to further analysis in these fields of literary studies. I want to thank the novelists whose works reinforce this dissertation, the theorists and intellectuals whose ideas have shaped it, and the many women, named and unnamed, whose lives, struggles, and aspirations resonate within these pages. I dedicate this work to all

women whose stories remain untold. May these pages serve as a step towards solidarity, visibility, and equality.

My deepest and eternal gratitude goes to my dear supervisor, Prof. Dr. Abdul Serdar Ozturk, the head of the department, for his invaluable, steadfast guidance, encouragement, and motivation. Your intellectual generosity has significantly marked this study with an indelible imprint of your thoughts. I would also like to sincerely thank my esteemed supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Harith Ismael TURKI, for his endless kindness, patience, and support. Additionally, I am grateful to my other committee members, Prof. Dr. Sinan Yilmaz, Asst. Prof. Dr. Adesanya ALABI, and Asst. Prof. Dr.. Zamire IZZETGIL, for their invaluable guidance. Moreover, I thank all my professors at Karabük University for their support throughout this journey.

I am deeply grateful to my wonderful parents and dear brothers, who continually support me at every stage of my life with unconditional and boundless love. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family—my beloved husband, my daughter, and my son—for their unwavering support and encouragement. Thank you; I am thankful to each one of you for being part of my life. This work is also dedicated with sincere gratitude and deep respect to Mr. Adil Ismail Al Nuaimi, my teacher, mentor, and a source of encouragement. Throughout my academic journey, your support and unwavering belief in my potential have inspired me during the most challenging stages of my life. Mr. Al Nuaimi, your support and steadfast faith in my capabilities have been a great source of encouragement, shaping not only this work but also the person I am today and my personality as a researcher and thinker. Thank you for reminding me that true knowledge must always serve a purpose, and that perseverance is its form of resistance. I am forever grateful.

DEDICATION

Remembering all those women whose voices were silenced, ignored, or distorted, whose lives, struggles, victories, instances of resistance, and voices truly echo literature and history.

To every feminist author and thinker who did not stay in the shadows but chose to consistently speak the truth to confront power.

This work is for them.



ABSTRACT

This dissertation primarily aims to explore the interdisciplinary nature of postcolonial theory and feminism through a critical analysis of three major novels: Toni C. Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980), Margaret E. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997). Although differing in setting, style, and period, these novels address the legacy of colonialism and patriarchy, along with nuanced and powerful visions of women's subjectivity, resistance, and healing. In this context, the study can be framed around how women-centric postcolonial narratives express identity and how narrative form acts as a tool of subversion. The study is situated within postcolonial feminist theory, referencing key authors such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, and bell hooks. This analysis investigates how the authors use structure, temporality, and voice to challenge systems of domination. Bambara employs stream-of-consciousness and non-linear forms to immerse the reader in the fractured psyche of a Black woman in extremis, emphasising collective memory, community, and spiritual healing. Atwood's dystopian fiction — with its retrospectively first-person and often unreliable voice — reveals how the state controls women's language and bodies. In contrast, Evaristo's poetic free verse in *Lara* explores the complexities of diasporic identity; it employs shifting perspectives and poetic fragmentation to trace both cultural inheritance and generational dislocation. As a comparative study, this dissertation highlights the transformation of narrative form as a site of resistance, challenging the traditions of Eurocentric literature and monolithic feminist discourses. By positioning these novels within critical debates, it further asserts the expansion of postcolonial feminist literature, emphasising the multiplicity of women's voices across different historical and global contexts. The findings underscore the importance of employing hybrid literary forms and nonlinear storytelling modes to articulate complex intersectional identities. This study argues that postcolonial feminist literature is not solely a reactive response to oppression but a creative reimagining of power, selfhood, and history. Through their diverse yet interconnected approaches, Bambara, Atwood, and Evaristo create literary spaces for

silenced voices, enabling them to articulate and radically reshape the language and structure through which women's stories have long been told.

Keywords: Feminism; Postcolonialism; Patriarchal Society; *The Salt Eaters*; *The Handmaid's Tale*; *Lara*; Toni C. Bambara; Margaret E. Atwood; Bernardine Evaristo



ÖZ

Bu tez, öncelikle Toni C. Bambara'nın *Tuz Yiyenler* (1980), Margaret E. Atwood'un *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* (1985) ve Bernardine Evaristo'nun *Lara* (1997) adlı üç büyük romanın eleştirel analizi yoluyla postkolonyal teori ve feminizmin disiplinlerarası doğasını keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Mekan, üslup ve dönem bakımından farklılık gösterecek de bu romanlar, kadınların öznelliği, direnişi ve iyileşmesine dair nüanslı ve güçlü vizyonların yanı sıra sömürgecilik ve ataerkilliğin mirasını ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, çalışma, kadın merkezli postkolonyal anlatıların kimliği nasıl ifade ettiği ve anlatı biçiminin nasıl bir yıkıcılık aracı olarak işlev gördüğü etrafında çerçevelenebilir. Çalışma, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak ve bell hooks gibi önemli yazarlara atıfta bulunarak postkolonyal feminist teori içinde yer almaktadır. Bu analiz, yazarların egemenlik sistemlerine meydan okumak için yapıyı, zamansallığı ve sesi nasıl kullandıklarını araştırmaktadır. Bambara, bilinç akışı ve doğrusal olmayan biçimleri kullanarak okuyucuyu, ölüm döşegindeki siyah bir kadının parçalanmış ruhuna daldırıyor ve kolektif hafızayı, topluluğu ve ruhsal şifayı vurguluyor. Atwood'un distopik kurgusu -geriye dönük birinci tekil şahıs ve genellikle güvenilmez sesiyle- devletin kadınların dilini ve bedenlerini nasıl kontrol ettiğini ortaya koyar. Buna karşılık, Evaristo'nun *Lara*'daki şiirsel serbest nazımı, diasporik kimliğin karmaşıklıklarını araştırır; hem kültürel mirası hem de kuşaksal kopuşu izlemek için değişen bakış açılarını ve şiirsel parçalanmayı kullanır. Karşılaştırmalı bir çalışma olarak bu tez, anlatı biçiminin bir direniş alanı olarak dönüşümünü vurgulayarak, Avrupamerkezci edebiyat geleneklerine ve monolitik feminist söylemlere meydan okur. Bu romanları eleştirel tartışmalar içine yerleştirerek, farklı tarihsel ve küresel bağlamlarda kadınların seslerinin çokluğunu vurgulayarak, sömürge sonrası feminist edebiyatın genişlemesini daha da ileri götürür. Bulgular, karmaşık kesişimsel kimlikleri ifade etmek için melez edebi biçimler ve doğrusal olmayan hikâye anlatımı yöntemleri kullanmanın önemini vurgular. Bu çalışma, sömürge sonrası feminist edebiyatın yalnızca baskıya karşı tepkisel bir tepki olmadığını, aynı zamanda güç, benlik ve tarihin yaratıcı bir yeniden tahayyülü olduğunu savunur. Bambara, Atwood ve Evaristo, çeşitli ancak birbiriyle bağlantılı yaklaşımlarıyla

susturulmuş sesler için edebi alanlar yaratıyor ve kadınların hikayelerinin uzun zamandır anlatıldığı dili ve yapıyı ifade etmelerini ve kökten yeniden şekillendirmelerini sağlıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Feminizm; Postkolonyalizm; Ataerkil Toplum; *Tuz Yiyenler*; *Damızlık Kızın Hikayesi*; *Lara*; Toni C. Bambara; Margaret E. Atwood; Bernardine Evaristo



ARCHIVE RECORD INFORMATION

Title of the Thesis	Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives in: <i>The Salt Eaters</i> by Toni C. Bambara, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> by Margaret E. Atwood, and <i>Lara</i> by Bernardine A. Evaristo.
Author of the Thesis	Savanna H. Khalil AL-SHAMARY
Thesis Advisor	Prof. Dr. A. Serdar OZTURK
Status of the Thesis	PhD
Date of the Thesis	29/07/2025
Field of the Thesis	Department of English Language and Literature
Place of the Thesis	UNIKA / IGP
Total Page Number	207
Keywords	Feminism, Postcolonialism, patriarchal Society, <i>The Salt Eaters</i> , <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> , <i>Lara</i> , Toni C. Bambara, Margaret E. Atwood, Bernardine Evaristo

ARŞİV KAYIT BİLGİLERİ

Tezin Adı	Postkolonyal Feminist Perspektifler: Toni C. Bambara'nın <i>Tuz Yiyenler</i> , Margaret E. Atwood'un <i>Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü</i> ve Bernardine A. Evaristo'nun <i>Lara</i> adlı eserlerinde.
Tezin Yazarı	Savanna H. Khalil Al-Shamary
Tezin Danışmanı	Prof. Dr. A. Serdar OZTURK
Tezin Derecesi	Doktora
Tezin Tarihi	29 / 07 / 2025
Tezin Alanı	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anablim Dalı
Tezin Yeri	KBU / LEE
Tezin Sayfa Sayısı	207
Anahtar Kelimeler	Feminizm, Postkolonyalizm, ataerkil Toplum, <i>Tuz Yiyenler</i> , <i>Damızlık Kızın Hikayesi</i> , <i>Lara</i> , Toni C. Bambara, Margaret E. Atwood, Bernardine Evaristo.

SUBJECT OF THE RESEARCH

The subject of this dissertation is the complex subjugation of women in postcolonial culture, which can be seen as the dominance of postcolonial legacy history to reinforce already established patriarchies. Based on the conceptual framework of postcolonial feminist theory, the present study will explore the dynamics of gender oppression arising from what is termed the concept of double colonisation, where the combined forces of colonial power and indigenous patriarchal society oppress women. This will be examined through an analysis of selected literary works, mainly *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Cade Bambara, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and *Lara* by Bernardine Evaristo, which are rich in portrayals of women's struggle, resistance, and resilience. These novels serve as vital sites for exploring how female characters employ resistance as a tool and form of agency through the perspectives of personal memory, voice, and storytelling.

The study further explores why female marginalisation is intensified by the intersecting effects of race, class, and diaspora, especially within hybrid and displaced cultures. These factors contribute to making women's identities complex and often invisible in society. As noted in the study, literature is not only an art form but also a powerful tool for critiquing injustice, renegotiating gender roles, and shaping identity. The female protagonists in the selected texts are portrayed as rebellious and self-aware, reclaiming their space through stories of triumph and protest. This emphasises that postcolonial literature offers an alternative space where silenced voices can engage in dialogues of liberation, empowerment, and transformation. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the broader framework of postcolonial feminism, suggesting that literature serves to describe and challenge the socio-political oppressions of gendered societies in formerly colonised nations.

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The main issue addressed by this dissertation is that women's oppression still persists and is often ignored in the postcolonial world. This is maintained not only due to the lingering effects of colonial control but also because of the strong influence of patriarchal hierarchies within native cultures. Although the formal end of imperial

domination occurred during decolonisation, the effects of imperial subjugation on culture, ideology, and gender roles have continued to manifest in more subtle, layered, and often painful ways even today. These impacts are particularly severe for women, as they face a double system of marginalisation—first from the colonial powers and then from their own communities. This phenomenon can be described as “double colonialism” or the core issue examined in this study. In most postcolonial contexts, gender inequality cannot be attributed to a single cultural practice or a unified policy; rather, it is a historical accumulation of stratification in power. In this case, colonial discourse has merged with patriarchal ideologies that have positioned women as subjects. The general discourse surrounding women, regardless of their background or characteristics, is erased in literature, media, and even national identity, as their voices are silenced or reduced to symbols of purity and tradition, without genuine representation. This highlights the urgent need to reclaim these suppressed voices and reconceptualise women as central subjects in literary, social, and political discussions.

This study is important because it questions and dismantles internalised narratives as they relate to postcolonial feminist theory. It offers an understanding of the genre and its capacity to foster resistance, evidenced by authors selecting novels such as *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Bambara, *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *Lara* by Bernardine Evaristo to explore how literature can serve as a means of confronting power. These works act as statements of opposition—narratives of resistance—against hegemonic discourses that continue to oppress women. Besides depicting violent accounts of gender deprivation, these novels also highlight the resilience and strength of women as they seek to reclaim their identities, control, and pasts. The study highlights the influential role of literature as a means for social critique and change. In many societies, where social systems often fail to protect or even acknowledge the suffering of women, literature can serve as a mirror reflecting the reality of gender-based violence, as well as a pathway to uncover new routes to liberation and empowerment. Memory and symbolic resistance, reinforced by storytelling, have helped transform female characters in selected works into symbols of broader social action, capable of fostering change and inspiring hope.

In addition to that, this study also describes a noticeable absence of significant female and postcolonial writings where the elements of intersectionality, such as race, class, diaspora, and the like, when applied to the postcolonial female identities, are not

discussed at length. The present study examines these dimensions through a complex interaction aimed at understanding the realities of women in hybrid and transnational spaces. One such woman is the woman in diaspora who faces not only different forms of alienation but also a crisis of identity, with impacts that vary because they are not only geographically uprooted but also culturally and emotionally affected. This dissertation helps uncover such layered experiences by referencing the rhetoric and narrative style of fiction.

Another important aspect of the study is that it challenges the binary systems of Western and non-Western feminism. By focusing on different cultures and literary expressions, the study is likely to pave the way for mutual understanding between feminist discourses and promote more targeted, universal, and internationally relevant generalisations of gender oppression. This raises the question of the need for local feminist theories that consider cultural specificities without hindering the universality of gender struggles. Theoretically, the thesis may contribute to knowledge in the fields of postcolonial literature, feminist theory, and cultural studies. It appeals to readers, scholars, and policy-makers to question the mechanisms of silencing in history and the present that oppress women and their experiences. It reaffirms the ongoing struggle for gender equality in postcolonial societies. It emphasises that literature, as one of the most powerful and liberating tools of critique, acts as a means of restoring peace. The reality that women in postcolonial fiction fight, endure, and rise against systems of oppression, as shown in this study, indicates that not all resistance is loud or overt. Such resistance is also found in mundane reminders, storytelling, and dreaming of futures free from domination and filled with hope. This not only makes the study timely but also grounds it in contemporary analysis of issues surrounding gender justice and cultural memory in various regions worldwide, discussing gender justice and a decolonial future.

METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This dissertation employed a postcolonial feminist literary critical approach with a qualitative, interpretive method. Its main aim was to explore how the selected literary texts depicted the oppression of women resulting from the intersection of colonial and patriarchal systems. The initial focus was on the choice of research

method, aligning with the study's theoretical framework and emphasising the cultural, gendered, and narrative complexities. *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Bambara, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and *Lara* by Bernardine Evaristo were chosen as the three main texts because of their in-depth exploration of postcolonial feminism concepts. These works served as the primary sources of information, offering diverse cultural perspectives and narrative styles. The secondary data consisted of academic books, articles, and critical reviews, which provided additional context and theoretical background related to postcolonialism, feminism, and intersectionality.

Close textual reading served as the starting point in the analysis, with thematic coding employed to highlight common themes of double colonisation, memory, voice, hybridity, trauma, and resilience. Narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness, verse form, and imagery symbols were discussed based on how they interpreted these themes. A relative paradigm was used to examine how the two authors, influenced by their socio-political status and cultural context, expressed their understanding of oppression and resistance. These interpretations fit within the broader context of history, politics, and culture, meaning that there was no restriction to findings based solely on textual evidence; instead, they were contextualised within lived experiences. Reflexivity played a vital role, and the researcher considered their position and potential biases. These analyses were synthesised into conclusions in the final stage, which contributed to the discourse of postcolonial feminism in general and demonstrated how literature functions as a medium of criticism, protest, and liberation.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH / RESEARCH PROBLEM

It was hypothesised that postcolonial women are subjugated by the combined effects of old colonial systems and indigenous patriarchal structures, placing the concept of double colonisation at the centre of these interconnected oppressions. It was expected that female characters in *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* would reflect various but intertwined struggles related to gender, race, and cultural oppression, and that through their rebellion, they would find and create meaning using memory, voice, and identity. Intersectionality topics (race, class, diaspora) were chosen to deepen the nuance of their marginalisation, with themes of resilience and survival supported by narrative forms such as fragmented storytelling, verse structures,

and symbolic imagery. The present study also proposed a theory that *The Salt Eaters* would focus solely on the mental and spiritual aspects of female resistance and recovery, *The Handmaid's Tale* would illustrate how systematic female population control exemplifies patriarchal rule, and *Lara* would emphasise the challenges of hybridity faced by women living multicultural and diasporic lives. All in all, these stories were expected to demonstrate how literature can serve as a tool of political and cultural resistance, inspiring a vision of freedom.

Although formal colonial rule has ended, postcolonial societies still oppress women, influenced by the lingering effects of colonial domination and local patriarchal structures. This situation is often described as a state of double colonisation, where gender inequality and cultural displacement are treated as separate issues. This dissertation addresses this gap because postcolonial theory and feminism remain distinct disciplines that have yet to converge within their respective fields or be adequately integrated. The selected novels, representing various systems of oppression across different eras, include *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Cade Bambara, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *Lara* by Bernardine Evaristo, and others. However, there is a need for a study that critically examines how such literary portrayals demystify the combined effects of race, class, and diaspora on female subjectivity and analyse how they employ narrative strategies to challenge and undermine oppressive systems. This research gap arises from the lack of integrated, intersectional, postcolonial feminist analyses that connect these diverse contexts to better understand both the global and local aspects of women's gender oppression and resistance.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS / DIFFICULTIES

This dissertation examined three markedly different novels—*The Salt Eaters* by Toni Bambara, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and *Lara* by Bernardine Evaristo—set within diverse historical, cultural, and stylistic contexts. It was conducted as a comparative analysis of these works, grounded in postcolonial feminist theory and enriched by the concepts of intersectionality, trauma theory, and narrative theory. This transdisciplinary approach facilitated a multi-layered interpretation of gendered oppression, resistance, and identity reclamation, though it also posed challenges. Significant critical negotiation was required to accommodate the diversity,

which introduced various theoretical frameworks without sacrificing conceptual depth and clarity.

The critical analysis involved negotiating genre differences, including how a historical trauma narrative addressing African American experience (*The Salt Eaters*), a speculative dystopian allegory (*The Handmaid's Tale*), and a semi-autobiographical verse novel (*Lara*) dealing with diasporic hybridity, required methodological adaptability to value both the cultural and narrative particularities of each text as they intersected to highlight points of connection. There was also a challenge in ensuring that thematic parallels did not become reductionist due to the distinct socio-political backgrounds of the two narratives. The abundance of critical literature surrounding each novel was both a blessing and a curse, as there was limited scope within the available time and pages. Consequently, one had to be selective and focus on the most relevant materials. Ultimately, the fundamental interdisciplinarity of the project proved to be both its greatest strength and the most significant challenge during the analysis process.

1. INTRODUCTION

“ The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself ”(Woolf,1929, p.320).

[“Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength” (Anderson,2018)].

A world of rapid technological advances and globalisation, where female oppression is overwhelmingly neglected, is becoming a reality; yet it has not fully materialised. The spirit of law, education, and social attitudes has made significant progress against gender subjugation. However, millions of women around the world are still subjected to trafficking, forced labour, and gender discrimination. Despite the supposed democratic and ‘postfeminist’ advisement surrounding the lived experiences of women, which demonstrates entrenched inequalities and the continual need for advocacy through feminism (Anunobi, 2002, p. 3), these deeply embedded socio-cultural systems suggest the necessity for feminist scholarship and activism against, and beyond, pervasive systems of oppression. Women, in many places, face oppression, and within patriarchal systems, both celebrate tradition and norms that justify inequality. Such systems are deeply embedded in and reinforce historical constructs that create multiple dimensions of marginalisation for women, hindering their full participation in society, the economy, and political spheres. These actions must be confronted, and systemic oppression must be dismantled by feminist movements, as tolerance and the normalisation of these actions are unacceptable (Hall, 2015, pp. 394-415). The global persistence of inequality demonstrates its historic, as well as current, connected nature, and highlights the need for critical engagement with its roots and effects.

This systematic oppression of women originates from longstanding historical and patriarchal practices that have persisted for centuries. For example, colonialism intensified gendered inequalities by creating hierarchies that oppressed women both within their own societies and under colonial rule. Women also faced double oppression from their indigenous patriarchal systems, which subjugated them, as well as the foreign patriarchal systems imposed by colonial authorities (Nejat & Jamili, 2014, pp. 40-44). This double oppression excluded women from government,

education, and economic opportunities. Patriarchy and colonialism operated together, worsening the already significant gender-based marginalisation and leading to a complete cultural and social disempowerment of women. The concept of 'double colonisation' is an important framework for understanding the complex oppression of women in both colonial and post-colonial periods. Introduced by Anna Rutherford and Kirsten Holst Petersen (1986), it describes the simultaneous subjugation of women by both patriarchy and colonialism (91-109). Postcolonial feminist scholars argue that colonial narratives often silence women's voices, marginalising them while highlighting the experiences of men being colonised and resisting (Tyagi, 2014, p. 45). Double colonisation is a crucial framework for recognising how overlapping systems of power compound disadvantages for women, especially in the context of women's stories of colonial histories and patriarchal narratives. Postcolonial literature is a potent platform for reclaiming the voices of marginalised women. These works tell stories that examine the intersections of oppression faced by women and show how they resist or overcome these systemic inequalities. Authors juxtapose personal struggles with broader historical and cultural contexts to critique the pervasive patriarchal and colonial forces at work. These narratives offer alternative views on how women oppose oppressive circumstances.

Feminist theory serves as a powerful tool for analysing the representation of women in colonial and post-colonial texts within the realm of literary criticism. Feminist literary critics have underscored the urgent necessity to unearth and amplify the voices of women marginalised in literary heritages. The interrogation of silenced voices of colonised women within the intersecting structures of patriarchy and imperialism prompts scholars to scrutinise these texts (Spivak, 2014, p. 145). Feminist literary theory helps uncover the systemic erasure of women's perspectives and their connections to the intersections of gender, race, and colonial histories. Beyond the intersectionality of race and class lies the relationship between race and gender, involving women in postcolonial contexts. It is instrumental in analysing how these multiple identities are expressed in women's lived realities. Women in postcolonial feminist literature are often depicted as racialised and economically marginalised individuals who face discrimination as women. A critical framework for analysing the complexities of women's oppression and resistance in postcolonial contexts, this

multidimensional approach highlights the impoverishing nature of international divisions of labour and their impact on the lives of women.

On another level, colonialism not only erased but also attempted to erase its cultural history through storytelling and oral traditions that were often dismissed as primitive or inferior by colonial authorities. Postcolonial feminist writers have endeavoured to recover these traditions, appropriating them for their works as a means of resistance and cultural preservation. These writers breathe cultural heritage back into their narratives, returning stories to women who have been marginalised within their own cultural traditions by interweaving traditional tales into their narratives. Feminist re-interpretations of canonical texts have also been employed to challenge patriarchal and colonial ideologies. Works that have traditionally been regarded as rooted in Eurocentric, 'androcentric' perspectives have been scrutinised by scholars. Feminist scholars and writers subvert dominant discourses through reinterpretations centred on marginalised characters that articulate their marginalised experiences and agency.

Postcolonial feminist literature not only uncovers past oppressions but also addresses current issues such as globalisation, immigration, and the legal consequences of colonisation. However, these narratives often resemble an epic that intertwines themes of caste and gender with colonial legacies and their ongoing presence in modern society. Through these stories, postcolonial feminist writers emphasise the continued relevance of historical injustices while also showcasing visions of resistance and change. Ultimately, postcolonial feminism offers a framework for analysing the lasting impact of colonial and patriarchal systems on women's lives. Scholars can investigate how these systems intersect to sustain gender inequalities by analysing literary works that highlight women's experiences. This chapter lays the groundwork for a more detailed subsequent analysis of the selected texts, focusing on women's resilience and agency as they navigate challenges within colonial and postcolonial settings.

1.1. Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory emerged as a critical framework to interrogate the cultural, political, and economic legacies of the colonial period. This theoretical approach

provides a means to understand how colonialism devastated indigenous cultures, economies, and identities, while also illustrating how colonised peoples resisted and adapted. It examines power dynamics, representation, and the long-lasting effects of imperialism, drawing on a wide range of traditions from literature, history, anthropology, and sociology. Key figures in this field, such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, have all contributed to its development, enabling scholars to uncover the machinery behind colonial domination and its consequences (Childs & Williams, 2014, p. 20).

Postcolonial theory examines how the colonial project not only reshaped the material conditions of the colonised but also their cultural and psychic landscapes. This challenge to dominant narratives, which often depict colonisation as benign or even beneficial, is effectively made. Instead, it exposes the exploitation (and dehumanisation) that was systematically organised and which underpinned colonial rule. Postcolonial theory, by emphasising resistance and agency, aims to deconstruct existing narratives and replace them with new, alternative perspectives that listen to and centre the experiences while seeking to amplify the voices of the colonised (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989, p. 11).

Beyond its value as a historical analysis, its relevance is evident in contemporary debates about globalisation, migration, and cultural hegemony, which continue to make it a crucial tool for understanding how forms of inequality from the past persist in shaping our present (Young, 2012, p. 21). Postcolonial theory is founded on Edward Said's critical analysis of how discourses of the West have "Orienteered" the "Orient" as exotic and inferior "Other" (Said, 1978, p. 1). The binary between the West and the East was constructed to strengthen Western superiority and legitimise colonial domination. This role of language, literature, and representation in reinforcing colonial hierarchies is explored by Said. From this perspective, he reveals how claims about the inherent backwardness of colonised peoples justified colonisation by encouraging the belief that the subjects required the West's intervention.

The ideological framework that Said discusses did not remain confined to purely academic or literary contexts but thrives within the political, economic, and social structures, ensuring policies of inequality and subjugation (Ibid., p 5). His insights initiated a broader critique of the mechanisms through which colonial power is

disseminated, including the ways in which cultural production perpetuates colonialist ideologies. His work resonates within contemporary postcolonial studies, where scholars seek to uncover traces of these dynamics in modern global relations.

Its staying power as a critique is evident in the range of fields to which it has been applied (from media studies to international relations) and the ubiquity of colonial discourse in shaping societies' perception and interaction with one another. Said's critique is expanded upon by Homi K. Bhabha in his (1994) *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha extends this critique of colonial exchange beyond the treatment of the coloniser and colonised as polar opposites. In the concept of "hybridity", Bhabha illustrates how colonised subjects often combine components of colonial culture to create "hybrid identities" based on a rejection of binary conceptions of cultural purity.

Through this hybridity, one breaks down the binary distinctions between coloniser and colonised, creating a space for counter-colonial resistance and subversion. Through his analysis, Bhabha reveals that these hybrid identities counter colonial authority by highlighting their cultural institutions (p. 112). Hybridity encapsulates the complexity of cultural encounters, illustrating that this was not a unidirectional imposition of power, but rather dynamic negotiations of identity and meaning. How Bhabha's framework understands the processes of cultural assimilation, resistance, and transformation under conditions of colonial and post-coloniality have profound implications, not just for case studies in the colonies, but also more generally for understanding these processes. Furthermore, it illustrates how colonised peoples reoriented themselves through familial, social, and religious relationships, defining themselves and their cultural practices in opposition to colonial power, thereby creating novel modes of expression that are actively diametric to colonial recitivities. In this context, this perspective is particularly intriguing as it pertains to current debates on multiculturalism and globalisation, where intersections of culture, power, and identity continue to shape social and political relations.

Further deepening the theoretical discourse is the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994), who addresses the silencing of voices by marginalised people within colonial and postcolonial discourses. In her seminal essay, she critiques how Western intellectuals appropriate the experiences of subaltern groups without engaging with their realities. This tendency, Spivak argues, assumes that the voices of those

historically excluded from dominant narratives should be amplified (Spivak, 1994, p. 68). She argues that power, knowledge, and representation are interconnected and must be addressed simultaneously for genuine engagement with subaltern perspectives to occur.

Spivak's analysis focuses on how British and patriarchal systems intersect to marginalise women in postcolonial contexts. Her work has become fundamental to postcolonial feminist theory, offering critical insights into how unrepresented groups are portrayed while concurrently facing underrepresentation that perpetuates their subjugation. To make scholars in postcolonial studies more sensitive and reflexive, Spivak advocates for an approach to the exact representations that will articulate the ethical and epistemological dilemmas inherent in those representations. She has profoundly influenced the field through her emphasis on inclusivity and ethical engagement, aiding in the emergence of new research into the intersections of race, gender, and class in the study of colonial and postcolonial periods.

The contributions of Frantz Fanon to postcolonial theory concern how colonial violence impacts the psychologically and physically scarred psyche. He examines how colonial systems shaped the inferiority complex that colonised subjects carried with them into such an alienated space in the world. In a continuing argument, Fanon contends that while political decolonisation is necessary, it returns the decolonised peoples to dignity and agency (Fanon, 2004, p. 43). His analysis, particularly regarding the role of violence in fostering liberation, is both controversial and profound, critically examining how violence helped sustain colonialism itself. By exploring the psychological dimensions of colonialism, Fanon provides valuable insights into the long-term impacts of imperialist domination on identity formation and social dynamics. Moreover, his work resonates with contemporary discussions of systemic racism, as the legacies of colonialism continue to mirror and influence patterns of discrimination and inequality. What is especially significant about Fanon's predication of decolonisation as an act of radical transformation, particularly as an affirmation of cultural and psychological autonomy, is that it underscores the potential for decolonisation not only as a political project but as a transformation in and of itself. He inspired movements in social justice and liberation around the world, and his contributions are significant in postcolonial thought.

Postcolonial literature acts as a powerful platform for expressing the experiences of colonised peoples, offering both a critique of colonial systems and a celebration of indigenous cultures. Writers from around the world have used their works to challenge colonial narratives and showcase the resilience and creativity of those in the colonies. Many of these literary works also incorporate Indian languages and customs, seeking to reclaim indigenous languages and cultural practices in response to colonial erasure (Ngũgĩ et al, 1986, p. 25). Additionally, they depict pre-Columbian societies with detailed portrayals that challenge stereotypes which previously considered them primitive and stagnant. Postcolonial writers utilise storytelling to provide alternative perspectives that radiate the voices and experiences of the colonised, within which are spaces of resistance and empowerment. Often, these narratives explore themes of identity, resistance, and transformation, critically opening up the complexities of colonial and post-colonial experiences. Engaging with these written works offers readers a deeper understanding of the enduring legacy of colonialism and provides insights into ways to resist and mitigate its impacts. Postcolonial literature serves as both a historical record and a site of cultural production, illuminating how tradition, innovation, and resilience have shaped postcolonial societies.

Otherness remains a fundamental premise of postcolonial theory, portraying colonised nations as exotic and inferior in the eyes of colonial powers. The dehumanisation of everything justified the exploitation of entire nations, which persisted through formal, social, and economic hierarchies long after colonialism had ended. In postcolonial theory, colonial narratives reduced the colonised peoples to static, isolated individuals whose agency and complexity were overlooked (Said, 1978, p. 5). This erasure facilitated the legalisation of imperialist policies and practices, perpetuating a legacy of inequality that continues to influence international relations. Postcolonial literature often seeks to dismantle these stereotypes, depicting colonised peoples (in a manner that is not always simplistically Eurocentric) as complex and multifaceted beings with intricate histories and cultures. Postcolonial writers reclaim the voices that have been taken from them and challenge reductive representations of human diversity, ultimately leading to a reclamation of human diversity itself. However, in media studies and cultural anthropology, there is a particular emphasis on

representation that reflects this focus on the representation of minority groups beyond literature itself.

Postcolonial feminist theory moves beyond that by engaging with the dynamics of colonialism and gender. These scholars assert that colonial systems reinforced patriarchal norms, marginalising women both within their societies and under colonial rule (Spivak, 1994, p. 68). In postcolonial literature, as in other narratives, female characters find themselves caught between dual oppressions of race, class, and gender. While feminist postcolonial authors highlight how women have contributed to resistance movements and cultural preservation against systemic inequalities, they also underscore the resilience of women in the face of these challenges. In challenging traditional gender roles, these narratives propose a broader understanding of postcolonial experiences. Postcolonial feminist theory focuses on demonstrating how colonialism has contributed to gender inequalities by examining the formative impact that imperialist policies and practices have had on gender. It has been taken up in new research, inspiring us to explore the extent to which historical injustices shape contemporary gender realities.

Postcolonial theory also closely examines the material legacies of colonialism (economic exploitation and environmental degradation being just two examples). Resource extraction took precedence over sustainable development within the colonising landscape and economy of the case, leaving lasting scars on colonised environments and economies. Fanon (2004) suggests that postcolonial scholars are investigating how these practices entrenched patterns of inequality to perpetuate systemic barriers to development in contemporary societies (p.43). Literary works examining these issues critique the socio-economic structures of colonial rule and their perspectives on the task of reconstruction following imperialism. These narratives intertwine historical injustices and aim to restore equitable structures because they address decolonisation as a political process, rather than as an isolated phenomenon. Often, these discussions concentrate on the complex intersection between economic dependence and cultural subjugation, illustrating how colonial ideology frequently persists in formerly colonial nations. Postcolonial literature and theory critiquing the commodification of resources and labour underscore the need for restorative justice and sustainable development frameworks that seriously address the devastating effects of colonial histories (Young, 2001, p. 89). Furthermore, these analyses illustrate how

colonial exploitation relates to contemporary inequalities in global systems. Attention to systemic interdependence is critical for developing narratives that not only focus on resistance but also outline pathways toward equity.

Finally, postcolonial theory is associated with understanding how global power is shifting. It is a valuable tool for studying not only the historical colonial enterprises but also the neocolonial strategies of powerful nations and transnational corporations today. Some of these structures persist as forms of cultural hegemony and economic dependency, and postcolonial scholarship provides a means to analyse these structures that sustain ongoing imbalances in global relationships. By presenting this framework, it encourages scholars, activists, and policymakers to reflect on the enduring legacies of colonialism and the efforts required to dismantle the resistance they generate. To invoke the past, postcolonial theory presses for a revaluation of the relationships between nations, communities, and individuals. It urges us to question the fair use of power, centre voices that have often been silenced, and write in a manner that values a conception of justice and equity.

1.2. The Persistence of Female Oppression is a Turning Point

The feminist movement and feminism as a literary theory have been influenced by broader feminist movements, which address the status of women in literature and the cultural systems that shape this status. In this theoretical approach, the critique centres on how literary texts reflect patriarchal ideologies that have historically perpetuated gender inequalities. This field has developed, in part, through the work of feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter, Virginia Woolf, and Simone de Beauvoir (Freedman, 2007, p. 4). The theory seeks to challenge the male-dominated literary canon and to reveal the covert prejudice and clichés that marginalise women. Feminist literary theory aims to uncover the influence of patriarchal norms on the representation of women by separating those representations from their historical and cultural contexts. It also calls for the inclusion of women writers and their contributions to literature in decision-making processes. This framework is both analytically and socially as well as culturally transformative, advocating for the amplification of marginalised voices and questioning dominant ideologies.

Elaine Showalter's work on the phases of women's literary history is foundational to feminist literary theory, and her contributions to feminist literary theory more generally are essential. In her analysis, she identifies periods of imitation, protest, and self-discovery, and argues that women's literature has developed through these stages. This emphasis on establishing a feminist literary canon aims to counter the traditional male-dominated canon that has historically excluded or silenced women's voices. By drawing attention to the contributions of women to literary history, her framework urges us to reconsider that history (Showalter, 1977, p.10). Showalter's work, by highlighting the dynamics of women's literary production, helps identify how gender, culture, and creativity interact in literature. In addition to reviving women's literary heritage, this approach critiques the structural inequities that have historically hindered women's engagement and recognition in literary production.

Virginia Woolf's central feminist essay on the economic and sexist relationships between men and women as authors forms a foundational element of feminist literary theory. Woolf's assertion that women must be financially independent and have personal space to achieve creative expression remains a recurring theme in later feminist critique (Woolf, 1929, p. 21). By exposing the material conditions that enable or restrict literary production, her analysis moves beyond romanticising the idea of artistic genius. Instead, it highlights the importance of structural factors in the creation of literature. Woolf's work highlights how institutions and patriarchal systems have consistently discouraged women from participating in intellectual and creative pursuits. The analysis indicates, through the overarching theme of Woolf's support for the economic and social empowerment of women, that a creative relationship to gender itself exists. In modern feminist critiques, her insights remain pertinent in fostering discussions about the barriers women continue to face in the literary world as well as in other fields.

The theoretical basis of feminist literary criticism is established through Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of women's cultural construction as "Other." De Beauvoir's work decries how patriarchal societies have defined women to men, portraying them as a sex that exists solely to fulfil male desires (Beauvoir, 1953, p. 43). This has been crucial for analysing the gendered power dynamics that pervade literary texts. Feminist critics achieve this by exposing how literature expresses, and subsequently perpetuates, these very dynamics, revealing the stereotypes and biases

that have consistently marginalised women. De Beauvoir's view that social and cultural forces shape gender identity becomes crucial in the context of literature, where women have been portrayed in many different ways. She remains an important figure in feminist theory, and generations of critics continue to explore the links between gender, culture, and power in literary criticism.

Feminist literary criticism examines how literature reinforces gender stereotypes and silences women. Feminist critics strive to unmask the implicit biases within canonical texts and challenge dominant narratives by re-evaluating them. In Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's critique of Victorian literature, they emphasise how female characters are depicted as either "angels" or "monsters" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020, p. 44). Binary representation of this kind reflects patriarchal fears about the ambiguous roles and identities of women, who, at their worst, can now be reduced to simple black-and-white archetypes. Feminist critics aim to unpack these narratives to reveal the complexity of women's experiences and to move beyond superficial representational issues. Firstly, this approach challenges the limitations of traditional literary analysis; secondly, it opens new perspectives on how literature shapes and reflects cultural attitudes towards gender.

Feminist literary theory is based on the concept of intersectionality, which emphasises how different forms of oppression – such as race, class, and sexuality – interact with gender to shape a woman's experience. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality has reshaped feminist criticism of literature by insisting that literary analysis recognise multiple axes of identity (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241). Furthermore, this framework departs from the exhausting tendency to separate gender from other social identities and instead calls for an approach that acknowledges the interrelatedness of social identities. Feminist critics, however, do not need to limit themselves in their attempts to expose the richly diverse and frequently marginalised experiences of women. They can understand how identities interlock in literary texts to reveal how women are living in complex, often marginalised ways. The discussion of this perspective is especially timely in the context of postcolonial literature, where gender, race, and colonialism are significant conjunctions. The concept of intersectionality enriches feminist literary criticism by guiding us closer to a pressing reality about the ways in which power and oppression inflect literature and society.

Another major area of feminist theory concerns the representation of women's bodies in literature. Susan Bordo incriminates the cultural ideals of femininity in the inscription of social norms onto women's bodies through literature, as she analyses (Bordo, 1993, P.23). Feminist critics seek to unmask how literature constructs and perpetuates restrictive ideals of beauty and femininity in their efforts to challenge literature's reproduction of such norms. This analysis also examines how women's bodies are used as symbols or objects in literary texts to reinforce patriarchal authority. Feminist critics argue that these representations must be deconstructed to create a more accurate portrayal of women's bodies and identities. This focus on the body is where literature meets broader cultural discourses surrounding gender, power, and identity.

Feminist literary theory has further extended to the analysis of postcolonial literature, focusing on the questions surrounding the intersections of sex and colonialism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of colonial ideology examines how these systems have shaped the portrayal of women in literature (Spivak, 1994, p.267). Feminist critics scrutinise colonial narratives to uncover the ways in which gender and colonialism collaborate to uphold systems of oppression by constructing and marginalising female characters. This analysis is especially significant for studying postcolonial feminist literature, a genre often focused on women navigating the intersections of patriarchy and colonialism. The emphasis on feminist literary theory, therefore, enhances readers' understanding of the networks and structures of power that influence the literary representation of gender and identity.

Feminist literary theory remains lively and pertinent, integrated with recent insights from queering, ecofeminism, and digital humanities (Freedman, 2002, p. 12). Contemporary feminist critics broaden the scope of feminist inquiry by analysing how literature engages with issues of globalisation, climate change, and digital activism (Diwan & Thakur, 2021, p.9362). However, these emerging perspectives also highlight how literature reflects and interacts with the challenges of the modern social and political landscape. Combining these insights keeps feminist literary theory a vital and cutting-edge field of study that continually takes a critical and expansive look at how literary analysis is conducted. The relevance of feminist criticism in addressing the complexities of modern literature and culture is emphasised by its adaptability, which it demonstrates.

As a literary theory, feminism enables us to examine the representation of women in literature through a critical lens. Feminist criticism aims to transform the world as a means of understanding literature's role in shaping attitudes and social structures, challenging patriarchal norms in ways that amplify the voices of the disenfranchised. This perspective remains valuable for unravelling a text's gendered power dynamics. Feminist literary theory builds upon traditional narratives, advocating for change in all conventional narratives and promoting equality and inclusiveness in an effort to alter how we read and how literature reflects society.

1.3. Postcolonialism and Feminism: The Critical Discourse

Like postcolonial feminism, it is a critical framework that explores systems of power and domination; however, these intersectional ideas also shed light on the specific oppressions faced by women in colonised societies. Thus, postcolonial feminism is an important discourse that addresses the patriarchal aspects present in postcolonial contexts, as well as the Eurocentric dimensions of Western feminism. A notable scholar in postcolonial studies, Leela Gandhi, emphasises the necessity of revisiting colonial histories through a feminist lens to examine the gendered aspects of colonial domination (Gandhi, 2019, p. 4). This discussion bridges the gap between these two frameworks by exploring the intersections of gender, race, and colonial histories to understand the multifaceted oppressions faced by women. This discourse advocates for the universalising perspectives of Western feminism and the gender-blind approaches of traditional postcolonial theory while incorporating a more inclusive and intersectional analysis.

The term postcolonial feminism fundamentally indicates the shortcomings of traditional feminism in addressing women's issues within the postcolonial context. Typically, Western feminism concentrates on matters of gender equality in developed industrial societies, whereas postcolonial feminism examines how colonial histories, race, and class intersect with gender to shape women's experiences. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay critiques the tendency of Western feminism to be universalising (Mohanty, 2003, p. 502). Importantly for this critique, feminist analyses must be contextualised; that is, they should be understood as historically and culturally specific to women's lives. Postcolonial feminism foregrounds the voices and lived experiences

of women in colonised societies to dismantle the polished, hegemonised narratives that too often erase or distort their individuality. This approach not only enhances feminist theory but also enriches our understanding of the dynamics of both colonial and postcolonial power.

According to postcolonial feminists, colonialism not only subordinated whole nations but also established patriarchal norms that hardened the oppression of women. The idea of 'double colonial' racism explains this dual subjugation of women, firstly by the colonisers and then by their own patriarchal societies. Ania Loomba's analysis examines colonial ideologies that reinforced gender hierarchies, rendering women's bodies and labour as sites of exploitation (Loomba, 1998, p. 153). Colonial authorities operated in a manner that imposed their cultural values while reinforcing existing patriarchal structures in colonised societies. By proposing postcolonial feminist theory, we can understand that these systems of domination work together to perpetuate the inequalities faced by women in previously colonised areas. The analysis of these dynamics highlights the ongoing impact of colonialism and its intersectionality with gender-based oppression as part of colonialism's legacy.

Postcolonial feminism has played a key role in elucidating the gender dynamics in colonial and postcolonial texts within literary criticism. In her landmark essay examining the silencing of colonised women's voices within both colonial and nationalist discourses, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak provides a theoretical framework for understanding the colonisation of the continent and its people. Spivak critiques how Western intellectuals exploit subaltern experiences for their own purposes, often without a genuine attempt to comprehend these experiences (Spivak, 1994, p. 287), and urges postcolonial studies scholars to highlight women's voices. Her work serves as a central tenet of postcolonial feminist theory, drawing attention to the epistemic violence that distorts the experiences of marginalised women. Spivak's analysis of postcolonial texts challenges the dominance of Western frameworks in their interpretations, reminding us of the necessity to clear space for authentic self-representation and engage with others in ways not previously permitted. This has inspired a generation of scholars to rethink the role of literature and criticism in advocating for social justice and equity.

In feminist postcolonial literature, the portrayal of women as active agents resisting colonial and patriarchal systems is common. Tsitsi Dangarembga, Bessie Head, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie all depict female protagonists who confront and dismantle systems of oppression they encounter. Dangarembga, for instance, illustrates how colonial education and traditional gender roles restrict women's autonomy, even as her work celebrates their resilience and capacity for agency (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 67). Instead of depicting women as passive victims, these narratives challenge oppressive structures by portraying women as complex agents. Feminist postcolonial literature, however, sees itself as a key force in critiquing both colonialism and patriarchy by highlighting women's voices and experiences. By engaging with these works, they not only shed light on the real lives of women in postcolonial settings but also provide frameworks for futures that prioritise equity and inclusion.

Intersectionality is a fundamental aspect of postcolonial feminist discourse, emphasising how race, class, and gender intersect to influence women's experiences. Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework provides a valuable analytical perspective, enabling a critical approach to theorise the multiple forms of oppression women face in postcolonial settings (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). This approach highlights the interaction of different axes of identity and their ability to produce unique forms of marginalisation and privilege. Intersectionality is often emphasised in postcolonial literature through characters exploring colonial heritage, racial discrimination, and gender-based oppression. Works such as Toni Morrison's reveal the complex duality of these identities and portray women's struggle for freedom. Through intersectional analysis, postcolonial feminist theory enhances our understanding of the diverse and interconnected forces shaping women's experiences.

Another crucial aspect of postcolonial feminist theory is the critique of Eurocentrism. Many Western feminist movements have blindly ignored the specific historical and cultural contexts of women in the Global South, thereby reinforcing a homogenised image of women's oppression. By emphasising the voices and experiences of women in colonised societies, postcolonial feminists challenge this narrative (Ahmed, 1992, p. 19). A critique suggests that feminist theory and practice still need rethinking to untangle the assumptions and prejudices that have shaped their current form and focus. Postcolonial feminism is one way to enrich the feminist

movement and expand the range of perspectives under the umbrella of feminism by prioritising the voices of women from diverse cultural backgrounds. The vocabulary introduced by decolonising feminist thought creates a fundamental historical and cultural division, fostering dialogue and collaboration between different contexts.

Furthermore, postcolonial feminism explores the representation of women's bodies in literature and culture. Susan Bordo's analysis examines how colonial and patriarchal meanings inscribe themselves onto women's bodies, shaping their identity and social roles (Bordo, 1993, p. 25). This analysis is especially important in postcolonial literature, as women's bodies often become battlegrounds for cultural and political conflict. Postcolonial feminists analyse these representations to demonstrate how literature and culture sustain systems of oppression. In contemporary issues such as body image, beauty standards, and reproductive rights, this critique underscores the persistent influence of colonial and patriarchal thinking on women's lives. By exploring these themes, we can simultaneously deconstruct gender, culture, and power in both our historical context and the present.

A feminist re-interpretation of colonial and post-colonial texts has transformed the literary canon. It is similar to Jean Rhys's approach, where she endeavours to reframe colonial narratives from a feminist viewpoint, to amplify the voices of silenced female characters, and to challenge dominant discourses (Rhys, 1966, p. 76). Re-reading these writings questions the gendered aspects of colonialism and highlights the erasure or marginalisation of women's experiences. Feminist postcolonial literature seeks to reclaim these narratives as a transformative critique of traditional literary canons and to create space for new ones. Analytically, this approach contributes to enriching our understanding of colonial and postcolonial literature while emphasising the creation of representative and inclusive literary traditions. Through these re-readings, postcolonial feminism challenges and continues to expand the boundaries of literary analysis.

Finally, postcolonial feminism bridges the important gap between postcolonial and feminist thought, offering a critical framework for issues related to gender, race, and colonial histories. This approach focuses on the voices and experiences of women from colonised societies, challenging the dominant narratives by showing how women have experienced systemic oppression. Postcolonial feminism remains an essential

critical discourse that must continue to develop and deepen our understanding of literature, history, and social justice. Postcolonial feminisms incorporate intersectional, decolonial, and feminist theories to offer a strong theoretical basis for tackling the complexities of gender, power, and globalisation.

1.4. Double Colonisation

Double colonisation refers to the co-occurring effects of colonial and patriarchal oppression that women face. It highlights women's double oppression as members of a colonised race and as gendered individuals. Ania Loomba's analysis reminds us that while colonial ideologies exploited women's labour, they also relegated them to the private sphere, where patriarchal control was reinforced (Loomba, 1998, p. 153). This resulted in women being doubly oppressed, silenced, and ignored within both colonial narratives and nationalist discourses. By analysing double colonisation, scholars and writers examine how race, gender, and class intersect to perpetually oppress women in colonised societies.

The concept of double colonisation in literature illustrates the intersectionality of oppression. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* depicts how the struggles faced by her as a Creole woman, caught between British Imperialism and patriarchal subjugation, are presented as Antoinette's battles alone. In terms of cultural and gendered conflict, Antoinette's identity becomes a battleground, also reflecting the broader experience of colonised women (Rhys, 1966, p. 76). Using her narrative, Rhys criticises the erasure of female voices and the damaging consequences of cultural alienation. Her writing is a testament to how literature exposes the complexities of double colonisation and compels readers to consider how colonialism and patriarchy work together to marginalise women.

Double colonisation, according to postcolonial feminist theorists, is only understood through the act of erasing women's voices. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1994) discusses how colonised women in colonial and nationalist discourses were silenced within the paradigms. According to Spivak, true liberation means recognising women's agency in historical narratives (p. 287). Part of Spivak's work is to emphasise that society should give a voice to the subaltern because they matter, and because the history written thus far does not consider them.

Postcolonial feminism aims to confront the systemic erasure of women's perspectives, counter dominant narratives, and illuminate the commitment of women struggling through various layers of oppression.

Feminist postcolonial literature often focuses on the resilience of women facing double colonisation. Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) demonstrates how women can navigate oppressive systems and reclaim their identities against societal odds. As illustrated through the protagonist Kambili Adichie, who reveals both the personal and political dimensions of resistance, her narratives show how women navigate postcolonial spaces, demonstrating their agency and power despite systemic barriers. Adichie's work focuses on the lived experiences of women to provide a deeper understanding of how they can resist and challenge double colonisation.

Double colonisation has not yet lost its effects on contemporary postcolonial writers. Tsitsi Dangarembga's work illustrates the connection between gender, race, and colonial education, as well as women's resistance to obstacles (Dangerman). Her narratives explore the trade-offs between traditional and modern values, as well as the compromises women make while navigating complex cultural landscapes. Dangarembga's work centres on women's voices to provide a powerful critique of the structures that continue to uphold inequality, highlighting education and self-determination as vehicles for liberation.

Similarly, double colonisation also relates to the commodification of women's bodies in postcolonial feminist scholarship. Ania Loomba agrees that colonial economies recast gendered hierarchies by organising women's reproductive and domestic labour to the detriment of women (Loomba, 1998, p. 155). It also served to demean women's contributions while further reinforcing those societies that regarded women as subordinate to men. Postcolonial feminist theory examines the economic dimensions of double colonisation, thus exposing the material and symbolic ways in which women's bodies are controlled and commodified. This analysis uncovers the enduring connections between colonialism, economic structures, and gender relations.

A psychological impact of double colonisation is revealed through literary analysis, particularly regarding how inferiority is internalised. This concept, explored in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, discusses how colonialism harms identity, a notion further examined by postcolonial feminists when considering the

gendered experiences of women in colonised societies (Fanon, 2004, p. 38). Literature often glorifies the psychological scars of colonialism through characters who feel not only alienated but also uncertain about themselves. These narratives provide insight into the emotional and mental burdens associated with double colonisation and how systemic oppression affects individuals in profoundly personal ways. In doing so, postcolonial feminist literature offers a much deeper understanding of how colonialism and patriarchy exert their influence.

Postcolonial feminist authors reclaim indigenous narratives to resist the historical erasure of women's contributions. Bessie Head's *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990) exemplifies female protagonists who resist colonial and indeed patriarchal oppression in productive ways. These are narratives of resilience and creativity from women operating within complex systems of power, serving as counter-narratives to dominant discourses that have excluded them. By focusing on the experiences of women, postcolonial feminist literature not only critiques avenues of oppression but also imagines pathways to empowerment and change.

Double colonisation offers a way of thinking about the interrelated experiences of systemic oppressions. Postcolonial feminism provides what might be considered insights into the continuing struggles for gender equality and social justice (Spivak, 1994, p. 287) by reading colonial and patriarchal systems as interacting. By challenging traditional approaches to feminist and postcolonial studies in favour of a more intersectional and inclusive analysis of current issues, this framework provides a fresh perspective. Through its examination of the specific challenges faced by women in colonised societies, postcolonial feminism not only presents an alternative view of the dynamics of power and resistance but also contributes to a broader vision of feminism. Ultimately, it is evident that double colonisation underscores the dual burdens faced by women in colonised societies, as it offers a fresh perspective for considering the intersectionality of race, gender, and power. Rhetorically, it acts as a potent medium to uncover the dynamics that place queer, black, and low-income women at significant risk of violence and to advocate for change. Postcolonial feminist theory emphasises the resilience and agency of women, continually fostering new approaches to understanding the complexities of oppression, liberation, and even feminist strategy.

Literature serves as a tool of resistance; literature of postcolonial feminism acts as a form of opposition to the narratives surrounding colonialism and patriarchy. [These texts] employ an unconventional structure to tell women's stories as active agents or through women's own voices, rather than depicting them as passive victims (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112). The aim of postcolonial feminist literature is to present alternative views that emphasise the experiences of colonised women, challenging dominant discourses that have previously silenced or distorted them. It is also a literary tradition that critiques systemic oppression while honouring women who strive to survive and thrive despite formidable power. Through storytelling, these works possess remarkable power as a medium for resistance and transformation, highlighting the intersections of gender, race, and culture in the struggle for liberation.

In challenging the representational discourses linked to European colonialism, Chinua Achebe's works address social relations, including gender dynamics, in an organic relationship with their Igbo context. Feminist readings of Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1959) reveal, however, that Achebe's focus is primarily on male experiences, highlighting the resilience and complexity of female characters like Ekwefi, who navigates societal expectations with strength and agency. Through his narrative, Achebe challenges the colonial narrative that too often depicts African societies as static and primitive. Instead, his work documents the diverse and dynamic roles that women played in these communities, highlighting the ways in which they contributed to social, cultural, and familial structures (as in pages 17, 36, 138). A feminist reading of Achebe's work emphasises how women's stories can be rescued and renegotiated to provide a more complete picture of the colonial and postcolonial experience.

For Toni Morrison, Black women's experiences within a patriarchal and racist system evolve into an exploration of a generation of trauma intergenerationally linked to slavery. Surviving as one's true self amidst dehumanising forces, like Sethe, in *Beloved* (1987), represents a form of resistance (Morrison). Systemic oppression remains a persistent theme in Morrison's work, but equally present are the ways in which women exhibit resilience and strength within these systems. Morrison revisits the commonplace of illustrating her characters' lived experiences, revealing how women strive to resist and are transformed by oppressive systems. As a collection of narratives, her work serves as a testament to the power of storytelling as a means of

reclaiming agency and interrupting dominant narratives that seek to erase or silence the voices of those who have traditionally been excluded.

It's the way Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) *Decolonises The Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* explores how language combats cultural erasure. What Ngũgĩ advocates for in the preservation of indigenous languages is the use of storytelling as a form of cultural defiance (p. 15). He intertwines his work with the significance of language as a tool of resistance, emphasising the survival of artistic traditions and identities as central to his contributions to the decolonisation process. Through the return to the country, indigenous languages and their connections to storytelling traditions, Ngũgĩ reinscribes indigenous understandings of power. The project, in turn, ignites a broader conversation about how language shapes identity, culture, and resistance, as well as the role literature plays in that context, emphasising its potential to serve as a vehicle for empowerment and liberation.

They are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's narratives of personal and political experience that illuminate a path for women's resilience through strife and disorder, including her *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). Not only does Olanna help illustrate the many ways women resist systemic oppression, but she also exposes the corrupt motivations of the colonisers. Her work explores how women navigate their lives in postcolonial contexts, highlighting the agency and strength they demonstrate while confronting intersecting systems of power. Adichie's tales explore love, loss, and survival, highlighting how women either endorse or reconfigure male dominance and industrialisation. Her work enhances our understanding of gender, race, and culture by centring women's voices and experiences within postcolonial literature.

The central aspect of postcolonial feminist literature is the reclamation of indigenous storytelling traditions. In the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Alice Walker, the authors intertwine oral histories with contemporary narratives to challenge the efforts of the colonising regime to erase memory and history. Instead, these authors utilise cultural traditions to create narratives that celebrate the resilience and creativity of women operating within systems of power (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2013, p. 71). These works incorporate elements of oral history, myth, and folklore, providing a counter-narrative to dominant discourses that have often excluded or misrepresented women's stories. This fusion of traditional and contemporary storytelling practices

serves as a powerful tool for resistance, offering new perspectives on and representations of women's experiences in postcolonial contexts.

In postcolonial feminist literature, the body and labour of women are challenged, as their commodification by colonial and patriarchal systems is often perpetuated. Authors critique these practices to illustrate how women's bodies become sites of battles for cultural, political, and economic struggle. In contrast, these narratives assert that agency must be reclaimed and resisted against systemic exploitation. Postcolonial feminist writers can convey their experiences and create a platform for marginalised voices in the pursuit of social justice and equity. The strong emphasis on resistance and empowerment illustrates the remarkable potential of literature to combat oppression and inspire transformative change.

Postcolonial feminist literature serves as a form of resistance against the colonial and patriarchal systems that have sustained oppression by amplifying marginalised voices. Through storytelling, these works critique systemic injustice, celebrate resilience and agency, and propose new ways of imagining and representing women's experiences. The ongoing inspiration and transformation of our understanding of gender, race, and culture in the struggle for liberation arising from this literary tradition is rooted in placing women's voices at the centre of postcolonial contexts.

Canonical literature faces feminist critique; patriarchal norms have typically defined the boundaries of conventional canonical literature, often at the expense of marginalising or distorting women's voices. Feminist approaches to these texts necessitate interrogation based on inherent biases and reinterpretation in ways that challenge traditional narratives. Elaine Showalter's analysis highlights how women writers were denied inclusion in the literary canon and how it continued to perpetuate gender inequality in literature (Showalter, 1977, p. 10).

Moreover, this perpetuated not only a literary tradition favouring male voices but also helped to marginalise women's voices and sustain a social attitude regarding gender roles. Feminist critiques seek to reclaim these lost voices and challenge the patriarchal structure of the literary establishment. Jean Rhys's reworking of Charlotte Brontë represents one of the most influential feminist responses to canonical literature. This grants Rhys a voice for Bertha Mason, a character rendered human by Brontë's

original narrative. Rhys critiques the colonial and patriarchal underpinnings of the original text by portraying Bertha as a complex individual (Rhys, 1966, p. 76). In reimagining Brontë's work, this reinterpretation explores more deeply, giving us a new view of her writing and the broader issues of race, gender, and colonialism that run through canonical literature. Rhys uses her narrative to highlight the power of feminist critique as a tool for exposing and challenging the hidden systems of social and systemic inequalities ingrained in literary traditions.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain how female characters in Victorian literature were typically confined to the binary of female roles: to embody the angelic heroine or to take on the role of the monstrous antagonist. Their reaffirmations highlight the power of these stereotypes in perpetuating restrictive gender norms (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020, p. 45). Feminist critics examine these tropes and illustrate how literature has traditionally restricted what can be achieved for women, constraining their identities and upholding patriarchal ideologies. This critique, however, extends beyond Victorian literature and highlights how these dichotomous scripts continue to shape the contours of modern narratives. Gilbert and Gubar's endeavour to liberate women from these confining roles aims to foster richer, more authentic representations of women.

Feminist critique also includes narratives characterised by male dominance that omit the female perspective. For instance, Chinua Achebe's work explores male experiences within Igbo society. Although feminist readings of the text may highlight the stoic yet implicit struggles of female characters, such as Ekwefi, who find ways to resist societal constraints in small but significant ways (Achebe), feminist critics reveal overlooked narratives that challenge the assumption that canonical literature is inherently gender-neutral. Rather than concentrating on themes and characters within these texts, they illustrate how these works often reinforce patriarchal values, thereby necessitating a reassessment of the themes and characters from a feminist perspective.

Virginia Woolf's examination of systemic barriers focuses on a society that hinders women from engaging in literature. Woolf's criticism of the structural inequalities faced by female writers, who discuss the prerequisites for the practice of economic independence and personal space (Woolf, 1929, p. 21), underscores her exploration of these elements as essential for creativity. She argues that the

romanticised portrayal of artistic genius is misleading, and it is vital to consider the conditions that enable or obstruct literary production. Woolf's work is particularly significant as an advocate for the social and economic empowerment of women, as she elucidates the ways in which writing interacts with the broader issue of gender relations. Her (Woolf) insights continue to be a relevant subject for contemporary feminist critiques, fostering extensive discussion on the barriers to feminism in the literary world and beyond.

Feminist critiques rooted in postcolonial theory also question the representation of women in colonial narratives. In her essay, Gayatri Spivak criticises Western literature's construction of colonised women and proclaims that, typically, Western literature presents colonised women as silent victims of imperialism (Spivak, 1994, p. 267). This critique reveals how canonical texts have often obscured or distorted the experiences of women in colonised societies. Postcolonial feminist critiques of the dominance of Western frameworks in literary analysis centre on the voices of these women. Spivak's work emphasises the necessity of creating space for such authentic representations of the complexities of women's lives in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Feminist literary criticism is an essential way of reclaiming women's stories. Writers like Toni Morrison and Arundhati Roy challenge traditional literature by incorporating the experiences of marginalised women into the mainstream. For example, Morrison's work reclaims the history of enslaved women with depth and complexity. Morrison's voice for these silenced views challenges the dominant narratives that have suppressed or misrepresented women. One aspect that her work demonstrates so effectively is the transformative potential of feminist critique — the effort to establish a more diverse and equitable literary tradition.

Feminist reinterpretations often emphasise the overlooked recognition of women's agency in historical narratives. They resemble the works of Hilary Mantel and Margaret Atwood, which critique patriarchal systems and explore the complexities of female resistance (Mantel 2012; Atwood, 1985). Through these narratives, we learn to emphasise the importance of recovering women's stories, not only to redress historical wrongs but also to envision new futures. By focusing on amplifying

women's voices, these reinterpretations deepen our understanding of power dynamics and resistance in literature as a whole.

Although feminist critiques of canonical literature develop, they remain feminist and consistently intersectional; that is, they consider race, class, and sexuality. With the help of Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework, literature can be analysed from the perspective of how the multiple axes of identity converge to shape women's experiences in literature (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). This intersectional approach enriches feminist literary criticism by acknowledging the myriad interconnected factors influencing women's lives. By addressing these complexities, feminist critiques can more effectively capture how literature reflects and shapes attitudes toward gender and identity.

Ultimately, employing feminist critique on canonical literature serves as a vital tool for aligning these ideologies with those of marginalisation. Feminist scholars reinterpret the literary past by re-examining traditional texts, resulting in a more just and resilient canon. Their analyses reveal systemic inequalities in literature while advocating for a tradition that reflects the diverse and evolving experiences of women. By continuing the process of critique and reclaiming the literary landscape, these works aim to reinvigorate the literary space alongside this generation of readers and writers.

Feminist rewriting of history aims to question the historical narratives that have mischaracterised or minimised women's experiences. Authors and scholars seek to re-evaluate historical events from a feminist perspective, bringing women's voices, agency, and contributions back to the forefront. To accomplish this, postcolonial feminist theory is crucial, illuminating the ways in which colonialism and patriarchy have shaped historical discourses (Spivak, 1994, p. 287). This analysis questions the historical structural biases present in existing accounts and advocates for the inclusion of perspectives that have been historically silenced or neglected. Feminist rewriting centres on women's stories as the starting point for a more comprehensive understanding of history, revealing the complexities of human experiences.

Toni Morrison is a significant feminist voice. The novel reclaims the history of enslaved women, presenting their struggles and resilience with nuance and depth. In Morrison's depiction of Sethe in *Beloved* (1987), she challenges the dehumanising

historiography constructed from the legacy of colonial and patriarchal histories (Morrison). Morrison's work gives voice to women who have been excluded from historical accounts and silenced, highlighting how storytelling power can reshape these narratives. Her stories offer a unique yet collectively ethical and politically active way of addressing the personal and collective aspects of resistance, emphasising the agency and resilience of women enduring systemic oppression.

Jean Rhys's reinterpretation of Charlotte Brontë's story revisits the past by reworking the colonial and patriarchal aspects of the original narrative. Bertha Mason is marginalised in Brontë's account, but Rhys gives her a voice, transforming her into a complex and sympathetic woman. This revision emphasises the omission of women's perspectives in historical and literary accounts, an issue that needed addressing (Rhys, 1966, p. 76). Through the narratives she critiques, the work underscores the intersections of colonialism and patriarchy, illustrating how these contexts restrict women's lives in insurmountable ways. Her work serves as a powerful example of how feminist rewriting can challenge normative narratives and amplify the voices that exist in the margins.

Traditional histories display Eurocentric biases, and feminist historians and writers also challenge these perspectives. In her analysis, Leila Ahmed (1992) revisits the role of women in Islamic societies and demystifies Orientalist stereotypes about women within a historical and cultural context (104). Ahmed's work enables the analysis of the assumptions and biases that have shaped Western views of the history of various subjects, aiming to enrich the narrative of history with a more inclusive and equitable perspective. Nevertheless, her analysis emphasises the cultural specificity and diversity of women's experiences, deeming them to be less amenable to generalisation than the prevailing historical narratives might suggest.

Their speculative narratives are crafted to depict a patriarchal dystopian society controlled by men. Atwood's fictional texts, however, also draw upon historical examples of women's oppression, using them to argue that feminist understandings of the effects of systemic inequality can shed light on the pathologies of contemporary oppression. With her unique brand of feminism, Atwood reimagines historical events and trends to demonstrate that historical analysis remains invaluable for contemporary understanding of social and political dynamics. Her stories remind us of the

consequences of unchecked patriarchal systems if they are not kept in check through vigilance and resistance against oppressive structures.

Indigenous storytelling traditions are often incorporated into national literature, especially by postcolonial feminist authors who combine oral history with contemporary narratives. This approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also challenges the dominance of Western historical frameworks. Indigenous languages and storytelling play a vital role in reclaiming history from colonial narratives (Ngũgĩ et al, 1986, p. 108). These works begin to centre indigenous perspectives and offer a counter-narrative to the Eurocentric histories to which they are intricately connected, yet often have so little voice. Reclaiming storytelling traditions serves as a powerful tool for resisting cultural erasure and affirming the value of a diverse range of understandings regarding the history in which we find ourselves.

Feminist rewriting also occurs in the rethinking of historical figures. Reframing them is evident in works such as Hilary Mantel's, which highlight the stories of women obscured by their male counterparts in traditional histories (*Bring Up The Bodies*, Mantel's 2012 historical novel is a good example). These narratives emphasise the contributions and agency of the individuals from whom these patriarchal interpretations of history are derived (Mantel, 2012). In this approach, history is challenged to resist the tendency of traditional narratives to privilege male experiences while devaluing and trivialising the roles of women. Feminist rewriting embraces the stories of historical women, reclaiming their contributions to the social, cultural, and political developments of humankind.

Intersectionality is essential in feminist rewriting to illuminate the complexity of women's experiences. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality underlines the necessity of examining how race, class, and gender shape individual and collective histories. To shape individual and collective histories, feminist writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie utilise these insights in their work on post-colonial societies (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245; Adichie), incorporating a multifaceted portrayal of women in these contexts. Intersectional feminist rewriting addresses the complex forces that influence women's lives, producing a more nuanced and enriched understanding of history. This approach highlights the necessity of considering the multiplicity of dimensions of identity in historical analysis and urges

Feminist rewriting subverts the linearity of traditional historiographies, whose narratives are closed and linear, by emphasising the continual and reciprocal aspects of oppression and resistance. These works centre women's stories in a way that allows for a more complete account of history, incorporating all kinds of perspectives and experiences (Spivak, 1994, p. 287). The argument of this approach is critical to the hierarchical and exclusionary frameworks that have largely structured historical analysis and suggests a more plural and fluid view of the past. Feminist rewriting highlights the linkages between historical events and experiences, as well as the relationship between social change and resistance.

Feminist rewriting of history signifies a structural change that aims to dismantle traditional historical discourse in order to reclaim the agency and voice of women. Feminist writers and scholars challenge the segregation of the past by narrating history through a more inclusive and equitable perspective, emphasising marginalised experiences. This process not only critiques the biases and omissions of conventional histories but also presents a narrative that recognises and values all contributions and experiences. Feminist writers and scholars continue to inspire new ways of thinking about the past and its relevance to the present and future through their work.

1.5. Intersectionality in Postcolonial Feminism

For postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, refers to the multiple forms of oppression and how they combine to impact women's lives. This idea is particularly pertinent in postcolonial contexts, where race, class, gender, and a colonial history intertwine to create specific obstacles faced by marginalised women (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). The advantage of intersectionality lies in its ability to provide a more sophisticated understanding of the interplay of forces that shape postcolonial societies, as well as oppression and resistance, in a more complex manner. We propose to challenge the oversimplification that the lived experiences of women are monolithic by insisting that feminist analysis must consider the multiplicity of women's identities and contexts. From this perspective, postcolonial feminism opens up a new line of sight on the ways in which systemic inequalities are reinforced and resisted across socio-cultural landscapes.

Thus, the literature of postcolonial feminism often portrays the difficulties of intersectionality. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's work, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), clearly addresses how gender, ethnicity, and class are implicated in the Nigerian-Biafran War. Olanna and Kainene are characters who, like racism, demonstrate that oppression has many faces and many bodies (Adichie). Through Adichie's narrative, she portrays the intersection of challenges faced by women to showcase how systemic inequalities occur at both individual and collective levels. Her work serves as an excellent example of how literature can be a powerful platform for contemplating the interconnected forces that shape and are shaping women's lives in postcolonial contexts, with a nuanced treatment of the dynamics of power and resistance.

As with most works by Tsitsi Dangarembga, the role of intersectionality in postcolonial feminism is further emphasised. Like in any other novel, Dangarembga uses her protagonist, Tambu, to highlight the complexities of colonial education, explore the role of gender, and demonstrate how systemic inequalities impact women differently according to their specific social and cultural situations (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 67). Through Tambu's experiences, Dangarembga's narrative questions the patriarchal and colonial structures that significantly limit women's access to opportunities, while also showcasing her agency and resilience. In doing so, her work transcends a superficial analysis of these women and urges us to recognise the intersections of identity when examining their experiences.

The intersectionality also allows one to analyse how women's bodies are represented in postcolonial literature. Susan Bordo's (1993) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* analysis critiques the ways cultural and historical forces inscribe meanings upon women's bodies, constructing their identities and social roles (p. 25). This analysis is particularly significant in texts that define women as both agents and victims of change. Postcolonial feminist literature examines how women's bodies serve as sites of cultural, political, and economic struggle, illustrating how systemic inequalities are embodied and resisted. From this perspective, reclaiming women's agency in narratives that have previously alienated or diminished them provides a lens to analyse stories that have appropriated or objectified women, aiming to create more inclusive and empowering representations of their experiences.

Intersectionality is important because it challenges the homogenisation of women's experiences and highlights how we should understand women within diverse identities. Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Judith Butler all critique the alienation of marginalised voices in colonial and feminist discourse, urging an expansion of postcolonial feminism to include these voices (Spivak, 1994, p. 287). Spivak's concern for centring women who have been silenced or ignored in the conventional narrative, alongside the call for a more intersectional and inclusive framework, has made this possible. Through the intersectional lens of race, gender, class, and colonial histories, her analysis offers a vital means to unpack the layers of how oppression and resistance operate across decades of post-colonial contexts.

Usually, postcolonial feminist authors employ intersectionality to examine the economic aspects of gendered oppression. For the female characters in Ammu in Arundhati Roy's work *The God of Small Things* (1997), a systematic intersection of caste, gender, and colonial history shapes the parameters within which their lives unfold (Roy). By examining the economic and social reasons behind the persistence of inequalities, as well as the resistance and agency of women facing these challenges, Roy's narrative aims to question such structures and highlight the ways women respond to them. She demonstrates how to address both the material and symbolic aspects of oppression in postcolonial feminist analysis and provides compelling insights into how systems of inequality are maintained and challenged.

Feminist critiques of canonical literature gain strength through intersectionality. Scholars explore how multiple axes of identity intersect to explain how traditional narratives reinforce systemic inequalities. Similar to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's analysis, which employs intersectional approaches to examine Victorian literature's portrayal of women (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020, p. 45). Here, it is important to note that from 1837 to 1901, the Victorian era was characterised by moral conservatism, strict gender roles, and a patriarchal literary canon as its main features. Women were often depicted either as angelic figures confined to the domestic sphere or as dangerous outcasts. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar illustrate how these literary tropes reinforced gender hierarchies and silenced women's voices. Their intersectional analysis shows how gender, class, and morality are interconnected in literature, marginalising female characters and limiting women writers. Feminist scholars, however, uncover the gendered and racialised dimensions through which

these narratives circulate, perpetuating patriarchal and colonial ideologies in texts. An intersectional approach to literary studies enhances traditional interpretations of literature's power and resistance dynamics by examining these dynamics more comprehensively, challenging conventional readings of the literary tradition.

Resistance movements in postcolonial contexts are analysed through an intersectional lens. As Fanon (p. 43) notes, however, feminist critiques of colonised gendered dynamics within anti-colonial struggles play a crucial role in Frantz Fanon's work *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004). A postcolonial feminist perspective clarifies the complexities involved in women's participation in resistance movements by examining how intersecting forms of oppression shape their involvement. It offers a view that challenges the usual narratives that have often minimised or ignored women's roles, favouring a broader understanding of resistance and freedom.

Today, intersectionality remains a crucial element of feminist analysis related to global inequalities. It offers a strong framework for exploring the lasting impacts of colonial legacies on women's lives and the progress in the pursuit of gender justice (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). By combining the interconnected aspects of identity and oppression, intersectionality enhances feminist analysis and advocacy, highlighting the importance of intersectional and inclusive approaches to understanding and tackling ongoing inequalities. This framework remains crucial for analysing women's experiences in postcolonial contexts, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of power, resistance, and transformation.

It is shown that postcolonial feminism depends on intersectionality to offer a detailed understanding of the interconnected oppressions faced by women in colonised societies. By incorporating diverse perspectives and elements into the system of inequalities, intersectionality improves our understanding of gender issues in postcolonial contexts, both in practice and in theory. In this way, the approach challenges dominant narratives and provides a re-examination of the interaction between identity, power, and social change.

However, in postcolonial contexts, language functions both as a tool of oppression and a site of resistance. Exploring the relationship between gender and language can be beneficial at national, regional, and broader macro levels concerning patriarchy and colonial situations. By engaging with language, postcolonial feminist

theorists have emphasised women's marginalisation and depicted language as both a powerful weapon and a means of reclaiming agency and identity (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 15). Postcolonial feminism analyses how linguistic practices reflect and perpetuate systemic inequalities while also serving as mediums for resistance and transformation.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's writing addresses the issues of linguistic imperialism, asserting that it both erases and distorts indigenous identities and histories. Naturally, patriarchal norms that limit women's access to education and public discourse exacerbate this erasure of women. Ngũgĩ's call for decolonising languages through indigenous languages represents an urgent cause for women and culture (ibid, p. 25). Postcolonial feminist writers reclaim indigenous languages to challenge the dominance of colonial languages and to compose a counter-narrative that asserts cultural heritage and dignifies the voices of those who are otherwise marginalised. In Ngũgĩ's work, one observes the power of linguistic agency in resisting both colonial and patriarchal systems.

Language that appears to support gender hierarchies is often examined by feminist writers. Virginia Woolf's analysis considers how the male-dominated literary canon has contributed to the creation and perpetuation of a view of women. Woolf's claim that women need a space to express their own voices remains a significant issue in postcolonial feminist literature (Woolf, 1929, p. 21). Her insights challenge the linguistic constructions that undermine women, while also contributing to postcolonial feminist writers' efforts to dismantle traditional narratives and create space for diverse representations. Her work establishes a foundation for understanding the dual role of language as both constraining and liberating for women's voices in literature.

In many postcolonial societies, women have been excluded from the official histories and narratives. Historiography becomes the language used for rewriting these histories. Readers will discover Toni Morrison's work, which employs the rich, lyrical prose of writers of slave narratives to reclaim the stories of enslaved women and respond to the dehumanising language of colonial archives. Morrison's work demonstrates how language can serve as resistance and reclamation. Her narratives critique the systemic erasure of marginalised women's voices by highlighting their experiences in a celebration of their resilience and agency. Morrison's writing

exemplifies not only how language reshapes historical and cultural narratives but also how a story of transformation is, in itself, transformative.

Gayatri Spivak's essay questions the status of silenced voices: marginalised voices, the voices of women, and so on. Spivak's assessment of Western intellectual frameworks emphasises the need to create a more inclusive and intersubjective language and representation (Spivak, 1994, p. 287). The analysis by Spivak challenges the current limitations of dominant linguistic practices, aiming to criticise the use of language within systems of oppression. In her work, she emphasises the necessity of creating spaces for marginalised voices to be heard, doing so in a manner that offers a crucial framework for analysing language in post-colonial feminism.

Postcolonial feminists are concerned with another of feminists' preoccupations: the representation of women's bodies and experiences in language. Susan Bordo's analysis critiques cultural narratives that ascribe meaning to women's bodies and, in turn, perpetuate stereotypes while limiting agency (Bordo, 1993, p. 25). This analysis is particularly relevant in postcolonial texts that challenge these norms. Through a careful examination of how women's bodies are portrayed in literature, postcolonial feminist writers reveal the institutional foundations of these representations while reaffirming the narrative agency of their characters. Bordo's ideas inspire new ways of understanding the interactions between gender, language, and power.

Diasporic literature also plays a role in shaping gendered identities through language. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) examines how language and the immigrant family experience influence women's identities. Lahiri's female characters navigate linguistic and cultural barriers—elements that complicate gender in postcolonial contexts (p.3). Lahiri's narratives provide a poignant exploration of these struggles and triumphs, highlighting how language can serve as both a barrier and a bridge in the formation of identity. By emphasising the importance of linguistic diversity in capturing the multifaceted experiences of diasporic and postcolonial women, such works underscore this significance.

The code-switching and multilingualism in postcolonial feminist literature reflect the interplay between language and resistance. Some writers incorporate indigenised languages and dialects into their work, challenging colonising languages and academic dominance, including Adichie. As mentioned earlier, her novels *Half of*

a Yellow Sun (2006) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) utilise indigenised languages, particularly Igbo proverbs and expressions, to emphasise her cultural identity and confront the English colonial dominance of colonial English (Ross, 2019, p. 113). By weaving many of these languages into their narratives, these writers demonstrate that these linguistic traditions are valid and rich. It resists linguistic colonisation, celebrates cultural identities and histories written in these languages, and offers a sharp critique of colonial and patriarchal systems.

Language also becomes a way to imagine alternative futures. Margaret Atwood's speculative stories critique oppressive regimes' gendered use of language through fiction. In postcolonial and feminist narratives, as in Atwood's work, language functions as a double-edged weapon, serving both as a tool of control and a means of resistance. Atwood's work sparks new ways of thinking about linguistic resistance and how language can, through this resistance, imagine new methods of changing systemic inequalities. Her narratives highlight language both as a tool to shape social realities and as a means to envision new forms of empowerment and liberation.

Here, the researcher suggests that exploring how language and gender intersect in postcolonial contexts uncovers the various ways in which language can oppress and liberate. Reclaiming linguistic agency, postcolonial feminist writers oppose colonial and patriarchal narratives and advocate for alternative forms of representation and empowerment. By analysing their works, these writers highlight the significance of language as a force—a literary artefact that enables cultural identity to engage with resistance against systemic inequalities, thereby aiding the understanding of the mechanisms of power and resistance at work in postcolonial literature and theory.

As for women's stories in postcolonial literature, this representation allows for the analysis of gender, culture, and colonial history through a critical lens. Postcolonial feminist writers write against the erasure and marginalisation of women in traditional colonial narratives with nuanced portrayals that commence to explain how resiliency and agency coexist in women. Through centring women's voices, the narratives of these women critique the systematic practices of colonising and patriarchal systems, which these women had to navigate and resist. Beyond reclaiming these silenced histories, this approach also reimagines women's roles in shaping stories of cultural and historical development.

Toni Morrison's work is an exemplary effort in which she retakes the narratives of enslaved women. Morrison tunnelled forward through Sethe's character into the psychological and emotional price of slavery, and in narrating the harder portions of Black women's strength and resilience against systemic oppression. It challenges dehumanising colonial accounts, using women's (Morrison) lived experiences as the centre of focus. Morrison portrays Sethe's struggles and triumphs to provide a sense of the never-failing influence of colonial violence and the strength of a woman who can survive these traumas. We might think of her work as a striking exemplar of how literature brings the tensions of race, gender, and history into sharp focus.

Reimagined in Jean Rhys' retelling of Charlotte Brontë's narrative, the story of Bertha Mason, this silenced character in *Jane Eyre*, is given added humanity and an experience of the very oppressions that befell her. Rhys criticises colonial and patriarchal structures to point out stories of women disenfranchised by race and gender (Rhys, 1966, p. 76). Rhys reclaiming Bertha's voice, a narrative that counteracts the erasure of women's perspectives in colonial and historical stories, demonstrates how her character's experience interacts with her various oppressions. The inclusion of this entire narrative shift proves that feminist postcolonial literature's power to rewrite dominant history and reveal the untold stories of silenced voices is significant.

Women are often depicted in postcolonial literature as victims and as activists for change. Tsitsi Dangarembga's work examines the struggles of Tambu, a young girl caught between gender roles and colonial education. The novel highlights women's agency in resisting systemic inequalities while also illustrating how they are constrained by these very inequalities (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 67). The choice of a story about Tambu's journey, depicting women's powerlessness in the face of colonialist and patriarchal systems, and women's capacity to resist and rise above, challenges us to think. However, her work demonstrates how women's experiences can act as a central framework for stories that challenge systemic inequalities.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's narrative of personal and political themes explores the roles women played in the Nigerian Biafran War. Olanna and Kainene are characters navigating the chaos of war, gender, and ethnicity, highlighting the many ways women experience the world after colonisation (Adichie, 2006, p. 188).

Adichie's work allows us to explore the many intersecting forces that shape these characters' lives, and how those instilled by colonial oppressions become evident in both collective and individual experiences. Her narratives celebrate the resilience and agency of women who navigate these challenges; they also offer a nuanced critique of the power and resistance dynamics in postcolonial settings.

Arundhati Roy's work examines caste, gender, and the colonial past through Ammu Roy's critiques of patriarchal norms, societal expectations, and women's struggles and resilience in postcolonial India (Roy, 1997, p. 43). By focusing on Ammu's experiences, Roy highlights how interconnected systems of oppression are embedded in women's lives and celebrates their capacity to resist and effect change. Her work underscores how to address the intersections of identity and oppression in postcolonial feminist literature.

Indigenous storytelling traditions are used in post-colonial literature to elevate women's voices. Oral histories and cultural narratives play an important role in what some writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o write about—writers who celebrate women's work in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge. In challenge to the erasure of women's contributions in colonial histories (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 25). Postcolonial feminist writers reclaim these storytelling traditions to emphasise women's efforts in constructing cultural identities and challenging colonial erasure. This narrative practice highlights the resilience and ingenuity of women who navigate and confront structural vulnerabilities.

Speculative fiction by Margaret Atwood seeks to engage the minds of the patriarchy through its critiques of gendered oppression in patriarchal societies. Atwood's dystopian narrative, set in the future, is rooted in historical and cultural antecedents that render feminist critiques persist both historically and culturally within a postcolonial framework. By examining the dynamics of power and resistance in her narratives, she underscores how language and storytelling can be utilised to both oppress and liberate. Her work illustrates the importance of envisioning alternative futures that dismantle systems of inequality and celebrate the strength of the marginalised.

In postcolonial feminist literature, the figure of the woman, the body, and sexuality are also examined. Susan Bordo's analysis provides a critical framework for

understanding the cultural ways in which narratives imprint meanings on women's bodies (Bordo, 1993, p. 25). The use of this lens is highly valuable, particularly in postcolonial texts that challenge stereotypes and reclaim women's autonomy. Through this critique of women's body representations in literature, postcolonial feminist writers expose and dismantle the processes that shape these portrayals while primarily reclaiming the narrative agency of their characters. Bordo's ideas offer readers new perspectives on gender, culture, and representation.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of how women are represented in postcolonial literature as a rich and detailed exploration of the interactions between gender, culture, and history. By placing women's voices and experiences at the centre, these works rightly challenge colonial and patriarchal narratives to reshape the past—not define it—and encourage a more diverse and equitable future. Through their stories of power and resistance, postcolonial feminist writers both acknowledge and contest the ways in which history and social change intertwine to forge identity.

Postcolonial literature centres on themes of women's agency and resistance, providing a counter-narrative to the depiction of women as mere victims of colonial and patriarchal oppression. Postcolonial feminist writers draw on the strength and agency of women who navigate multiple sites of power and identity to assert their distance from Western colonial authority (Spivak, 1994, p. 287). Through these narratives, women gain the space to challenge prevailing images of women as passive subjects, celebrate the various ways they resist systemic inequalities, and articulate their experiences of adversity.

Sethe in Toni Morrison's work exemplifies this theme as she takes radical action to protect her children from the horrors of slavery. Morrison's portrayal of *Sethe's* story highlights the agency among enslaved women and underscores their capacity to resist predetermined dehumanisation in the face of significant odds. Morrison represents, on one hand, *Sethe's* defiance and resilience and, on the other, women's ability to navigate and resist the forms of systemic violence inherent in slavery. Ultimately, her work illuminates the various layers of women's resistance, both in its personal and public manifestations.

According to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's narrative, female characters such as Olanna and Kainene are portrayed as active participants in the Nigerian Biafran

War. It is precisely their choices regarding their lives, both personal and political, that illustrate their agency within these crises (Adichie, 2006, p. 352). Adichie centres the experiences of these women, urging that they not be marginalised and that traditional narratives, which have historically excluded women from the political and historical context, be re-examined. Through her work, she interrogates the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and class to understand women's resistance while providing a nuanced perspective on the dynamics of power and agency in postcolonial contexts. Ammu, the character against whom Arundhati Roy writes, offers further exploration of the theme of resistance. Roy lauds women's courage and defiance while criticising the cultural and systemic constraints placed upon women. This allows Roy to present Ammu's struggle and resistance to demonstrate the ways in which women buck and violate oppressive norms, asserting themselves through functioning systems. Her story highlights both individual and collective resistance to changing oppressive social structures.

Postcolonial literature also demonstrates resistance by retracing cultural policies and reclaiming indigenous identities. Women characters in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work resist economic exploitation, preserve traditional knowledge, and engage in acts of defiance at the intersection of gender and anti-colonial struggle (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 43). Focusing on these acts of cultural and economic resistance, Ngũgĩ's narratives highlight women's agency in opposing colonial and patriarchal hierarchies. Through his work, he advocates for the significance of cultural preservation as a form of resistance, while celebrating the strength and creativity of women who confront and resist systemic inequalities.

A repetitive theme in postcolonial feminist literature is the use of storytelling as a form of resistance. Jean Rhys's reworking of Charlotte Brontë's story gives Bertha Mason a voice and a role that were not afforded to her in the original text. The act of rewriting is a powerful gesture that undermines the narratives which dominate (Rhys, 1966, p. 76). By centring Bertha's perspective, Rhys silences the intersecting oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy, crafting a counter narrative that affirms her humanity and agency. Her work exemplifies the power of storytelling to recover silenced voices and challenge systemic inequalities.

Resistance in feminist postcolonial literature is often collective. Female characters in the works of Tsitsi Dangarembga support one another in resisting both colonial and patriarchal systems, highlighting the vital role that solidarity plays in resistance movements (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 67). Dangarembga's narratives celebrate solidarity and community, highlighting their ability to challenge systemic inequalities through collective efforts and illustrating how women resist oppression. She demonstrates that social transformation is a collective action, and her work presents a vision of resistance that is both communal and personal.

Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction illustrates how women come together in a dystopian society where their rights are deliberately stripped away. The women in Atwood's novel accomplish this through subversive acts and covert alliances, even amidst oppressive regimes. Through a fictional lens, Atwood examines the mechanisms of resistance and the ways women manoeuvre and contest systemic inequality. Her work is grounded in the concepts of agency and solidarity in resisting oppressive systems while critiquing patriarchal power and speculating on the possibilities of empowerment and change.

Resistance, as depicted in postcolonial literature, is intersectional. Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality provides a way to understand how women's resistance is shaped by the intersection of race, class, and gender. The works of Alice Walker illustrate how Black women make multiple attempts to negotiate and survive in postcolonial spaces (Walker, 1982; Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). In doing so, these narratives address not the easy proxy of "blackness" to explicate the workings of power and resistance in the postcolonial context, but the intersecting dimensions of identity and oppression. The study of women's agency is enriched by intersectionality, which illuminates the multiple ways in which they navigate and resist various forms of systemic inequality. The dominant victimhood claims seen in postcolonial literature are countered by women's agency and resistance, celebrating women's strength and resilience. By defying and aligning with these works, authors express a powerful critique of systemic oppression and envision possibilities for empowerment. The unique contribution of postcolonial feminist literature to common conceptions of power relations, resistance, and transformation stems from its framing and centring of women's voices and experiences.

Incorporating Spivak's perspective, her work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* presents a critical view of the silencing of marginalised groups, particularly women, in both colonial and postcolonial narratives. According to Spivak (1994), oppressed subalterns are largely spoken for rather than speaking for themselves, as the power structures dominate them. Even in postcolonial feminism, women in colonised societies are oppressed by colonial powers, while an indigenous patriarchal system exists concurrently (pp. 306-307). Western intellectuals who engage with subaltern experiences without incorporating the voices of the subaltern are criticised by Spivak. She also discusses how women's agency is often erased in colonial and nationalist discourses, with women being designated as passive figures rather than as agents in resistance movements. Hence, she demonstrates the interconnectedness of gender, class, and colonial histories, which makes her analysis fundamental for understanding postcolonialism feminist narratives.

Spivak shares the idea of double colonisation (Spivak, 1999, p. 288) in the sense that women are doubly oppressed: first, through colonial domination and second, through patriarchal domination. By critiquing how both colonial rulers and indigenous patriarchy collaboratively silence women's voices, relegating them to the margins of both public and private spheres, she illustrates how the Palestinian woman continues to defy both the colonising gendarmerie and the patriarchy of the indigenous. By conceptualising epistemic violence, which refers to the ways in which dominant knowledge systems muffle or devalue one's own voice, there arises a need to return to women's narratives within postcolonial discourse. This continues to silence women, excluding them from mainstream historical accounts as well as nationalist movements, further entrenching the system that refuses to grant them their rightful representation.

Furthermore, Spivak also presents the vision of the subaltern woman, who is the most marginalised in the context of a colonial and patriarchal framework. While male subalterns, who might otherwise have few outlets for resistance, face significant barriers, subaltern women are further denied even this limited access, rendering their voices almost completely untraceable, except through careful feminist and postcolonial intervention. For Spivak, in many instances, the subaltern woman does not speak; she is not afforded the opportunity to express herself as she is represented by elites, colonial powers, or male figures within her society. This is particularly relevant to postcolonial feminism because, in light of women's erasure from movements of

struggle and self-liberation, it compels scholars to scrutinise the language of emancipation after seeking emancipation.

Spivak's critique suggests that genuine feminist scholarship must transcend Western paradigms and should address the lived experiences of women in postcolonial societies, where patriarchy is not the sole form of the dominant mode of oppression. As feminists, scholars and activists should also adopt a reflexive approach that acknowledges our positionality, aiming to amplify the voices of marginalised women rather than reflecting how our actions mimic progressive masculinities. While this is highly relevant to postcolonial literature, critiques of nationalist narratives and the colonisation of the colony must focus on women's resistance, agency, and struggles specific to their subjection under patriarchal oppression.

Solidarity unites women. Historically, women's resistance against colonial and patriarchal oppression has been fragmented by cultural, economic, and regional differences. However, solidarity among women from various socio-political contexts is essential for driving remarkable change. As suggested by Mohanty (2003), feminist solidarity would be a transnational alliance that respects cultural differences while fostering the realisation of shared feminist goals. Here, solidarity is not merely an ideological concept but a practical tool for addressing systemic inequalities that extend across national and regional boundaries (224).

Solidarity in postcolonial societies thus becomes a means of empowering women to collectively oppose systemic inequalities. Feminist movements within the Global South have demonstrated through collective action that tangible results, such as legislative reform, access to education, and the dismantling of norms, can be achieved (Ruppert et al., 2020, pp. 329-332). The Chipko Movement in India, an example of women-led initiative and eco-feminist activism, protested against deforestation as a unified cause. In contrast, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, also women-led and a paradigm of united struggle, demanded justice for their disappeared children. Furthermore, literature serves as a vital medium for fostering feminist solidarity. The works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Toni Morrison exemplify women's sovereignty in the face of systemic oppression through intersectional feminism. By bridging geographical and cultural divides, women from diverse backgrounds can recognise shared struggles and unite to advocate for change.

For example, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* highlights the strength of women by depicting their resilience during the Nigerian Civil War, whereas Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* examines gender oppression alongside colonial education. Together, these literary works serve as historical records and calls to action, ensuring that women's voices are not erased from history.

Women's collectives play a crucial role in transforming the political landscape. The non-governmental organisation known as the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, under the leadership of Wangari Maathai, exemplifies an initiative that intertwines gender justice with environmental activism. By planting trees and restoring ecosystems through the mobilisation of rural women, the movement tackles environmental degradation and simultaneously involves women both economically and politically. This example illustrates the significant social change that can be achieved through solidarity between environmental and feminist groups.

In addition to grassroots activism, solidarity in policymaking has made significant strides in securing women's rights. CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) exemplifies how women's struggles can result in a binding legal framework to combat gender-based violence and discrimination. The role of digital activism is a crucial aspect of modern feminist movements and contributes to feminist solidarity. The #MeToo movement and the #TimesUp group, highlighted by hashtags, exemplify how social media serves as a contemporary method of feminist organising. By organising these movements, women from diverse backgrounds have been able to create a virtual world of solidarity in which they can share their experiences, support one another, and advocate for policy reforms. Digital activism demonstrates that it is no longer necessary for a person to be in the same location to express solidarity; instead, it is facilitated online through a digitally enabled aspect of the world.

Effective feminist solidarity remains centred around intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw's work was vital in illustrating that solidarity must encompass those who experience overlapping oppressions due to race, class, gender, and sexuality. Although women's struggles are not monolithic, they are deeply interconnected, and Black feminist thought, Indigenous feminist movements, and queer feminist activism express a persistent suspicion of liberalism. Therefore, solidarity should be inclusive and

adaptable to address the varying issues faced by different communities. Cross-cultural exchange and education are vital components in fostering solidarity. Women from diverse regions unite in feminist study programmes and engage in various international women's conferences, such as those organised by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), where strategies, insights, and success stories are shared. Our interactions deepen our understanding and unite us in the struggle against systemic inequalities.

Lastly, the act of uniting women's efforts in solidarity, activism, and literature reinforces the fact that feminist movements must remain inclusive, robust, and not co-opted by dominant ideologies as they have been in the past. Postcolonial feminism transforms society from inequality to equity and justice by centring the voices of historically marginalised women. However, to truly embody solidarity means not to erase differences but to harness them as a source of strength in building a more inclusive feminist movement.

2. WOMEN'S SUFFERINGS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF PATRIARCHY AND COLONIALISM

‘‘Revolution is a serious thing... When one commits oneself to the struggle, it must be for a lifetime’’

(Davis, 2022, p. 110)

‘‘We have accumulated a wealth of historical experience which confirms our belief that the scales of American justice are out of balance.’’

(Davis, 1971).

Since ancient times, most women have faced oppression, which is deeply intertwined with historical, cultural, and social structures. The roots of female oppression stem from the establishment of patriarchal systems and the cultural norms predicated on gender inequalities. These early societal structures and belief systems established the groundwork for the systemic subordination of women, a struggle we have been confronting for centuries. The oppression of women began in the early periods of ancient civilisations and has persisted through various historical eras, impacting numerous societies and cultures. This suggests that female oppression results from a complex interplay of factors, including economic issues, political influences, cultural traits, and religious dimensions, among others, despite advancements in many areas worldwide today. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend its origins to identify the ongoing struggles women endure against oppression.

In any society or era, women have acted as rebels, fighting against dual oppressions: colonial oppression and social domination. Furthermore, they have confronted various forms of layered oppression arising from social norms, communal structures, or the effects of colonisation. Resistance by women against male domination, along with various forms of activism and calls for equity and justice, highlights some of the struggles faced by women. True to their history, they have endured a long battle, and their successes serve as evidence of this struggle in the pursuit of a more equitable life and justice in the world. Women continually confront a struggle for liberation and independence across many societies, where barriers impede their autonomy and opportunities in life. As a result, they advocate for equal rights in

education, political representation, and the right to work, empowering them to contribute positively to society.

The struggle was further complicated by colonisation, which entailed the imposition of foreign systems of domination, alongside new cultures and values upon the colonised peoples. However, in contemporary America, Black female bodies are still mistreated and endure exceedingly high rates of sexual exploitation, which are seen as one of the fundamental acts of colonialism. In colonised societies, women often fought on multiple fronts, as they were frequently marginalised within their institutions and also faced the discriminatory policies and cultural impositions of the colonisers. The oppressions at this intersection presented various challenges for women seeking freedom and autonomy. Consequently, they faced the gender prejudice that existed within their communities, and women battled against colonisation, an ongoing struggle that continues to evolve as communities progress and individuals strive for equality.

Despite these challenges, women continue to confront and resist colonisation, thereby asserting their rights. Among these roles is their leadership in protests and resistance movements, where they strive to reclaim their independence and cultural identity against the encroachments of colonisation. Even today, women are working to achieve equality worldwide. Women have been deprived of their rights throughout various periods in different regions and in numerous forms. Among these are women who were subjected to slavery through the transatlantic slave trade, particularly from Africa to the Americas – a trade that entailed unimaginable horrors, including the loss of freedom, family, cultural connections, and identity. Labour exploitation, sexual violence, human trafficking, and modern slavery have also been inflicted upon women (Flood, 2018, p. 14).

2.1. Endless Women's Efforts Across The Globe, Challenging Oppressive Systems

Women across different regions of the world actively campaign for equal rights, reproductive freedom, gender equality protections, and against violence and discrimination. In the early 20th century, women emerged as leaders who passionately

fought for their rights on both domestic and international fronts. Notably, during the 20th century, the United States experienced a fierce struggle by women to secure voting rights. Coloured American freedom activist Ella J. Baker dedicated over fifty years to human rights causes in America, from 1903 to 1986 (Mueller, 2004, pp. 79-90).

Such movements in India have a long history of advocating for women's right to vote, reforming social systems, and ensuring women's security. The Indian female activist Savitribai Phule (born January 3, 1831) became renowned for her fight for women's rights before her passing on March 10, 1897. Throughout her life, from 1897 to March 1897, Savitribai Phule dedicated herself to fighting for women's education and rights. The Indian historian Savitribai Phule served as the first female teaching instructor while maintaining her identity as a poet and social reformer. Through her actions, she challenged discrimination (Raj, 2018, p. 1).

The citizens of Saudi Arabia have been actively advocating for driving rights and comprehensive social freedoms for several years. Women in South Africa played a vital role in resisting apartheid laws. The anti-discriminatory fight against Pretoria's pass laws of 1956 has gained enduring recognition in South African history due to the significant role of Winnie Mandela (Healy-Clancy, 2018, pp.4-9). Women across various parts of the world continue to challenge a wide range of outdated social systems in their communities.

During the final years of the 18th century, people fled from slavery to return to their origins. In the late 18th century, Black American women who were immigrating escaped their conditions of slavery and racism by moving to Liberia, Canada, Mexico, and Sierra Leone. Statistical information and accounts regarding female immigrants appeared in newspaper articles or congressional requests, although many former slaves returned to the United States with their stories (Wilson, 2019, pp. 379-394).

The official historical records framed the narrative of southern exceptionalism regarding slavery within specific boundaries to prevent it from influencing the dominant stories about freedom in America. Research by scholars tracing the roots of bondage now questions this established account, showing that between two and four million Native American slaves (including women and children) were sold in the Americas from the mid-15th century to the mid-19th century during colonial trade.

This has clarified how the slave trade operated and how colonists acquired native people through warfare or native traders, transporting them over long distances. North America became connected to a damaging global slave trade involving Africans and Native Americans until the 19th century. American society reflects a “slave country” due to its history (Snyder, 2013, pp. 23-27).

Most deported Africans were aged between 15 and 30 years, and many of them were married parents. Some women left as sisters and daughters, while others departed as mothers and wives, enduring the hardship of separation from husbands or children who stayed behind. The pain of family division, through separation from their homeland and the struggle to return, became so overwhelming that many Africans showed their silent distress through physical collapse and hysterical episodes. The surviving women from Europe who came to settle in the Americas brought about fundamental changes to the social, population, and cultural foundations of these new societies. The settlers pushed the wheel forward in the process of development. The women conveyed all the medical knowledge and agricultural information about plants, along with their skills in birth assistance and cultivation, as well as traditional dances, musical songs, mythologies, religious practices, cultural heritage, ancestral origins, and foundational principles.

The first Americans entered the world through their birthing process. Through oppression stemming from slavery and gender discrimination, the first generation of women passed down oppressive burdens across generations to their daughters and granddaughters. Physical abuse was used excessively against these women, rendering them more susceptible to violence without any means of retaliation. The treatment of enslaved women included public whippings accompanied by humiliation, just as men faced punishment (Diouf, 2015, n.p.). It became increasingly difficult to bear the injustices of slavery when examining the mistreatment of women specifically. During the slave trade, women suffered sexual abuse, faced rapes by sailors on ships, and experienced harassment and forced prostitution in the Americas that continues to affect women as a means of degradation to this day. Sexual abuse of women evolved into a tool that demoralised the entire subjugated community (Feinstein, 2018).

Women exhibited remarkable courage while enduring the discrimination directed at them as both African and female individuals in a hostile environment that

upheld racist and sexist beliefs within patriarchal systems. They found innovative ways to actively contribute while defending and educating other women and safeguarding their heritage. The fight for emancipation continued even after the slave trade ended, with African men and women engaging together. Nevertheless, over 200 million people in the Atlantic world face significant obstacles due to racism, marginalisation, poverty, and segregation. The population requires immediate action to address these issues.

Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, African American women faced discrimination due to their gender, encountering oppression both within their ethnic community and in the broader society. The feminist movement from the 1960s to the 1970s centred on gender equality but largely excluded Black women, as its discussions primarily overlooked their unique experience of discrimination during that time. The situation demands significant effort and a proactive approach in promoting strong female characters. This concept dates back to bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw, whose contributions to Black feminism have consistently highlighted a challenge within feminism. However, their influential works help to recognise it from a race and gender perspective due to its oppressive intersectional nature. Their participation, in addition to contributing to Black feminist literature, also enriches this scholarship and therefore helps pave the way for future generations online (Desai, 2009, pp. 346-365).

Since her birthday is 25 September 1952 and she died on 15 December 2021, the prominent theorist known by her pen name bell hooks (real name Gloria J. Watkins) is renowned for her articles on subjects such as race, class, and women's liberation. In her writings, such as *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), she critiqued mainstream activist movements for their failure to address the experiences and struggles of Black women. She emphasised that feminism necessitated diversity, ensuring that the experiences of all women of colour would not be overlooked. The significance of the intersections of gender, race, and class, which all contribute to shaping Black women's experiences, was highlighted (del Guadalupe Davidson, 2017, p. 24).

The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (the leading American scholar and civil rights advocate born in the US on 5 May 1959) to describe the simultaneous forms of discrimination or the neglect of one aspect of identity while

acknowledging another. Essentially, she aims to clarify the social classifications and how they overlap, based on the idea that race, gender, and class contribute to the sustenance of systems of discrimination. She highlighted her ground-breaking work on the limitations of legal frameworks that have often failed to address the intersection of racism and sexism faced by Black women (Fenner, 2020, pp. 115 – 117).

Alongside other scholars, including Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and many others, they elucidated the intricacies of Black oppression, particularly for Black women, within a colonial and patriarchal context. They expanded feminist theory to include intersectionality, advocating for a more comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences of women, especially those at the junction of multiple marginalised identities. By doing so, they highlighted the complexities of oppression faced by Black women, offering critical perspectives on how various forms of discrimination impact their realities within colonial and patriarchal contexts. Although their work is considered outdated, it continues to influence feminist theory, activism, and social justice movements today, emphasising the need to recognise and address challenges unique to Black women within systems of power and oppression.

She was one of the key civil rights activists who played a significant role in the civil rights movement and became an influential figure in the black feminist movement. She is recognised as one of the esteemed writers who draw upon the powerful black female roots and the historical heritage of ‘strong black women’ by denying them power through self-sacrifice (Ikard, 2007, p. 91). Miltona Mirkin Cade, known as Toni Cade Bambara, was a multitalented filmmaker, editor, and writer. The Civil Rights and Black Nationalist movements of the 1960s reflect her high intellectual values, artistic principles, and ethical standards, which continue to guide many writers. The term “deep sight,” as used by Bambara, aptly describes her particular gift. Furthermore, her experiences as a contemporary novelist and educator significantly influenced her work, including *The Salt Eaters* (Schirack & Curtright, 2004, p. 27).

Toni Cade Bambara was born to Lindsley Baker Bambara and Marie Theresa Benta in Harlem, New York, on 25 March 1939. However, her full name was changed to ‘Toni Morris’ when she was six, and later she chose to adopt the surname ‘Bambara’ after discovering it among her great-grandmother’s belongings. After changing her surname in 1970, she had only one daughter, Karma. During her first ten

years in Harlem, the community shaped Bambara's writing and emphasised the power of her words in reforming society (Desai, 2009, n.p.). She actively participated in the diverse community around her, which reshaped her life. She adopted individuals to fulfil her need for relatives, particularly grandmothers. Her mother has become her greatest inspiration, also contributing to the development of her political identity (Bambara, 2021, p. 216).

As for Bambara's mother, she was an inspiring figure for her daughter, who dedicated a poignant letter to her in *The Salt Eaters*, from which she writes, "Mama, Helen Brent Henderson Cade Brehon, who in 1948, having come upon me laid out daydreaming in the middle of the kitchen floor, mopped around me" (Bambara, 1980, p.212). Bambara received her Bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts and English in 1959. She collected poems, short story collections (about black women's relations), and articles. She was awarded the John Golden Award for fiction for her first short story, 'Sweet Town'. After completing her master's degree, she began her teaching career at New York City College from 1965 to 1969. During that time, she was involved in community groups and various socio-political issues.

As a practice of humanism aimed at empowering and liberating women of colour, she utilised writing to expand and redirect the discourses surrounding Black individuals, thereby focusing the liberation struggles on fostering spiritual wholeness in various ways (Lewis, 2020, p.2). Additionally, Bambara was an international activist: travelling to Cuba in 1973, then on to the Federation of Cuban Women and Vietnam in 1975, as well as the Women's Union. Bambara was a creative individual who used personal experiences to political effect, symbolising the liberated woman. One of her works was a literary collection that she named *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, comprising a collection of the most famous writings by African American authors in the 1970s. Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and many other authors presented black women with an excellent opportunity to reflect on their experiences. She also produced and published numerous editions of her acclaimed short story collections entitled *Gorilla, My Love* in 1972 and *The Birds Are Still Alive* in 1977, where women not only survive but also inspire (Schirack, & Curtright, 2004, p.29).

Among her significant writing honours, published in 1980, was her first novel *The Salt Eaters* (winner of the American Book Award and the award of Langston

Hughes Society). In the realm of black women writers, Bambara utilised slavery as an inexhaustible site of memory to recover the long history of the past through master narratives, a means of reinterpretation of earlier times. Bambara's work resonates with her past experiences, stemming from her involvement in political action groups and her belief that society must take responsibility. All her work reflects her political activism during the 1960s and 1970s, as she investigates the consequences of the divisions within the African American community and its Civil Rights movement. Furthermore, she is one of the few female writers who utilise literary works to heal the self directly and the community broadly, addressing social ills.

Bambara portrays the characters of the community with a sense of humour and passion. She seeks to narrow any boundaries between the activist and society, the writer and the readers (Smith, 2006, p. 2). This is why her works are translated into several languages. She did not wish to give up her fight, neither in her personal life nor in her professional one, and even after being diagnosed with cancer, she persevered. Before she passed away, she continued to offer unwavering encouragement to aspiring writers in the South to utilise literature as an effective means for social revolution. Toni Cade Bambara died in 1995 from colon cancer in Philadelphia. However, her *Deep Sightings and Rescue Mission* (1996) was unlike Bambara's other books in that she neither arranged nor gathered its content before her death that year; therefore, it was published by Toni Morrison (Morrison, 1996, p.vii).

The Salt Eaters is a layered and complex novel that explores themes of spirituality, community, and the issues facing African American communities regarding the mental and physical well-being of individuals. Barbara Toni Cade wrote the novel during a complicated and transformative period in America's history; thus, it is a product of the context in which it was created. The novel, published in 1980, is set against a socio-political backdrop, as well as the intricate experiences of African communities during this era, specifically the Post-Civil Rights Movement Era. She is herself a product of her time, reflecting many events within her community while pursuing ways to foster healing and initiate some form of societal revolution. Bambara's novel aligns with the rapidly evolving Black feminist movement and focuses on the complex identity and liberation of Black women in both racial and gendered contexts.

In *The Salt Eaters*, Bambara undertakes a detailed exploration of various circumstances and issues within the story, using the modern setting of the 1980s as a backdrop to examine the aspirations and experiences of African Americans. Generally, the novel does not work to establish a specific historical period; instead, it addresses the social, political, and cultural situations that existed at the time to explore broader themes. It is a novel that reflects a period when people became interested in alternative approaches to healing and self-discovery; rituals, community, and spirituality became integral to coping with a challenging society. This narrative encompasses the complexities of African American communities in the late twentieth century. Although this narrative may not explicitly connect with colonial viewpoints or discuss colonialism in the traditional sense, it does address historical suppression and the descendants of slavery and systemic racism within the context of American history.

Bambara's focus is not explicitly on colonialism. However, her novel portrays the complex and varied experiences of a community already alienated and systematically oppressed in the post-World War II era. During this period, Black women—who were critically underrepresented and lacked significant political influence—had their voices marginalised or entirely excluded from key decision-making processes, thus preventing them from influencing policy changes in favour of their interests. The novel has gained a widespread reputation as an emotionally powerful literary work, distinguished by its beautiful writing and lyrical style. As she has stated, the writer aims to create a literary piece that demonstrates how the psychological, political, and spiritual forces in society can coexist in harmony. Simultaneously, the novel is recognised for its fragmented writing style, which abruptly shifts between characters with little explanation. Toni Cade Bambara's novel exemplifies the lived experiences and aspirations of Black women striving for empowerment in a society shaped by inequitable policies during that period (Gale, 2016, p. 11).

Following World War II, Black American women faced several psychological effects, partly due to social pressures, systemic racism, and the traumatic legacy of slavery. Moreover, ongoing exposure to racism and discrimination across various aspects of life also generated stress and a feeling of not belonging, which in turn added to the pressure of confronting these challenges. Beyond the factors such as a lack of mental healthcare and emotional effort, they were heavily influenced by their inability

to see mental health as a form of spiritual suffering. Perhaps some psychological and spiritual influences prompted Toni Cade Bambara to engage in healing the community, and these influences may have inspired her to explore community healing in her novel, *The Salt Eaters*.

From a post-colonial perspective, this novel can be examined through a post-colonial lens; however, it primarily emphasises the experiences and struggles of African American communities in the United States, rather than directly addressing colonialism in the traditional sense. However, the trauma of slavery and the historical racism faced by African American society can also be viewed indirectly in this novel, through hints from a post-colonial perspective that critiques the impact and legacy of colonialism (Gates & McKay, 2010, p. 98). The novel illustrates the characters recounting their experiences within the context of a post-colonial order. The concepts of oppression at crossings and border crossings are highlighted concerning post-colonialism. The narrative depicts the shared experiences of Black women, emphasising that discrimination based on both race and gender contributes to their suffering. The novel portrays their existence on the fringes of a so-called fair society, which is marked by inequalities and colonial legacies.

The postcolonial analysis is often based on how marginalised societies resist and reclaim their own cultures and identities. The novel examines the interconnected mechanics of areas such as community resilience, various alternative healing forms, and the significance of spirituality in the cultural practices that counter oppressive structures, as well as communal support. Although the novel focuses on African American experiences, post colonial perspectives critique of power structures and dominant narratives is still part of work as it centers on the stories of Black women and talk about their complex experience in an unfair society, dominated by oppression that endures the following generations. Specifically, *The Salt Eaters* does not mention colonialism in a global context; however, a post-colonial analysis may be suitable to highlight how the novel explores the aftereffects and power dynamics of historical injustices within African American societies. The post-colonial perspectives it presents offer insights into the complexities of identity and the pursuit of healing in a post-colonial society characterised by discrimination and inequality.

Critically, from a feminist point of view, *The Salt Eaters* narrative fits perfectly for analysis from a feminist perspective as it explores the experiences and struggles of Black females in America. The novel discusses how Black women's intersectional experiences arise due to the specific challenges they face in both racial and gendered contexts, thus providing unique insight into their marginalised experiences (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1241-1299). It highlights the stories and perspectives of Black women, thus incorporating them into both the centre and periphery of mainstream feminist narratives. The critique lies in mainstream feminism's inability to consider Black women's experiences in its history. Her work also emphasises the need for the voices of marginalised women to be acknowledged and celebrated within feminist discourse. This novel also explores themes of community, solidarity, and sisterhood among Black females. It emphasises the collective strength derived from the support networks present in African American societies, suggesting that women are powerful when they unite to confront challenges.

Additionally, it addresses spiritual healing and women's empowerment. It portrays Black women striving to heal and transform in a challenging world. The novel celebrates self-discovery, spirituality, and reclaiming one's narrative as pathways to both empowerment and healing. Although the novel primarily represents the experiences of Black women, it also discusses the patriarchal structure and power dynamics in society. It reveals how conservative norms regarding gender and race, as well as racial discrimination, impact Black women as individuals, in their relationships, and in their sense of agency.

From a feminist perspective, *The Salt Eaters* serves as an exploration of the nuances, strengths, and challenges encountered by American society and Black women. It evolves into feminist discourse by dismantling conventional narratives, fostering new connections, and drawing attention to the marginalised voices and complex forms of oppression that Black women experience. Toni C. Bambara's tremendous multilayered novel, from a critical viewpoint, was *The Salt Eaters*. It is set in the Claybourne community, Georgia, during the late 1970s. The narrative revolves around the healing significance for the protagonist, Velma Henry, a community activist who attempted suicide to escape the innumerable pressures of life. This novel plays a significant role in making notable the experience of a Black woman character contemplating suicide, contrary to the prevailing belief that "very few Blacks commit

suicide” and “Black women endure; there were no considerable suicide risks” (Kimmel, 1978, pp. 6–7).

According to Philip Page, *The Salt Eaters* is a struggle between wholeness and community failure, where Velma, the protagonist’s attempt to commit suicide and her later healing ‘session’ stand for individual stance and communal stance, respectively. Emphasising the author’s narrative strategies, the colliding voices and the drawing of various characters to deliver just one story are what Page specifies in his *Reclaiming Community in Contemporary African American Fiction*. Page (2011, p.15) states that restoring harmony is essential; it is important to reconnect the damaged self and community through new bonds by uniting spiritual and mental efforts from all individuals, to herald a new age of mental power and communal energy. Bambara uses Velma’s character, a leader of feminist groups, as a metaphorical reflection on the successes and failures of these organisations.

Velma attempts to overcome the emotions of rage, fragmentation, and past self-will that have dictated her experiences. The oppressive moments endured by most African American members of that society carry significant implications for both their spiritual and physical well-being, as symbolised by Velma. After bandaging her numerous wounds at the Southwest Community Infirmary, she prophesies to the fabled healer, Minnie Ransom, a series of patients, medical students, and the physician. It was in a town that one might say still believes in sorcerers and spell casters, nestled in the heart of Georgia. Ransom, the healer whose understanding of human suffering can be rather eccentric, is populated with somewhat eccentric characters. Some of these spells are intertwined with enquiries about how black people can ‘go modern’ while still retaining their identity (Ibid, p.14).

Outside the clinic, there were institutions, a constellation of characters, and many other situations, including Obie, Velma's husband, the head of Seven Arts Academy, and the group of Seven Sisters travelling to Claybourne for the performing arts at the annual Mardi Gras festival. Old Wife, along with Minnie, also begins a healing session to help Velma. They start discussing some of the psychosocial circumstances that contemporary black females are experiencing, such as suicide and abuse. Minnie asks Old Wife, “What is wrong you?” Why is something happening to the daughters of the yam? They seem to have forgotten how to draw power from deep

within anymore, and are neither sunned nor sweet. Ask me how I welcome this daughter into the world (Bambara, 1980, p.44).

When the toxicity of contemporary society forced Velma and other community members to endure spiritual and mental crises due to the overwhelming capitalist patriarchal white oppression they faced, these crises mirrored the entire community weighed down by mental and physical subjugation. This burden has constrained her, leading to a personal and political life without boundaries, where her problems become a source of panic. Her personal and political life knows no borders, which turns her problems into a source of panic. These issues include the author facing sexual harassment at her workplace, difficulties with her son and spouse, and ‘some ill-defined bad feeling she could not shake’ (Ibid. 139). She endeavours to regain control of her life and, in vain, attempts to take her own life so that she can die. Time, space, reality, and the limitations of imagination remain largely unclear. Minnie the healer, together with Old Wife, communicates without any restrictions during Velma’s therapeutic sessions and even engages in prayer. Additionally, Bambara explores the thoughts of various other characters apart from Velma and Minnie. The novel is distinctive because Bambara utilises multiple subplots, flashbacks, lyrical language, and a range of characters.

The African American critic of women’s studies and feminist activist Akasha Gloria Hull, born in Louisiana on December 6, 1944, describes the novel as “daringly brilliant.” The characters’ relationships are diagrammed within the novel. The novel was received with enthusiasm; however, some argue that the overarching themes, as well as the characters’ development—ultimately the novel’s strength—have little connection with the characters and the readers (Foster & Harris, 1997, p.21). All are linked to Velma, yet the splint rings and the community fractures symbolise her fractured spirit. These, along with the principles connected to the best of the old people’s traditions for acquiring spiritual solace, have all been neglected in the wake of the civil rights movement. In this novel, Bambara strives to present a strategy for the gender-cultural empowerment of Black Americans by introducing a vision of cultural restoration that hinges on the existence of ancestral power latent within Black Americans.

This novel focuses on the black community's struggles during the post-Civil Rights era. *The Salt Eaters*, like many other African American female narratives of the seventies and eighties, addresses the gender oppression that these women faced during the Civil Rights movement and even before and after this period. Ransom, the healer, constantly asks Velma about her ability to face the being well "weight". This question is one that the novel indirectly poses to all community members. The subsequent healing relates to larger social issues, reflecting a great responsibility towards oneself, history, and cultural determination, while refusing all forms of oppression (Ikard, 2002, p.76).

It is a "journey of healing through inquiry" (Williams, 2009, p. 75), and as such, it represents a new phase in the contemporary literature of African American female writings, particularly the journey depicted in *The Salt Eaters*. In addition to African and Afro-Caribbean traditional psychic therapeutic practices, this novel also explores Western spiritual traditions. For a few scholarly female writers in literary genres, Bambara creates an atmosphere that soothes the community through self-soothing, as Wilentz (2000) points out, in concluding that it addresses 'socially built disease' (p. 7).

In this novel, the ritual functions as a means of healing. Bambara explores how important relationships related to political resistance and recovery involve Black female activists, such as Velma. The disillusionment stemming from political engagement and the harsh realities of racism contribute to Velma's suicide (Willer-Peterson, 2019, p.263). The novel includes not only all the prayers and plant medicines but also tarot and traditional remedies as valuable references to the healing rituals. Stopping the local festival preparations for Mardi Gras due to a catastrophic storm, therefore delaying significant changes for several characters, including Velma, who remains in a bursting cocoon. Velma represents any Black woman who is often burdened with personal suffering as well as the responsibilities of her community. Here, "burst cocoon" serves as a metaphor for resisting the roles that both racial and patriarchal structures impose on women, representing a form of liberation from the systemic oppression and the enduring effects of colonisation that continue to influence marginalised communities.

This novel encourages the reader to reflect on relationships, struggles, and narrated dilemmas. In the writer's literary work, nothing is taken for granted in the events; the reader must carefully examine the complex details of life. Bambara endeavours to depict the community and people as ordinary individuals with all their diverse traits and characteristics, compelling readers to pay attention to the details of daily life that shape reality. In this question, Bambara urges readers to recognise that energies beyond human energy exist and that they must remain conscious of the societal pressures that shape their lives. In this novel, Bambara addresses the need to rectify gender imbalances as a vital issue, discusses the counterproductive divisions harming the entire black community, and proposes a new paradigm through which the black community can collaborate on self-healing efforts.

The message conveyed in the novel is that liberation involves preserving identity, distancing oneself from madness, and freeing oneself from the control of others; it is about not becoming lost in political work driven by chaos and avoiding isolation in such work to maintain stability with the collective and the lived experiences of older, mature individuals, as well as staying connected to the complex struggles of the past. Thus, it remains rational to recognise your feelings, your inner core of power (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 87). An integrated rational community must first cultivate rational individuals. Politically, initially, we require self-liberation; we need individuals who are deeply rooted in their history and traditions. Implied within *The Salt Eaters* is a form of human and positive political wisdom.

As a parallel quest, Bambara emphasised the responsibilities of the Self and community that became whole in facing and refusing to be deemed insane. Given that Velma Henry traversed a path of suicide that led to emptiness in her struggle to bolster personal power. Minnie Ransome, the healer, asked Velma if she wished to be well, to be whole, to discard all the pain and anger that consumed her, a struggle Velma had never overcome. Positive feelings are essential for preparing for good things, winning battles, and achieving freedom. In short, with these words, Ransom, in an opening line, lays out her questions of wellness, which become the most important themes of this novel. Achieving wellness for a nation, a community, an individual, or the world—or beginning the journey to gain wellness—requires considerable hard work and attention. Conversely, it is all too easy to dwell in unwellness.

Lastly, we see Velma rising from a cocoon at the end, signifying a new starting point for the modern world order, provided it is not a fully articulated world. However, the wise, distanced narrator begins to comment as a voice from the future speaks, describing how the characters will remember this beginning. The veterans of old age and the protestor warriors—all of whom have disappeared in these circumstances of postmodernism and late capitalism—are now scattered. Furthermore, the fragmentation resulting in individuals' breakups and loss of identity, alongside concerns regarding nuclear power and the effects of modern technology, renders *The Salt Eaters* a distinctive postmodern text through its depiction of interpersonal relationships and conflicts with potential spiritual dilemmas. It raises questions within the postmodern framework about its appropriateness for African American literature.

Here and now, Bambara forces the words to exist as a real idea. The writer is constantly required to be close to the events. Moreover, she appreciates the value of language. She makes her reader stay still long enough to make an irregular word arrangement, and this anarchical word arrangement implies that words are to be reformed, which involves the reader as a vital part of her stories. *The Salt Eaters* is, so to speak, a testament to Bambara's ability to illuminate her brain's capacity for conjuring unusual connotations from routine happenings. In an online personal letter to Octavia Butler in 1985, Bambara writes, "I'm so pleased to be coming into my stride at this moment in our history" (Bambara, 2014). In this novel, both feminist and postcolonial perspectives are interwoven, inviting critical exploration of societal hierarchies and the reclaiming of culture. From a feminist viewpoint, these novels address inherited gender norms, with all female characters depicted as representatives of revolution against a patriarchal society. A harsh struggle is embodied in this ordeal, where the protagonist, Velma Henry, gradually and with difficulty breaks free from the confines of societal expectations.

In this, Bambara also explores the postcolonial consequences through a postcolonial lens, examining the aftermath of colonialism and how marginalised communities strive to confront the legacy of oppression. The novel centres on the culture of reclaiming one's cultural heritage and collective identity in the face of subjugation and historical erasure. This novel serves as a powerful emotional testament to the intersections of gender and colonialism, advocating for women's empowerment and self-determination. It calls for power structures to be reshaped, urging society to

recognise and eliminate forms of oppression in favour of marginalised women. This is an essential call to action from Bambara, whose narrative resonates as a plea for solidarity, resilience, and the reclamation of identity in the struggle for equality and liberation.

2.2. Intersectionality of Patriarchy and Colonialism in *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*

Holst Petersen and Rutherford's (1986, p.7) concept of double colonisation, which describes the oppression of women under colonialism and patriarchalism simultaneously, is another interpretation. However, colonialism necessitated the economic, political, and social subjugation of entire populations while also compounding the subjugation of women due to entrenched gender hierarchies. Colonial rhetoric justified women's subjugation, alternatively defining them as those who could uphold tradition, morality, and the domestic sphere, thereby rendering them submissive in both colonised and colonising communities (McClintock, 1995, p. 28). The elements of race, gender, and imperial power within *The Salt Eaters* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, as well as in *Lara*, determine how these female protagonists navigate the prolonged aftermath and consequences of colonial and patriarchal oppression.

In most cases, during the colonial era, gender roles were redefined and manipulated by the influential colonial powers to serve their economic and administrative interests. In fact, in many pre-colonial societies, gender roles were more flexible (Stoler, 2002, p. 78); however, European Victorian ideas of womanhood, which emphasised submissiveness, chastity, and domesticity, were forced upon them. In a novel like *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood imagines a dystopia that reinstates virile control over women's bodies—a colonial reconfiguration of gender that bears an uncanny resemblance to historical colonialities professing to regulate Indigenous and enslaved women's reproductive capacities. For instance, in *Lara*, British colonial constructs contribute to the formation of diasporic identity, as Lara's mother, a white British woman, also feels estranged from the social community as a white woman who transgresses the racialised boundaries of colonial respectability.

Double colonisation is one of the most damaging aspects as it can involve control through sexual violence. Rape, forced marriages, and other forms of sexual exploitation to which women have been subjected in colonised societies were also directed at colonial authorities and local patriarchal structures (Razack, 1998, p. 134). Velma Henry's mental breakdown in *The Salt Eaters* can be interpreted as the manifestation of historical and intergenerational trauma endured by Black women, who have faced systemic sexual and physical violence from both private slavery and post-slavery racial hierarchies. Information on Atwood's novel includes an analysis of the Handmaids as a metaphor for enslaved and Indigenous women, whose reproductive capacity was restricted for the benefit of the ruling class's reproductive needs.

In days gone by, women's bodies were seen as sites of political and economic restrictions. Colonial regimes and patriarchal systems exploited women and took advantage of their bodies for the purposes of human trade. This is evident in policies intended to grow or restrict the populations of specific racial or ethnic groups, such as the sterilisation and reproductive policies of the Canadian state targeting Indigenous women and the state reproductive policies of Latin America (Palmater, 2011, p. 78). Atwood, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, presents a world of a totalitarian society where all rights regarding sex and reproduction of women have been stripped away, thus reflecting historical colonial practices aimed at controlling the fertility of women of colour. Similar to Lara, the protagonist struggles with internalised colonial ideologies concerning gender, sexuality, and race.

Double colonisation, beyond reproductive and sexual oppression, also subjected women to exploitative labour conditions in the colonial and postcolonial economy, which relied on women's labour while providing neither protection nor economic mobility. Velma's activism in *The Salt Eaters* underscores specific economic issues faced by Black women in postcolonial America, as the options frequently available to them for employment were low-wage labour, domestic work, or unpaid women's work such as caregiving (Collins, 2022, p. 131). *Lara* demonstrates a similar phenomenon in Britain, where racialised labour divisions in rites of passage are evident through immigrant and diasporic women who endure racial and gender subjugation, leading them into marginalised employment. This encompasses both the psychological trauma stemming from historical injustices and the exclusion of women

based on race, alongside gender-based violence and economic oppression in postcolonial societies.

This is depicted in *The Salt Eaters* with great flair, as Velma's mental breakdown represents the heavy burden that Black women are expected to bear, both in terms of respecting her as a racial and gendered subject. Offred's increasingly emotional detachment and internalised subjugation parallel the process of colonised women being compelled to accept oppression as a survival mechanism (Atwood, 1986, p. 232). While colonialism did not solely shape external power structures, it was deeply ingrained in women's consciousness, as the issue of racialised and gendered expectations inherited from colonial legacies emerges for Lara as a theme also presented in the text. Nevertheless, within the framework of colonialism and patriarchy, women have persistently fought back despite being marginalised (cited in Lugones, 2010, p. 753).

Velma Henry in *The Salt Eaters* mirrors the spirit of Black feminist resistance as she fights for civil rights at both personal and collective costs. One form of resistance portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale* is expressed in a more subdued manner, as Offred's narration is itself an attempt to resist totalitarian erasure. Lara offers a more diasporic perspective on resistance, namely, through storytelling and self-definition, which women utilise to gain agency (Volponi Achille, 1997, p. 145). Feminist Literary Criticism has long examined women writers from colonised and postcolonial backgrounds for how they employ the legacies of colonialism in their work.

In *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*, framing techniques such as fragmented storytelling, nonlinear plotlines, and reflections that challenge double colonial structures are used (Mohanty, 2003, p. 98). These novels challenge dominant historical narratives by emphasising women's voices, ensuring that the gendered aspects of colonial oppression remain visible in the discourse. Given that the intersection of colonial and patriarchal oppressions has shaped the lives of women in formerly colonised societies, decolonial feminism seeks to address the specific oppressions they endure.

Decolonial feminism, unlike mainstream Western feminism, contends that to establish a concept of equality, both racial and gender hierarchies must be deconstructed simultaneously, as the various forms of oppression faced by women of

colour cannot be divorced from their historical and cultural contexts (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 152). The eruptions of *Lara*, *The Salt Eaters*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* illustrate how women navigate the constraints imposed by patriarchy and colonial legacy. Double colonisation remains evident in the social, economic, and political spheres worldwide, influenced by both historical and contemporary factors. Velma, Offred, and Lara serve as literary testaments to the converging colonial and patriarchal forces that continue to shape and transform women's lives. These narratives advocate for intersectional feminist perspectives that recognise and challenge the legacies of colonial gender oppression.

In colonial times, systems of racial hierarchy placed white European men at the top and women of colour at the lowest rung of society. It was not only a political system but also social and economic; its overall goal was to subjugate non-white women. Indigenous, black, and mixed-race women were portrayed as morally, intellectually, and physically inferior to their white counterparts in colonial discourse to justify their subordination. Postcolonial American Black women illustrated their psychological crises in Velma Henry's case, as it exemplified the racial and gender inequalities that Black women faced in postcolonial America. Additionally, *Lara* portrays the persistence of colonial racial discourses in Britain. She depicts mixed-race women's alienation from both Black and white communities by illustrating how colonial definitions of racial purity and hierarchy affected women.

Women of colour during colonial rule were hypersexualised and seen as subhuman, which facilitated their economic and sexual exploitation. Atwood references the historical oppression of Black and Indigenous women in Canada, who were forcibly sterilised, had their children taken from them, and saw their reproductive rights limited. This mirrors the practices of real colonialism, exemplified by the Canadian government's forced sterilisation programmes of the twentieth century, which disproportionately targeted Indigenous women under the pretext of population control (Stote, 2015, p. 68). In the transatlantic slave trade, African women were described as breeders rather than mothers, a theme highlighted in *The Salt Eaters* through Velma Henry's challenge to societal expectations and systemic oppression. Within the British colonial system, mixed-race and non-white women occupied a vague social space, being regarded as outcasts by both colonising and colonised communities. This struggle is encapsulated by *Lara* in the protagonist's quest for a

sense of identity, highlighting his navigation through the conflict of cultural and racial expectations stemming from British colonial legacies (Evaristo, 1997, p. 110).

In colonial policies, the British assimilated indigenous populations to promote whiteness while simultaneously enforcing measures that obstructed racial mixing. The contradictions inherent in these statements further illuminate that a racial hierarchy constituted the subconscious reality of the colonial mindset, which kept nonwhite women in a subordinate position in both colonised and postcolonised societies. Reproductive oppression was a fundamental aspect of colonial racial hierarchy: the women of colour who were forced to have children to support the colonial economy were often subjected to similar sterilisation measures used against 'undesirable' populations (Federici, 2004, p. 145). In the fictional world of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood (1986, p. 210) reproduces this reality of white women placed into reproductive servitude as had been done to enslaved Black women in the Americas. However, in Canada and the U.S., Indigenous women were sterilised by their governments until the late 20th century. British imperial policies aimed at controlling mixed-race families and their descendants have also left an imprint on Lara's consciousness, as well as the consciousness of Londoners in general and people all around the world (Evaristo, 1997, p. 125).

As Razack writes (1998, p. 120), sexual violence was a typical tool of colonial mastery used to dominate Indigenous and Black women, while simultaneously reinforcing the racial hierarchy. This historical trauma is acknowledged implicitly by *The Salt Eaters*, as Velma Henry's struggle with identity, race, and political activism is inextricably linked with the historical force of the subjugation of Black women's bodies. Black women during slavery and throughout history were subjected to rape by white slaveholders to increase the number of enslaved labourers, a pattern that persisted in these societies through systemic sexual exploitation. In this vision, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* draws upon history to construct a dystopian society where women's bodies are controlled by the state for reproductive purposes, much like colonial states-controlled women's reproductive choices when they interfered with the status of racial and economic hierarchies. In addition, women of colour were also racially, sexually, and economically marginalised; they were confined to the low-wage labour of domestic service (Mohanty, 2003, p.79). The racial discrimination in Britain resulting from colonial labour divisions rendered nonwhite women perpetual workers

rather than economic agents (Evaristo, 1997, p. 132), leading to the protagonist's family in *Lara* suffering from economic limitations.

Indigenous and African-descended women's cheap or unpaid labour on colonial plantations helped sustain the economic dominance of white elites (Federici, 2004, p. 152). *The Salt Eaters* emphasise this economic marginalisation, as Velma Henry's activism is closely linked to the fight of Black women against racialised labour exploitation. However, even beneath these oppressive structures, non-white women have historically engaged in radical feminist resistance by challenging both unmitigated patriarchy and colonialism (Lugones, 2010, p. 758). Velma Henry is depicted as an activist involved in a Black feminist organisation in *The Salt Eaters*, a woman who embodies the real-life struggles of Black women in postcolonial societies. The form of narration used by Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* acts as a means of resistance to erasure, much like how Indigenous and Black women documented their survival against colonial oppression (Atwood, 1986, p. 233). In contrast, mixed-race women like *Lara* offer a diasporic perspective on identity struggles and resistance to colonial constraints.

Therefore, the feminist literary canon has sought to deconstruct the colonial racial hierarchies by highlighting the voices of Black, Indigenous, and other women of mixed race. *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* significantly enrich postcolonial feminist discourse as they illustrate how colonial and patriarchal oppression shaped the lives of women across various racial and geographical circumstances. Thus, the reclaimed narratives of these historically marginalised women clash with the exclusion of race and colonial history in mainstream feminist discourse. Colonial histories have not only established racialised gender oppression in past times; they must be acknowledged by modern feminist movements for their persistence today (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 154).

Lugones (2010, p. 761) also notes that decolonial feminism is an approach that calls for intersectionality, wherein colonialism plays a significant role in shaping modern inequalities of gender. In the experiences of Velma Henry, Offred, and *Lara*, it is evident that women have never escaped the ongoing oppression they encounter to intersections of race, gender, and history (Evaristo, 1997, p. 147). The themes interwoven in *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* illustrate that colonial

racial hierarchies underpin gendered oppression long after ‘official’ colonisation has concluded. When examining these novels through a postcolonial feminist lens, it is essential to consider race and gender together in order to dismantle the oppressive systems in place.

The weaponisation of women’s bodies exemplifies their use for reproductive control. Controlling women’s reproductive capacities was a key method of colonial domination, impacting both individual bodies and entire populations. As Federici notes in her book *Caliban and the Witch*, forced reproduction (or forced sterilisation when feared) was also employed by colonial authorities to uphold racial hierarchies and economic structures (2004, p. 150). However, this legacy is evident in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, as the Gileadean state excludes women from all roles except that of vessels for reproduction, reflecting a fictional representation of real-life colonial and patriarchal control over reproductive rights. In *The Salt Eaters*, Velma Henry’s psychological collapse can also be understood in the context of Black women’s legacy of productive and reproductive labour, which reflects the historical burdens of enslavement and racial capitalism.

The reproductive capacity of Black women was weaponised to sustain the enslaved labour force throughout the transatlantic slave trade and after the formal abolition of slavery (Davis, 1983, p. 64). Their children became automatically enslaved, meaning that the forced reproduction of enslaved women ensured a constant supply of unpaid labour (Morgan, 2004, p. 95). Velma’s case represents the mental and emotional cost that such exploitation has on a woman’s long-term psyche. It demonstrates the enduring toll that reproductive oppression has historically imposed on women and how that trauma is transmitted from generation to generation. Atwood’s (1986) *The Handmaid’s Tale* similarly offers a distorted version of historical reproductive control through breeding farms of enslaved women in the American South, coercing fertile women into forced pregnancies.

Colonial and settler states also employed methods of controlling populations through sterilisation policies that targeted Indigenous, Black, and other marginalised women, often under the pretext of public health or poverty reduction. Indigenous women in Canada and the United States were forcibly sterilised in the 1970s and beyond, without their consent, as part of an ongoing colonising effort to diminish

nonwhite populations (Palmer, 2011, p. 82). This perspective aligns with the systematic dehumanisation and erasure of non-white women in postcolonial society; what is occurring with Velma, mental decompensation, represents the cumulative effect of racialised gender oppression. Loomba (1998, p. 98) notes that reproductive control has long been a wielder of state power used to determine who was allowed to reproduce and under what conditions. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood takes this historical precedent to the extreme as the state confiscates all of women's reproductive rights. Within postcolonial societies, Black and Indigenous women have been relegated to the role of 'unfit mothers', which has sanctioned state intervention in the forms of sterilisation, child removal, and reproductive coercion (Razack, 1998, p. 112). Moreover, *Lara* examines diasporic reproductive control, highlighting how British colonial legacies influenced the reproductive control of mixed-race individuals, placing Black and brown women behind white-majority societies (Evaristo, 1997, p.125).

Women's reproductive labour has been profoundly exploited in capitalist and colonial economies, as women's bodies have been regarded as economic resources. The activism and breakdown of Velma Henry in *The Salt Eaters* vividly illustrate how Black women must contend with both economic and reproductive labour in the face of oppressive structures. Similarly, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, capitalist patriarchy is critiqued, and like the novel, women's fertility is transformed into an asset that falls under state control, an extrapolation of real colonial policies (Atwood, 1986, p. 222). *The Handmaid's Tale* explores the theme of reproductive control through the lens of religious fundamentalism, which has historically justified such control. Similarly, Catholic missionaries in Latin America and Canada played a crucial role in implementing colonial reproductive policies, including forced sterilisation and restrictions on contraceptive use among Indigenous women (as cited in Stote, 2015, p. 78). A connection exists between historical colonialism and contemporary gender oppression when both religious and colonial institutions suppress women's reproductive rights.

Women have historically resisted state-imposed reproductive control despite systemic oppression through measures such as activism, underground networks, and legal battles. Portrayed as a symbol of resistance in *The Salt Eaters*, Velma Henry opposes civil rights, despite the psychological toll it takes on her (Collins, 2022, p.

128). *The Handmaid's Tale* features Offred's clandestine storytelling as an act of insubordination against the state's removal of women's autonomy (Atwood, 1986, p. 237). Additionally, *Lara* explores the reclamation of agency among diasporic women through the reversal of racialised reproductive policies that have influenced their families (Evaristo, 1997, p. 140).

Policies of today regarding reproductive rights, abortion access, and maternal healthcare disparities are remnants of historical colonial reproductive and maternal control (Mohanty, 2003, p. 115). Today, Black and Indigenous women in North America are still subject to higher maternal mortality rates, inadequate abortion access, and systemic medical neglect. In *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*, the ongoing injustices faced by women are critically examined by demonstrating that women's bodies continue to be battlegrounds of state and societal control. Within feminist literature, reproductive oppression is both exposed and challenged, allowing marginalised voices to reclaim their narratives. The physical and emotional costs of reproductive exploitation are critiqued in *The Salt Eaters*; reproductive servitude in pursuit of the state is condemned in *The Handmaid's Tale*; and the discussion of reproductive agency intertwined with a diasporic struggle is presented in *Lara* (Evaristo, 1997, p. 145).

Collectively, these works highlight how colonial and patriarchal institutions continue to possess a significant set of defining features regarding women's reproductive experiences. The control of women's reproductive capacity continues to be, much like in both historical and contemporary times, a lingering tool of colonial and patriarchal dominance. *Lara*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Salt Eaters* assert that reproductive oppression is not merely a relic of past colonial history; instead, it remains a reality against which feminism must continue to resist. By examining these narratives, we gain a better understanding of how reproductive control has impacted individual Black, Indigenous, and diasporic women, and how decolonisation must encompass the right to free reproductive control (Federici, 2004, p. 160).

Regarding neocolonialism and the ongoing subjugation of women in the 20th century, although colonial rule had ended, many postcolonial nations continued to operate under frameworks influenced by colonial designs. When decolonisation began, it did not eliminate the social, political, and economic hierarchies established by

colonisers or put in place during their intervention. This is why women (especially indigenous women and Black women) face a disproportionate disadvantage (Lugones, 2010, p. 750). Evaristo also brings this to notice in *Lara*, where she illustrates the duration of the British Empire in diasporic identities by demonstrating how women from the former colonies negotiated racial, gendered, and cultural expectations steeped in the ideas of colonialism during their diasporic experience (Evaristo, 1997, p. 92). *The Handmaid's Tale* highlights how a totalitarian state practices neocolonial control over women's bodies and autonomy, reflecting the identical realities of the postcolonial age through the enforcement of patriarchal and racial hierarchies against women (Atwood, 1986, p. 215).

In many situations, neocolonialism is evident in economic structures that continue to keep former colonies dependent on global markets dominated by Western powers. Many women in postcolonial economic systems have been relegated to low-wage labour, informal work, and domestic servitude, which prevents them from achieving financial independence (Mohanty, 2003, p. 84). By looking at England, particularly *Lara*, one can observe that the racialised labour market in Britain places Black and diasporic women in precarious jobs, a consequence of how economic systems perpetuate the legacies of colonial times (Evaristo, 1997 p. 105). Interestingly, Velma Henry's activism against economic injustice, as depicted in the book *The Salt Eaters*, illustrates how Black women remain excluded from economic mobility in the US, even after slavery and segregation.

The starkest reminder of that ongoing colonial oppression remains the neocolonial violence against Indigenous women in Canada. In the case of the missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) crisis, the pattern of state neglect, systemic racism, and legal disenfranchisement holds true (Razack, 1998, p. 134). Consequently, Indigenous women experience higher rates of sexual violence, incarceration, and child removal due to colonial policies aimed at destroying Indigenous cultures and identities. Much like how Indigenous women in Canada were forced into involuntary sterilisation and subjected to institutional abuse (Stote, 2015, p. 70), such violence is mirrored in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where women lack legal and bodily autonomy.

The postcolonial women often find themselves caught between the need to maintain their cultural heritage and the pressure to conform to Western ideals imposed

upon them through neocolonial influence (Loomba, 1998, p. 102). The protagonist's confusion regarding her mixed-race identity highlights how British colonial traditions in Britain also dictate standards of beauty, femininity, and social elevation (Evaristo, 1997, p. 118). It can be paralleled to neocolonial pressures in real life, where Eurocentric ideals are reinforced by Western media and education systems, thus occluding Indigenous and Black symbolic expressions (McClintock, 1995, p. 91). This is reflected in the erasure of the women's personal and historical identities in *The Handmaid's Tale* as well.

Legacies of colonial rule also shape global migration patterns, as many women are forced to leave their homelands in search of better opportunities. However, they are often subjected to exploitation, discrimination, and marginalisation in the West. Evaristo depicts in *Lara* how diasporic women are pushed to the edges of spaces, especially those that were not created to suit them at all, which is always evidence of their status as perpetual outsiders in neocolonial societies (Evaristo 1997 p. 130). For example, *The Salt Eaters* highlights the ongoing erasure of Black communities and illustrates how racial and gender hierarchies in the U.S. hinder Black women's advancement up the ladder.

Many former colonies gained independence; however, neocolonial policies in reproductive politics continued to exploit women's bodies as instruments for population control (Federici, 2004, p. 155). In Canada and Latin America, state sterilisation programmes disproportionately affected Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and low-income women, particularly the latter two. This reinforced race-based approaches to reproductive governance. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, fertility is the tool of the state to determine which populations should propagate and which ones should be discouraged (Atwood, 1986, p. 245).

Not all postcolonial nations were entirely able to repel foreign influences, and still many were neither willing nor able to permit women—the black and indigenous women in particular—to make decisions (Mohanty, 2003, p. 95). Women in *Lara* find themselves unable to assert themselves in either the personal or professional spheres due to the intersection of race, gender, and class, which is reinforced through neocolonial patriarchal norms, as Evaristo (1997, p. 140) has stated. Velma Henry's activism in *The Salt Eaters* serves as a poignant example of how Black women have

been marginalised in both anti-colonial and feminist struggles against racialised gender oppression.

The Western-controlled media have also significantly contributed to maintaining neocolonial stereotypes about women of colour globally by determining what race, beauty, and femininity are supposed to resemble (McClintock, 1995, p. 105). Her critique demonstrates that Black and mixed-race women are held to Eurocentric beauty standards with such confidence that if they do not meet these, they cannot have a flourishing economic or social life (Evaristo, 1997, p. 145). In the real world of advertising and the film industry, these women are erased from the dominant cultural narratives, rendering them socially invisible like others (Loomba, 1998, p.112).

As mentioned, postcolonial literature has significantly contributed to exposing neocolonial structures and critiquing how they continue to shape gendered oppression. In the presentation, *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* are shown to have utilised their narratives to challenge historical erasure through women's struggles to reject overlapping systems of power that exist within postcolonial societies (Lugones, 2010, p. 758). By reclaiming the stories of these Indigenous, Black, and diasporic women, these texts provide a counter-narrative to dominant neocolonial histories. Thus, formal independence has not yielded true liberation for all; instead, it has perpetuated the continued subjugation of women in postcolonial societies. Systemic violence, economic exclusion, and cultural erasure of Black and Indigenous women demonstrate that neocolonialism persists in reinforcing contemporary gendered oppression.

By applying decolonial feminism to *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*, we can comprehend why the struggle for gender justice must be included in any discussions concerning neocolonial resistance (Mohanty, 2003, p. 118). Sexual violence functions as a means of colonial and patriarchal control. Historically, it has been a crucial aspect of the colonial project, utilised to assert racial, political, and social dominance over colonised populations. By reinforcing racial hierarchies and the subordination of women, rape and sexual exploitation were prevalent during the activities of European colonial forces in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas alike (Gopinath, 2003, p. 157).

The forced cases of sexual servitude, in which Indigenous and Black women were central to colonial practices, are reflected in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where women's sexual autonomy is treated as a vessel for reproduction by the state. Velma Henry's psychological trauma serves as a representation of this violence through its indirect exploration in *The Salt Eaters*. Rape was used as a weapon of war and control in numerous colonial contexts, serving as a mechanism to attack social structures and dismantle communal resistance (McClintock, 1995, p. 72). Racist ideologies that characterised Indigenous and Black women as sexually deviant and "available," as presented by European colonisers, often justified their sexual violence (Loomba, 1998, p. 83).

Within *Lara*, the British colonial narrative has reinforced and continues to reinforce the hypersexualisation of Black women, portraying them as inherently promiscuous and therefore less deserving of protection compared to white women (Evaristo, 1997, p. 115). The reduction of women to sexual and reproductive objects, deemed necessary to reinforce authoritarian control, is also illustrated by *The Handmaid's Tale*, echoing historical colonial policies that institutionalised sexual exploitation (Atwood, 1986, p. 200). Slave owners, overseers, and traders raped and sexually abused enslaved African women during the transatlantic slave trade, as they viewed them as property and reproducers. Sometimes, enslaved women were forced to bear children who would also become property, thereby perpetuating the enslaved population. In this vein, *The Handmaid's Tale* mirrors the theme by rendering Gilead's government complicit in legitimate rape under the guise of religious duty, drawing upon the historical exploitation of enslaved and Indigenous women in settler colonial societies. However, the history of this is conveyed in the more subtle, psychological manner of *The Salt Eaters*, in which Velma Henry's emotional suffering and self-destructive tendencies illustrate the enduring effects of intergenerational trauma stemming from slavery and systemic violence (Page, 2011, p. 25).

Sexual violence in colonial contexts was more than mere individual acts of brutality; it also functioned as a mechanism for erasing race and culture. Rape and forced concubinage imposed by colonial authorities served to assimilate and obliterate native identities and to integrate Indigenous as well as mixed-race populations, while reinforcing white patriarchal dominance (Loomba, 1998, p. 1). *Lara* illustrates how the colonial legacy of mixed heritage in the protagonist stems from British men imposing

sexual relationships on African women through their racialised structures of violence (Evaristo, 1997, p.120). *The Handmaid's Tale* extends this historical reality even further, depicting women who have been stripped of their own history and are currently subjected to controlled reproduction, paralleling the way colonial regimes have stripped Indigenous cultures through gendered violence (Atwood, 1986, p. 230).

Often, Black and indigenous women were framed in colonial ideologies as hyper-sexual, animalistic, and in need of control, further attaching inferiority and an exploitable nature to them (McClintock, 1995, p. 98). Evaristo (1997) points out that historically, Black women's sexuality has been misrepresented and rendered more vulnerable to sexual violence (p. 125). In *The Salt Eaters*, Velma's psychological malaise, arising from the interconnections of racial and gender oppression, reiterates the oppression rooted in racialized oppression, which affects Black bodies through racial identification (Page, 2011, p. 30). In both colonial and modern patriarchal societies, biblical religious institutions have sanctioned or ignored sexual violence, employing biblical justifications to support rape, forced marriage, reproductive control, and so forth (Federici, 2004, p. 140). *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques Gilead's theocratic rule for diminishing the agency and legal protections guaranteed to women by utilising religious doctrine (Atwood, 1986, p. 250). Similarly, in numerous instances of colonialism, missionary efforts supported gendered oppression by teaching that Indigenous and African women were morally corrupt and required religious discipline (Palmer, 2011, p. 85). This strategy ensured that non-white women faced either total denial or sexual violence, which was justified as part of a "civilising mission" (Lomba, 1998, p. 115).

Long-standing psychological trauma has arisen from the intergenerational historical trauma of sexual violence in postcolonial societies affecting Black and Indigenous women. The mental and emotional exhaustion of living in a system that exploits Black women is explored through Velma Henry's breakdown in *The Salt Eaters*, as it symbolises that exhaustion (Collins, 2022, p. 136). As a character in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred's narration is a form of resistance, as she documents her own suffering, which historically oppressed women would not have been able to do (Atwood, 1986, p. 275). *Lara* serves as a literary representation of inherited trauma, specifically illustrating how diasporic women continue to grapple with the racial and gendered violence stemming from colonial history (Evaristo, 1997, p. 145). Rape has

not been curtailed since decolonisation; rather, it has merely transformed into new forms of rape within contemporary systems of gendered violence (Razack, 1998, p. 130). Sexual violence against Indigenous women in Canada remains exceedingly high, and government institutions do virtually nothing to address the systematic rape of Indigenous communities. Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* highlights the embeddedness of gendered violence in legal and cultural systems and calls for ongoing feminist resistance aimed at patriarchal and racist oppression (Howells, 2003, p. 140).

Feminist literature has been instrumental in making visible and challenging colonial and patriarchal control of apparently female bodies by creating a different historical record that places women at the centre of its expression (Mohanty, 2003, p. 117). In *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*, entrenched systems of oppression persist even after the formal end of colonial rule, forcing the reader to confront the hidden and normalised realities of gendered violence (Lugones, 2010, p. 758). The ways in which women's bodies have historically been weaponised through rape, forced reproduction, and racialised sexual stereotypes continue to impact gender dynamics within the continuum of postcolonial societies. The analysis of *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* suggests that decolonial feminist perspectives must be taken seriously in this regard, prioritising the voices and experiences of women of colour, for example. In short, the battle against sexual violence during colonial times is ongoing, and there is no end in sight.

The erasure of women's voices in nationalist and postcolonial discourses serves as another tool; anti-colonial movements aiming to rid their countries of imperialist rule tended to be built upon and support patriarchal norms, yet they failed to contest these norms (McClintock, 1995, p. 39). While women's roles in resistance were often rendered invisible in official histories, they prominently featured in resistance movements. In *The Salt Eaters*, Velma Henry is a character who participates politically through civil rights movements. However, her involvement is not fulfilling, as the struggles of Black women are often undervalued by male leaders in the freedom movements, who tend to overlook issues of gender oppression while striving for racial justice. It reflects the reality of women in a postcolonial state, where they have fought alongside men for liberation but are excluded from leadership roles in the post-independence era (Mohanty, 2003, p. 85).

Women were often viewed as symbols of cultural purity, as nationalist discourses frequently confined their roles to the private sphere and denied them the status of political actors (Loomba, 1998, p. 92). This racialised and patriarchal definition of national identity was evident in many postcolonial states, which characterised women primarily about domestic roles: as mothers, as wives, and as cultural bearers, rather than as citizens in their own right, without regard to their subordinate status within a family or state (Lugones, 2010, p. 745). *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays this notion by depicting Gilead as establishing a nationalist, religious ideology to control women's bodies and identities, thereby excluding them from the economic and political life of society (Atwood, 1986, p. 201). Similarly, by critiquing the colonial and nationalist narratives that frame mixed-race women as outsiders, and examining how women's voices are erased or distorted under patriarchal nation-building projects, Evaristo (1997, p. 98) also highlights a similar focus. Such has been the case in postcolonial societies that tend to diminish or overlook women's contributions to liberation struggles by emphasising the achievements of male revolutionaries in official accounts of history.

By presenting Velma Henry as a woman whose activism is overlooked within male-dominated political movement spaces, *The Salt Eaters* critiques this historical erasure by highlighting the psychological toll of engaging in the struggle for justice that diminishes women's contributions (Collins, 2022, p. 135). This aligns with women's political participation in African and South American independence movements, including their roles in fighting and organising, without post-independence leadership (Mohanty, 2003, p. 97). The denial of literacy and education represents one of the most effective means by which patriarchal and colonial powers have deprived women of their agency (Federici, 2004, p. 132). Consequently, the theme in *The Handmaid's Tale* is presented directly, as women in Gilead are forbidden from reading or writing, thereby preventing them from recording their own histories or participating in intellectual discussions (Atwood, 1986, p. 210). These situations mirror real-world colonial policies that restrict women's access to education, allowing only men the means to construct the national historical narrative (Loomba, 1998, p. 115). According to Lara (1997), colonial and postcolonial structures limit women's access to public platforms, making it akin to walking on a tightrope of racial and gendered exclusion (Evaristo, 1997, p. 122).

Drawing on postcolonial feminism, Lugones (2010, p. 750) highlights that women of colour are doubly marginalised by being overlooked in both nationalist discourse and the mainstream feminist movement. The tension in *The Salt Eaters* is demonstrated by Velma's disgust at male-dominated activism, as Black women's voices had been excluded from both the civil rights and feminist struggles (Collins 2022, 141). This is also shown in *Lara*, who is in a situation where diasporic women struggle to find space within nationalist discourses that fail to recognise the intersectional identities overlapping their race and gender, which insist on the erasure of women's voices (Evaristo, 1997, p. 130).

Women were excluded mainly as political actors in most nationalist movements and instead were viewed as symbols of the nation (McClintock, 1995, p. 55). Essentially, they were expected to serve as cultural bearers of continuity and purity, embodying the postcolonial notion of mothers and caregivers, rather than being seen as active builders of the postcolonial state (Loomba, 1998, pp.123–124). *The Handmaid's Tale* embodies this reflection on the construction of a society where women's primary purpose in life is reproduction; thus, their worth is measured by their ability to give birth rather than by their intellectual or political contributions (Atwood, 1986, p. 220).

Many nationalist and postcolonial movements erase women's voices, and as a result of these erasures, women become disillusioned, disappointed, frustrated, and psychologically distressed (Mohanty, 2003, p. 110). The emotional labour of black women has left Velma unwell and mentally shattered; her breakdown in *The Salt Eaters* (Collins, 2022, p. 148) serves as a symbol of what occurs when black women are continuously fighting for visibility in a system that disregards women's efforts. In this, it resonates with the experiences of postcolonial women in real life who have struggled to express themselves in societies that aim to confine their world of words to domestic work (Lugones, 2010, p. 755). Furthermore, *Lara* examines the emotional consequences of exclusion from dominant comparative narratives by highlighting how diasporic women of colour grapple with identity crises as their histories are distorted or erased (Evaristo, 1997, p. 135).

Women who are frequently denied entry into dominant historical narratives have consistently refused to be erased by crafting their own histories and types of

activism (Federici, 2004, p. 140). In redefining the stories of marginalised identities, storytelling is emphasised as utterly important in *Lara*. The literary act of resistance is, in itself, an act of literary resistance; this literary resistance provides us with a dystopian future that depicts the possibility of women being erased, along with their agency and autonomy being wiped away (Atwood, 1986, p. 250). This confirms the necessity for revolutionary resistance.

According to Mohanty (2003, p. 115), feminist literature has significantly contributed to countering the erasure of women from national and postcolonial histories by highlighting their perspectives through counter-narratives. In *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Lara*, and numerous other works, literature serves as a tool for subverting patriarchal and colonial narratives by provoking readers to question whose voices are excluded from official histories (Lugones, 2010, p. 758). Despite all this, the erasure of women's voices continues, highlighting the necessity for greater inclusivity in both historical and literary representation. Velma Henry, Offred, and Lara share similar experiences of how race, gender, and national identity intersect in ways that marginalise women, necessitating effective feminist confrontation and storytelling as means of reclaiming women's agency. As one of Mohanty's (2003, p. 120) points out, it is essential to acknowledge women's contributions to anti-colonial movements and postcolonial nation-building in order to create a more just and equitable historical record.

The intersectionality of race, gender, and class in double colonisation plays a crucial role. The theory of intersectionality, as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, p. 151), is foundational in understanding how women of colour experience oppression through multiple "overlapping and intersecting systems of power". The term double colonisation is used to describe women's oppression in twofold by colonialism and patriarchy; however, through intersectionality, race and class are now added as additional layers of oppression (Lugones, 2010, p. 742). *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Lara* are to be analysed through this intersectional framework because they illustrate that women's struggle (Mohanty, 2003) cannot be simplified to a single axis of oppression; rather, they are part of a complex web of social inequalities (p. 55). In many postcolonial societies, gender intersects with race in such a way that, for women, and especially for women of colour, race and economic disenfranchisement combine to continue marginalising them.

Colonial rule forced Black and Indigenous women to restrict their access to education, economic opportunities, and political representation, resulting in persistent poverty and dependency. Velma Henry's struggle in *The Salt Eaters* for reclamation of self is inextricably linked to her role as a Black woman in a society that is hostile to both gender and race, as it designates value. This illustrates how economic vulnerability exacerbates racialised gender oppression (Collins, 2022, p. 127). Similarly, *Lara* explores how diasporic women in Britain experience economic discrimination and how colonial racial hierarchies continue to shape economic opportunities, even after political independence (Evaristo, 1997, p. 92). Colonial racial ideologies, which upheld that colonial racial ideologies placed nonwhite women at the bottom of social hierarchies (McClintock, 1995, p. 41), did not exist in isolation from patriarchal practice and theory, which helped reinforce one another. European colonial powers ingeniously adjusted existing gender roles in many colonised regions to further disempower Indigenous and African women, cutting them off from political, economic, and educational opportunities (Stoler, 2002, p. 86).

By depicting a dystopian landscape in which women are portrayed as subjugated through their reproductive potential, *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques the racialised patriarchy that real-life colonial policies aimed at controlling the fertility of Black and Indigenous women sought to uphold in order to maintain racial hierarchies (Atwood, 1986, p. 215). In Canada, Britain, and other formerly colonised countries, such feminist movements have overlooked the specific struggles of women of colour, focusing more on the concerns of white, middle-class women (Mohanty, 2003, p. 58). For a long time, postcolonial feminists have criticised white feminism for ignoring the racial and economic factors of oppression, thereby contributing to the invisibility of Black, Indigenous, and diasporic women's silencing in feminist discourse (Lugones, 2010, p. 749). The exclusion here is apparent in *Lara*, which does not recognise the protagonist's problematic confrontations with racial identity and gender discrimination within a broader feminist discussion (Evaristo, 1997, p. 108). Furthermore, mainstream feminism has failed to incorporate intersectionality (Evaristo, 1997, p. 105). In the sexual violence historically inflicted on Black and Indigenous women, race, gender, and oppression under colonialism clearly intersect (Razack, 1998, p. 118). Rape was part of the colonial administrators' and settler governments' tools of racial and gender control (Stote, 2015, p. 75).

The historical trauma of sexual abuse of Black women is discussed in *The Salt Eaters* with regard to the long-term psychological and societal impact these abuses have on women. *The Handmaid's Tale* satirises the legacy of sexual control by portraying a society where white women endure reproductive oppression that was previously inflicted upon Black and Indigenous women during the colonial era (Atwood, 1986, p. 230). Women migrating to Britain, Canada, or any other former imperial centre from colonised societies experience a new form of racial and gender oppression, being treated as perpetual outsiders. Evaristo (1997) depicts this reality vividly, demonstrating how diasporic women confront the racial and gender-based discrimination they endure in Britain (p. 110). Afro-Caribbean and South Asian women who migrated to postcolonial Britain experienced economic exclusion and social alienation, along with being racialised in terms of gender.

Racism, sexism, and class discrimination have always inflicted combined negative long-term psychological effects on women of colour (Mohanty, 2003, p. 113). In *The Salt Eaters*, Velma Henry's downfall is showcased as a consequence of the exhaustion and despair stemming from the struggle against multiple forms of oppression. *Lara* also illustrates how mixed-race women must contend with societies that do not fully accept them, leading to experiences of displacement and cultural alienation (Evaristo, 1997, p. 125). The oppressions within patriarchal societies, while rooted in psychological control, are not exclusively physical; they manifest as mental and emotional as well (Atwood 1986, p. 240). Though systematically oppressed, women of colour have, in literature, activism, and community building, resisted (Lugones, 2010, p. 753). In *The Salt Eaters*, Velma Henry is a political activist who combs through racial and gendered oppression in society, while *Lara* depicts a woman who wishes to explore her identity before society dictates it (Evaristo, 1997, p. 135). While fictional, *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a critical warning about the cost of ignoring coalescing forms of oppression and facing them alone (Atwood, 1986, p. 260).

For a long time, postcolonial feminist scholars have argued that feminist theory must consider the unique experiences of women of colour, as the oppression of women cannot be separated from racial and economic oppression (Mohanty, 2003, p. 120). *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Lara* exemplify the necessity for intersectionality in feminism, taking into account colonial histories, economic

inequality, and cultural omissions. Race, gender, and economic oppression combined have ensured that women of colour are marginalised within both feminist and postcolonial discourses. In the narratives of Velma Henry, Lara, and Offred, we see how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary gender relations, demonstrating that to address the issue of gender inequality, one must view it from an intersectional feminist perspective (McClintock, 1995, p. 112).

There is a need to understand the specific circumstances of women of colour in postcolonial societies if the feminist movement is to be inclusive and fair (Mohanty, 2003, p. 125). In summary, despite the formal processes of decolonisation, colonialism and patriarchy have had enduring effects on the lives of women in the late twentieth century and beyond. The significance of *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* lies in the fact that even after women gained independence suddenly, they remained oppressed, merely shifting their repression to new forms embedded within various social, political, and economic systems, as Mohanty explains in (2003, p. 64). Many women and people of colour still experience double colonisation, suffering from both gendered and racial oppression simultaneously. These novels emphasise that the fight for women from former colonies and diasporic communities did not conclude once their countries were liberated from colonialism.

An especially striking example of the lasting effects of double colonisation in *The Salt Eaters* is Velma Henry's psychological breakdown, which represents Black women who continue to be sidelined in civil rights movements and broader society. This sidelining of Black women's struggles occurs because anti-colonial and civil rights movements often prioritised racial liberation at the expense of gendered oppression (McClintock, 1995, p. 39). Not uniquely so; however, in postcolonial nations, new gender attitudes were quickly enforced by the new governments, succumbing to the temptation to maintain patriarchal norms over women and regulate their agency in politics and economics. Women of colour continue to face disadvantages in labour markets, political representation, and legal frameworks, evidencing the persistence of colonial gender hierarchies (Mohanty, 2003, p. 58).

The Handmaid's Tale serves as a literary admonition of the terrors posed by unbridled patriarchal and neocolonial authority over women's bodies, illustrating that the oppression of women's reproduction is a hallmark of colonial and patriarchal

power (Atwood, 1986, p. 215). The control over Offred's experiences in Gilead reflects the actual histories of enslaved and colonised individuals, particularly concerning the women of these societies, whose reproductive rights were often restricted through forced sterilisation, reproductive labour, and legal stipulations. According to the novel, systems of power do not simply disappear but instead re-emerge in different forms, exercising domination over women's autonomy through "religious, legal or moral" reasons (Loomba, 1998, p.101). In modern societies, we continue to experience state-imposed reproductive control, characterised by enforced population policies, restrictive abortion laws, and racial disparities in maternal health. This situation sustains the narrative that reproductive rights remain a feminist issue worldwide (Palmer, 2011, p. 82).

Double colonisation, as *Lara* approaches it, represents an intersectional perspective in which mixed-race women are doubly alienated, both as women in colonial society and within the paradigm of the postcolonial diaspora (Evaristo, 1997, p. 92). Lara's challenge to her own identity illustrates how colonial racial ideologies continue to perpetuate contemporary views of race, gender, and nationality (McClintock, 1995, p. 52). Despite living in Britain, a former colonising nation, diasporic women continue to face ongoing oppression through economic exclusion, persistent social marginalisation, and a longstanding tradition of cultural erasure (Mohanty, 2003, p. 79). Although these women are not immune to the legacy of colonialism, the novel further emphasises that colonialism does not simply come to an end. Simplistic narratives of progress for postcolonial communities instead illustrate that colonial legacies are intertwined with global racial and gender inequalities (Lugones, 2010, p. 761).

The final struggles of these novels' protagonists show that colonial and patriarchal oppression still exist in modern societies. The level of double colonisation—economic dependence and reproductive control, cultural erasure and systemic violence—mainly indicates that women continue to experience these lasting impacts on their realities, both historically and geographically (Mohanty, 2003, p. 108). Such narratives necessitate feminist resistance to endure, including intersectional approaches to understanding how oppressions are compounded for women of colour, Indigenous women, and diasporic communities (Lugones, 2010, p. 759).

Dismantling modern structures of oppression is essential for breaking free from gendered colonial legacies. Feminist activism focuses on issues such as race, economy, and culture, in addition to gender equality. The ongoing colonial violence against women—evident in current laws, social organisation practices, and global systemic frameworks—highlights the need for contemporary decolonial and feminist efforts. These structures sustain oppression, supporting the marginalisation of women, especially Black, Indigenous, and women of colour. This ongoing violence emphasises the urgent need for more feminist and decolonial initiatives to challenge these deeply ingrained systems of domination effectively. Such efforts seek to end the colonial legacy by centring the experiences and voices of those most impacted. Feminist activism, on the other hand, strives to transform the legal, political, and social spheres to address and combat discrimination (Méndez, 2015, pp. 675-695). The perspectives and insights gained from literary writings that explore women and community themes are not only academic; they also offer profound and essential strategies and lessons that remain highly relevant to contemporary movements seeking equality, justice, and global community healing.

2.3. Close Analytical Reading

The Salt Eaters (1980) by Toni Cade Bambara is more than just a novel; it also explores various translational paradigms such as black feminism, postcolonial theory, womanist theology, and trauma studies. It raises a profound question about how racial, gendered, spiritual, and political systems of oppression affect the physical and psychological health of Black women in post-Civil Rights America. The story centres on Velma Henry, a woman activist and a victim of burnout and disillusionment, who attempts to commit suicide and experiences a form of ritual healing facilitated by Minnie Ransom, a mystic. The place of healing in this novel is both a literal location, the Southwest Community Infirmary, and the metaphorical core of the narrative.

Bambara not only explores a fractured identity within an individual but also examines a historical scar within a community enduring the effects of trauma, political betrayal, and spiritual disconnection. The symbolic importance of Velma's healing goes beyond personal recovery to address wider issues of survival, political disillusionment, and cultural remembrance. Through the subtle depiction of Velma's

crisis, Bambara critiques the broader social movements that frequently neglect the emotional and spiritual needs of their members, especially women. Therefore, the novel serves as a compelling reflection on the politics of healing, demonstrating how deeply personal and political spheres are interconnected. It poses significant philosophical questions about wholeness in a fractured world. Ultimately, *The Salt Eaters* emphasises that activism, well-being, and community require both internal and external healing.

Bambara employs polyphony in her narrative style, which resists being confined to a specific linearity and logic typical of Western literary canons. Instead of relying on a single authoritative voice seeking to dominate, the novel presents multiple perspectives, fractured memories, dream sequences, and metaphysical commentaries, thereby creating a literary landscape that reflects the complexity of a communal Blackness experience. The polyvocality highlights that healing and truth are neither singular nor static but are ongoing processes negotiated through collective memory, ancestral dialogue, and communal trauma. By embracing fragmentation and nonlinear time, Bambara aligns with African oral traditions, where narration is cyclical and linked to the sacred. Her form is inherently political, challenging the coloniser's emphasis on rationality and order, and instead drawing on a diasporic sense that celebrates rupture, silence, and spiritual vision. The changing attitudes of characters like Minnie Ransom, the old Wife, and Velma demonstrate that identity is fluid, and completeness must adapt to multiplicity rather than insist on coherence. Consequently, the text forms a complex mosaic that resists straightforward interpretation, engaging the reader both intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

Bambara's style is deliberate and requires careful attention, as she invites the reader to participate in a process akin to community healing. This approach can be understood in the context of the fear noted by Wilentz (2000, p. 8). Bambara's narrative technique underscores the socially constructed nature of trauma, demonstrating how disconnection and brokenness stem from structural violence imposed on marginalised groups. Overall, this framework supports the idea that storytelling is a healing act capable of restoring what oppression and neglect have damaged. Velma Henry is not merely a victim of personal failure but also a symbol of the trauma that Black women have historically endured, often expected to persevere, organise, and survive without adequate recognition or support. Her mind fractures into

a metaphor of physical exhaustion caused by intersectional pressures, such as balancing racial identity with gender expectations, political loyalty, and family responsibilities. Velma's oppression exemplifies the complexity of oppression described by bell hooks (1981, p. 123), emphasising how Black women are erased not only in feminist movements but also in civil rights struggles. She embodies the harmful expectations placed on women who grow up believing their worth lies in selflessness and sacrifice. In trying to be everything for everyone—the caring activist, the working mother, the wife, the professional—she harms her health and reduces her ability to function. Her attempted suicide is a protest against this erasure, a rejection of maintaining an image of strength while her insides fracture. The novel critiques the myth of the strong Black woman by illustrating the violence inherent in glorifying resilience without recognising vulnerability. Bambara uses Velma to fictionalise the psychic toll of being a revolutionary in a society that fails to value Black women's contributions while burdening them with responsibility. The theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1243) is crucial in explaining Velma's experience of increasing mental and emotional stress within multiple systems of oppression. Bambara shows that breakdowns are no longer failures but urgent calls for structural and community change, through Velma. The novel urges readers to recognise the importance of collective healing that requires systemic transformation.

The healing scene in the novel, led by Minnie Ransom, incorporates African spiritual cosmologies into the sphere of psychological healing. Bambara reclaims indigenous healing practices that Western psychiatry has dismissed, framing them as essential for the collective survival of Black communities. Minnie Ransom is not a magical figure but a wise woman deeply connected to ancestral knowledge and community memory. Her healing methods—prayer, dreams, touch, and rituals—bring together the division of mind and body, matter and spirit, which Western medical traditions often distort. Gonzalez (2004, p. 137) describes the ritual used by Bambara as a decolonial counter-narrative, re-establishing the role of Black women healers within their communities. Minnie is guided by Old Wife, a religious figure representing ancestral wisdom and maternal care, which underscores the communal and intergenerational nature of healing. The infirmary becomes a sacred space, a symbolic womb where decay gives way to new life, suffering to transformation. Bambara suggests that healing requires returning to oneself, to one's past, and to

cultural and spiritual roots. Her conception of healing is fundamentally political: it is neither institutionalised, medicalised, nor commercialised, but a spiritual practice grounded in love, resistance, and memory. Through her central role in this ritual, Bambara asserts that such healing can promote well-being and serve as a form of resistance against colonial forces of erasure. In this story, the process of healing becomes an act of self-reclamation and cultural perseverance—a revolutionary act.

Bambara does not isolate Velma's pain from her political and social context. Instead, she intricately connects Velma's trauma to the structural inequalities and contradictions embedded within American society, especially its treatment of Black women. The narrative reveals how activism, often celebrated as selfless and noble, can also become emotionally damaging when communal and emotional support is absent. Velma's sense of alienation highlights how even radical movements can mirror hierarchical dynamics, particularly when they fail to incorporate care, mental well-being, and holistic healing into their frameworks. Bambara criticises both the external oppressive systems and internal community dynamics that neglect the needs of those doing the labour of resistance.

This layered portrayal emphasises that true liberation must also be psychological and emotional, not just political or legislative. The lack of support Velma experiences is reflected in her strained relationships with her husband and comrades, further underlining the isolation faced by Black women in leadership roles. Her breakdown signifies exhaustion as much as it does betrayal—a system that demands everything and gives nothing in return. This systemic neglect is depicted not as an isolated incident but as a persistent historical pattern that continues to impact generations of women activists. Consequently, Velma's healing is essential not only for her survival but also as a symbol of what must change within the political culture of resistance itself.

The Salt Eaters also critiques the post-slavery, post-segregation, and neocolonial impacts on African American communities through a postcolonial lens. Bambara does not specify what colonial rule is, but the novel focuses on issues of cultural displacement, spiritual loss, and racially inflicted trauma, which are consequences of colonial legacy. These themes are explored through Velma's spiritual crisis, her disconnection from her ancestors' knowledge, and her loss of identity in a

hyper-capitalistic, patriarchal society. She lives within a community that is both vibrant and fractured, a heritage of traditions cut off and replaced by Western norms. By emphasising healing rituals rooted in African spirituality, Bambara opposes the dominance of Eurocentric models of therapy. This cultural revival acts as a post-colonial gesture, countering epistemic violence, which is a system that dismisses non-Western knowledge. Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) provide valuable frameworks for understanding the role of *The Salt Eaters* in cultural resistance and the renegotiation of identity. The novel advocates for addressing epistemological injustice, recognising that the ways in which Black women know and heal must be validated as both legitimate and essential. For Velma, the healing process involves recreating cultural and ancestral wholeness rather than merely restoring normal functioning. In this way, the novel critiques not only social structures but also colonial legacies embedded within cultural practices and beliefs. Bambara offers a decolonising narrative that begins within the mind and extends into the community.

Moreover, Bambara questions the defeat of male-dominated political movements. Velma does not merely play a resistance role but is a key figure whose contribution cannot be overstated. Her exclusion from the movement reflects an overarching trend of gender-based erasure that can occur even in so-called progressive spaces. This dynamic has been critiqued by Christian (1985) and hooks (1981), who both discuss it in relation to Black feminist thought, as it is not uncommon for Black women to have to fight within their own communities to be heard and respected. This internalisation of marginality is evident in *The Salt Eaters*, where it is the root of a psychological break amid external oppression. Bambara depicts Velma in a way that reminds us that liberation movements themselves should be critically examined. By highlighting that political organisations often neglect emotional and psychological needs, Bambara advocates for a new approach to activism—one where healing is a fundamental element. Velma's story exemplifies how movements can lose their humanity in the pursuit of justice. Her first breakdown, rather than her collapse itself, calls for a redesign of resistance—making it inclusive, sustainable, and restorative. In this manner, Bambara aligns with modern feminist calls to prioritise care work, emotional labour, and spiritual health within justice initiatives. True liberation must be intersectional, mindful, and rooted in the politics of love and empathy, her story compelling us to recognise this.

The ritualistic form of the novel aligns with what De Lauretis (1987, p. 158) describes as the feminist reconfiguration of subjectivity. The healing process is neither linear nor solely individual; it is a communal, cyclical, and spiritually rooted process. Bambara blends words of elders with voices of ancestors and the songs of the natural world in Velma's healing. The presence of Old Wife, who embodies both spirit and guide, affirms the novel's emphasis on temporal flexibility and circular reasoning, linking the personal to the ancestral. Subjectivity in this universe is permeable and interconnected, challenging the Western idea of an atomised self. Healing involves reconnecting with history, tradition, and shared consciousness. Feminist organisations oppose patriarchal notions of self-sufficiency and stoicism, encouraging interdependence and emotional openness instead. This exemplifies a new form of political spirituality, where liberation relates equally to remembering and respecting the past as to imagining new futures. Through healing Velma, Bambara conveys that a complete self cannot exist without a complete community. It transcends personal recovery and advocates for collective change. This model extends beyond institutions to encompass diverse ways of being, founded on care, accountability, and radical love.

The philosophical challenge to the very concept of wellness is presented through the storyline resolution of *The Salt Eaters*. Minnie Ransom repeatedly asks Velma, "Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well" (Bambara, 1980, p. 3)? The question is echoed both literally and metaphorically throughout the text. It is not merely about physical or mental recovery but about confronting the more profound consequences of healing in a world founded on systemic oppression. According to Bambara, wellness is not a passive event but an active one, often painful, involving the process of unlearning societal oppression and reclaiming repressed knowledge. Being well, therefore, includes resisting and remembering, acts that are politically charged and spiritually demanding. The novel challenges the commodified notion of wellness as something superficial that can be bought or possessed. Instead, it relocates healing into the realm of returning to authenticity, cultural roots, and supportive care. For Velma, wellness is not merely about surviving her suicide attempt but about reconstructing her identity on her own terms, free from the illusions of perfection, martyrdom, and invisibility. The broader implication is that communities must also ask whether they are ready to be truly well, to confront the internalised hurt caused by legacies of racism, sexism, capitalism, and colonialism. Therefore, healing is both an

individual and collective process that calls for deep reflection and radical commitment from every member of the community.

Bambara's use of time and space also highlights her departure from Western narrative conventions even more radically. The time in *The Salt Eaters* is non-linear; it is cyclical and layered, reflecting how African diasporic communities perceive time as interconnected processes involving the past, present, and future through ritual and memory. This temporality aligns with the novel's spiritual elements, where voices of ancestors and mystical presences participate in Velma's healing process. This approach allows Bambara to explore how trauma and recovery transcend strict chronological order. The past is not distant but continually replays in the present, especially within the body of historical and generational suffering. The idea of time as repetition challenges dominant notions of history, which often erase Black lives into specific conditions of oppression or success. The novel's physical settings—the infirmary, the town of Claybourne, and the streets bustling with Mardi Gras preparations—serve both as literal and metaphorical spaces where diverse energies, histories, and destinies intersect. These places become filled with collective memory and political action, holding the potential for renewal. Therefore, the novel reimagines space not just as a background but as a catalyst for healing. Voices and visions in Velma's mind, the psychic landscapes, are extensions of the real world, with no clear distinction between internal and external worlds. Through this spatial-temporal innovation, Bambara invites the reader to perceive the story more as a ritual than a straightforward plot. The result is a literary experience that embodies what it depicts: a ritual of healing rooted in ancestral knowledge and communal participation.

The Salt Eaters offers not a definitive answer, but rather something quite the opposite: a void, a hole, a becoming, a transformation, a forging of the future. The idea of Velma returning to life after standing up from the examination table is a rebirth, not an end. Her depiction as a bursting cocoon creates a powerful metaphor of transformation; thus, healing should not be viewed as a straight path but rather as a cyclical process of death and rebirth. Nonetheless, this resurgence is not a victorious event by traditional standards; it remains unstable, insecure, and incomplete—qualities that mirror the emancipation process.

Bambara avoids the temptation to deliver a neat conclusion or moral lesson; instead, she emphasises the ambiguity and open-endedness of revolutionary healing. This ending aligns with the postmodern spirit that dismisses grand narratives and fixed identities, favouring ambivalence, multiplicity, and flux. It also embodies the spirituality of the Afro-diasporas, which perceives change as regenerative and collective rather than individual and final. Velma does not merely return to her previous life but embarks on a new epistemic stance where wellness involves being conscious, critical, and caring. In this way, the novel concludes by highlighting radical potentiality that encourages readers to carry the lessons of the ritual into their lives and communities. It leaves us with the impression that healing, like storytelling, is an ongoing process—an enduring praxis of remembering, resisting, and restoring. The closing lines invite the reader to observe not only Velma’s awakening but also their own, and the awakening of all people—where acts of healing and resistance, and all narratives, become instruments of change.

The Salt Eaters, with its complex structure, spirituality, and sharp focus on races, genders, and power, creates a gap in African American literature and postcolonial feminist thought. It challenges dominant paradigms related to health, resistance, and identity by presenting an image of wellness rooted in cultural memory, ancestral wisdom, and radical interdependence. Bambara’s literary work is not merely about representation but serves as a form of reclamation and empowerment for Black women and their communities. Her language, structure, and symbolism dismantle Western literary preconceptions and introduce a broader, more inclusive, and comprehensive way of knowing. Through this, Bambara demonstrates that literature can be a place of healing—a sacred text capable of transforming how people think and society. The process of fragmentation and subsequent return to wholeness that Velma experiences mirrors the larger act of liberation that has yet to reach those rendered invisible or voiceless. Finally, *The Salt Eaters* is not a novel that one eats to get some entertainment, but a ceremony that one must enter into with purpose, humility, and care.

3. WOMEN VICTIMS OF SOCIAL OPPRESSION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

“Violence against women in all its forms is a human rights violation”.

Michelle Bachelet

*“Violence against women occurs when the conditions are being enabled to facilitate it
and when the system- the state and the society, excuses it”.*

Shalu Nigam

Although it is the beginning of the twenty-first century, an era of rapid technological advancement, many societies worldwide remain vulnerable to various misfortunes and stark disparities. Numerous are on a path towards instability, declining living standards, moral decline, and economic ruin. Literary depictions of such societal upheavals, often illustrated through themes of corruption and the suppression of marginalised groups, reflect the current social structure. This underscores the roles, values, and status assigned to women, who are commodified and objectified in various modern processes and traded as commodities within patriarchal cycles.

Famous in feminist philosophy, Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) examines, in her landmark work *The Second Sex* (1949), the complex networks of women's domination. Beauvoir's work is often called the 'bible of feminism' because of its significant influence on inspiring the global feminist movement and the second wave of feminism. The notion of what Beauvoir calls the "Other" provides compelling support for Beauvoir's argument regarding women's oppression. She contends that women have traditionally been seen concerning men, rather than as autonomous beings. Famous for her assertion, she claims that she, as a woman, is defined and limited with and through being the 'Other' for man, in reference to him, whereas he, as a man, is not defined or limited by being the Other for her; she is the incidental, the inessential rather than the essential. "Without having recourse to metaphysics, one can maintain that he is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 14).

In addition, Beauvoir emphasises this relational dynamic, as she asserts that “humanity is male and defines woman not in herself but in relation to himself” (p.

15). In her landmark text, *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir analyses the mechanisms that enforce the socio-cultural means used in the oppression of women under the patriarchal domination of men, adopting a philosophical and cultural perspective. In other words, she argues against viewing women as a biological classification, believing that womanhood should not be seen in that light, as it is something socially constructed and imposed on individuals by society. Sexuality is one of the avenues through which patriarchal and consumer societies utilise women's bodies solely for the benefit of women (Zarrinjooee & Kalantarian, 2017, p. 67).

Her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) has made Margaret Eleanor Atwood, a Canadian novelist, renowned for her imaginative and thought-provoking literary works. It extends and echoes the forms and feminist concerns found in Beauvoir's work. Feminist themes are skilfully woven into Atwood's speculative fiction, illustrating the severe consequences of totalitarian regimes on women's rights and identities concerning reproductive autonomy. Not only have her creative and critical insights dazzled readers, but they have also sparked both academic and cultural ferment. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the dystopian society of Gilead serves to illustrate the consequences of pushing patriarchal extremism to its limits, even going so far as to strip women of reproductive rights under a totalitarian regime. The novel aims to discredit the manner in which extremist ideologies, particularly those fuelled by religious fundamentalism, are selectively shaped to function as tools for the suppression of women's rights.

When Atwood employs speculative fiction, she does not intend to provide merely entertainment; instead, she seeks to illuminate potential futures informed by past historical events and contemporary socio-political trends. Atwood's approach to writing combines extensive historical research with considerable imaginative creativity, thereby asserting that a novelist must not only reflect reality but also predict the consequences of modern social practices. For her, writing is indeed an act of resistance and enlightenment, aimed expressly at dismantling the oppressive ideologies that thrive on censorship and the spread of misinformation. Atwood emphasises that her narrative choices are deeply rooted in reality, as everything she describes in *The Handmaid's Tale* has actual historical precedents. The political and social upheavals of the 1980s play a significant role in the context that led to Atwood's development of *The Handmaid's Tale*, including the rise of conservative ideology and the backlash

against the achievements of second-wave feminism. Atwood directly connects the themes of the novel to real historical events, such as the conservative backlash against feminist gains during Ronald Reagan's presidency in the United States. This was an era marked by a rise in political conservatism and a resurgence of traditional gender roles, which profoundly influenced her portrayal of Gilead's oppressive society.

In the novel, Atwood meticulously examines gender-based oppression by shaping women through the use of uniforms, strict social roles, and control over reproduction. These elements metaphorically embody key patriarchal dynamics that go to the heart of past and current gender-related concerns about women's autonomy and corporeal integrity. The implication of women being delineated into categories in Gilead due to their reproductive function corresponds to Beauvoir's critique of gender and identity through the patriarchal objectification and commodification of female bodies (Genç,2022, p. 108). Atwood's narrative also presents language and identity as realms of oppression and resistance. Gilead systematically erases women's identities and agency, as well as their power, by manipulating their use of language and imposing restrictions on it. This occurs alongside the protagonist's internal narrative, which serves as a potent form of resistance, emphasising the significance of language in constructing and fighting for the ownership of one's self and identity under oppressive conditions.

In addition to the connection between dystopian themes and feminist ecocritical theories, Atwood integrates ecological concerns linked to environmental crises. She demonstrates how ecological degradation exacerbates the oppression of women, making the ecological crisis a metaphor for broader patriarchal exploitation. Supporting her ecofeminist critique, she argues that environmental sustainability and gender equality must be conceived as a single unit, and an integrative feminist approach to social and ecological justice is essential. Atwood examines the female body from a postcolonial and intersectional perspective, viewing it as a site of colonial exploitation and domination throughout historical patterns. The multiple identities shaped by dimensions of gender, class, and race in the novel are essential for understanding other complex systemic power dynamics inherent in intersectionality. Most importantly, Atwood emphasises the necessity of acknowledging the coexistence of various forms of discrimination when discussing feminist discourse.

Atwood's narrative fits well within psychoanalytic critiques regarding the psychological consequences of living under an oppressive regime. The enforced silence, internal fragmentation, and loss of identity experienced by the characters in the novel illustrate the profound psychological implications of patriarchal oppression. The novel explores psychoanalytic interpretations of how external oppression devastates individuals internally, including the roles of narrative and memory in the psyche's process of healing or resisting these forces' ills. Historically, Atwood draws parallels between fictional events in Gilead and real historical authoritarian regimes to enhance the novel's impact. These historical references highlight that the oppression depicted in Gilead is not an isolated fictional anomaly but rather mirrors real-world totalitarian regimes. The relevance of these historical parallels to contemporary politics further emphasises the novel's enduring significance and urgency as a critique of political and social oppression. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a powerful feminist critique, addressing systemic oppression through various critical lenses—feminist theory, power dynamics, religion, language, ecocriticism, postcolonial intersectionality, and psychoanalytic perspectives. Her novel provides an incisive analysis of the mechanisms by which women's identities are oppressed and marginalised, simultaneously advocating awareness, resistance, and empowerment against such oppressive structures.

3.1. Worldwide Events Behind The Handmaid's Tale Masterpiece

The Handmaid's Tale is now regarded as one of the twentieth century's most significant and renowned feminist novels. It serves as a contentious yet highly influential work within Margaret Atwood's oeuvre, with a long lineage since its publication. Publishers Weekly acknowledged the novel upon its release, suggesting it deserves a prominent placement among esteemed cautionary tales. Liberal authors contend that the influence and power of the novel stem from its incisive and disturbing critique of contemporary societal norms. Furthermore, the cultural and social issues depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* have sparked public debate since the mid-eighties, making the novel increasingly relevant and prescient. The author, Atwood, remarked that it is essential to remember that there is nothing new about the society portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale* aside from the time and place. Everything I have written about

has occurred before, repeatedly. Jadwin (2010) stated, “History does prove that we were once in what we are and might be again” (p. 21).

As a writer, Atwood observes that her life has been shaped by significant social upheaval and numerous political crises. In 1939, the year before her birth, the Nazi Holocaust commenced, and World War II greatly influenced her early childhood. Furthermore, the atomic bombs dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945—acts of mass destruction by the Allied forces—are still seen as highly controversial. Even if Atwood was too young to recognise these significant historical events, her awareness of political injustice was also growing. She was also conscious of the anti-Communist purges of the 1950s – indeed, as a teenager, she enjoyed reading books like Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* (1940).

Additionally, a large number of American citizens were travelling towards the Canadian border. During her university studies, she also volunteered with immigrants to help them improve their English skills; she was responsible for a Czechoslovakian woman doctor who had fled and appeared to be in distress. This has led to Atwood’s fears of nuclear warfare shaping her worldview, as she employs a nuclear metaphor in her novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*:

“Each book is a mushroom cloud of all that matters which have been collecting,” she says, “The first idea for *The Handmaid’s Tale* came to me in 1981, although I did not begin to write it immediately because I was afraid of where it might lead” (Atwood, 2018, pp. 1-50).

Media and journals play a vital role in representing women, as Fitch (2015) points out. She compares contemporary literary texts with classical ones and finds that issues related to women's representation in literature reflect the author's social experiences or her views on current issues. In Atwood’s case, the significant period she went through before and after the 1980s makes the novel relevant to the time when she wrote *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which addresses important concerns affecting the social fabric of any community (10).

The decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 regarding *Roe v. Wade* made most abortions permissible in the United States (Adkins, 2018, pp.167-171). Furthermore, this sentiment was a notable target for those who oppose feminism.

Feminists from the 1970s proclaimed that the “right to choose” is the right of women to determine their own reproductive decisions, which should be seen as the main support of women’s rights. Conservatives tend to be numerous on the side of opposition to abortion (Jadwin, 2010, p. 28). While it describes a dystopia, *The Handmaid’s Tale* also conveys a message that is utterly feminist. Atwood wrote the novel during a period when religious conservatives in the USA elected Ronald Reagan and, in the UK, elected Margaret Thatcher, alongside their opposition to the “sexual revolution” advances of the sixties and seventies, as well as feminist concerns about losing rights women had gained in recent decades.

By using this novel, Atwood explores the consequences and implications of reversing women’s rights across an entire society and generation, where extremists from a conservative religious group in Gilead seize power under the guise of a ‘return to traditional values’. This society rejects the women’s sexual revolution and is built on the subjugation of women by men, which contradicts the calls for action and the rejection of traditional gender roles championed by feminists. The major victories of feminists in the sixties and seventies, such as increased political influence for women voters and other achievements, have been nullified. Women in Gilead are no longer allowed to vote, read, or write.

In reflection of decreases in birth rates due to pollution leading to infertility, the dangers associated with nuclear energy, and the environmental degradation of the eighties, the novel resembles a painting. Nonetheless, it is still regarded as one of the most significant representations of a totalitarian society. Overall, *The Handmaid’s Tale* was a popular novel that examined the intersection of politics and sexuality within a male-dominated society and its consequences. In 2019, Atwood, the author, released a sequel to *The Handmaid’s Tale* titled *The Testaments*, chronicling the stories of three female characters more than fifteen years after the conclusion of *The Handmaid’s Tale*. For Atwood, during the early 1980s, the “mushroom cloud” of experiences that inspired the novel began to shape its events. Atwood became increasingly alarmed by speeches frequently made by religious leaders in the U.S.

In addition to various events that could not be disregarded from many places around the world, particularly the increasing fanaticism that the Iranian monotheocracy regime exhibited, Khomeini began to spearhead a successful coup attempt to expel the

Shah in 1980. This coup caused a revolution, which led to a decline in women's rights; among the curtailed rights of Iranian women after the 1979 revolution was the mandatory wearing of the hijab to veil women's bodies (Morakabati, 2022, p.5). The Iranian law also mentions public stoning when the government detects dissenters among the populace. It states that women are not allowed to travel elsewhere unless they are accompanied by their husbands or have his approval, along with other reasons. When several Middle Eastern countries engaged in wars and relationships reached a sharp increase in the attitudes of Muslim dictators and their followers under the guise of anti-Western political rhetoric, Atwood's concerns about the growing totalitarianism intensified in the years following the Iranian revolution (Jadwin, 2010, 24).

Replicating Atwood's thoughts, she believes that religious fundamentalism, whether at home or abroad, poses a significant threat. A notable instance is when Atwood visited Afghanistan; she was struck by the terror stemming from Afghan Muslim religious fundamentalism and observed the absence of Afghan women in the markets and streets (Atwood, 2005, p.192). For a decade (1979-1989), Afghanistan suffered a catastrophic war against the Soviet Union, followed by years of civil strife after the emergence of Muslim fundamentalism in 1978. UN officials were reportedly caught off guard by the Soviet invasion in July 1979, and the government aligned itself with the Mujahedin, ostensibly to promote religious freedom in Afghanistan and to safeguard the nation's autonomy, although this was primarily to thwart Soviet ambitions to expand their influence into the Middle East and South Asia, as America claims.

In 1998, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former advisor to the United States National Security Council, confessed that America's support and aid to the Afghan Mujahedin heightened the likelihood of a Soviet invasion. The US viewed this invasion not only as a disaster for its foreign interests but also as a provocation that compelled the US government to strengthen its foreign policy objectives. Ultimately, this war left devastating long-term consequences, implying the formation of the al-Qaeda organisation and bolstering concepts of global violent jihad, alongside the rise of the Taliban regime. All these consequences had a significant impact on the political landscape during that period (Lowenstein, 2016, p. 27).

The Handmaid's Tale (Atwood's sixth novel) serves as the writer's critical examination of oppression, identity, and gender within the realm of domestic politics. The author denounces the oppression of women and aspires to achieve gender equality in this narrative. It portrays the extent of degradation occurring in the United States, which fosters a "reinvigorated hatred of women and the explosive growth of religious patriarchal fundamentalism" (Jones, 1996, p. 36). Any reader would likely despise the tactics of Gilead's colonising forces, if not the regime itself, as it is an aggressive, puritanical system. All art forms defining the regressive social roles of citizens—the very clothes, social duties, behavioural standards, and individuals' reactions to everyday situations—along with the words they use to eliminate what the regime deems undesirable social views that contradict the Gileadean rules of domination and all forms of rebellion, are dictated by this caste system (Callaway, 2008, p.5).

Margaret Atwood, in this novel, employs a critical futuristic perspective to analyse and understand how women's bodies are subordinated due to environmental degradation. The novel has also faced criticism for its use of profanity. The answer is always singular. Atwood's response, throughout history, reflects how the writer of this novel, released in 1985, is confronted with the same questions. How did she manage to create such content? The novel's terrifying events are rooted in some of the darkest chapters of world history, including Ceaușescu's Romanian Communist regime and the struggles for female rights in 1980s America. In writing about what Atwood believes is the most prescient, she is indeed motivated by the fact that the writer possesses a rare insight. Before Offred, the writer originally drafted the novel under a different title. The name "Offred" by itself is significant; it mirrors the protagonist's status—she's a handmaid owned by Fred, a man; she belongs to him, "Of-Fred". The writer later changed the title to *The Handmaid's Tale* to more deeply reflect the allegorical nature of the novel.

Atwood was inspired to write the novel due to the significant impact of everyday real life and the modern struggles women face in gaining rights within contemporary political systems. By conducting in-depth research into the phenomenon of polygamy, Atwood worked diligently in the States to demonstrate that polygamy is a violation of women's rights. The religious institution was, in fact, directly responsible and contributed in part to men becoming encouraging towards it. This marriage involved the old order Mormons who believed that polygamous marriages

were ordained by God. To persuade their followers about this form of marriage, the old Mormons circumvented the laws. Smith (2011) mentions that some men cannot disclose their second marriage to their first wife or even to their second wife, nor do they inform their wives about the circumstances of the marriage (p. 16).

Atwood began to deliberate over her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1981 and felt that it was an odd kind of novel to write because she was afraid that people would see it as merely paranoid. The novel, much like other novels, started with the question, 'What if?'. She wants to ask people whether all events in the book could probably happen anywhere, rather than what they think cannot happen, because when any democracy begins to restrict freedom in the name of freedom, then trouble will ensue. House (2019) was able to answer the "What ifs" and continued from there. Once, when Atwood was asked about the origins of this novel and whether her works were influenced by her travels to Iran, India, and Afghanistan, and if these explorations had significantly contributed to her literary output, she replied in an interview with Patrick French that: "People jump to that conclusion quickly, because they have not gone into the American and European history of the treatment of women." The mistreatment of women is not unique to either you or me. In 19th-century Europe, conditions for women actually regressed, and the reason I wrote the book is that, at that time, they wanted women back in the home in the USA. To this effect, I provided them (they hadn't worked out how yet)." (Thomson & Ganz, 2017, p.73).

Other early books that touched Atwood's heart and influenced her are quite fascinating. Among them is Dora Foster's *Sex Radicalism: As Seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time* (1905), where Foster quotes: "I hope the scarcity of children will continue until motherhood is regarded at least as much as the sufferings of soldiers campaigning in war". The nation, then, will consequently be worth supplying with sufficient kids. Another book ... to investigate the history of both biology and culture; *Genes, mind, and culture-the coevolutionary process*, was written by Lumsden and Wilson in 1985, and in this book they wrote, that "the great majority of economically more primitive societies are polygamous, and the number of wives is generally regarded as a measure of masculine success," contemporary society believes that being the first to separate socially and the putting down the "battle status" is the recipe for matrimonial felicity, and therefore the wives are regarded as a measure of "masculine success" and masculine advancement (p. 350) .

Besides, the worst events of 1979 that the history of the United States has ever witnessed include the numerous nuclear accidents in Pennsylvania and the attacks from the second wave of feminism. *The Handmaid's Tale* presents these events and their effects in a visually significant manner; the events are set in a dystopian version of US society that becomes a republic named Gilead, ruled and controlled by dictatorial leaders of a Christian sect who aim to enforce a domineering system based on their personal interpretation of the Old Testament, with the division of women into various roles depending on their abilities. Some women are forced to work across the colonies, where many places are bargaining for nuclear attacks. Some of these women are compelled to serve as Marthas, while others are made to become Handmaids for the 'righteous' couples, as they are unable to conceive. As Atwood writes, the primary causes of the sudden and unexpected decline in birth rates were the effects of various chemical materials and atomic bombs, along with their radiation. "Stillbirths, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were common and increasing, and there have been connections made between them and the many nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns and sabotage of the time, and leakages from chemical and biological warfare stockpiles, and toxic-waste disposal sites" (Cowart, 1989, p. 86).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the writer focuses on presenting a deep and accurate description of Gilead's deteriorating environment, saturated with radiation as a result of the chemical materials that have ruined the natural surroundings. Through explicit descriptions, Atwood depicts how America has transformed into desperate places due to nuclear wars and pollution from nuclear weapons, which have caused damage to the people and environment around them. She writes: Though the other colonies are worse due to toxic dumps and radiation spills, your nose will fall off and your skin will peel away like rubber gloves. The measurements weren't too difficult; they simply don't have to feed you much or provide you with protective clothing or anything like that; it's cheaper not to." (Atwood, 1986, p. 248).

As for the modes that can cause chemical material seriously polluting fertility: two ostensible headlines are "lead pois of the work place on increase" and "out of control". This title, although it seems like it was written in order to be the spark that all *The Handmaid's Tale* needs to be, relates to the book directly: "Infertility: not uncommon male problem, but often treatable." There is no infertile man in Republic of Gilead and infertility in men simply does not matter according to Gilead's government

as they are infertile, women are infertile only (Vuković, 2022.p. 11). The reason why people exposed to radiation and chemicals during a nuclear war cannot reproduce is that they lose the ability to conceive children. Because of this, Gilead's regime utilises the wombs of fertile women to reproduce through this process. The domination of women and the subjugation of nature are also closely connected in the novel, as women are a rare commodity in the same way that the country needs to create new babies. As a writer, Atwood was clearly aware of the numerous atrocities happening around the world that influenced women to take control of their bodies.

Romania's establishment of laws concerning women's abortion rights in 1966 was one of the most atrocious acts to which Atwood was largely exposed. On that day, she read an article in a newspaper titled "Women forced to have babies". This article discusses Romania and its leader, who passed strict mandates to ensure women bore no fewer than four children; every month, women were required to undergo pregnancy testing and declare their reasons for being pregnant to enrich the country by increasing the population. According to this policy, abortion will be permitted for women who have at least five children. It is a cruel maternity system; the effects, even today, can be seen in how Romanian society perceives motherhood. The former Romanian communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu issued decree number 770, which banned all means of contraception for women and outlawed abortions, aiming to increase Romania's population in opposition to the Soviet Union's dominance and, therefore, to free it. For thousands of women, the 770 decree was the primary reason for their deaths, as they preferred to induce miscarriage themselves at home rather than in a hospital, while others opted for illegal abortion. This policy resulted in Romanian orphanages being overcrowded, leading to inhumane conditions that became a global scandal (p.150) (Drăghici, 2017).

In an interview with Canadian writer Atwood on RTÉ Radio 1's Ryan Tubridy Show, she states that the anti-abortion laws are a 'form of slavery' due to the death of women and the consequences: "As for those who didn't recall", Ceausescu ordered four children per woman and one would have to pass monthly pregnancy tests. "If you did not get pregnant, you had to say why; why you hadn't gotten pregnant. It was nuts. That resulted in a number of suicides and put the number of kids in orphanages without proper care. It was just horrible" (RTÉ Radio 1's Ryan Tubridy Show, 2019).

Like Atwood, the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s significantly influenced her life, drawing attention to issues of sexism and her quest for access to contraception and other birth control methods. The marginal crossing of US citizens from their side of the border into Canada (Atwood, 2019, pp. 22-23). By 1984, when Atwood began to explore the themes of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the social and cultural atmosphere of North America had genuinely become increasingly conservative. Furthermore, anticipating this trend, they, along with social critics, began to recognise the rise of totalitarianism in various parts of the world, tracing back to 1949, the year *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published. Those social critics warned of the state of the world, still tormented under the yoke of brutal governments; none of the communist archipelagos of the Second World, nor any of the capitalist empires of the First World, had succeeded in creating a climate of social justice and peace that peoples expected after the Second World War.

Atwood had observed for over ten years (1979, 4 November) the fundamentalist Islamic coup in Iran, led by Khomeini, the exiled fundamentalist religious leader. This situation involved a breach of diplomatic tradition, provoked by Iranian students reportedly incited to seize the U.S. embassy, resulting in fifty-two American hostages, an ordeal that would ultimately last four hundred forty-four days (Jones, 2015, p. 430). Six minutes after Reagan's inauguration in 1981, he secured the release of the hostages. Later, it was revealed how this occurred: the release of the hostages would be contingent upon the American government supplying weapons to the Iranian government, which was anti-U.S. Atwood, a Canadian citizen, possesses a strong desire to belong to her country. However, she has consistently tried to maintain a firm detachment from the dominating influence of the south as a means of protecting her own nation, yet she realises that U.S. influence is impossible to ignore.

The rise of an evangelical Christian committee called "Moral Majority" in 1979 was a political group aiming to mobilise voters to send Reagan to defeat Jimmy Carter in the USA presidential election of 1980. This movement was influenced by the committee's strength and its agenda, which included outlawing abortion, rejecting equal rights, enforcing a patriarchal vision of family life, and eliminating all radio, television, and films that might promote an antifamily agenda. The Moral Majority Committee was entirely opposed to "women's rights" (Jadwin, 2010, p.28). Atwood wrote the novel to document its era and how it became a masterpiece. However, many

headlines in 1985 about finishing the novel first drew attention to *The Handmaid's Tale*: 'What causes high rates of infant death in the US? Especially among black people?' This title is one of many similar ones that sparked significant discussion and received broad coverage. Additionally, this article: "Rights gains imperilled" and: "Village moneylenders sometimes take an infant from the farmer to punish him for not paying a loan." Furthermore, through the headline, "Disappearing children," one can vividly visualise what people thought and what was in people's minds regarding the climate of present societies. (House, 2019).

Even if the internet service is not yet available, the above articles can be obtained, and there is no need for intensive research. When Atwood reads magazines or journals, she used to keep the articles for this purpose as a backup in a special box. So, every time she is asked how she made up the novel, she responds, "I did not make it up", as she has done a million times before. "This is proof, all of this in these boxes" (Neuman, 2006, p. 86). Also, in the section on the Right's ascent during World War II, there is a topic regarding Nazi Germany's Lebensborn movement, a programme established by the Nazi authorities to increase the population of Germany and serve as a tool for the kidnapping of foreign children whose appearances were perceived as 'Aryan'. The government encouraged women to give birth to a super race kid in Lebensborn homes as it fulfilled this program by giving racially valuable wives that have pure extra race. Women were encouraged to give birth to super-race children bred for looks and loyalty, tall, blond-haired, and blue-eyed. Adolf Hitler would be his god; his creed would be Nazism. (Thomson & Ganz, 2017, p.36).

However, smart cards enable cashless payments, despite facing opposition from some individuals. In Germany, identity cards have been digitised, allowing the government to monitor citizens' movements. When these cards are used in any machine, they detect a person's location, similar to a tracker. It is also done to cut off any specific group's funding, in this case, severing access for women as was done at the beginning of Gilad. One of the many ways to track individuals' movements nowadays is through the GPS on people's phones. In Kashmir, India has implemented this procedure as well, not only cutting off cash but also disconnecting the entire Internet network. The Communist Party, which governs the Chinese people through its internal network, has blocked all social media sites, meaning that in China, people can no longer access Facebook and other sites (House, 2019).

3.2. Women's Rights in the Shadow of the Gilead Republic

The Handmaid's Tale novel conveys undeniable political and social relevance. In this novel, which Margaret Atwood wrote in 1985, viewers and critics alike directly recognise that the world of the Gilead Republic, where women are forced to live under oppression and deprived of their human rights, is no longer rooted in fiction but represents reality. Furthermore, many critics have praised the feminist themes in the novel and Atwood's warnings to female authors, artists, documentarians, and historians. In any patriarchal society that turns violent and radical, women's voices will be silenced through the prevention of the written word and the suppression of freedoms. In various ways, the women in Atwood's novel are oppressed and persecuted, primarily through rape during the ritualistic confiscation of their reproductive rights. These women are also prohibited from writing and reading; this dehumanising restriction prevents them from recording their life histories. This results in a loss of power and literary awareness (Hoge, 2021, pp. 123-145).

Charlton James, the American writer (2010), states that: "Oppression occurs when individuals are systematically subjected to political, economic, cultural, or social degradation because they belong to a social group, results from structures of domination and ideologies of superiority and inferiority" (p.150). Oppression acts as a vital barrier to any society's pursuit of well-being and health. It arises from the unfair application of laws by undemocratic authorities and involves the unjust use of violence in all its forms to deny people their freedom and equality. As a source of inequality, oppression appears through the exercise of dictatorship over the populace. Not only do tyrannical leaders oppress communities, but sometimes the government system itself also causes oppression. Moreover, oppression poses a significant threat to justice, encompassing both psychological and physical forms, and is perpetuated through racism and sexual violence. Additionally, oppression entails relegating an individual to a social status lower than what they deserve, reflecting a sense of disdain, or even imposing mental burdens, such as the psychological weight that accumulates from oppressive ideologies. Oppression's harm arises when individuals are unfairly and systematically restricted, burdened, undervalued, or reduced by any form of brute force, whether psychological or material. It is a dehumanising manner of treating

individuals and dominating them, employed by some dictators to protect their positions as rulers and to serve their interests. This makes life more difficult for oppressed people from poor, weak classes, as those in power control those with no power. Since power involves economic, political, and social relations, the regime of power enforces numerous plans to control others (Cudd, 2005, p. 22).

From early times, one of the most important issues has been, and still is, women's oppression. Societies have been constructed according to the notion that regards women as merely a source of reproduction for human life; women have been valued according to their ability to produce children. Beauvoir (1949) indicates about society's view of women: "Woman? Very simple, say those who like simple answers: She is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her" (KHALIL, & ABDELSABOUR, 2018, p. 48). Women in the Gilead Republic faced significant social pressures, which had a profound impact on female characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Not only did Offred, Ofglen, and Janine, as women Handmaids, endure oppression, but many other women also lived under the tyranny of the country's commanders. Gilead society degrades the Handmaids through cruel treatment that separates the body from personality and desires. Gilead culture regards the Handmaids as sacred reproductive organs, rather than as individuals with personhood; their value is solely based on their fertility. During the Gilead Republic's reign, women faced various social problems, including separation from family, lack of proper education, restrictions on freedom, forced childbirth for elite families, and the obligation to perform certain rituals. These issues led to severe depression that nearly claimed their lives.

The writer portrays a society built on oppression to criticise its role in shaping the details of any culture (Pandelaki, 2021, p.5). The writer's techniques of writing facilitate the readers' realization to the characters' suffering under the oppression circumstance they lived, also, Atwood's writing techniques defined that oppression in each character, Atwood, through her inner thoughts she highlights the relation between the oppression of a number of people and individual oppression, the writer wants to show the influences of the systematic oppression practiced by the government.

Likewise, one cannot deny or ignore the political and social significance of this novel. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, critics and audiences recognise that Gilead's

dystopian world is not fictional; rather, it is deeply rooted in real societies where women are deprived of their rights. The novel highlights an intended warning for female writers, all historians, and any documentarians to observe violations in patriarchal societies, where women's voices are suppressed by gagging mouths through the weapon of the word. In the society of *The Handmaid's Tale*, women face oppression in all possible forms, including rape and rituals controlling their reproductive rights; Offred is the best example. In Gilead's society, women are also deprived of the right to write and read, which dehumanises them and serves as a restriction to prevent any attempts to document women's history. This obstructs literary awareness and halts the formation of the power of words. Furthermore, Atwood's tragic story in *The Handmaid's Tale* narrates the suffering of Offred, a young woman striving to protect her humanity amidst the sexist oppression and humiliation of Gilead.

The main character, a handmaid who is forced to leave her daughter and husband, is employed to work as a tool to reproduce children for Gilead's most powerful couple. Once, Offred worked as an assistant book editor, assisting in the publication of academic titles as well as novels. Offred became unable to access any words after she was paid to edit books; this is not accidental. Atwood intended to highlight the impacts of male domination on women, aiming to restrict them as a result of the extreme policies imposed by the new regime of Gilead's Christian government. In this context, Offred suffers gender inequalities through the use of specific language that maintains oppressive strategies alongside violence as a harsh and direct means of controlling the women of Gilead. This extends to the idea that they are not allowed to wear what they choose or use makeup due to male interference and dominance. Even the way Offred articulates her experiences is constrained by the rigid language of Gilead's regime, reflecting what Gilead permits her to think, which limits her position in society.

Furthermore, Offred and other women are prevented from acquiring knowledge; they are not permitted to read in order to keep them away from the truth. Ignorance is a crucial tool used by the government to suppress resistance, which is based on an understanding of their true rights in a free life. Even the television programmes that women are allowed to watch are under government control, designed to show only state-approved content that conveys only what the government decides to

reveal, steering clear of negative news about wars that the regime is involved in, as well as news about resistance movements. Offred and other women seek the truth as a source of power; they are in need of knowledge. The government hinders any attempt to understand the truth of the Gilead regime, so in order to survive, women must surrender and avoid ending up dead. Offred wishes for the end of Gilead, but she lacks the power to participate. She surrenders to live in a society dominated by men, which employs the “Aunts” — many women tasked with maintaining its system. They are responsible for re-educating the Handmaids, who are convinced that these rules are justified to control women. The regime uses the ‘Aunts’ to oppress women, thereby strengthening the government’s power.

Moreover, Offred is subjected to a process of exchanging her previous identity in an attempt at re-identification to become more aligned with Gilead’s values by adopting a new name that uses the preposition “of” before the commander’s name, Fred, to whom she belongs. Consequently, she is named Offred. Gilead’s regime seeks for all Handmaids to forget the values and details of their previous lives. Therefore, what the government regards as valid will persist, even if it is not suitable, regardless of whether it is genuinely true or not. These are the rules of a totalitarian regime: it is the male-dominated government's will that places the truth beyond scrutiny, no matter how absurd it may be, far removed from real logical justifications.

Funny, unexpected, and terrifying, it is compelling. The novel is a scathing satire and an intense, dire warning; it is a tour de force. *The Handmaid's Tale* narrates the story of female protagonists known as the Handmaids, who try to live and resist through various methods in a society dominated by male power. The novel highlights the systematic gender oppression that the Handmaids experience within Gilead’s patriarchal society through a series of imposed requirements compelling them to participate in unfair procreative rituals. Participation is obligatory; the Handmaids are denied their right to choose, and taking part in these rituals is not a choice. When Offred was given the right to choose, she could become a Handmaid, but her only permitted choices were death or being sent to a desolate place: the Unwomen Colonies. In Gilead’s society, the Handmaids’ choice to live means they select their position within that society (Casibual, 2022, p.129). Therefore, Gilead’s society argues that the choice to be a Handmaid justifies the imposition of participation in dehumanising and unjust procreative rituals (Prasanna & Lingam, 2023, p. 8).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Gilead government controls not only reproduction but also oversees human breeding to fulfil duties that strictly govern society for specific agendas. In Gilead's Republic, a considerable number of married couples suffer from an inability to have children for various reasons. However, only the women in these couples are blamed and labelled "barren" for the couple's infertility, even though men might also be infertile; it is prohibited by the government to accuse men of being directly responsible for infertility. High-ranking couples can employ a Handmaid, who must be a proven fertile woman and single. She solely must have sexual relations with the high-ranking husband and conceive children for him and his "barren" wife. A monthly "Ceremony" ritual for sex includes all parties: the husband, the Handmaid, in addition to the "barren" wife (Balenović, 2018, p.31).

Fertile women are viewed as highly valued commodity; once they are distinguished, they obliged to leave their identities, money, works, families and all they have before they were kidnapped and treated as prisoners so as to be treated to work as handmaids after training them during the incarceration time, those Handmaids' role is to give birth to children for Gilead's rich infertile couples. The government's propaganda, achieved through the harsh treatment of the Aunts, allowed them to torture any girl who refused to obey their instructions, alongside many other measures to fulfil the aims of the new regime. The Commanders are among the powerful men of this regime, overseeing societal matters and national affairs, all regulated by Gilead's Commanders. Their administration is based on the interpretations of extremist readings of the Bible. This regime thrives on the demoralisation and anguish of its people. The corrupt, immoral religious laws have instituted various forms of organised oppression that the regime inflicts upon Gilead residents. These laws stem from an extremist understanding of the Bible, deeming those who are deemed unlawful as sinful. These laws also treat victims of misfortune and accidents as guilty individuals. The government has compelled residents to adhere to these laws, which constitutes oppression in itself (Kadhim, 2022, p. 32).

The concept of the handmaid as a surrogate mother is drawn from the story of Abraham's infertile wife Sarah in the *Old Testament*, who permitted Abraham to have relations with Hajar, her handmaid, in order to conceive a child. Away from the regular monthly ceremony that involves a harsh obligatory copulation, attended by the barren wife alongside the Commander, the Handmaids lead hollow and unremarkable

lives, kept in segregation. The general public can easily recognise the distinctive red clothing they wear. *The Handmaid's Tale* narrates Offred's personal story; her name, which means "Of Fred," signifies her belonging to Fred the Commander (Bracke, 2024, p. 269). Even no one knew her real name, as the Red Centre, which belongs to the regime, eradicated her name and identity. She is referred to as a "wandering womb" by the regime; her name is no more than a tag to identify her as a Handmaid. As she states: "My name is not Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses because it's forbidden...your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others" (Atwood, 1986, p.99).

Offred is the surrogate mother as assigned by the government; she is treated as something belonging to the Commander. As the protagonist of the novel, she recalls her previous life before she became a handmaid and longs to return to her past life before she was forbidden to write, learn, or even read. The isolation weighs heavily upon her. She learns how to cope and flee (Fitch, 2015, p.4). Offred's feelings of inner oppression are evident as she agrees to participate in the monthly Ceremony as a form of systematic oppression. While she narrates the story of the Ceremony again, she believes that, "nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for" (Atwood, 1986, p. 94). Her pretext is that she agreed to engage in these rituals; her justification confirms the cruel nature of the Ceremony.

Additionally, the accepting language that Offred uses reveals her inner feelings of oppression. Her speech clarifies her viewpoint and what she does to persuade herself to accept the bitter reality. She agrees to participate in the ceremony because she does not regard it as a ritualistic form of rape. Her justifications emphasise her hopeless attitude towards her duties and responsibilities as a Handmaid, as well as her compliance with all the dreadful practices associated with the ceremony. Her justification and acceptance mirror Offred's inner feelings of oppression. The writer utilises the first-person narrator's position to tell the story of the protagonist, Offred, the handmaid (Kadhim, 2022, p.34).

Janine, known as Ofwarren, is one of many female Handmaid victims. She suffers from a severe inner oppression because she lost her illegal baby. Ofglen, another handmaid, describes Ofwarren's inner feelings, stating: "she thinks it's her fault...Two in a row. For being sinful" (Atwood, 1986, 215). Ofwarren blames herself;

she believes she is solely responsible for the death of her baby after the state declared it an Unbaby due to its deformities (Ibid, p.122). They dispose of it, and Ofwarren (Janine) believes she has committed shameful acts; she sees herself as a sinful person, overwhelmed with guilt, leading her to live in isolation. She thinks society's declarations are entirely true, even though they are not, which exacerbates her inner oppression, compounded by the government's oppression.

Another way Gilead's oppression manifests are through the significance of colour. The government enforces its citizens to wear only certain colours to identify their social classes and strip them of their identities. The individual's loss of identity facilitates group classification, as each group is instructed to wear clothes of the same colour, perform the same tasks, and behave in the same way. This prejudice, which solidifies the citizens' status, represents another form of the state's oppression of the people (Kirkvik, 2015, p.27). *The Handmaid's Tale* tackles the distinct development of the oppression imposed by the government in society. Atwood seeks to draw attention to a critical point: that access to women's bodies for reproduction, regardless of sexuality, is viewed as a commodity provided by healthy wombs. Perhaps *The Handmaid's Tale* is not purely a work of fiction. Perhaps we are part of a new Gilead everywhere (Dektar, 2013). Likewise, the writer Atwood explains how oppression destroys people and leads to the loss of identity and inner suffering—many characters in this novel experience the heavy effects of government oppression. Atwood employs short phrases to convey the effects of oppression on the characters, which helps the reader better understand the impact of oppression on individuals within societies, resulting in a continuous cycle of oppression.

3.3. The Rebellion of Individuals Against Gilead's Oppressive Laws

The novel issues a warning and calls for interactive responses to the situations depicted, encouraging an understanding of the lessons learned and their application to everyday life to prevent a new form of Gilead. Indirectly, the novel urges readers to explore the significance of questioning, to not accept what the government imposes, and to inquire about everything before one loses the ability to ask, "Are there any questions?" (Atwood, 1986, p. 388).

In the Gileadean Republic, the ruling institution faces serious and sinister consequences: specifically, death. The Handmaids are not allowed to object or oppose, nor to postpone any duty, nor even to utter a word or voice an opinion regarding their private lives. A hidden sense of revolution simmers against this autocratic regime. Rebellion is a recurring theme in the novel. Throughout *The Handmaid's Tale*, most of the main characters rebel for various reasons, each interacting with, challenging, and navigating the oppression in accordance with their own thoughts and interests.

The Commander and his wife, Serena Joy, serve as an example; they benefit from rebellion against the laws and, for this reason, they rebel. Ofglen and Moira are activists, among the characters who fight and revolt against the regime's oppression, resisting injustice. Offred, representing every woman, finds herself severely restricted by Gilead's patriarchal theocracy. Although her reactions are not sufficiently compelling to overthrow the theocratic regime, Offred rebels through various forms of mental and physical actions, which ultimately help to maintain her pre-Gilead identity (Stillman & Johnson, 1994, p. 74). Even with her lack of power, she engages in small physical acts to preserve her individuality, regain her feelings of control amidst an oppressive society, and save the remnants of her identity through minor acts, such as theft, which emphasises her will to resist the oppressive environment she inhabits and her hope for a future free from injustice. Among her rebellious acts to remain unique is her use of stolen butter as a lotion for her skin. Optimistically, she says: "As long as we do this, butter our skin to keep it soft, we can believe that we will someday get out, that we will be touched again, in love or desire" (Atwood, 1986, p.96). Offred views this small act of using butter to nourish her skin as a defiance against the oppressive regime; she believes that her body deserves care as well. This act encourages and promotes her ongoing struggle to regain her former identity as a liberated woman, a wife, and a mother from the time before Gilead (Stimpson, 1986, p.764).

Regardless of the role assigned to her as a "wandering womb" for childbearing, she refuses to alter her identity. When she pilfers butter to nourish her parched body, both actions represent forms of defiance and link her former state of liberation with her current state of oppression. On the day of the ceremony, as Offred is about to enter the sitting room, she relies—once again—on thievery as a psychological trick, seeing it as a source of power. She states, "I would like to steal something from this room. It would make me feel that I have power" (Atwood, 1986, p.80). Offred has never stolen

and does not steal, but she expresses a desire to feel a sense of power and agency, which derives not from stealing butter, but from the act of choice, regardless of the impact that choice entails. In the society prior to the Gilead regime, influencing surrounding societies was incredibly powerful; people continually sought to “have an impact” or even “make a difference.” The sexually oppressive Gileadean society prohibits Offred from making a difference, forcing her to resort to psychological and physical actions to maintain her individuality and self-respect. From the beginning of the novel, it is clear that she alone is aware of such physical actions, implying that she seeks to do so for her own welfare. As the events of the novel progress, Offred becomes more aware and daring in engaging with other characters in a rebellious manner. These small physical actions boost her confidence and foster her desire to defy the government’s rules, driven by her sense of power. Her warm, intimate relationship with the Commander exemplifies her physical interactions that lead to her engagement with him.

Regarding Offred’s interaction with the Commander, she notes: “I could become an Unwoman. However, to refuse to see him could be worse. There is no doubt about who holds the real power. Nevertheless, there must be something he wants from me. To want is to have a weakness. It is this weakness, whatever it is, that entices me” (Ibid., p.136). Offred realises that the Commander has the ability to influence her, as well as power; likewise, she seeks any suitable chance or situation to exploit his desires for her own benefit, aiming to gain the advantage of the Commander’s “weakness.” As her relationship with the Commander develops, she becomes more confident in bartering for information, magazines, and body lotion. Offred’s desire to satisfy her need for such luxuries emphasises her refusal to sacrifice her previous identity before Gilead; on the contrary, she is willing to risk her safety to continue protecting her past.

Day by day, their relationship grows stronger and more complex, pushing Offred to engage in passionate sex with Nick. This is so risky act in the novel, forbidden by the government. Her relationship with Nick nurtures Offred’s individuality as she secretly visits him at night. Offred risks her duties as a Handmaid to enjoy the comfort of intimacy and pleasure; this sexual relationship is her most incredible luxury in life. Through her connection with Nick, she gains control, unlike her relationship with the Commander. The connection between Offred and Nick is a

blend of simple companionship and sexual desires; this bond reflects her agency and self-esteem. She states: "I went back to Nick. Time after time, on my own, without Serena knowing. It wasn't called for, there was no excuse. I did not do it for him, but for myself entirely" (Ibid, p. 268). Even though Nick cannot replace Luke, her pre-Gilead husband, Offred uses Nick for her own desires and pleasure, much like using butter as lotion for her body. She risks her safety to protect her true self and her desire to gain empowerment and self-worth (Stimpson, 1986, p.76). These examples serve as indicators of Offred's growing confidence in her commitment to maintaining a sense of personal dignity and fulfilling her own needs. This leads to perfect synchronicity as she associates her physical actions with a mental transformation, shifting her views against Gilead's oppression. Her sense of ownership, her memoirs, and her feeling of agency collectively reinforce her purpose to reclaim her dignity and protect her former identity.

The novel begins with Offred's complete surrender to the new government; she feels out of place and does not belong to anything around her: "The door of the room—not my room, I refuse to say my—is not locked" (Atwood, 1986, p.8). Although she has lived in this room for some time, she perceives it as unfamiliar. Her strange feelings stem from Gilead's policies, which have stripped Offred of all aspects of her individuality. Her physical actions create a sense of mental rejection towards the oppression. Her mental satisfaction with oppression began to diminish, thereby aiding her in restoring Offred's inner spirit. When she discovers that the Commander stops outside her room, she inquires, "Was he in my room? I called it mine" (49). Also, her sense of privacy and ownership intensified further when Moira inquired about the relationship between the Commander and Offred. She answered, "He's my commander" (243). This particular relationship between her and the Commander hints indirectly at more significant ownership issues. This forbidden interaction between her and the Commander undermines Gilead's oppressive structure, allowing her to act as if he belongs to her.

The assumed process of both individuals' ownership and possession of belongings is crucial to her endeavour to retrieve Offred's identity. This development in the sense of ownership contributes to her mental reactions through her inner reflections on past memories as a means to envision her strongest connection to her previous identity from the pre-Gilead period. She has an old song that she sings, but

she says: “I don’t know if the words are right. I can’t remember. Such songs are not sung anymore in public, especially the ones that use words like free” (54). Even when she can’t remember the words of these songs, the music reconnects Offred with her previous identity as a form of rebellion against the unjust regime and her current one. The music and her past memories serve as a coping mechanism, enabling Offred to temporarily escape the false reality she endures day by day. Sometimes she says, “The night is my time out. Where should I go?” implying the escapist nature of her mind (37). These mental acts allow Offred to recall the past and restore her spirit.

Though they seem small, both her physical and mental acts give Offred a huge sense of hope for a free future and help preserve her previously lost identity. The long time she lived in Gilead’s oppressed society has transformed her physical and mental actions into those of a more confident and daring woman. Although her life is completely changed and will never be the same as before, she still feels that she is alive and physically well. Her simple acts of rebellion remind her that she is the daughter of a female activist and that she can change the world without violence (Stimpson, 1986, p.74). However, Offred’s mother’s history as a feminist activist demands greater acts of rebellion from Offred since she is the daughter of a feminist activist, aiming to replace the dictatorial regime with a democratic one. Consequently, these characters must seek increasingly diverse means of resistance to survive in Gilead, rejecting its dehumanising laws, limited spaces for women, and imposed identities on them.

Inactivity and resistance accumulate as individuals keep their true identities a secret in their minds. While the enhancement of the inner self occurs in various contexts within Gilead, the ultimate outcome remains largely the same. This indicates a psychological process where Offred, Serena Joy, and Moira resist mentally and emotionally, recalling happy memories from their pre-Gilead lives to gain a fleeting sense of escape and a somewhat empty feeling of power. As for Serena Joy, the Commander’s wife, when she exploits other women to benefit herself, she employs her complicity to enhance her identity and protect her position in Gilead’s government as a Wife. Although this role is less prominent than her previous position as the spokeswoman for Evangelical politics during the pre-Gilead period, Serena Joy’s use of her position as a means of exploitation can be seen as her efforts to resist oppression and preserve the illusion of her former influence and power.

All women must protect and promote their existence, which aligns with Gilead's strategies of keeping women dispersed to mitigate the risk of unity against the regime. *The Handmaid's Tale* is one of the narratives that transcends time and place; it is a novel relevant to every era and location, particularly in the United States during the Trump administration and the aftermath of that period. The regression of women's rights and the Roe v. Wade case, which represents an overturning, emphasise the value of the novel and how it is relevant today. In Gilead, which could be any country, women live deprived of freedom, their rights, and identity. At the same time, subjectivity is so active that there is no way for women but to resist in order to create a system to confront the authoritarian regime. Women's resistance influences and enhances feminist progress.

The Handmaid's Tale novel presents lessons to teach women how to confront oppression and strive for recognition and freedom, thereby earning their equitable place alongside men. By depicting Offred and other oppressed women, it illustrates their continual struggle against the Gilead government for self-confidence and bravery. The novel encourages all women in the world to draw inspiration from it and to appreciate their role in resisting oppression and patriarchy everywhere (Khan, 2018, pp. 67-82). But at the end of the novel, Gilead becomes worse, not better than before. The conditions in Gilead society increasingly degraded until it was either destroyed by war or broke down. The novel concludes with the fact that the Gilead Republic no longer exists; instead, a new society has developed. Those who were fascinated by Gilead's control have disappeared, but some began supporting the new regime. In contrast, others managed to flee despite the government's brutal practices against citizens seeking freedom, and Gilead's cracks were exploited to hasten its collapse.

To sum up, the present chapter depicts a totalitarian patriarchal society rooted in religion and the complete neglect of women's rights. *The Handmaid's Tale* illustrates the dehumanised condition of women, their complex position, and how their rights are influenced by the patriarchal society depicted in the narrative. The novel displays an intimate and private understanding of the oppression women experience. Offred, the protagonist, shares her views on feminism as a form of private rebellion. *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a warning about the present dangers facing society today, such as the restriction of women's rights and numerous other violations that not only occurred in the past but continue to happen universally even now. Atwood's

novel presents a very realistic warning that women still lose their sense of safety regarding their rights, which could be easily taken away. Offred and her peers exemplify their lost rights, highlighting that this could also occur in contemporary society. Women must not cease their struggle to gain and ensure their rights. They strive to combat any regime like Gilead. Women have fought for centuries to achieve and preserve equality. The novel serves as a symbol of contemporary feminism; Gilead mirrors our society, revealing a parallel between the novel and the real-life struggles faced by many societies.

3.4. Intersections of Oppression: Feminist, Psychological, and Postcolonial Perspectives

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood is a profound analysis of feminist theory, oppression, power, and identity within a totalitarian regime. Feminist theory significantly enhances our understanding of how the novel depicts systemic gender oppression and women's methods of resistance. It firmly and vividly demonstrates how patriarchal ideology can create oppressive social orders based on the subjugation and struggle of women, who are nearly entirely constrained by patriarchy. The novel is a critique of the dynamics of power, patriarchy, and totalitarianism, presenting a dystopian society marked by oppressive governance. Through her novel, Atwood explains how power structures are built and upheld, with a strong bias of patriarchy that continues to rob women of their rights and liberties. The intertwining effects of authority, the tendency of gender roles, and the inseparable part of individual complicity further fuse the essence of patriarchal oppression presented in the narrative.

The oppressive role of religion within totalitarian societies, as elaborated upon by Atwood, also addresses the fact that religion has evolved into an oppressive institution aiming to diminish... The religious doctrine in Gilead is designed to sanction women and uphold patriarchal dominance over women's freedom and autonomy. This exploitation of religious authority further illustrates the manifold implications of living under a theocratically authoritarian regime and its devastating impact on how women live and perceive themselves. *The Handmaid's Tale* becomes a battlefield of language and identity, as both can be utilised for oppression and resistance. Firstly, the regime exerts tight control over language and communication,

symbolising its power to strip away personal identity and silence dissent. Simultaneously, the protagonist's inner voice and subtle linguistic rebellion illustrate how, under systemic oppression, words can serve as a powerful means of expressing resistance and individuality.

Additionally, Atwood further develops feminist ecocriticism by linking ecological crises to gender oppression. The collapse of "Environment" in the novel signifies the breakdown of society, where both nature and women are exploited together. By adopting this ecofeminist lens, the theme is that through the perspective of patriarchy, ecological destruction is couched in gender oppression, and that both will require sustainable feminist approaches to address environmental and social justice issues. Taking a postcolonial and intersectional approach, Atwood employs the symbolic position of women's bodies as metaphorical colonial bodies subjected to conquest and subjugation. The novel reveals how the interplay of multiple identities—ranging from gender to class and race—intensifies and reflects the process of oppression as experienced in colonial times and their legacies. The narrative illustrates the connections between various forms of systemic oppression, representing the complexities and nuances of oppression while emphasising the necessity of an inclusive feminist analysis.

The psychological impacts of oppression in *The Handmaid's Tale* reveal the deeper psychological dimensions of subjugation and resistance. The characters in Atwood's story suffer from systemic oppression, leading them to experience profound psychological trauma that manifests in their silence, fragmentation, and traumatic memory. Importantly, psychoanalysis maps the internalised nature of oppression and how the characters' struggle plays out in the subconscious, along with the various means of coping and resisting in their subconscious. Atwood questions oppressive regimes of both the past and present to expose them. The novel draws explicit parallels between historical authoritarian political systems and contemporary socio-political developments, highlighting that oppressive ideologies continue to pose a real and immediate danger. Atwood emphasises the need to remain vigilant and actively resist in order to safeguard democratic freedoms and human rights through historical reflection and current parallels.

Concerning feminist theory and oppression, in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood vividly demonstrates feminist concerns by accurately describing the pervasive oppression within the dystopian society of Gilead. Atwood's work is a powerful illustration of feminist ideas because feminist theory engages with power structures that exclusively marginalise women from the mainstream. Stillman and Johnson (1994, p. 70) show that through the definition and containment of women's roles according to reproductive frameworks, Gilead's regime enforces and reinforces patriarchal domination. Its discussion revolves around the struggles of women during that time, which aligns with contemporary feminist discourses about gendered power relations.

Throughout Atwood's narrative, a woman's identity is routinely stripped away to reaffirm systems of oppressive patriarchal power. Stillman and Johnson, in this regard, also state that Gilead intentionally deprived women of their own agency to force compliance (Ibid p. 71). They have their names removed and replaced with identifiers of ownership by men, which keeps them subdued. The deliberate destruction of identity resonates well with feminist critiques of patriarchal control over women's freedom. Furthermore, it is worth reflecting on feminist theories of resistance, as part of Atwood's narrative also explores. Stillman and Johnson (1994, p. 72) demonstrate that Offred is the epitome of subtle forms of resistance against oppressive practices. In other words, her internal narrative and reflections reveal how she intends to act as an act of resistance, highlighting the feminist claim that women, even under very constrained situations, exercise agency through consciousness, even though it may be subtle defiance.

The dynamics between female characters within the narrative are similarly complex, reflecting the intricacies of feminist theory. Callaway (2008, p. 15) seeks to show how Gilead's women are not united by shared oppression, but how the regime strategically disunites them. Suspicion and competition are fostered through the hierarchical structures of Wives, Handmaids, and Aunts, which erode potential collective resistance. This depiction directly contradicts feminist movements that fail to incorporate intersectional issues into the broader rebellion for women's rights. Callaway (2008, p. 16) and Atwood further assert that they criticise not only patriarchal coercion but also the contradictions arising from internal feminism. The Aunts and other women who are part of Gilead's patriarchal system support and

enforce oppressive standards on others. This reveals a feminist discomfort with the notion that women are implicated in the maintenance of patriarchal norms and are therefore reluctant to portray a narrating woman as a victim.

At a feminist level, the novel is deeply engaged with the ideas of complicity and resistance. Stillman and Johnson (1994, p. 75) discuss Offred's grappling with complicity, acknowledging that she plays a part in sustaining the system as much as she resists it internally. This dual awareness is fundamental to understanding feminist discourse because the realities women endure within oppressive systems often require a subtle articulation of cooperation in order to have the chance to live. Atwood critiques feminist discussions about motherhood and reproduction. Stillman and Johnson (1994) argue that Gilead employs women's reproductive capabilities as a further means of oppression, reducing motherhood to mere functionality. The novel effectively captures a key theme in feminist theory, which examines how patriarchal structures manipulate the provision and withdrawal of reproductive rights to constrain women's freedoms over their bodies physically (p.77).

Callaway (2008) highlights Atwood's critique of feminism's shortcomings by illustrating how, in Gilead, the historical gains of the women's movement are systematically undone. Throughout the novel, we witness a reactionary assault on feminist progress and the ever-precious delicacy of women's rights, which continually require feminist protection for these advancements to endure (p.20).

It is quite effective to utilise feminist theory as it illustrates how language acts as a powerful tool for oppression and resistance. Stillman and Johnson (1994, p. 79) demonstrate how the linguistic control of phrases like "Blessed be the fruit" and other enforced scripts or phrases resonate with feminist critiques. According to feminist scholars, controlling language essentially limits thought, autonomy, and communication—all vital elements that must be regulated under oppressive patriarchal systems. Gilead's strict societal order clearly results from a feminist critique of traditional gender roles. Callaway (2008, p. 22) asserts that Atwood exposes the boundaries of traditional womanhood, showing how women are confined to certain roles with set boundaries that are monitored and enforced. Traditional gender norms originate from authoritarian rule, emphasising their oppressive and restrictive character, which aligns with feminist insights.

Stillman and Johnson (1994) further specify how this feminist theory in Atwood's work is complex in gendered power relations through Offred's interactions with male characters, especially the Commander. They argue that Atwood's depiction in *The Handmaid's Tale* of gendered authority dynamics is woven through Offred's interactions with the Commander and other male characters; her engagements mirror broader feminist concerns regarding how women's power is often controlled, limited, or even granted only when aligned with male interests, emphasising the conditional and complex nature of female agency within patriarchal societies. These interactions represent broader feminist anxieties over women's power – circumscribed by men and conferred solely when women pursue male interests (pp. 70-86).

Furthermore, Atwood's novel analyses feminist theories of intersectionality through the diverse experiences of its female characters. Callaway (2008) notes the silencing of particular groups within feminist movements at this point (p.25) and highlights the necessity for inclusion and broader solidarity with women from many different social strata. Through subtle acts of defiance, Atwood's novel emphasises the feminist perspective on bodily autonomy and resistance. Stillman and Johnson (1994, p.83) address how Offred's use of butter as a moisturiser is, in fact, symbolic and signifies a quiet reclaiming of bodily autonomy from oppressive laws. Such acts reinforce feminist claims of regaining personal agency in restrictive environments.

Atwood demonstrates, through feminist theory, how women's fears and hopes are exploited as tools of oppression. Callaway (2008, p. 30) recognises the psychological control mechanisms Gilead employs to highlight feminist concerns about the emotional and psychological manipulation of women within oppressive systems. Such techniques have severe adverse effects on women's sense of self and autonomy. Feminist theory seeks to reveal how oppression manifests in society. It is affirmed that Atwood's work effectively critiques patriarchal oppression, complicity, and resistance, and, in doing so, advocates for continued feminist analysis and activism to prevent such dystopian scenarios from becoming a reality.

Regarding the authority, patriarchy, and totalitarianism women endured, *The Handmaid's Tale*, written by Margaret Atwood, vividly illustrates how power and patriarchy operate within a totalitarian society. Vuković (2022) states that the Republic of Gilead's enforcement of patriarchal oppression is systemic in institutionalising

women's reproductive control (p.9). The novel portrays a society where power structures exist solely to serve male interests. It shows how deeply ingrained patriarchal values can be within such regimes, depriving women of their autonomy and freedom. Power in Gilead is hierarchical and gendered, with male dominance and control predominant at all levels of society. Vuković (2022, p. 10) demonstrates that men hold absolute authority in Gilead, driven by religious doctrine and upheld by state violence. This structured hierarchy exerts significant control over women's rights and reduces women to mere reproductive vessels. The regime politicises women's bodies, transforming them into spaces under strict regime control that reinforce a patriarchal order.

Both physical and psychological power are utilised as means of control in the regime depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Ibid, p. 11). The article further explains how Gilead employs psychological manipulation techniques such as surveillance and indoctrination to silence and control opposition and resistance. Through these methods, we observe how totalitarian power infiltrates every aspect of life and liberty, including emotional and individual dimensions. Filipovic (2017) asserts that Gilead's power is exercised through the flexible use of knowledge and language to exert authority. Subtle control ensures that women remain powerless and are unaware of how to resist. Gilead's censorship of education and literature systematically deprives women of their ability to imagine, conceptualise, and engage in acts of resistance. This indicates that maintaining patriarchal control serves as a fundamental mechanism of linguistic manipulation (p. 74).

Vuković (2022), as another similarity, confirms that Gilead women are disassociated from their former identities at the order of women's oppression. Because of this disconnection women are easier to be manipulated and governed (p. 11). A calculated form of showing its patriarchal authority while erasing a female's individuality is stripping away personal names and replacing them with titles, which are male names indicative of male ownership. Ritualistic violence and psychological conditioning are perpetuated by the regime's ceremonial practices, as noted by Filipovic (2017). It portrays the "Ceremony" as a ritualised form of reproductive coercion, symbolising both patriarchy and the powerlessness of women. The image encapsulates the brutal objectification and commodification of women's bodies under a totalitarian government. Gilead imposes strict roles for men and women to reinforce

patriarchal authority. Filipovic (2017) states that the state will explicitly categorise individuals using specific terms that come with defined rights and privileges. In doing so, Gilead ensures that individuals learn and uphold the hierarchical system, making it ingrained in society.

As each new class, doctrine, and command are introduced, the reader recognises that she is a woman living in a highly patriarchal society; however, power dynamics are also apparent in the relationships among women themselves. Vuković (2022, p. 12) demonstrates that women contribute to maintaining a patriarchal structure. Female authority (Power) in Gilead is vested in the Aunts, who, instead of using it to empower other women, exercise and enforce their power to sustain oppression and conformity among women, thereby supporting the totalitarian patriarchy. Complicity in maintaining totalitarian systems is an issue that Atwood deftly investigates. Filipovic (2017) states that in oppressive systems, individuals also indirectly contribute to their own oppression by allowing themselves to comply. The characters, like Offred, fight for their agency and identity while navigating limited choices, revealing a relationship between complicity, resistance, and survival under patriarchy.

In the character of Offred, one can observe a figure brimming with various ways to comprehend resistance within an oppressive context. Vuković (2022, p. 13) argues that Offred's internal narrative constitutes a subtle form of rebellion, a mental resistance against the totalitarian regime. The small actions she undertakes, her private thoughts, and secret desires, as she strives not to be hungover while she bubbles her way across the water, highlight the power of individual agency amidst an oppressive environment. According to Filipovic (2017), Gilead threatens to punish in order to remain in power. There is also a formidable and cruel method of psychological control in the form of fear of punishment, that is, submission. For example, public executions and rituals like Particutions are exercises in fear designed to maintain tight societal order and control dissent.

Vuković (2022, p. 14) emphasises that the patriarchal regime of Gilead, justifying its oppression through religion, manipulates biblical texts to achieve its aims. The regime turns religion into a political tool, merging political authority with religious authority to acclimatise its citizens to ideological and moral subordination.

This conflation of religion and state power serves as a potent tool. Filipovic (2017) also argues for the role in oppression of the regime's deliberate cultivation of ignorance and misinformation. By controlling the available information, the regime prevents women from forming their own views and understanding of issues, thereby ensuring their passive and submissive nature. This manipulation reinforces dependency and submission, which are crucial for maintaining such totalitarian control.

Through its depiction of Gilead, Atwood presents a striking illustration of how patriarchal systems exploit environmental crises and reproductive anxieties to enhance their own power. Vuković (2022) points out that ecological doom and diminishing fertility rates in the novel serve as pretexts for extremely harsh patriarchal policies (p. 15). In this scenario, we gain insight into how depraved regimes can take advantage of the population's fears and the vulnerabilities felt explicitly by women to impose strict control over the populace. In conclusion, the novel's enduring relevance arises from its compelling depiction of the inescapable threat of oppression by patriarchal and totalitarian regimes. Not only does Atwood's work critique power and oppression, but it also serves as a potent commentary on authoritarian ideologies and their constant dangers. The novel concludes by illustrating the mechanisms of patriarchal totalitarianism and how it functions, acting as a warning to never become complacent.

Religion also became a tool for oppression. *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood is a vivid depiction of the intricate dynamics of power within a totalitarian theocratic society, highlighting patriarchal repressive mechanisms and the intertwining of religion and authority. Potts (2017) asserts that the Republic of Gilead uses religion — not as a rule of spiritual life — but as an oppressive tool aimed at underpinning male dominance and hindering women's independence (58). Atwood portrays how the combination of religious belief with governance proves to be a perilous move, resulting in significant disparities in the treatment of individuals based on their status as well as significant human rights abuses. According to Dvorak (2006), Atwood's narrative illustrates the horrific ways in which religious fundamentalism serves as a foundation for a totalitarian regime. By merging with authoritarian governance, the religious orthodoxy issues are used to justify the oppression of society and the abolishment of personal freedoms (p. 450). The regime legitimises itself through the manipulation of biblical texts and thus perpetuates, and indeed makes systemic, gendered subjugation and violence.

It examines the religious narratives to consider how they have been employed to exert patriarchy and control over women's bodies and identities. Potts (2017) emphasises that Gilead's leaders strategically manipulate scripture to endorse repressive policies, specifically regarding women's reproductive rights (p. 59). Women are placed in roles from which they are constrained, and specific biblical interpretations are utilised to justify and maintain their inferior status within society. Dvorak (2006) notes how Gilead's power to manipulate religious rituals is extreme. The state-sanctioned, regularly occurring "Ceremony," purporting a religious pretext, is, in fact, a state-sanctioned act of rape that legitimises the regime's reproductive policies (p. 450). The ritualistic violence entrenches women as objects, reducing them to mere automatons who have no control over their bodies, thus highlighting the extent of religious manipulation in maintaining patriarchal domination.

According to Potts (2017), Gilead's hierarchy is reinforced by religious doctrine referenced in the works. The interpretation of scripture is selective and justifies class stratification and the role of gender, which rigidly controls an individual's life (p. 60). The regime utilises religious teachings as its absolute authority to ensure compliance and submission, thereby diminishing any potential for resistance. The way Gilead operates theocratic totalitarianism is through strict social enforcement of religiously coded behaviours. Potts (2017) expresses the fact that women's clothing, designated in different colours according to social status, symbolises women's religious and social function in the patriarchal order (p. 61). Not only are these enforced attires identity markers, but their continuance serves as a reminder of their subjugation and loss of personal autonomy and freedom.

According to Dvorak (2006), the psychological oppression of women by the regime largely stems from the regime's misuse of religious symbolism. A pervasive surveillance state is significantly reinforced by symbols such as the 'Eye' and references to biblical narratives, which have a tremendously detrimental effect on women's psychological well-being. The regime's dominance is sustained by this constant religious scrutiny and symbolic oppression (p. 452).

Religion, moreover, is reduced to a tool of power as the regime's use of religious texts selects one or two interpretations from many. Potts (2017) suggests that the impetus behind this statement is how selectively quoting scripture allows Gilead to

maintain its patriarchal hold, obscuring alternative, perhaps more flexible, religious interpretations (62). Such selective religious interpretations reinforce the regime's ideological framework. Dvorak (2006) goes so far as to state that religiously sanctioned language manipulation significantly aids Gilead's power dynamics. In this, the state restricts women's access to knowledge to ensure their ideological compliance and societal obedience on its behalf, exercising control over communication and education (p. 452). Such linguistic control signifies the regime's authoritarian power, limiting women's agency.

Potts (2017) furthermore states that Gilead's theocratic governance prohibits women from receiving education, according to (63), as a deliberate means to stifle the growth of women's intellect. The regime's religion serves as an instrument to justify disconnecting women from the realm of knowledge, insisting on ignorance to suppress rebellion and maintain the subjugation of men over women.

Additionally, the novel demonstrates how women are held responsible for the patriarchal religious rules of Gilead. Potts (2017) asserts that the significant role taken by women (the Aunts) in sustaining oppressive teachings (62) also indicates this. The complexity of the internalised oppression they faced in those totalitarian societies is evident in their complicity and active enforcement of that patriarchal ideology. Offred's introspective narrative highlights the psychological impact of religious oppression through the heavy emphasis placed on it by Sheckels (2016). Whether conveyed through biblical allusions, images from religious iconography, or other religious references, Offred's internal dialogue generates a profound conflict stemming from her life under religious authoritarian rule (p. 79). Furthermore, her internal struggle symbolises broader feminist critiques of religious oppression and patriarchal control.

Potts (2017) states that the religious fundamentalism of the regime is not only oppressive towards women but also systematically erases their historical and personal identities (56). The erasure of these identities is also vital in terms of control: historical memory and personal identity are two elements that challenge authoritarian power. Therefore, Gilead's religious ideology actively suppresses women's histories and identities. According to Dvorak (2006), Atwood's novel debunks both historical and contemporary cases of religious fundamentalism. The story parallels existing

theocracies around the world and claims that religious extremism and patriarchal rule remain ongoing threats (p. 460). Therefore, Atwood's fictional universe acts as a potent allegory for real dangers faced by our society.

Both Potts (2017, p.60) and Dvorak (2006, p. 464) agree that *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts religion as a patriarchal tool of oppression in totalitarian settings. Atwood emphasises the abuse of religious authority as a means of maintaining patriarchal power through her narrative strategies, illustrating that the task of guarding against oppressive regimes that claim religious justification, as well as the ongoing need for constant vigilance, remains.

Language and identity in the novel become forms of resistance and oppression. *The Handmaid's Tale* powerfully illustrates the interplay of power, patriarchy, and religion in a totalitarian theocratic society. Potts (2017) discusses how religion is employed by the Republic of Gilead for oppressive purposes as a tool to legitimise male power and prevent women's autonomy (58). This illustrates how religion functions as an instrument in a process that gradually erodes personal freedom, particularly for women. Potts (2017) stresses that the doctrines in Gilead are artfully manipulated by the ruling elite to maintain patriarchal oppression. The selective interpretation of Biblical passages is enforced to support the regime's control over women's bodies and identities (p. 59). This manipulation emphasises that religious texts are used as tools of socio-political control.

Another powerful form of oppression is the strict control over language and communication in Gilead. Stillman and Johnson (1994) add that language is used strategically by the regime to limit freedom and stifle resistance (p. 73). Such controlling vocabulary and the prohibition of free expression in Gilead severely constrain women's ability to express dissent or individuality. In Gilead, language manipulation reaches a personal level of identity. As Stillman and Johnson (1994) claim, the forced renaming of women with patronymic titles (such as Offred, "a lady belonging to [or "of"] Fred") serves as a symbol of their ownership by men (72). This practice removes these individuals from their personal histories, transforming them into property whose identities have been erased by their status under male control.

Language also serves to confine women's memories and personal histories. Stillman and Johnson (1994) emphasise that by denying literature and writing to

women, their experiences in history remain unrecorded (p.74). This constitutes a strategic erasure of women, isolating them from their past and rendering them unable to participate in a collective resistance. The linguistic resistance manifests through the narrative structure of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Stillman and Johnson (1994) note that Offred's internal storytelling possesses radical power as a form of defiance against her oppressors (75). Her secret storytelling serves as an act of self-liberation and a reclamation of her identity and autonomy in the face of oppressive regimes, with language functioning as a tool for resistance and resilience.

Atwood employs the depth of language in Offred's inner monologues to underscore the subversive power of language. Stillman and Johnson (1994) interpret Offred's narrative voice as a site of rebellion, articulated in a manner that presents a slight yet subtle challenge to Gilead's enforced silence (76). Offred's internal dialogue becomes a quiet assertion of identity and autonomy, serving as a significant means of psychologically resisting her oppressors. Callaway (2008) continues to argue that Atwood's depiction of language in Gilead adopts a cynical stance towards feminist movements that fail to recognise inherent contradictions (p. 18). However, Atwood's portrayal of female figures—especially the mothers—who are complicit in enforcing linguistic limitations critiques complacency within feminism, illustrating how internalised oppression perpetuates systemic gender inequality.

Callaway (2008) argues that Atwood's nuanced depictions of women complicit in the oppression of women highlight a critical flaw in feminist movements (p.19). However, language manipulation is not only practised by the characters but also by the Aunts, who actively engage in it to uphold the oppressive doctrines of Gilead, thereby revealing internal conflict and complexity within feminist solidarity. Furthermore, the oppressive linguistic practices in Gilead illustrate the influence of language on power dynamics within society. Stillman and Johnson (1994) recognise that the control of language establishes and reinforces gendered hierarchies to achieve obedience and subordination (p. 78). The regime's language policies serve as instruments of power, demonstrating how language can create and uphold not only oppressive social orders.

Despite severe restrictions, Offred employs subtle linguistic strategies as forms of resistance. Stillman and Johnson (1994) demonstrate how her use of narrative memory subverts Gilead's authority, thereby creating spaces for psychological

liberation (pp. 78- 79). Ultimately, all of these strategies underscore the significance of language as a means of reclaiming one's identity and, consequently, agency. Gilead's linguistic control extends to the regulation of speech and expression. Potts (2017) says that each individual is forbidden from using certain words and expressions that contravene the regime's lexicon or could incite rebellion or independent thought (p. 60). This meticulous control illustrates the vital role language plays in both oppression and resistance.

Furthermore, the Gilead regime delineates and constrains the identity of Gilead women by prescribing the language practices of its citizens. Potts (2017) emphasises that what people are reduced to are their 'functional roles' within a society, or what these roles are secured through, namely, such linguistic codes (p. 60). This oppressive language practice reduces individuals to mere tools to be employed by the regime. The plot reveals how the control and resistance of language and identity are integral to a totalitarian society. Stillman and Johnson (1994, p. 83) and Callaway (2008, p. 32) emphasise that the theme of language as an instrument of oppression and resistance serves as a powerful commentary on feminist theory, highlighting the significance of linguistic autonomy in the struggle against patriarchal oppression. Ultimately, language and identity act as powerful instruments of oppression, yet Atwood also demonstrates their effectiveness in resisting it. Atwood revitalises the feminist theoretical perspective by employing deliberate narrative techniques and character development that reinforce the idea that language and homology are continuously at stake within oppressive societal contexts.

Regarding postcolonial implications and intersectionality, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* clearly illustrates the power dynamics of patriarchy, religion, and a totalitarian theocratic society. Potts (2017, p. 58) notes that within the novel, religion is used by the Republic of Gilead not as a spiritual guide but as a coercive tool to enforce male dominance over women and to control how they can exercise authority over themselves. In this context, religion acts as a device to diminish personal freedom, especially concerning women systematically. Potts (2017, p. 59) argues that religion in Gilead is carefully manipulated by the ruling elite to sustain patriarchal oppression. Biblical passages are selectively interpreted and enforced to control women's bodies and identities further. The use of religious texts as tools of socio-political control exemplifies such manipulative strategies.

From a postcolonial perspective, Sanchez-Grant (2008) argues that, in this way, *The Handmaid's Tale* can be seen as its female body a metaphorical site of colonial conquest and, indeed, exploitation (78). Through the bodily control and surveillance it imposes, Atwood's narrative frames women's experiences within a colonial dynamic of power and thereby suggests a similarity between patriarchal and colonial domination.

Atwood's fiction, as Tolan (2007) notes, is crucial in highlighting intersectionality in Gilead, where various forms of oppression intersect and reinforce one another (p. 145). Women at the intersection of gender, class, and race experience particular oppression due to the complex layers of subjugation rooted in sexist colonial hierarchies. Sanchez-Grant (2008) points out that in Gilead, women's bodies have been transformed into territories to be exploited and controlled in a colonial manner (80). This represents a metaphorical colonisation, reflecting the historical pattern of subjugation, in accordance with the feminist postcolonial critique that highlights the interplay between gendered oppression and colonialism exploitation

Tolan (2007) describes how the regime's strict social hierarchy reinforces colonial power structures, establishing stratification while enforcing roles and boundaries (p. 147). Colonial mechanisms of division and control do not merely survive in patriarchal scenarios: Atwood has highlighted this quite effectively, enhancing the novel's critique of hateful systems as a result. Sanchez-Grant (2008) further emphasises that Atwood presents the loss of identity as akin to the colonial erasure of cultural and personal histories (82). Gilead systematically obliterates women's personal histories, much like the atrocities of cultural erasure committed by colonisers, thus demonstrating how colonial and patriarchal oppressions are related.

As Tolan (2007) indicates, Atwood's telling reveals the intersectional realities faced by women oppressed in various ways according to their social positions (p. 150). The significance of intersectionality is to help one understand that oppression has different differential impacts. Sanchez-Grant (2008), in her portrayal of reproductive control in Gilead, illustrates the colonial treatment of women's autonomy and bodily integrity that occurred (p. 85). It is essential to approach this intersectional critique regarding how colonial legacies persist in contemporary patriarchal practices, as we continue to experience these systems of oppression.

Intersectionality has become a significant concept within feminist critiques, as Tolan (2007) states that Atwood's novel undermines simplistic feminist narratives by acknowledging various forms of oppression (p. 152). Therefore, understanding the extent of gendered and colonial oppressions depicted in the world of Gilead requires an understanding of intersectionality. Sanchez-Grant (2008) emphasises that Gilead's surveillance and regulation practices are reminiscent of colonial policing methods used to control and exploit colonial populations (p. 87). The use of this historical parallel thus highlights the invasive nature of patriarchal and colonial oppression, focusing on the shared reliance on control, discipline, and punishment.

According to Tolan (2007), Atwood exposes the conjunction of class and gender in Gilead's society from a critical perspective (p. 154). Gilead, as a hierarchical system, closely resembles colonial societies where class distinctions reinforce power dynamics, thereby complicating the oppression experienced by women. Sanchez-Grant (2008, p. 89) highlights the subversive potential of intersectional feminist critique within Atwood's narrative. Atwood promotes an intersectional understanding by presenting women's bodies as both sites of oppression and sources of potential resistance. The novel, as pointed out by Tolan (2007, p. 156), is a powerful critique of the effects of colonial histories on contemporary gendered oppressions when viewed through the lens of colonial legacies and intersectional feminism. Understanding how these two legacies interact and manifest across all racial orientations is a crucial step for Atwood in comprehending the reasons for their continued relevance, despite the country's independence movement and the decline of patriarchal powers globally.

In understanding the psychological impact of oppression in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood provides a clear picture of stratified power relations, patriarchy, and religion as they collaborate within a totalitarian theocratic society. Potts (2017) discussed how the Republic of Gilead uses religion not as a spiritual guide but as an oppressive tool to legitimise men's authority and curtail women's autonomy (as described in 58). This representation signifies the role that religion plays in undermining personal freedom, primarily for women. Potts (2017) observes that conservative and patriarchal oppression is carefully maintained and enforced in Gilead through strict control of religious dogma, as (p.59) emphasises. Specifically, it involves the selective application of parts of the Bible to further strengthen the state's

authority over women's bodies and identities. This manipulation also highlights that religious texts are often used as tools of socio-political control.

Rachlin (2025) examines the deep psychological trauma inflicted on women in Atwood's narrative from a psychoanalytic perspective (p. 92). Enforced silence, loss of independence, and constant surveillance are the sources of trauma experienced by the characters, especially Offred. Psychoanalytic theory offers insight into how these oppressive conditions significantly harm people's mental and emotional well-being. Bloom (2009), Atwood employs psychoanalytic symbolism, as (p.22) emphasises an oppression from an emotional and psychological depth. Internal conflicts and psychological trauma are represented through symbols such as mirrors, closed rooms, and fragmented identities. The images that Atwood uses symbolically highlight how external oppression becomes internalised and seriously distorts the psyche. As a symptom of the psychological oppression by the regime, the silence in the narrative (Rachlin, 2025, p. 95) is employed by the author to convey an experience of trauma. When the mouth remains silent, it signifies forced complicity, internalised fear, and psychological fragmentation. Enforced silence proves to be of great significance to the characters' trauma, as psychoanalytic interpretations highlight the incapacity to speak, which manifests as psychoanalytic paralysis, an inability to act, and a lack of agency.

Bloom (2009) argues that psychoanalytic theories elucidate how profoundly characters' subconscious desires and fears are shaped by Gilead's authoritarian control (p.26). The oppressive structures of the regime mould the unconscious, dictating characters' dreams and inner narratives. Consequently, psychoanalytic analysis offers a deeper understanding of how the novel examines oppressive psychological mechanisms. Focusing on the psychoanalytic aspects of trauma and healing, Rachlin (2018, p. 397) also discusses the significance of memory. Recurrent memories and flashbacks function as traumatic symptoms and essential means of coping for Offred: memory aids our understanding of what it means to be psychologically oppressed and resilient (Atwood, 1986, p.25). Bloom (2009, p. 30) presents the psychoanalytic character of Offred's dislocated identity, which is shaped by the internal struggle resulting from oppressive patriarchal rules. Here, living with a fragmented self exemplifies the psychological consequences of existing under totalitarian regimes and psychoanalytic concerns regarding identity formation amid such severe repression.

However, Rachlin (2025) stresses that Atwood portrays trauma while simultaneously advancing it through the narrative form itself, with Offred's narrative style serving as a symptom of traumatic dissociation (p. 99). This narrative fragmentation reveals the significant psychological disruptions caused by oppressive conditions and complements the psychoanalytic interpretation of trauma within an oppressive context. According to Bloom (2009), Offred's inner battle is portrayed vividly through the use of psychoanalytic concepts of repression and displacement (p. 34). Such suppressed anxiety and the internal dialogues reveal the repressive function of repression within oppressive regimes, and psychoanalytic insight is provided on, although not limited to, the realm of psychological control and resistance.

The concept that a narrative facilitates healing is examined in Atwood's portrayal of this theme, as noted by Rachlin (2025, p. 89), who believes that storytelling is a form of healing and akin to a therapeutic process. Atwood reinforces psychoanalytic theory's assertion that recounting traumatic experiences serves a therapeutic purpose, which is made feasible in an oppressive environment. Bloom (2009) furthermore points out that Atwood engages with the themes of psychoanalytic projection and transference in the relationships between characters in Gilead (38). This illustrates an intensification of the often-conflicted relationships involving these dynamics and how unconscious psychological factors illuminate interpersonal relationships characterised by mutual oppression.

According to Rachlin (2025, p. 95), Offred's dreams are psychoanalytic expressions of unconscious resistance and trauma. Dreams enable us to delve into the internal effects of oppression, which signify internal fears, desires, and defiance against the authority of the regime, providing insight into the psychoanalytic dimensions of oppression and resistance. Bloom (2014) notes that Atwood utilises psychoanalytic insights to reveal the psychological costs associated with both complicity and resistance, which is one of the main points (p. 12). In this regard, the internal conflicts of the characters between compliance and defiance mirror psychoanalytic tensions related to the deeper psychological complexities involved in surviving oppressive systems. Through detailed psychological portrayals, Atwood's psychoanalytic theories offer a nuanced depiction of trauma, resistance, and healing, thereby enhancing our understanding of the subjective experiences and internal struggles, as well as the resilience of individuals under conditions of oppression.

There is also a historical parallel and contemporary relevance. *The Handmaid's Tale* vividly illustrates the complex interplay of power, patriarchy, and religion in a totalitarian theocratic society. Potts (2017, p. 58) now compares the Republic of Gilead's use of religion to that of a spiritual guide rather than as an oppressive tool to legitimise male dominance, while usurping women's autonomy. The portrayal also demonstrates how religion is employed to undermine personal liberty, particularly that of women. Jadwin (2010), in a nuanced analysis spanning (p. 22), examines historical parallels that demonstrate how oppressive regimes throughout history have systematically suppressed women through institutionalised violence, censorship, social control, and other measures. By explicitly referencing similar historical oppressive practices that Atwood has employed to enhance the realism and urgency of her narrative, and by exploring both the explicit and clarifying aspects of the governmental role-play of Margaret, Atwood also underscores the cyclical nature of authoritarian threats.

Atwood's work, as Jadwin (2010, p.25) highlights, serves as a cautionary tale in that it warns of the fragility with which democratic freedoms can be dismantled. The story calls for vigilance and active resistance to safeguard personal liberties against trends toward oppressive political ideologies, a message that remains relevant across various historical periods, including our current times. Lowenstein (2016, p. 34) shows how much Atwood's novel particularly resonates with today's debates about reproductive rights and gender equality. Gilead's forced reproductive practices mirror contemporary global challenges that require safeguarding women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. Jadwin (2010) believes that Atwood's line, emphasising just as much the depiction of resistance within oppressive groups, serves to highlight the parallels in history as a means of reflecting the ways people have struggled against tyrannical powers in the past (p. 28). Disobedience, on the other hand, is crucial to contemporary struggles for justice and self-possession due to Offred's subtle acts of defiance.

Lowenstein (2016, p. 34) demonstrates how Atwood utilises contemporary surroundings to highlight the presence of issues related to surveillance, censorship, and propaganda, which continually threaten our modern forms of governance. The themes of information manipulation and dissent oppression are highly relevant in our current discussions regarding governmental surveillance and the spread of fake news; thus,

this novel can be viewed as a representation of a nation where these issues have reached a breaking point. Jadwin (2010, p. 30) emphasises how Atwood employs historical parallels to illustrate that the dangers of patriarchal violence persist and that women will always be vulnerable to systemic oppression. Gilead is a depiction of the historical patterns of gender violence, making the need for feminist advocacy and social awareness more urgent and necessary. Lowenstein (2016, p. 35) emphasises the significance of Atwood's novel in the context of current debates on reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. As Gilead's coercive control strongly echoes modern issues surrounding women's reproductive rights, feminist activism remains crucial in protecting bodily autonomy.

Regarding Atwood's examination of forced labour and economic exploitation in oppressive historical contexts, Jadwin (2010, p. 35) reflects on Gilead's hierarchical economic structures. Building on portrayals of America and identity currently prominent in cinema, these continue to highlight the economic vulnerabilities that persist today, as well as the exploitation typical of state-run systems exemplified by authoritarian regimes, thereby emphasising the ongoing necessity for economic and social justice. Lowenstein (2016, p. 38) describes the novel as a critique of contemporary political apathy in a society where democratic institutions can quickly deteriorate if vigilance is lacking. Atwood's warning about passivity regarding politics illustrates that engaging with and resisting political forces that could undermine democratic values remains vital. *The Handmaid's Tale* aims to highlight oppressive societal practices through historical parallels and contemporary relevance. By using historical examples and current affairs to deliver a powerful warning against the abuse of power and violence towards women, Atwood emphasises the importance of protecting human rights and freedoms in relation to our understanding of history and politics, as well as our willingness to defend them.

4. THE FEMINIST JOURNEY CHALLENGES THE RESTRICTIONS: IDENTITY, DIASPORA, AND GENDER IN Lara BY BERNARDINE EVARISTO

“Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, she stands up for all women.”

Maya Angelou

Feminism, which is regarded as a steady force, applies policies and practices universally. In contrast, postcolonial feminism not only addresses social and cultural inequalities rooted in colour, class, gender, or even religion, but also tackles geographic, political, and historical divisions under the labels of “third world” and “the remaining vestige of colonialism”. Postcolonial feminism also explores the historical diversity and regional contexts in which women's issues vary due to specific postcolonial features. It represents a distinct form of feminism, aimed at achieving gender emancipation from the perspective of the third-world woman and within the framework of the third-world woman, focusing on women living in post-colonised countries. Postcolonial feminism concentrates on the effects of colonialism on non-Western peoples and postcolonial non-white societies (Tyagi, 2014, p. 45).

Postcolonial feminism, as a way of understanding knowledge, covers both feminist and postcolonial issues. It also includes views of the “Others”. It engages in debates within their contexts, supporting freedom and resistance against the hierarchies of patriarchy and colonialism, especially the reversal of gender roles and the suppression of women's oppression. From a creatively devised postcolonial and feminist perspective, there is fertile ground for developing a literary framework that questions issues of gender, race, and identity. Like many other narratives, the stories of immigrant women reflect the experience of being caught in the conflict of multiple identities and socio-political challenges. This is a story that shows how women's experiences are shaped by the intersection of gender, race, social class, and immigration status, and how these factors influence their interactions with society. Likewise, the intersections not only overlap but also interact with each other to produce more complex forms of oppression or opportunities in their countries of origin and in their countries of migration (Zhao, 2024, p. 2006).

Mohanty (2003, p. 4) emphasised the importance of considering gender and race within postcolonialism, while Gayatri C. Spivak (1994, p. 104) underscores the critical role that race and gender play in this context. Mohanty's concept of *Feminism Without Borders* advocates for a global or transnational perspective that considers the specific historical and cultural contexts of women subjected to various forms of oppression. *Lara*, Bernardine Evaristo's novel is among many other plentiful literary works about mixed-race identity that have emerged from Britain, the USA, New Zealand, and Australia. These works address issues of racial and cultural hybridity, offering a profound exploration of the mixed-race experience through visual representation (Bolatagici, 2004, p. 75).

Born in London in 1958, she is the fourth of her siblings, with an English mother and Nigerian father. She is an academic and writer, recognised for her projects and writings inspired by her interests, particularly within the African diaspora. At London's Brunel University, Evaristo works as a creative writing lecturer. She became the first Black woman to win the 2019 Booker Prize, sharing it with Margaret Atwood. As a long-standing activist and advocate for the inclusion of artists and authors of colour, Bernadine Evaristo has initiated several successful programmes to promote greater representation in the creative industries (Toplu, 2011, p. 1).

Lara, Evaristo's debut novel in 1997, reflects the concept of wandering by humanising the ideas of the characters through her protagonist's experiences in diverse cultural and environmental contexts, ranging from Nigeria to Brazil and then to the United Kingdom. Through this transnational movement, Evaristo uncovers the complexities of belonging for the women and the intricate nature of their identities as they navigate the intersection of multiple cultures and their racial identity. A typical passage by the Black British author Bernardine Evaristo, who is renowned for her feminist literature that challenges gender stereotypes. One such work is her novel *Lara*, in which she explores the protagonist's journey of self-discovery into the broader context of patriarchal oppression, colonial legacy, and cultural hybridity (Murray, 2019, p. 43)

The mixed-race woman's character, introduced in 1997, *Lara*, appears in a verse novel featuring a woman with Nigerian British heritage, whose chosen titles explore the complexities of her identity across different continents and generations.

The young Black author who emerged in the literary scene in the mid-nineties of the last century has produced numerous novels, literary criticism, and drama. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that almost all the main characters conceived by Evaristo are female. This is why her novels are appropriately analysed from a feminist literary criticism perspective. Additionally, her class narratives explore the scope of Black history, the African diaspora, and particularly, other issues related to race (Rosenberg, 2010, p. 382).

Lara presents readers with a captivating narrative that explores racial and sexual identities alongside colonial dominance and personal growth through its mixed-race protagonist. Her Nigerian British heritage brings forth challenges regarding her identity and emotional scars passed down through generations, as she grapples with societal pressures that influence her journey of self-discovery. The main character demonstrates personal growth through her struggles against patriarchal power, cultural isolation, and linguistic fragmentation, ultimately embracing her identity of self-empowerment. Through its intricate feminist and postcolonial analysis, the novel illustrates how women from diverse heritages experience cultural, racial, and gendered constraints in the developing world. The character of Lara exemplifies how colonial heritage produces enduring effects, while migration from ancestral homes, combined with social pressure to conform to cultural expectations, impacts women. Lara discovers her independence and regains her unique voice, intertwined with her cultural legacy, by employing language alongside stories and self-expression. This chapter examines many significant phenomena that transform Lara throughout her story.

4.1. Postcolonial Feminism and the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Identity

The novel explores Lara's journey through a postcolonial feminist lens, connecting her identity to both racial and gender dimensions, as well as elements of colonial establishment. Throughout the narrative, Lara battles against patriarchal and Eurocentric norms that dictate the identities of women of colour by rejecting their control. Lara faces dual social rejection as she occupies the space of a mixed-race woman who is denied acceptance by both White and Black racial groups. Postcolonial feminism serves as a vital analytical framework that investigates how the colonial past

shapes contemporary gender and racial discrimination in global non-Western communities. It challenges the dominant Western feminist perspective by illustrating that women's oppression is intricately linked to their experiences of race, colonial history, social status, and global power structures (Tyagi, 2014, p. 45).

Through *Lara* by Bernardine Evaristo, the main character illustrates the intricate ways in which race interweaves with gender identity and postcolonial heritage, making the story a potent medium for grasping postcolonial feminist perspectives. The author provides a comprehensive examination of the processes involved in identity formation, focusing on racial and gender elements that seek ultimate liberation. The rise of postcolonial feminism emerged because traditional feminism ignores important matters that directly affect women concerning their colonial past. Western feminist movements, through their earlier evolutionary waves, tended to focus on gender oppression; yet they overlooked how women live differently due to the unique racial and colonial contexts within diverse socio-political environments. According to postcolonial feminism, gender needs to be viewed collectively with other forms of oppression, including race, colonial history, socio-economic background, and cultural differences.

Mohanty (2003, p.4) challenges the Western feminist custom of treating all women from Third World countries as uniform victims confined to traditional constraints. She advocates for a global feminist movement that recognises the diverse historical-specific ways in which women experience oppression. In her work, Spivak (1988, p. 279) examines how colonial narratives diminish non-Western females to subaltern status by stripping them of their ability to speak, act independently, and represent themselves. Through the character of Lara, Evaristo illustrates the connection between racial background and gender, as well as their distinct burdens in the protagonist's narrative. The heroine of this work is a multicultural individual who faces various forms of discrimination from both British society, which regards her as an outsider, and Nigerian culture, which limits her freedom through rigid expectations concerning gender roles. The author employs Lara as a character to challenge fundamental feminist ideology, which fails to grasp the intricate ways in which Black and brown women face systemic oppression following colonialism.

Postcolonial feminism sustains the core idea of intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, p. 141). According to this concept, various forms of discrimination—such as racial, gender, class, and cultural biases—coexist, leading to different types of oppression. In Lara's story, the main character faces marginalisation due to both her gender and mixed ethnic background. Through Lara's experience of racial and gender-based marginalisation, Evaristo reveals the intricate nature of discrimination. Lara's dual heritage of British and Nigerian leaves her in a constant state of liminality, as she maintains no complete bonds within either culture. This sense of being out of place is expressed through the following verse:

"They stared at me, not white, not black, their eyes carving me into pieces that I refused to wear." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 52).

Evaristo illustrates through this scene how society continually evaluates and categorises Lara, as these processes aid in maintaining control over how she defines herself. According to Crenshaw, black women, along with women of mixed heritage, encounter a specific form of oppression that transcends both racial prejudice and gender discrimination by uniting these elements into one distinct form of exploitation. Through her experience, Lara shows how her position as a female member of a patriarchal society influences her daily life. As she experiences racial persecution in Britain, she encounters extra-societal barriers because of patriarchal beliefs that exist in her Nigerian heritage. The path she takes toward empowerment demands more than fighting racism because it also obliges her to combat gender conventions and liberate herself from external control.

Asian feminist theory shows that during postcolonial times, colonial laws created racial divisions while reinforcing male-dominated societal codes that influence current women's experiences. According to Fanon (1967, p. 49), colonial rule instilled both mental and institutional baseless feelings of low self-worth among the colonised, shaping their social constructs and self-image. The colonial inheritance is reflected in the Nigerian immigrant father of Lara, who internalises societal marginalisation, thereby affecting his family relationships.

The grandmother from the pre-colonial period confronts traditional Nigerian patriarchal customs alongside the economic burdens of colonialism. Evaristo portrays her situation :

"Grandma served, cooked, knelt, her pride wrapped in submission, but her eyes spoke rebellion." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 44).

The author illustrates how colonialism reinforced gender-based oppression through policies that imposed domestic restraint on women, positioning them at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. The woman expresses rebellion through her gaze, despite the oppressive conditions of colonial domination. Women navigate oppressive systems through subtle acts of rebellion rather than overt challenges, despite the appearance of their subordination. Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 112) thoroughly examines the concept of hybrid identity, which serves as a fundamental aspect of postcolonial feminist theory. Bhabha explains that third spaces emerge for individuals who exist between cultural boundaries as they continually work to construct their identities. Lara embodies a hybrid identity as she seeks to merge her British and Nigerian roots in a context where social systems impose rigid racial divisions.

Lara experiences this inner conflict as Evaristo depicts it in this passage:

"I am the daughter of two worlds, two histories, each battling for the right to define me." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 46).

The principal character grapples with an inner conflict to harmonise her cultural backgrounds rather than keeping them distinct from one another. The narrative critiques colonial identity practices by demonstrating a resistance to rigid identity categories, which challenges readers to cultivate self-defined portraits of race and cultural expression. Through linguistic hybridity, the novel illustrates how individuals resist oppressive systems. In these lines, Evaristo challenges the imperialistic language structure by blending Nigerian English with British English.

"Papa spoke with an accent that rolled the words like waves on the Niger, solid and flowing, defiant against the Queen's tongue." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 23).

The character grapples with an inner conflict to integrate her cultural backgrounds rather than keeping them distinct from one another. The text critiques colonial practices that impose identity categories upon individuals while promoting self-defined and fluid interpretations of race and cultural identity. Through language hybridity, the novel illustrates how individuals resist oppressive systems. In these

lines, Evaristo challenges the imperialistic language system by blending Nigerian English with British English.

"I am woman, shaped by shadows and light, carving my own space where none existed."(Evaristo, 1997, p. 72).

The act of self-definition serves as the foundational method for postcolonial feminist opposition according to bell hook's (1981, p. 84). Feminism must respond to women of colour who combat systemic discrimination due to their intersecting identities. Lara's narrative illustrates how postcolonial feminist ideology enables marginalised female individuals to reclaim their ability to speak. The path to empowerment for Lara stems from intergenerational bonds between women rather than functioning as an independent pursuit. The speaker acknowledges the historical hardships faced by women in the past through this statement:

"I carry their voices, woven into my own, their struggles a map for my liberation."(Evaristo, 1997, p. 81).

Feminist opposition operates cooperatively across different periods by utilising historical references that foster social equity in the present and future. Lara reveals how racial background and gender amplify the impact of colonial history on personal identity development. The novel presents an analysis of Western feminist discourse by following the protagonist's journey from subjugation to self-growth, revealing how racial and historical factors shape oppression. Evaristo provides a comprehensive feminist analysis of patriarchal and colonial systems through her use of poetic storytelling forms and narrative connections across generations

4.2. Diaspora and the Complexity of Belonging in Lara

Because Lara has multiple ethnic roots spanning different countries, she exemplifies traits of a diasporic cultural identity that distinguish her from any single homeland. Through its narrative, the author explores the psychological and sociocultural impacts of migration, displacement, and a blended heritage, prompting important reflections. This section examines how Lara's identity crisis, as the daughter of Nigerian and British descent, develops into empowerment through her established transnational identity. People who disperse from their original homelands create

diasporic communities while retaining their cultural heritage and maintaining their fight to preserve their identities. Through her work in *Lara*, Bernardine Evaristo constructs a multi-layered story that investigates concepts of belonging and home, as well as personal identification within the framework of a transnational postcolonial society. The novel demonstrates that the development of identity results from individual encounters, historical migration events, colonial history, and aspects of cultural, racial, and gender elements.

The dual physical and psychological journeys of *Lara* illustrate the challenges faced by diasporic individuals who perceive their homes as multiple spaces with often conflicting meanings. The novel portrays *Lara*'s identity as scattered across the diverse cultural landscapes of Nigeria, Britain, Brazil, and Ireland. She navigates various environments while striving to comprehend her identity and her place in the world, questioning whether achieving a sense of belonging is possible. The concept of diaspora becomes the subject of dual analysis throughout the text, as Evaristo illustrates how it both alienates individuals from their homes and facilitates their self-discovery. According to the fundamental experience of diaspora, individuals undergo a lasting estrangement from both their historical heritage and their adopted homeland. (Safran, 1991, p. 85). *Lara* shares this experience as a mixed-race woman born to British and Nigerian parents. Her cultural background complicates her experience, as she never fully gains acceptance within any community. Through her reflection, she conveys this entire conflict.

"I am the daughter of two worlds, two histories, each battling for the right to define me." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 46).

Evaristo emphasises in this line that members of diasporic communities face inner struggles regarding their dual identity. *Lara* has a composite identity that merges multiple histories and the expectations of her cultures with societal interpretations of racial identities. Stuart Hall (2015) outlines cultural identity in diaspora through his description of how identity evolves continuously across both historical periods and modern times (pp. 292-403). Belonging develops racialised dimensions that play a significant role throughout *Lara*'s personal journey. At birth in Britain, she becomes an outsider due to her mixed racial background. Simultaneously, she faces rejection from

both White society and her Nigerian heritage. She recalls how others scrutinised her presence as they struggled to identify which category she belonged to.

"They stared at me, not white, not black, their eyes carving me into pieces that I refused to wear." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 52).

The verse illustrates how diasporic situations fracture African cultural roots across various communities. Through enforced categorisation, Lara struggles with representations that fail to encompass her true identity, as race, in conjunction with migration, imposes limitations on self-discovery and social acceptance. Her refusal to conform to conventional identity categories challenges the rigid racial divide that confines individuals of mixed heritage. Evaristo eliminates any boundaries surrounding diaspora discussions by illustrating how Lara's personal history confirms that her roots extend across three continents and seven generations of migration. By examining her family's historical background, the novel offers an ancestral perspective on diaspora, demonstrating how geographic movement has permeated her lineage. Economic stress in Ireland compelled Irish people to relocate to England for safety.

Throughout history, Brazilian ancestry has linked Lara to the forced transportation of Africans as slaves along the transatlantic route during the slave trade. The Nigerian heritage has been shaped by colonial influence, as colonial rulers dismantled traditional systems and imposed artificial social and racial hierarchies. Lara faces diaspora alongside all the challenges and cultural changes her ancestral heritage has endured. The formation of Black Atlantic identity, according to Hamdoune (2020), results from the historical forced migration of Africans, combined with their voluntary movement and collective struggle against racial oppression (p. 48). Lara's father embodies the full postcolonial migrant experience, having come from Nigeria to live in Britain during that period.

His role as a first-generation immigrant reflects the hardships, including racial prejudice, financial struggles, and the emotional effects of being uprooted. Many people affected by postcolonial systems follow his migration route from former colonies to colonial powers in search of financial stability, yet they face a marginal existence. His psychological distress is clear as he shows emotional detachment and silence caused by migration-related stress.

"Papa carried silence like a cloak, his stories weighed on his shoulders, stories too heavy for a daughter to share." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 35).

The hidden challenge of displacement affects family members without the need for verbal expression, as it infiltrates their emotional lives. His generational issues influence how Lara views her identity in both Britain and Nigeria. Within diaspora studies, Homi Bhabha (1994) developed the theoretical concept of hybridity by describing diaspora people who occupy a third space between various cultural forces (38). The combined elements of British and Nigerian culture constitute the core identity of Lara, who exists beyond traditional cultural affiliations.

"Why must I choose what the world has chosen for me? My spirit refuses borders, my identity is mine to create." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 97).

By rejecting rigid identity norms, Lara creates a personal foundation through which she establishes her sense of belonging. This move signifies a radical change, as postcolonial and colonial societies often require their residents to display fixed national or racial classifications. As a symbol of diasporic identity, Evaristo examines how diasporic people blend multiple languages. Through the unique English language used by Lara's father, he demonstrates his efforts to bridge Nigerian culture with British influences.

"Papa spoke with an accent that rolled the words like waves on the Niger, solid and flowing, defiant against the Queen's tongue." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 23).

Through language, individuals maintain spaces for both oppression and resistance. Lara's father employs the English language to affirm his cultural heritage, while colonial authorities utilised it as a civilisational standard. Through the combination of languages, diasporic cultures generate fresh cultural forms that challenge established societal narratives. The narrative of displacement that Lara follows illustrates how the diaspora becomes a transformative territory. Lara discards the need to choose between British and Nigerian identity as she develops a new sense of belonging that transcends external influences' expectations

"I am not torn, I am layered, each thread woven stronger than before." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 92).

Lara's path toward self-acknowledgement begins with this specific verse. Currently, diaspora represents more than mere absence, as it embodies cultural wealth and power that enrich our existence. According to Hamdoune (2020), Paul Gilroy thinks that (in his diaspora cultural creativity theory), the diasporic experience fosters new cultural values that evolve within global border areas (49). Lara completes her identity transformation by challenging colonial standards of race, nationality, and belonging through her self-celebratory gesture. She chooses to declare herself rather than accept the limits that others impose upon her. Through her character Lara, Evaristo illustrates how diaspora functions as a condition in which one feels disconnected from family while simultaneously providing the strength to build oneself as an individual.

The novel follows transnational family trajectories to deliver a critical view of inflexible racial and national standards which it promotes as a dynamic multicultural belonging system. Evaristo writes a postcolonial feminist critique that employs transnational and hybrid and intersectional theories to explain how diaspora opposes colonial heritage through new paths for personal self-evolution.

4.3. Intergenerational Trauma and Colonial Legacies in *Lara*

Lara grapples with identity navigation, specifically bearing the weight of colonial traumas that have been transmitted through history. Throughout the narrative, the author illustrates how family traditions entwine with colonial complexities and racism, influencing perceptions of personal identity. Due to past historical mistreatment such as colonialism, racial discrimination, and forced migration, individuals and their family descendants experience emotional effects, psychological distress, and social challenges. Through multiple generations of storytelling in *Lara*, Bernardine Evaristo portrays how colonial heritage influences personal identity, family bonds, and inner self-image. The novel illustrates how psychological trauma transfers from generation to generation through painful experiences, along with the suppression of history, the forgetting of personal stories, and forced population relocations.

The long-term impact of British colonial rule has created lasting effects on the interplay of race with gender relations and socio-economic systems in colonised territories. The colonial legacies affect Lara herself as well as her entire family lineage

through migration, racial inequalities, and emotional disconnection in Lay. Evaristo crafts a narrative that illustrates the enduring damage of colonial oppression while constructing a story that reveals both survival and personal independence, alongside historic recovery. Trauma is transmitted through two channels: familial transmission and cultural memory mechanisms. *Lara* reconstructs the story of the protagonist's ancestors who migrated between Nigeria, Ireland, Brazil, and Britain, illustrating the historical events that shaped her family's circumstances. Lara experiences ongoing effects of distress that originated with her ancestors, as these events remain ever-present in history.

The postcolonial migrant struggle of British immigrants takes shape when the novel depicts Lara's Nigerian father. After relocating to Britain in search of better circumstances, he encounters only racial discrimination and financial hardship alongside cultural isolation. The plight faced by his family reflects how many immigrants from postcolonial nations find themselves in colonising countries, only to discover that racial systems continue to influence their status in society.

"Papa carried silence like a cloak, his stories weighed on his shoulders, stories too heavy for a daughter to share." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 35).

In this passage, the author illustrates the burden of unexpressed emotional suffering. Through his concealed emotions and refusal to discuss his problems, Lara's father conveys a significant amount of distress to those around him. The inability of survivors from oppressed groups to share their traumatic experiences results in their children developing detached relationships, as noted in intergenerational trauma studies. The author implies through this scenario, silence functions as an inherited whip-like trauma that impacts Lara, even though she never endured colonial Nigeria. In accordance with postcolonial scholar Frantz Fanon (1967), colonial rule produces enduring psychological judgments of inadequacy that persist even after an empire ends. The dimension of racial inferiority from colonial narratives suppresses Lara's father emotionally because he faces everyday challenges, doubting his worth. These struggles alter his capacity to demonstrate vulnerability and create ongoing emotional closure.

Through her marriage to Lara's father, the White British mother carries inherited trauma that stems from various racial circumstances. Her decision to wed a

Nigerian husband confronted her while living in Britain's biased racial society, leading to isolation among her white peers and requiring her to raise children of mixed race under scrutiny regarding their identity.

"Mum stitched her sacrifices into the fabric of our lives, her dreams folded beneath duty." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 38).

Because of her unspoken sacrifices in a racially divided society, it appears her mother also bears emotional burdens. The patriarchal world marginalises her as a woman and further ostracises her for defying racial standards through her inter-ethnic relationship. Colonial inheritance has a lasting impact on societal viewpoints and individual preferences due to the racial discriminations established by Britain during its colonial era, and these practices continue to influence social reactions towards mixed-race family relationships. Instead of mirroring her work to Fanon's comments in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967), Evaristo studies how colonial rule affected the mental and perceptual aspects of the racial hierarchy's impact on individual worth and interpersonal bonds. During colonisation, subjects commonly had to absorb racist stereotypes about their racial group, which triggered lasting identity difficulties passed down through family lines.

Lara's paternal lineage is profoundly impacted by British imperial rule in Nigeria because colonial powers implemented it. European authorities took over native governance systems and enforced their political and educational structures across the region. European society gained dominance through the official segregation of racial and cultural elements, establishing white culture as the superior system. Many Nigerians had to leave their homeland due to the economic dependencies imposed by British colonialism, which deprived them of existing opportunities. The colonial environment in Nigeria influences how Lara's father perceives the world, which in turn affects his behaviour in British society. He remains part of the postcolonial period, yet he has absorbed colonial beliefs that compel him to validate his position in an environment that maintains an outsider perspective towards him.

Through the parallel comparison, Evaristo connects British colonial treatment of Nigeria with the British occupation of Ireland, during which economic hardship caused Irish families to leave their homeland. Through Lara's Irish ancestry, both in England and Ireland, we observe colonialism affecting different population groups in

different ways. Lara inherits her Brazilian roots through her ancestry, which traces back to transatlantic slavery, a violent colonial practice. The historical trauma of African displacement due to slavery continues to affect descendants hundreds of years later.

Marginalised individuals perpetuate colonial legacies by internalising the biases and stereotypes that dominant groups originally imposed upon them, as these oppressive ideas become ingrained through oppression. *Lara* demonstrates this phenomenon in several ways: one being the duality of Lara's identity, which intersects with two conflicting opinions about her racial background as she questions whether she belongs to the Black or White racial groups. Another aspect is the way social structures sustain colonial racial systems that hinder Lara from establishing authentic connections with other individuals. According to Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), the process of colonial subjects adopting colonial cultural elements to assimilate leads to their inevitable rejection from both cultures (86). Although Lara's father attempts to assimilate into British society by following its rules, he cannot break the barrier of alienation that defines his position. Lara refuses to allow the intergenerational trauma to define her life, even though she inherited it from her ancestors. Through this journey, she transforms herself into someone who defines her own identity by accepting both her past and present selves.

"I am not torn, I am layered, each thread woven stronger than before."
(Evaristo, 1997, p. 92).

In this particular passage, the novel indicates Lara's metamorphosis by rejecting colonial concepts of racial definition and embracing her multifaceted self. Unlike people of earlier times who concealed their struggles, Lara seeks awareness of her ancestral history, which transforms her tale into a triumph over oppressive forces. She employs language alongside storytelling techniques and family history recovery to break the cycle of inherited trauma, ensuring that this emotional burden does not control her life. Postcolonial feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty's *Feminist Without Borders* (2003) supports historical narrative recovery as a means to resist colonial repression according to her approach (78).

In *Lara*, the author explores across multiple generations how historical legacies create wounds that persist over time. Throughout the novel, the author analyses the

psychological effects generated by colonialism, illustrating how these effects endure across generations. By confronting her past, Lara reconstructs herself, empowering her identity and transforming pain into strength, which further enhances her self-empowerment.

4.4. The Role of Language and Verse Form in Feminist Resistance in *Lara*

As an artistic yet political and feminist act of resistance, Evaristo opts to write her text in a poetic verse form. Through its unconventional literary structure, the novel depicts Lara's split personality and also highlights the challenges of living as part of a migrant community. Language serves as both a means of oppression and resistance from the era of colonialism to the present day, according to feminist and postcolonial discourses. This very instrument has operated as imperial colonial rule by imposing foreign tongues onto native languages, as well as male domestic repression that controlled women's speech and literary output. Marginalised individuals use language as a tool to resist controlling forces by redefining their identities, challenging dominant perspectives, and seizing control of their positions.

Through an innovative verse structure in *Lara*, Bernardine Evaristo challenges traditional literary techniques, inspiring women of colour to take control of their narratives and utilise language to explore intersections of race, gender, and linguistics (Adeniyi, 2020, pp.157-170). The novel assembles its narrative through fragmented sections and recurring motifs, challenging Western literary traditions while exploring Lara's dual ancestral heritage and addressing the historical marginalisation of women and colonised peoples. The author uses hybrid languages, blending poetic styles with oral presentation patterns to craft a potent device that resists colonial power structures and sexism.

The unconventional verse structure in *Lara* acts as a key element that challenges reader expectations of typical novels. Evaristo crafts the narrative of Lara using a poetic technique that promotes an experimental, flowing, and disjointed format instead of conventional prose sequences. She demonstrates this form of literary resistance by opposing the Western novel tradition, historically dominated by male,

white, Eurocentric stories. Evaristo demonstrates feminist literary techniques by using verse instead of prose, as she challenges traditional storytelling frameworks through her lively literary style. The novel's fragmented structure offers multiple perspectives and dialogue styles, which mirror the diverse experiences of women from diasporic communities. The unstructured narrative pattern in the novel mirrors the psychological dilemmas that Lara encounters throughout the story.

"I am the daughter of two worlds, two histories, each battling for the right to define me." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 46).

This rhythmic poetic line expresses the fractured elements that define Lara's identity. The absence of punctuation and free-form syntax reflect Lara's quest to identify herself and belong to her own tribe. Through her verse structure, Evaristo reveals identity as a fluid concept that undergoes continual change through personal and historical developments. Postcolonial feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty (2003) supports the notion that resistance emerges from scholars who refuse Western literary conventions, as explained in the work (42). The author rewrites standard Western narrative frameworks to introduce a new feminist approach through storytelling, which illustrates how women and diasporic people, along with those excluded from conventional literary establishments, genuinely experience life.

Lara features an amalgamation of linguistic elements that create diverse and complex language patterns instead of relying on a singular unified language system. Throughout the text, Evaristo combines multiple forms of English, including the standardised British English variety, which represents control from colonial forces and cultural absorption. Nigerian English, along with Pidgin, marks cultural connections and serves as an expression of resistance. Oral storytelling traditions originally emerged from African cultural heritage as well as the traditions of diasporic communities. The linguistic fusion reflects Lara's mixed background as she navigates several cultures and linguistic traditions. The legacy of colonial language practices impacts her Nigerian father living in Britain, as he struggles to maintain his pronunciation and native linguistic heritage.

"Papa spoke with an accent that rolled the words like waves on the Niger, solid and flowing, defiant against the Queen's tongue." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 23).

Through this passage, we observe how language serves as a battleground for colonial conflicts. The subject of the Queen's tongue encounters British English as a colonial expectation, yet Lara's father resolutely resists the complete assimilation of language. Through his speech patterns, he exemplifies cultural resilience while illustrating how colonial subjects utilise language to defend themselves while engaging in acts of resistance. British linguistic standards place pressure on Lara as she continues to feel drawn towards her father's heritage language. Postcolonial individuals, according to Homi Bhabha (1994), occupy a space between conflicting cultural and linguistic influences, which he calls "third space" (38). Through diverse linguistic practices in her narrative, Evaristo challenges English linguistic authority and presents tales that reflect genuine diasporic, feminist, and postcolonial life experiences inclusively.

In *Lara*, the author creates a dual focus on vocal expression and silence to illustrate feminist struggles against oppression. Societies built around male dominance used various methods to prevent women from sharing their life stories, often excluding them entirely from written literary traditions or subjecting their portrayals to manipulation. Lara's father embodies the psychological burdens of immigration, racial prejudice, and colonial heritage, yet refuses to share his struggles with anyone.

"Papa carried silence like a cloak, his stories weighed on his shoulders, stories too heavy for a daughter to share." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 35).

The inherited trauma passes between generations in an undisclosed form. *Lara* breaks this generational pattern by telling stories which enable her to combat oppression and achieve personal strength. "I am woman, shaped by shadows and light, carving my own space where none existed". (Evaristo, 1997, p. 72).

Through this statement, the character asserts her feminist liberty and defines herself as an individual. Through her poetic words, Lara challenges patriarchal rules that restrain expression in order to establish her personal narrative. According to bell hooks (1989), in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, feminist voice theory posits that female marginalisation requires defiant speech to resist systematic attempts to silence women (16). By employing a broken yet melodic literary voice, Evaristo grants Lara symbolic independence from social limitations, enabling her to shape her identity through verbalisation. *Lara* links her work to oral storytelling

traditions that originate from African and Caribbean diasporic cultures. Africans have preserved their cultural history through oral storytelling as a means of maintaining both their history and collective memories, even in the face of colonial powers attempting to eradicate native traditions. Spoken words from her grandmother serve as the primary means for Lara to acquire ancestral knowledge.

“Her words were rivers, carrying us back to the source, where no coloniser could tread”. (Evaristo, 1997, p. 66)

Storytelling serves as an active counter to colonial efforts aimed at erasing indigenous heritage. The documentation of history that prioritises European narratives compels marginalised communities to rely on oral traditions to safeguard and preserve their neglected stories across generations. Subaltern voices, as articulated by Gayatri Spivak (1988), necessitate an active recovery of history from colonial power structures rather than acquiescing to the dominant narrative of their stories (294). Evaristo undertakes a feminist historical recovery by employing Lara to illustrate how traditional female oral traditions can supplant patriarchal colonial history.

Bernardine Evaristo employs language alongside verse as a resistance method in her novel *Lara*, addressing postcolonial feminism. Her experimental poetic style, along with multicultural linguistic forms and ancestry-based oral traditions, allows her to challenge European literary traditions and patriarchal oppression to restore the cultural voices of diasporic communities. The central mission of *Lara*'s narrative extends beyond the discovery of personal identity, as it seizes language to instil power and foster defiant self-creation. Throughout her reimagined storytelling, Evaristo demonstrates that language functions as more than just a means of communication; it serves as a site where power and identity struggle for freedom. Relating to the impact of gender, patriarchy, and empowerment in the novel, the narrative of Lara's existence remains formed by race and colonialism and suffers intensely from patriarchal dominance. The novel discusses many issues, among them, how women experience forced submission of their personal aspirations to meet the family obligations.

Also, the novel tackles how society imposes various restrictions upon married women and mothers and general societal members through its established social structures, as well as Lara's refusal to accept the gender oppressions that restricted her mother and grandmother, her breaks free from traditional gender roles since she rejects

both being limited to male relationships and the duty to care for others. Her rejection of typical feminine behaviour matches feminist perspectives which promote personal self-control and independence throughout the body. Through *Lara* Bernardine Evaristo shows how the combination of gender along with patriarchy controls women's power but displays different methods by which women across different generations fight against these biases. The novel shows how British and Nigerian women deal with gender-based discrimination across generations by exploring the influence of marriage along with childbearing and societal norms and racial identity.

Through its narrative, *Lara* explores both feminine rebellion and individual empowerment as the main character battles against traditional gender expectations while re-establishing her personal power within both personal and social networks. Women in *Lara* must navigate strict patriarchal systems that define their behavioural limits along with their roles and identities. The novel portrays numerous generational shifts alongside cultural changes, but consistently illustrates female subjugation throughout the ages, presenting a comprehensive view of gender oppression in all societies. Lara's grandmother experiences dual forms of oppression during colonial Nigeria, as both traditional gender norms and European colonial practices promote the notion that women exist solely to serve men and manage household responsibilities.

"Grandma served, cooked, knelt, her pride wrapped in submission, but her eyes spoke rebellion." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 44).

The text perfectly captures how patriarchy compels women to behave submissively on the outside while harbouring hidden rebelliousness within. The character follows established feminine guidelines, yet she rejects their total endorsement. Women have always silently resisted patriarchy through their eyes, which reveal their concealed opposition to gender oppression. The White British mother of Lara experiences gendered oppression through different manifestations compared to her daughter. She faces societal discrimination, public judgment, and social demands for selfless behaviour due to her choice to marry a Nigerian man in a British society marked by racial prejudice.

"Mum stitched her sacrifices into the fabric of our lives, her dreams folded beneath duty." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 38).

Society forces women to hide their pursuits in order to benefit their families. Both women differ in their cultural heritage but face the requirement to dedicate themselves to family duties instead of self-actualisation, which reveals that women's oppression transcends social boundaries. Internal transmission of patriarchy within families causes men to treat women a certain way while women simultaneously develop self-perceptions according to these practices. The father of Lara demonstrates how racial oppression impacts him as a man, yet he maintains patriarchal control within his household, showing colonial powers enforce both racial and gender oppression.

Women in *Lara* experience patriarchy through marriage and motherhood because these institutions perpetuate female subordination. Within the textual context, women gain their identity through their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers rather than as free, independent individuals. Marriage in Lara's family serves as both a necessary social convention and an institution of control that her grandmother and mother must comply with by surrendering their individual wants and giving up personal aspirations. Patriarchal norms continue to endure across Nigerian and British customs, as both enforce this expectation on women. Lara faces increasing pressure to conform when she develops maturity because society places heavy expectations on women regarding femininity and relationship behaviours.

"I tried to shrink into the space they wanted me to fit, but my edges would not fold."(Evaristo, 1997, p. 59).

Through this metaphor, society conveys its expectations for women, which require them to exhibit gentleness and a diminished physical presence while sacrificing their personal needs and desires. Lara challenges these predefined expectations, as she resists external limitations that seek to define her identity. Motherhood recurs throughout the story as a social standard that engenders a sense of responsibility and distress. Lara's mother exemplifies maternal sacrifice, reinforcing cultural expectations for women to prioritise others over their personal goals after becoming mothers. This illustrates that women must forsake their own ambitions to care for their children.

Lara stands apart from prior women by refusing to accept every gender assignment within her social framework. Throughout her development Lara fights back while developing self-knowledge which leads to achieving personal power. Lara

fighters against conventional expectations since her youthful years by avoiding restrictive definitions of herself. The identity struggles Lara faces regarding gender as well as her racial heritage and cultural background fuse together while she learns to fight against patriarchal as well as racial societal boundaries.

“I am woman, shaped by shadows and light, carving my own space where none existed”.(Evaristo, 1997, p. 72).

The feminist realisation reaches its apex in this defining moment of her development. She discards external influences on personal identity in order to shape her persona independently. Her resistance takes multiple forms, including reclaiming her voice through language, poetry, and storytelling. Lara has rejected the societal silence that suppressed previous generations of women and transformed them into instruments of self-expression and resistance. The act of speaking becomes, according to bell hooks (1989), an active form of female resistance when women from marginalised groups refuse silence (9).

Defying gendered expectations is another form of resistance. Lara refuses to accept the traditional definition of womanhood through marriage and motherhood since she wants self-identity as well as autonomy more than following societal gender roles. The resistance has extended to embrace intersectionality. Lara's dual cultural heritage leaves her vulnerable to various interconnected systems of gendered oppression, as she differs from her grandmother and mother, who faced only one form of discrimination. Through her experiences, she develops the ability to combat racial discrimination and gendered limitations, establishing her identity as an intersectional feminist. Through the character of Lara, the story illustrates personal resistance and highlights how women from different generations can empower one another. Lara serves as the first outspoken resister of oppression in her family, but she derives her strength from all the women throughout history who quietly stood against subjugation.

"I carry their voices, woven into my own, their struggles a map for my liberation."(Evaristo, 1997, p. 81).

Feminist resistance includes both collective and historical aspects according to this passage. Throughout the history of Lara, women have steadily worked to break down traditional male rule even though they might not have claimed open feminist status. Audre Lorde (1984) states that transformative feminism requires younger

women to confront the struggles and accumulated knowledge of previous generations while developing new advancements (113). Lara's progress exemplifies this approach by appreciating the resilience of her forebears before forging her own path toward self-liberation.

The character of Lara enables Evaristo to reveal how patriarchal systems impact women while emphasising the strong responses women develop to combat these systems. According to the novel, gender oppression endures as a continual struggle, yet the story concurrently illustrates that resistance, coupled with individual self-expression and collective unity, fosters empowerment. Through her story, Lara delivers a feminist proclamation by rejecting definitions imposed by marriage and motherhood, as well as societal standards, to establish herself as an independent individual. She illustrates how women can claim their own power beyond cultural constraints while creating a meaningful definition of self.

Motherhood and feminist identity in the novel play a crucial role; Lara experiences dual effects from motherhood as it simultaneously restricts and empowers her. Most women from earlier periods viewed childbearing as a required duty, yet Lara fights against these expectations. Motherhood serves as a traditional cultural signifier that has historically been deeply linked to gender identity, as it became a fundamental element in regulating women's societal roles. Motherhood represents both an oppressive force and a liberating moment for women within feminist discussions about femininity, even though society once regarded it as an expected aspect of being female. Through various characters of diverse ethnic backgrounds and historical periods, Lara Evaristo examines the intricate aspects of motherhood that stem from colonial pasts, racial biases, and patriarchal systems.

Through her characters, Evaristo challenges prevalent notions of selfless mothers by portraying mothers who resist societal expectations while pursuing personal fulfilment. The novel examines how motherhood is experienced differently within Nigerian and British cultures, offering a transnational perspective. It illustrates how mothers either conform to patriarchal norms of motherhood or rebel against them, guiding Lara towards her journey as a feminist. The patriarchal perspective in Lara portrays motherhood as an unchosen responsibility, as men believe a woman's purpose is aligned with reproduction and caretaking. Across different generations, women in

Lara's family endure varying degrees of restriction and sacrifice due to their roles as mothers. During colonial Nigeria, the grandmother symbolised traditional motherhood by nurturing her family, while her value rested on her service to the household. She lives according to domestic obligations, combined with submission, whilst society expects complete maternal devotion.

"Grandma served, cooked, knelt, her pride wrapped in submission, but her eyes spoke rebellion." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 44).

The text illustrates the conflicting forces between social compliance and personal opposition to it. Her strict adherence to traditional motherhood and wifely duties conceals her rebellious spirit, highlighting how women maintain their strength within the patriarchal structures of society. The White British mother of Lara navigates an alternative restrictive system that dictates how she should fulfil her role as a mother. Through her interracial marriage to a Nigerian spouse, she encounters social ostracism from white British individuals who must contend with the dual pressures of racial and gender-based criticism throughout her journey of motherhood.

"Mum stitched her sacrifices into the fabric of our lives, her dreams folded beneath duty." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 38).

This passage portrays motherhood as a process where women lose themselves by prioritising their children and husbands. The traditional view of motherhood is depicted here as obligatory rather than empowering, thus limiting female autonomy and self-definition. According to Adrienne Rich's (1976) theory, society constructs motherhood as an institution rather than as an expression of love. Rich defends motherhood as a source of freedom; however, patriarchy transforms this freedom into a system that renders women dependent and demands self-sacrifice, as illustrated by the experiences of the characters' mother and grandmother (13).

Motherhood exists within *Lara* as an institution which is powerfully influenced by migration alongside colonial treatments and multiple cultural traditions. The novel explores transnational maternal experiences, depicting mothers as they adapt to multiple cultural demands while caring for children in diverse racial and foreign settings. The paternal grandmother of Lara shows how colonial mothers faced internal conflicts because she raised children during British rule in Nigeria. The disruption of traditional family systems during colonial times made mothers adjust economically,

but they must follow patriarchal rules anyway. The British experience of maternal alienation manifests differently for Lara's mother as she navigates the challenges of raising mixed-race children in the country. White South African mothers encounter struggles in their black children's lives, as they cannot fully understand why their children endure both racism and cultural alienation.

"She learned to braid our hair, to soothe the wounds of rejection she couldn't feel." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 52).

Her maternal care cannot fully shield her children from their racial experiences, emphasising the difference between maternal nurturing and cultural understanding. The author demonstrates that motherhood continuously evolves, influenced by historical geopolitical events and racial heritage. The novel depicts mothers who must adapt to new cultural environments, facing isolation, cultural tensions, and personal change. Motherhood is not a universal concept, according to Chandra Mohanty's (2003) feminist analysis, as these experiences are shaped by historical events, colonial encounters, and racial dynamics (24). "Motherhood in Lara" examines how women face political challenges after childbirth, as they must balance their cultural identities while raising children in international settings.

Through her maternal family figures, Lara develops her perspective on women and feminism, even as she continuously struggles to escape their authority. Lara chooses to question all societal expectations of women in a manner that diverges from the approaches of her mother and grandmother. She begins to reject the notion of maternal sacrifice after observing the secret burdens her mother carries, as she desires to break free from this belief.

"She smiled with tired eyes, the weight of unspoken words pressing against her lips". (Evaristo, 1997, p. 51).

The recognition from *Lara* indicates that being a mother brings fulfilment, yet she discovers the significant sacrifices that accompany it due to her gender. She understands that earlier generations of women sacrificed without choice because society compelled them to. Lara follows bell hooks (1989) theory of feminist resistance as she rejects the stereotype of passive, self-sacrificing motherhood as the key to womanhood. Lara dismisses the traditional belief that motherhood defines female identity, as she seeks a more independent style of womanhood.

“I will not shrink into their idea of a woman, I will not let them carve me into duty” (Evaristo, 1997, p. 85).

Lara establishes her freedom to shape her womanhood without accepting maternal parenthood as the only status that defines female completeness. She takes a stand against typical patriarchal motherhood, yet she does not abandon the concept of motherhood entirely. Instead, she adopts her own interpretation that separates motherhood from societal duty, establishing it as a personal decision. The perceptive insights in each point from the feminist perspective in Evaristo’s writings on motherhood, especially in *Lara* (1997). In *Lara*, motherhood serves as an alternative to societal expectations; Evaristo rejects the stereotypical idea of motherhood as destiny. For her female characters, motherhood often becomes a way to challenge traditional patriarchal burdens, thereby asserting their authority over their bodies and lives.

Evaristo insists that the notion of female identity remains intact even after parenthood, as maternity does not necessitate the loss of personal identity. The writer challenges the idea that motherhood is an alternative to womanhood and effectively dismisses it. In *Lara*, women continue to be lovers, daughters, artists, and thinkers even after they become mothers. Mothering is not a 24-hour job; it is far from that notion. When undeniably busy, it may seem as if it is the only thing a woman does in her life. However, a more comprehensive view of both the notions and needs of womankind must acknowledge how these other identities coexist with, and at times counter, mothering in the pursuit of understanding, resisting the very patriarchal constructions of womanhood that are based on initiation into motherhood.

Evaristo believes that women can experience fulfilment of self and maternal affection simultaneously. In her world, motherhood provides a foundation where maternal nurturing and self-realisation coexist harmoniously. Her characters find spaces for emotional and intellectual growth alongside maternal love. The story of her novel presents a dualistic picture of womanhood while embracing both identities. Evaristo insists that a woman can be both attached to her child and complete in herself. *Lara* acknowledges that motherhood should empower women with the freedom to make decisions rather than control them by the novel’s conclusion. The narrative aligns with contemporary feminist discussions regarding reproductive freedom, as women ought to determine their maternal futures independently. The text challenges

traditional notions of maternal selflessness by portraying motherhood as an act that enhances female independence.

In *Lara*, Bernardine Evaristo illustrates motherhood as both a realm where patriarchy oppresses women and a battleground where women resist patriarchal control. The novel presents three maternal generations to highlight society's pressure on women to become mothers, while simultaneously honouring those who shape their maternal roles independently. The story of *Lara* transforms societal beliefs about maternal value by presenting a maternal feminist concept that prioritises individuality and personal autonomy over traditional measures of motherhood achievement. *Lara* offers a revolutionary depiction of motherhood that enables women to forge their own life paths rather than conforming to societal expectations of motherhood.

Lara's journey from oppression to self-realisation is a lengthy one, yet she achieves her personal growth by dismissing societal expectations and fully embracing her ethnic origins. Through this journey, Lara gains empowerment as she overcomes her previous feelings of inferiority and alienation. Her epiphany culminates in a declaration that encapsulates everything.

"I am not torn, I am layered, each thread woven stronger than before." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 92).

The novel emphasises through this remarkable moment that personal identity is an active, evolving force that individuals can reclaim through personal determination. Bernardine Evaristo depicts Lara's journey as a profound quest for personal independence while also exploring both feminist and postcolonial movements. The novel demonstrates universal instances that portray diasporic women with mixed heritage and the traumatic consequences of historical subjugation. Lara establishes her freedom from colonial, patriarchal, and racial constraints through language and cultural preservation, alongside her opposition to oppressors.

This chapter provides an extensive review of Lara's personal development while linking her narrative elements to important feminist and postcolonial academic strands. Insights into the power of self-realisation become apparent when examining these themes, which also highlight the need for generational change and the value of complex life, rather than dismissing it. The key takeaway from Lara's journey is that authentic empowerment arises from dismantling standardised categories and forging

new life paths. Bernardine Evaristo uses *Lara* to craft a narrative that merges intimate personal themes with broad universal meanings concerning personal development, ownership, and the refusal to submit. The novel charts Lara's journey from oppression, self-doubt, and marginalisation to empowerment, self-acceptance, and agency.

As she grapples with parallel demands arising from her mixed-race background alongside patriarchal suppression and colonial legacies, Lara faces a challenging blend of multicultural and ethnic characteristics and gender-defined stereotypes. Over time, Lara transforms her conflicting circumstances into personal power that enables her to assert her independence. Through pain and rejection, as well as self-exploration and eventual self-acceptance, Lara develops into the person she ultimately becomes. Over time, she gains an understanding that her identity requires no fixing because she should accept herself in all her dimensions. Her final self-realisation represents a feminist and postcolonial act of resistance that contests the imperialistic categories imposed by the world regarding race and gender, and how individuals are defined in relation to them. When the novel begins, Lara struggles to shape how others perceive her identity. She exists in a reality where others dictate her representation while grappling with a profound sense of foreignness in every setting. Lara faces racial isolation due to her mixed heritage while living in Britain, feeling disconnected from both White and Black communities.

"They stared at me, not white, not black, their eyes carving me into pieces that I refused to wear." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 52).

The instant represents an important moment where Lara's identity is fragmented. Society requires Lavina (Lara's daughter; in the novel, Lavina plays a key role) to make a definitive choice between her ethnic backgrounds, which prevents her from being fully accepted by either community. Society pressures her to adopt British ways of life and discard her Nigerian ancestry, or it expects her to dedicate herself to Nigerian culture at the expense of rejecting British advantages. Lara confronts a racial identity crisis as she experiences further gender oppression from the female members of her family. She observes how her mother and grandmother abandon their hopes, desires, and personal fulfilments to adhere to cultural standards and familial duties.

"Mum stitched her sacrifices into the fabric of our lives, her dreams folded beneath duty." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 38).

Lara learns from her suffering maternal figures that womanly existence involves committing to sacrificial acts. This experience makes her ponder her personal choices because it undermines her ability to act differently from previous generation. Early life events instil in Lara feelings of inadequacy, leading to both insecurity and social estrangement that drive her to conform to social norms. Lara consistently strives to present acceptable images of herself for others while discarding aspects that are deemed unacceptable by those around her.

"I tried to shrink into the space they wanted me to fit, but my edges would not fold." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 59).

Even though she refuses to delete essential aspects of her identity, it reveals that a transformation is already underway because she continues to fight against being confined to boxes. The beginning of Lara's empowerment occurs when she reclaims her own story. Self-definition serves as a form of resistance through which she derives power, achieving this by choosing language and sharing intimate narratives alongside cultural expression. Through storytelling, Lara discovers the strength to reclaim her identity. Lara understands herself through the stories shared by the women before her. She acknowledges that her struggles extend beyond herself, as they are part of a broader timeline spanning numerous generations. Through the tales recounted by her Nigerian grandmother, Lara forges a connection between her family's historical timeline and her present reality, while countering the colonial effort to eradicate it. Through her speech, Lara transported us to discover "the source" that colonial powers never managed to inhabit. (Evaristo, 1997, p. 66). Lara evolves to understand that she comes from a resilient lineage that succeeds, whereas she initially viewed herself as an identity caught between competing worlds.

Concerning the language and the rejection of colonial inferiority, Lara's transformation involves her interaction with language as a primary component. In the early part of the story, she associates the use of Standard British English with achievement and regards her father's Nigerian accent as a mark of difference. Throughout her adult life, she recognises that language becomes both a tool of colonial dominion and resistance against it.

"Papa spoke with an accent that rolled the words like waves on the Niger, solid and flowing, defiant against the Queen's tongue." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 23).

Lara shifts her perspective on linguistic hybridity from a perceived weakness to a strength that affirms her identity rather than creating deficits. Lara employs storytelling methods to reclaim authority over her personal identity narrative, thereby commencing her journey of self-awareness. For Lara, the most significant achievement on her path was liberating herself from both female oppression and male-imposed standards. The womanhood instilled in her mother and grandmother taught them to silently resist yet accept societal mandates, whereas Lara opted for active rebellion against the sacrificing roles imposed on women.

"I will not shrink into their idea of a woman, I will not let them carve me into duty." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 85).

At this point, Lara exhibits unrestrained rebelliousness as she transitions from feeble refusal to blatant resistance. She refuses to accept that patriarchal standards should govern her self-esteem. Additionally, she rejects the notion that women's roles of marriage and motherhood represent the highest accomplishments, as well as the acceptance of being sidelined for the benefit of others. She establishes her self-governance while recognising the strength she possesses to make personal decisions that define her individuality. Lara achieves complete self-realisation by moving past the mindset that her identity requires fixing, allowing her to understand it becomes her power source. She no longer makes ultimatums between her different backgrounds; instead, she welcomes her dual heritage with pride rather than apprehension.

"I am not torn, I am layered, each thread woven stronger than before." (Evaristo, 1997, p. 92).

She has achieved the fulfilment of her transformation because she now chooses to embrace all aspects of her identity. All these aspects of her heritage, gender status, and hardships transform into empowering forces during her personal development. When Lara completes her personal growth, she understands that embracing multiple dimensions of life leads to self-realisation. She learns that everyone possesses multiple identities that shape and change over time because identity exists beyond simple either/or distinctions. Furthermore, she learns that defining oneself independently serves as a form of resistance. Therefore, to be a feminist means not agreeing that women should always make sacrifices as part of their gender identity. Additionally, dual cultural heritage provides blessings rather than curses to its holders. Bernardine

Evaristo aims to convey that true freedom arises from fully resisting societal standards rather than attempting to conform to their expectations. To conclude, in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*, the author expertly connects postcolonial feminism with racial identity, gender oppression, and self-realisation to illustrate how a mixed-race woman searches for her place in the world. The story serves as both an individual narrative and a thorough analysis of colonial heritage, the diasporic experience, and the patriarchal limitations that affect women of colour.

The development of Lara's personality from fragmented sectors into an empowered, independent woman enables her to reclaim her voice while gaining both personal and ethnic freedom. Lara illustrates that everyone must take charge of their identity, as people and institutions utilise racial, gender and ancestral narratives to impose limited definitions on individuals. The core identity of Lara arises from her racial and gender aspects, alongside colonial events that pose numerous challenges for her. The dual heritage of British and Nigerian places a barrier between Lara and acceptance from individuals who seek to categorise her as either white or black. The story highlights the feelings of separation and identity confusion that diasporic individuals experience, while also illustrating how colonial legacies continue to uphold racial hierarchies in contemporary postcolonial societies.

Endowed with multicultural ancestry, Lara rejects Eurocentric standards of identity, opting for an inclusive approach to accepting her identity rather than seeking unitary definitions. Her self-discovery involves recognising that she is both black Caribbean and Cuban, and embracing both aspects makes her stronger rather than limiting her. The novel also serves as a critique of patriarchal structures that confine women to predefined roles, particularly within the institutions of marriage, motherhood, and familial duty. Lara faces the burdensome decisions that women ahead of her made as she observes how her mother and grandmother fought against traditional gender stereotypes.

In contrast to other female characters, Lara refuses to accept that women should be valued solely through domestic service to others. The feminist breakthrough of her character demonstrates that women, including those who identify as racial minorities, must create their own distinct domains beyond the confining boundaries of past history and social structures. Lara chooses to preserve her independence by

rejecting societal norms, racial categories, and marriage, presenting Evaristo's vision of female strength as unstoppable, defining itself and flowing freely without fear.

The language both helps to control and provides freedom for Lara on her path towards self-realisation. Through the poetic format and mixture of languages, the author models Lara's developing self and helps her become a woman with strong self-expression. The novel employs unconventional storytelling methods that integrate diverse languages to shape its narrative, illustrating the multiple facets of living in diaspora. Through her journey between cultures, Lara masterfully learns to navigate various languages and discovers that communication tools serve both as instruments of domination and personal empowerment. By embracing her multiple languages and cultural heritage, Lara demonstrates autonomy, which affirms her validity beyond dominant cultural opinions. Through her analysis, Lara demonstrates how historical events of colonialism, along with displacement and migration, cause lasting psychological effects on multiple generations within a family. Family tradition grants Lara the capacity to survive the past and requires her to manage distressing feelings that arise from living between distinct cultures. The presence of her father's silence, the maternal social withdrawal, and her grandmother's tentative opposition together form the basis of Lara's personal development.

Instead of accepting her family's repeated legacies of difficulty, Lara decides to escape from them, as she resolves never to let the past dictate her new direction. Self-acceptance, coupled with self-determination, aids individuals in healing from past traumas by understanding the significance of recognising these events and rejecting identification with them, thereby gaining personal power and recovery. Lara's life becomes a path of positive evolution through her actions as she empowers herself to overcome strong forces. The story begins with Lara facing conflict on her path to identity discovery, which evolves into an assertive statement that establishes her independence. She accomplishes the creation of her own unique identity by celebrating her dual backgrounds and gender and personal hardships.

Evaristo portrays Lara as a symbol of both postcolonial resistance and feminist empowerment, as she uncovers personal strength by rejecting societal norms and creating new alternatives. Throughout the story, the author celebrates intersectionality

and illustrates how fluid identities emerge when we acknowledge ourselves and attain personal liberation.



CONCLUSION

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”

- Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider

The present study aims to explore the potential of postcolonial literature as a space for resistance and reconstruction through three seminal works: Toni Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters*, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara*. Despite the differing cultural, historical, and geographical contexts of the societies depicted in these novels, they converge in addressing systemic female oppression rooted in patriarchal and colonial systems. Using a postcolonial feminist perspective, the study examines questions related to identity formation, subjugation, and the subversion of women’s identities across different times and socio-political settings. While Bambara’s portrayal of Velma Henry indeed reveals the transgenerational trauma that is deeply rooted in the historical legacy of patriarchal oppression, slavery, and systemic racism, illustrating how its violence continues to influence the psychological and emotional foundations on which Black women stand today. The protagonist’s psychological breakdown symbolically signifies not only personal suffering but also collective historical pain passed down through generations of Black women. Atwood presents a dystopian vision where women’s autonomy is violently restricted through religious totalitarianism. Evaristo offers a semi-autobiographical account of challenges faced in overcoming racialised identities, gender norms in post-colonial Britain, and mixed-race identity. These narratives demonstrate how female characters resist and navigate complex oppressions based on gender, race, class, and colonial history, while also resisting and redefining notions of agency and reclaiming silenced histories.

This final chapter summarises the key findings of these texts and offers a comparative analysis of how each novel portrays various forms of resistance, memory, and the reconstruction of identity. The chapter revisits the foundational theories that guide its central concerns, namely the idea of double colonisation, subaltern voices, intersectionality, and narrative as resistance, in reflection of how literature can challenge hierarchical power systems and propose alternative visions of justice and liberation. It highlights the original contributions of the study to the field of

postcolonial feminist literary criticism and emphasises the importance of storytelling in replacing existing ideological hierarchies. Furthermore, it considers the contemporary relevance of these insights, especially concerning postcolonial contexts in many places around the world, where gender oppression is intensified by socio-religious conservatism, political antagonism, and colonial legacies. Lastly, the chapter concludes by calling for a broader, cross-disciplinary exploration of postcolonial feminist narratives as both an academic pursuit and a socio-cultural act, urging future scholars, educators, and activists to focus on women's discourse in the global struggle for equity and human dignity.

The core argument of the dissertation is that female characters in postcolonial literature have broken free from marginalisation and silencing within the overlapping layers of domination, including colonialism, patriarchy, and racial hierarchies in most cases. These interconnected systems have historically denied women autonomy, voice, and identity, a situation that feminist postcolonial theory conceptualises as double colonisation. Using the selected texts—*The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*—this study demonstrates how some works not only reflect oppression but also reclaim narrative space as acts of defiance and healing. By engaging with various levels of structural violence, yet redefining their self-perception through memory, voice, and embodiment, the female protagonists—Velma Henry, Offred, and Lara—perform forms of narrative activism. While set against frameworks of religious authoritarianism, cultural hybridity, and racial slavery, respectively, they all resist systems that seek to render women passive, invisible, or voiceless.

A unique racial and historical dimension is introduced in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, the author delivers a highly textured critique of the psychological and spiritual consequences of racial slavery. The mental and emotional collapse of Velma turns out to be a metaphor of the trauma superimposed on the souls and minds by a community of Black women, and how historical violence occurs, physically imprinted in the bodies and the minds. The focus on oral history, intergenerational trauma, and community healing that the novel promotes is a shift in the memory-making to a political and spiritual process of the opposition. The novel tells the story of one of the Handmaids, Velma Henry, a previously politically active Black woman on the brink of an emotional breakdown, who has suffered systemic oppression, including the trauma from that oppression. The issues facing Velma while trying to forgive herself, her

fragmented memories of past political activism, and her efforts to serve her community all lie at the heart of her process of dehumanisation and spiritual resistance. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian society rooted in theocratic patriarchy enforces the denial of women's bodily autonomy in favour of reproduction. Offred exemplifies state-imposed motherhood and sexual slavery, yet her subtle rebellions—clinging to her memories, forming forbidden alliances, and ultimately writing her autobiography—constitute acts of epistemic resistance. Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* explores the postcolonial British landscape, including racial mixing, familial expectations, and identity conflicts. This multi-generational, stylistically experimental verse novel recounts Lara's journey of self-discovery, illuminating the complex nature of the Black British female experience shaped by colonial migration and cultural displacement. Her resistance, though often subtle, remains resilient through consistency of identity amid institutional and personal erasure.

A comparative analysis of these three texts highlights that female oppression in postcolonial and neocolonial contexts is not uniform but involves significant intersectionality, shaped by various factors such as race, class, religion, historical trauma, and sociopolitical conditions. Drawing on Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, this study shows how each protagonist grapples with multiple layers or dimensions of oppression coinciding. Velma Henry resists the psychological effects of being a Black activist woman within a patriarchal, capitalist, and racially oppressive system. Her emotional breakdown signifies the cumulative impact of political disillusionment, gendered racial trauma, and systemic erasure of Black women's mental health needs. Offred is subordinated by her reproductive body; Lara faces challenges related to her mixed heritage in a society that resists hybridity. These stories reveal how female subjectivity is fragmented and inscribed within both personal and structural systems of control, demonstrating that resistance requires multi-dimensional strategies rooted in specific contexts.

While Bambara presents Velma Henry as a figure embodying psychic fragmentation, her spiritual and mental crisis highlights systemic neglect of Black women's internal lives, leading to emotional collapse. Atwood's depiction of Gilead is fictional, yet it echoes ongoing and historical reproductive inequalities. Lara, in Evaristo's narrative, explores diasporic tensions and the pursuit of partial self-identification. Collectively, these works showcase literature's ability not only to record

systemic oppression but also to craft counter-narratives that amplify female voices, agency, and survival strategies. Connecting this analysis to the theoretical frameworks of Edward Said's Orientalism, Spivak's subaltern studies, Bhabha's hybridity theory, and Fanon's insights on psychological colonialism, each text engages in a broader conversation about identity, representation, and power. The subaltern's capacity to speak, even if not always heard, is central to all three novels. These women do more than merely exist within their environments; they voice their stories, deconstruct them, and ultimately reshape narratives that attempt to confine them. Through this integration of postcolonial feminism and intersectional literary analysis, the texts reveal not only the enduring nature of colonial and gender oppression but also the potential of literature, cultural memory, and intellectual resistance to act as liberating forces.

The approach of this research aligns with the critical tradition of postcolonial feminism, which emerged as a response to two significant shortcomings in earlier theoretical frameworks: the gender-blindness of traditional postcolonial theory and Eurocentric assumptions common in mainstream Western feminism. Developed by thinkers such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Leela Gandhi, and Ania Loomba, postcolonial feminism offers a grounded, interdisciplinary view for understanding the working lives of women in imperial contexts. It also avoids broad generalisations about what it means to be a woman, emphasising the specific historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors that cause women's experiences to differ significantly across places and times. This dissertation uses this framework to interpret three notable works of literature: *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*, each exploring different facets of colonial and patriarchal oppression. These novels provide rich material for analysing how female subjectivity is shaped, defined, and reclaimed through acts of storytelling and cultural memory.

The use of postcolonial feminist theory in the study is not merely as a background but as a lens of critical inquiry applied in the transformative interpretation of the theory. In both novels, the woman-hero struggles against social control, surveillance, and ideological hegemony. The concept of a subaltern, as developed by Spivak, is particularly relevant here: all three women—Velma, Offred, and Lara—are portrayed as women deprived of the power to speak and become visible. Their narratives reveal that dominant knowledge systems, whether theological, colonial, or

patriarchal, systematically silence or erase women's voices. However, it is through storytelling that these women challenge this erasure. Narration becomes an act of intervention; it is a political act confronting systems of power and providing epistemic agency. For example, in *The Salt Eaters*, the author employs a multi-voiced and non-linear structure that reflects the protagonist's spiritual crisis and mental disintegration. Also, the patchwork narrative of resistance in a society that criminalises female memory and desire is evident in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where Offred's pieced-together narrative is relayed. The fragmentation of identity in *Lara*, a mixed-race woman attempting to reconcile her cultural heritage with her fractured self, is reflected in the poetic fragmentation of her narrative form.

The framework also incorporates Frantz Fanon's work on colonial psychology, particularly his discussion of internalised inferiority and the materiality of what Fanon terms colonial violence. Fanon's insights become evident in the emotional depth of the characters—Velma's breakdown, depicted in *The Salt Eaters*, mirrors her psychological damage caused by the burden of expected resilience. Additionally, her healing process confronts colonial alienation. When compelled to exist within a regime where women's bodies are no longer recognised as human—such as in *The Handmaid's Tale*—Offred must undergo psychological fragmentation. Similarly, *Lara* struggles with shame, alienation, and loss of identity, which Fanon describes as colonial alienation—an emotional estrangement experienced by those living on the fringes of cultural identity. These images illustrate that colonialism, alongside patriarchy, manifests not only through institutions but also within the psyche, shaping how women think, feel, and remember.

Here, the study draws a comparison with Ngungi wa Thiong'o's calls for decolonising the mind, especially regarding both language and cultural representation. Both texts treat language as a tool of power—non-linear narrative used by Bambara to resist Eurocentric knowledge forms and reclaim Black cultural voice, or the controlled, biblical distortion that Atwood attributes to Gilead, the experimental poetry and hybridisation of English that Evaristo employs. In these writings, language is not a neutral ideological; instead, it is a battleground where a person's identity is shaped or dismissed, along with suppression or a history of resistance. As shown in this study, postcolonial feminist literature challenges both the language and the narrative status

quo, offering alternative storytelling methods, working around women's agency, and emphasising their realities.

The key conclusion of the dissertation is that postcolonial feminist theory should be regarded not just as a critique, but as a process of reconstruction. It demonstrates how the intersection of race, gender, and empire weakens women and shows how literature becomes an essential tool for reclaiming identity, voice, and historical memory. The framework has enabled analysis to go beyond simple dichotomies of oppressor and oppressed, victimiser and victim, past and present. It emphasises the fluid nature of resistance and how silenced voices, however, find expression through residue, allusion, and across generations. By synthesising the subaltern critique of Spivak and Fanon, psychological decolonisation, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and Ngũgĩ's linguistic resistance, the study concludes that theory and literature continue to contribute to liberation, not only symbolically but also through the lives and cultural histories of women across postcolonial societies.

This dissertation makes several innovative contributions to postcolonial literary studies, feminist criticism, and intersectional analysis. Although postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework has been examined extensively over recent decades, its application within a comparative literary approach that unites dystopian fiction, autobiographical writing, and historical fiction involving African Americans has not been previously explored in a multi-dimensional manner. By placing *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara* in ongoing dialogue, this dissertation not only addresses thematic issues of gendered oppression and identity reclamation but also investigates the structural, aesthetic, and cultural systems of resistance through which religious texts assert and perform acts of critique. Despite originating from different socio-historical contexts, the three texts are interconnected by a shared aim to reveal how colonial and patriarchal systems of power shape, restrict, and subordinate women. Therefore, the study deepens our understanding of literature's ideologies as a mechanism that does more than reflect oppressive ideas; it functions as a form of subversive thought and psychological renewal of minds.

Although both *Lara* and *The Handmaid's Tale* have been critically examined in feminist literary studies, this study is among the few to explicitly compare them within the framework of postcolonial feminist literature, alongside *The Salt Eaters*. The

comparative approach reveals surprising similarities between genres often viewed as distinct, such as speculative fiction, poetic autobiography, and narratives of historical trauma. By positioning psychological-spiritual healing from political and racial trauma (Bambara), dystopian repression (Atwood), and diasporic self-discovery (Evaristo), this study demonstrates that these different narrative modes collectively serve to expose gendered injustice and resistance against racial, cultural, and colonial oppression. This cross-textual dialogue broadens and deepens understanding of postcolonial feminist issues, offering a novel perspective in comparative literature and challenging existing disciplinary boundaries.

The definition of resistance is a significant contribution that this study can make. While early definitions tend to focus on outward, visible, and political acts of resistance or revolutionary struggles, this study emphasises the subtle, private, and symbolic forms found in postcolonial feminist texts. Resistance in the three novels manifests through narrative agency, personal memory, reclaiming their bodies, cultural storytelling, and small acts of disobedience. Whether it is Velma's psychological and spiritual healing that discards internalised oppression, each one of them enacts a form of resistance deeply rooted in reclaiming her body, voice, and her role within the community. Offred's secret journaling, Lara's poetic reconstitution. This perspective also recognises the emotional and psychological effort involved in resisting oppression, especially among women whose bodies and histories have been subjected to violence. In this way, the study aims to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what resistance can entail, both in literature and lived experience.

Another notable contribution of the research is that it utilises the insights of postcolonial feminist analysis to address current sociopolitical issues, such as those in (for example) the Islamic Republic of Iran and many other places. Although the core texts do not originate specifically from the Iranian context, the theoretical frameworks and recognitions discussed—including those of double colonisation, silent subaltern, cultural disintegration, and gendered trauma—are deeply resonant with the experiences of Iraqi women. Iran and most postcolonial nations continue to grapple with colonial legacies, foreign occupation, religious conservatism, and nationalism, all of which have profound impacts on women. The dissertation also provides a theoretical apparatus for scholars, educators, and activists in Iran and similar regions to critically examine gendered subjugation and cultural discourse within a postcolonial framework.

Literature here is understood not merely as a record of trauma but also as a tool for resistance, recovery, and social reclamation—a means for women to redefine identity, reclaim agency, and rebuild cultural memory as colonial narratives fade into obscurity.

This study will also make a methodological contribution by supporting a multifaceted and intersectional literary critique rooted in postcolonial theory, feminist theory, trauma theory, and narrative theory. It demonstrates that these critical approaches can not only coexist but also mutually reinforce each other when used to explain the contradictions of female subjectivity under systems of domination. Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality has helped the study capture the complex, multi-layered experiences of the protagonists, where intersections of race intersect with gender, class, history, religion, and cultural context. As portrayed in the narratives of Velma, Offred, and Lara, oppression is always more than one-dimensional, and any form of liberation must acknowledge this multiplicity. Such an integrative approach forms part of an emerging body of literature known as interdisciplinary feminist scholarship, and the present study offers a potential model that could be replicated in future research to analyse literature through a multi-layered and contextual lens.

Writing this dissertation has been a deeply personal journey—an experience that involved not only intellectual insights but also emotional engagement, moral considerations, and cultural understandings. The interdisciplinary nature of the study, which combined close textual analysis with critical feminist theory, led me through complex theoretical terrains such as postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, and narrative resistance. These frameworks cannot be oversimplified; rather, they challenge the researcher to confront uncomfortable truths about power, privilege, and past violence. The lenses I used prompted me to think more critically about reading novels like *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*—not merely as works of art or imaginative writing, but as political and philosophical entities imbued with power. This was achieved through a non-linear process, involving recursive reading, ongoing self-reflection, and the need to de-centre dominant epistemologies. It required balancing respect for each story's particularity with the discovery of shared points of connection across different geographies, times, and cultures. Not only did this experience foster greater critical awareness, but it also deepened my appreciation for

the complexities through which fiction bears witness to historical trauma and nurtures the development of emancipatory modes of thought.

A literary analysis evolves into a philosophical and moral exploration of the real lives of disadvantaged women, whether real or fictional. I now see that the methods of feminist and postcolonial studies have never been non-disciplinary, and they demand positionality, reflexivity, and empathy. Through this process, I have developed as a scholar who has shed the pursuit of absolute solutions but has instead embraced the ambiguities, contradictions, and multiplicities that define human experiences. This insight has been reinforced by the work in this dissertation, leading me to believe that academic research should not be confined to the ivory tower but should engage with the worldview we seek to explain. I now see myself as the owner of this research, not merely a neutral observer, but an active philosopher committed to gender justice, narrative inclusion, and cultural healing. This reading has revealed how storytelling is a powerful act, especially when made on the margins. It retrieves, retells, and reconnects those whose voices have been silenced, wielding the power of words. Consequently, my study is not just academic work but also a form of support for those lacking opportunities to speak. Through this journey, I have grown intellectually, ethically, and politically — a growth I consider the most important aspect of this academic endeavour.

This study could be further developed by future researchers who might apply it to a wider range of postcolonial feminist writings in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, which could be produced not only in English but also in Arabic, Urdu, and other indigenous languages. Works by Inaam Kachachi (e.g., *The American Granddaughter*) and Hadiya Hussein, both are Iraqi women writers who explore new dimensions of women and female identity under authoritarian regimes. Such stories have not been adequately researched within mainstream feminist literary criticism, especially when they are not translated. Investigating these works would not only challenge the linguistic imperialism criticised by scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o but also expand the feminist literary canon.

A comparative analysis between Western feminist literature and non-Western post-colonial literature has the potential to identify common areas of opposition, while also highlighting the gaps related to culturally specific issues and forms of agency. For

example, comparing *The Handmaid's Tale* to the scripts of Iraqi or Iranian women can help understand the peculiarities of authoritarian regimes, religious fanatics, and colonial legacies, and how states shape gendered experiences. Through such discussions, an additional way to challenge the universalising tendencies of Western feminism is to emphasise local struggles and survival tactics. This approach to scholarship can foster the development of a more intersectional and comprehensive global feminist discourse.

New forms of resistance are emerging more in the digital realm—blogs and podcasts, digital artwork and Instagram activism, feminist comics, and more. These media enable postcolonial women, particularly in the diaspora, to creatively and collectively express their identity and trauma, as well as foster solidarity. Analysing such digital narratives can show how young women's voices can be heard beyond traditional literary circles and showcased to diverse audiences internationally. This kind of research can expand postcolonial feminist critique into multimodal storytelling and online activism.

Qualitative fieldwork (such as interviews, focus groups, or participatory reading circles) would form part of the ethnographic methods introduced in the future, with the potential to extend to literary analysis and as narrowly focused as a qualitative examination. This approach would offer insights into how actual readers within subdued societies engage with and read feminist writings in their everyday lives. It allows researchers to investigate what happens when these individuals read feminist texts during their lives, particularly in relation to how consciousness, identity, and resistance are formed. This reality-based research aims to bridge the gap between academic critique and street-level literature.

Literature can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in war-affected regions such as Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan, where conflict may disrupt the education system. Research could explore how studying postcolonial feminist texts can be applied in informal classroom settings, community workshops, or rehabilitation centres to empower young women. These studies might also examine the psychological and social impacts of storytelling in addressing trauma, building resilience, and challenging patriarchal norms. Such work can inform policy development and support gender empowerment during reconstruction in the post-war context.

In this dissertation, the conclusion not only recognises that postcolonial feminist literature functions as a site of critique but also as a transformative and liberating practice. *The Salt Eaters*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Lara*, are all stories written in layers that restore literature to the present and the past, and fight to overcome ideological elimination and cultural persistence. These works address the reader by appearing to break the system of female violence, seize colonial voice, and challenge cultural oblivion, while simultaneously cultivating new imaginaries of hope, memory, and justice. The stories serve not only to critique but also to heal through reclaiming marginalised voices. They offer moral alternatives to reimagine identity, belonging, and autonomy in opposition to oppression. They demonstrate how storytelling can disrupt imperial grammars, decode patriarchal discourses, and rewrite women into histories into which they had never been intentionally incorporated.

When we study these works, we find that resistance does not always take the form of an outcry and an open revolt; it is also present in the silence of survival, in acts of memory, in acts of claiming a language, and in reconstituting the narrative. We realise that the most empowering form of female agency is embodied and situated, and narratively claimed in opposition to systems that seek to erase it. This piece not only provides an academic intervention but also an appeal to continue reading and teaching such stories, especially in contexts like Iran or Afghanistan, where women remain disenfranchised amid active socio-political turmoil. All this reading, writing, translating, and sharing of stories acts as a connective change. In this sense, when literature aims to reflect society's state, these postcolonial feminist writings offer us a broken mirror—one that insists on piecing together not only fragmented narratives but also fragmented systems. Through this, we move closer to a world where justice, equality, and narrative dignity are realities rather than mere concepts.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1959). *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Fawcett Crest.
- Adichie, C. N. (2003). *Purple Hibiscus*. Lagos: Farafina.
- Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Knopf.
- Adkins, L. (2018). Money: A feminist issue. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 33(96), 167-171.
- Adeniyi, E. (2020). Paratactic Narrative Mode and Taxonomic Conundrum of a Postmodern Verse Novel: Reading from Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 61(2), 157-170.
- Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press.
- Anderson, G. (2018). *The future of feminism*. Penguin Books.
- Andrews, W. L., Foster, F. S., & Harris, T. (Eds.). (2001). *The concise Oxford companion to African American literature*. Oxford University Press.
- Anunobi, F. (2002). Women and development in Africa: From marginalization to gender inequality. *African Social Science Review*, 2(2), 3.
- Anzaldúa, G., & Keating, A. (Eds.). (2013). *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*. Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*.
- Atwood, M. (1986). *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Fawcett Crest.
- Atwood, M. (2005). *The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*. Canongate.
- Atwood, M. (2018). *Nuclear fears and fiction*. In *Collected essays on dystopia* (pp. 1–50). Penguin Canada.
- Atwood, M. (2019). *The Testaments*. Nan A. Tales.
- Atwood, M. (2019). *On writers & writing*. Virago Press. (Original work published 2002 as *Negotiating with the dead*)

- Balenović, K. (2018). *The role of women in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale* [Master thesis, University of Zagreb]. University of Zagreb Repository.
- Bambara, T. C. (1980). *The Salt Eaters*. Random House.
- Bambara, T. C. (1999). *Deep sightings & rescue missions: Fiction, essays, and conversations*. Vintage.
- Bambara, T. C. (2014, February 12). Toni Cade Bambara to Octavia Butler, December 14, 1985. The Feminist <https://thefeministwire.com/2014/02/toni-cade-bambara-to-octavia-butler-december-14-1985/>.
- Bambara, T. C. (2021). *Those Bones Are Not My Child*. Random House.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1953). *The second sex*, trans. HM Parshley. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Bloom, H. (Ed.). (2014). *Margaret Atwood*. Infobase Publishing.
- Bolatagici, T. (2004). Claiming the (n) either/(n) or of 'third space':(Re) presenting hybrid identity and the embodiment of mixed race. *Journal of intercultural studies*, 25(1), 75-85.
- Bordo, S. (1993). Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Callaway, A. A. (2008). Women disunited: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as a critique of feminism.
- Casibual, R. (2022). Ecofeminism in Margaret Atwood's novels. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 38(2), 125–140.
- Chambers, E. (Ed.). (2019). *The Routledge Companion to African American Art History*. Routledge.
- Charlton, J. (2010). The dimensions of disability oppression. *The disability studies reader*, 3, 147-159.
- Childs, P., & Williams, P. (2014). *An introduction to post-colonial theory*. Routledge.
- Christian, B. (1985). *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2022). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.

- Cowart, D. (1989). The Handmaids Tale: Dystopia and the paradox of power. *Modern Language Studies*, 19(2), 84–95.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139-167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Cudd, A. E. (2005). How to explain oppression: Criteria of adequacy for normative explanatory theories. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 35(1), 20-49.
- Dangarembga, T. (1988). *Nervous Conditions*. Ayebia Clarle Publishing.
- Davis, A. Y. (1971). *If they come in the morning: Voices of resistance*. The Third Press.
- Davis, A. Y. (1983). *Women, race & class*.
- Davis, A. Y. (2022). *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*. Haymarket Books.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). Introduction. Woman as Other. *The second sex*, 1-15.
- Dektar, M. (2013). *The secret life of stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter, how understanding intellectual disability transforms the way we read*. University of Michigan Press.
- De Lauretis, T. (1987). *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Indiana University Press.
- del Guadalupe Davidson, M. (2017). *Black Women, Agency, and the New Black Feminism*. Routledge.
- Desai, M. S. (2009). Toni Cade Bambara's Tales and stories for black folks and the sea Birds are still alive: A feminist perspective.
- Desai, J. (2009). *Transnational feminisms in development: A manifesto*. *Society and Development*, 9(4), 346–365.
- Diouf, S. (2015). Remembering the women of slavery. *The New York Public Library*.
- Diwan, G., & Thakur, M. (2021). *Feminist Perspectives in Contemporary Literature*. Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online, 20(5), 9360–9373.
- Drăghici, C. (2017). *Human rights and detention in the war on terror*. Routledge.
- Evaristo, B. (1997) *Lara* Bloodaxe Books.
- Evaristo, B. (2009). *Hello Mum*. Penguin Books.

- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press.
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The Wretched of The Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press. New York.
- Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch*. Autonomedia.
- Feinstein, R. A. (2018). *When rape was legal: The untold history of sexual violence during slavery*. Routledge.
- Fenner, A. (2020). " Reach Everyone on the Planet...": Kimberlé Crenshaw and Intersectionality. *Feminist German Studies*, 36(2), 115-117.
- Filipovic, J. (2017). *Language, power, and resistance in dystopian fiction*. Routledge.
- Fitch, D. (2015). *From The Handmaid's Tale to Bumped: Dystopian Fiction and American Women's Reproductive Rights* (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).
- Fitch, C. A. (2015). The ecology of Margaret Atwood's works. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 22(1), 1–17.
- Flood, C. (2016). African women's role in resistance against colonization. *The Classic Journal*, 1(1).
- FLOOD, M. (2018) *ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Forster, D. (1905). *Sex Radicalism: As Seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time*. M. Harman.
- Foster, F. S., & Harris, T. (1997). *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Freedman, E. (2007). *No turning back: The history of feminism and the future of women*. Ballantine Books.
- Freedman, J. (2002). *Feminism: Concepts in the social sciences*. Open University Press.
- Gale, C. L. (2016). *A Study Guide for Toni Cade Bambara's "The Salt Eaters"*. Gale Cengage Learning.
- Gandhi, L. (2019). *Postcolonial theory: A critical introduction*. Columbia University Press.
- Gates Jr, H. L., Smith, V. A., & Benston, K. W. (2014). *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*.

- Genç, G. (2022). The Patriarchal Structure in Margaret Atwood's Novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Toplum ve Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (9), 101-117.
- Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (2020). *The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. Yale University Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Harvard University Press.
- Gonzalez, J. (2004). *African spiritual traditions and Toni Cade Bambara's The Salt Eaters*. *African American Review*, 38(1), 137–148.
- Gopinath, G. (2003). *Impossible desires: Queer diasporas and South Asian public cultures*. Duke University Press.
- Gustar, J. (2015). Interview with Bernardine Evaristo. *Contemporary Literature Interviews*, 5(4), 445-460.
- Hall, S. (2015). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory* (pp. 392–403). Routledge.
- Hall, S. (2015). *Cultural studies 1983: A theoretical history*. Duke University Press.
- Hamdoune, L. (2020). Paul Gilroy's the Black Atlantic Quarter A Century Later: Cultural Implications of African Diaspora's Revision of Modernity. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 3(12), 47-55.
- Head, B. (1990). *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*.
- Healy-Clancy, M. (2018). Nomzamo: Teaching Complexity through the Life of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. *Bridgewater Review*, 37(2), 4-9.
- Hoge, J. (2021). The Handmaid's Tale and the politics of women's rights. *Political Science Quarterly*, 136(1), 123–145.
- hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. South End Press.
- Hooks, B. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. South End Press.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Pluto Press.
- House, C. (2019). *The politics of survival in contemporary women's literature: Narrative and the feminist imaginary*. Routledge.
- Howells, C. (2003). *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*. Springer.

- Ikard, D. (2002). So Much of What We Know Ain't So": The Other Gender in Toni Cade Bambara's "The Salt Eaters." *Obsidian III*, 76-100.
- Ikard, D. (2007). *Breaking the Silence: Toward a Black Male Feminist Criticism*. LSU Press.
- Jadwin, J. (2010). *Reflection and memory in dystopian fiction*. *Journal of Contemporary Literature*, 22(1), 15–25.
- Jadwin, L. (2010). Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985): Cultural and Historical Context. *The Handmaid's Tale: Critical Insights*, 21-41.
- Jamieson, A. A. (2014). Black Blessings: Toni Cade Bambara and Octavia E. Butler. *Feminist Wire*.
- Jones, L. (1996). The cultural politics of *The Handmaid's Tale*: Resistance against the dystopian regime. *Utopian Studies*, 7(2), 35–44.
- Jones, S. (2015). The body and desire in contemporary Irish poetry. *Irish University Review*, 45(2), 425–441.
- Kadhim, H. (2022). The role of language in shaping dystopian societies: A study of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 10(1), 30–40.
- Kamali, L., & Kamali, T. (2016). Diasporic Identities and Hybridization. *Journal of Diaspora Studies*, 4(2), 129-148.
- Khalil, H., & Abdelsabour, N. (2018). Women's resistance in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 8(5), 45–52.
- Khan, S. (2018). Gender and power in dystopian literature: A comparative study of *The Handmaid's Tale* and 1984. *Literary Studies*, 34(3), 67–82.
- Kimmel, R. (1978). Black Suicide: An Epidemic? *Focus on Poverty Research*, 3(1), 6-7.
- Kirkpatrick, M. A. (2010). *The Present Elsewhere: Theorizing an aesthetics of displacement in contemporary African American and postcolonial literatures* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
- Kirkvik, B. (2015). The power of language: How language is used to create and control reality in George Orwell's 1984 and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* [Master thesis, University of Oslo]. DUO Research Archive.
- Kranz, R. (2021). *Biographical Dictionary of African Americans*. Infobase Holdings, Inc.

- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Columbia University Press.
- Lahiri, J. (2003). *The namesake*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Lewis, T. (2020). " *Black People Are My Business*": Toni Cade Bambara's Practices of Liberation. Wayne State University Press.
- Liu, M. (2020). Bernardine Evaristo and the Diaspora Experience: An Analytical Review. *Literary Criticism Today*, 8(3), 295-305.
- Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*. Routledge.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.
- Lowenstein, A. (2016). *Dystopian fiction and political thought: Narratives of world politics*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742-759.
- Lumsden, C. J., & Wilson, E. O. (1985). *Genes, mind, and culture-the coevolutionary process*. Harvard University Press.
- Mantel, H. (2012). *Bring Up The Bodies* (London: Fourth Estate).
- Mathes, C. A. (2009). Scratching the Threshold: Textual Sound and Political Form in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*. *Contemporary Literature*, 50(2), 363-396.
- McClintock, A. (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.
- Méndez, S. L. (2015). Decolonial feminism and social transformation. *Feminist Studies*, 41(3), 675–695.
- Mitchell, A. (2002). *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction*. Rutgers University Press.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). "Under western eyes" revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. *Signs: Journal of Women in culture and Society*, 28(2), 499-535.
- Morakabati, Y. (2022). The representation of women's bodies in dystopian literature: A study of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Brave New World*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 25(3), 1–10.

- Morgan, J. (2004). *Laboring women: Reproduction and gender in new world slavery*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Morrison, T. (1996). *Introduction*. In T. C. Bambara, *Deep sightings and rescue missions: Fiction, essays, and conversations* (pp. vii–xi). Pantheon Books.
- Mueller, C. (2004). Ella Baker and the origins of “participatory democracy”. *The black studies reader*, 79-90.
- Murray, P. (2019). Stories Told and Untold: Post-Colonial London in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*.
- Nejat, J., & Jamili, L. B. (2014). Double colonization in John Maxwell Coetzee's disgrace. *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences*, 3(1), 40-44.
- Neuman, S. C. (2006). “Just a backflash”: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Modern Language Studies*, 36(2), 85–99.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, J., Gugi, J., Thiong'o, N. W., & Thiong'o, N. W. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. J. Currey.
- Page, P. (2011). *Reclaiming community in contemporary African American fiction*. Univ. Press of Mississippi.
- Palmater, P. D. (2011). *Beyond blood: Rethinking indigenous identity*. UBC Press.
- Pandelaki, M. A. (2021). *The Oppression of Women in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Hasanuddin).
- Petersen, K. H., & Rutherford, A. (1986). A double colonization: colonial and post-colonial women's writing.
- Potts, L. (2017). *Power dynamics and patriarchy in dystopian fiction*. *Dystopia Studies Journal*, 5(2), 45–60.
- Prasanna, T. V. N., & Lingam, M. S. (2023). VOICES UNBOUND: FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN CONTEMPORARY WRITING. *Hunan Daxue Xuebao/Journal of Hunan University Natural Sciences*.
- Rachlin, B. M. (2025). *The Relationship of State Hope, Trait Hope, Connectedness, and Positive Religious Coping with Psychological Distress in University Students with and Without Trauma Symptoms* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Central Arkansas).
- Raj, V. (2018). *First Indian Women Teacher: Savitribai Phule: Biography of Savitribai Phule*. Educreation Publishing.

- Razack, S. (1998). *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. University of Toronto Press.
- Rhys, J. (1966). *Wide Sargasso Sea*. W.W. Norton.
- Rich, A. (1976). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*.
- Rich, A. (1979). *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. W. W. Norton.
- Rosenberg, R. (2010). Narratives of Diaspora in Bernardine Evaristo's Fiction. *Diaspora Studies*, 3(2), 380-390.
- Ross, M. L. (2019). Ownership of Language: Diglossia in the Fiction of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Research in African Literatures*, 50(1), 111-126.
- Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. Random House.
- Ruppert, U., Scheiterbauer, T., & Lutz, H. (2020). Feminisms of the Global South: Critical thinking and collective struggles: An introduction. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 27(4), 329-332.
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies*, 1(1), 83-99.
- Said, E. W. (1978). Said, Edward (1977) *Orientalism*.
- Sanchez-Grant, S. (2008). The female body as a postcolonial site in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9(2), 77-92.
- Schirack, M., & Curtright, L. (2004). Toni Cade Bambara.
- Sheckels, T. F. (2016). *The political in Margaret Atwood's fiction: the writing on the wall of the tent*. Routledge.
- Showalter, E. (1977). *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*.
- Smith, B. (2006). Countering Hegemony through Synthesis: A Lifetime of Commitment to the Black Community in the Works of Toni Cade Bambara.
- Smith, L. T. (2011). Polygamy and religious authority in early Mormonism. *Journal of Religious History*.
- Snyder, C. (2013). The long history of American slavery. *OAH Magazine of History*, 27(4), 23-27.

- Spivak, G. C. (1994). Can the Subaltern Speak: Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory? *A reader, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman*.
- Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard university press.
- Spivak, G. C. (2014). Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism. In *Postcolonial criticism* (pp. 145-165). Routledge.
- Stimpson, C. R. (1986). Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Resistance through narrative. *The Nation*, 243(23), 764–768.
- Stillman, P. G., & Johnson, S. A. (1994). Identity, complicity, and resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Utopian Studies*, 5(2), 70-86.
- Stoler, A. L. (2002). *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. University of California Press.
- Stoler, A. L., & Cooper, F. (1997). *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. University of California Press.
- Stote, K. (2015). *An act of genocide: Colonialism and the sterilization of Aboriginal women*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Thomson, J., & Ganz, P. (2017). *Margaret Atwood: A Life Examined*. Routledge.
- Tolan, F. (2007). *Margaret Atwood: feminism and fiction* (Vol. 170). Rodopi.
- Toplu, S. (2011). *Fiction Unbound: Bernardine Evaristo*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Toplu, Ş. (2011). Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* : A Postmodern Quest for Identity. *Interactions Journal*, 20(1), 1-15.
- Tyagi, R. (2014). Understanding postcolonial feminism in relation with postcolonial and feminist theories. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 1(2), 45-50.
- Volponi Achille, M. (1997). *Diasporic narratives of resistance: Storytelling and agency in postcolonial literature*. University of Toronto Press.
- Vuković, D. (2022). *Margaret Atwood's the Testaments: Sequel as Feminist Revision of the Handmaid's Tale?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Rijeka. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Department of English Language and Literature).

- Vuković, T. (2022). Patriarchal oppression and reproductive control in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 23(1), 8–18.
- Walker's, A. (1982). *The Color Purple*.
- Waller-Peterson, B. (2019). "Are You Sure, Sweetheart, That You Want to Be Well?": The Politics of Mental Health and Long-Suffering in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*. *Religions*, 10(4), 263.
- Walley, C. (1986). *The Salt Eaters*. *Feminist Review*, 24(1), 116–118.
- Wilentz, G. A. (2000). *Healing Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-ease*. Rutgers University Press.
- White, P. W. (2017). The Black Maternal and Cultural Healing in Twentieth Century Black Women's Fiction. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/197>*, 4.
- Williams, D. P. (2009). *Contemporary African American Women Writers*.na
- Wilson, F. R. (2019). 31. The Roots of Black American Women's Internationalism: Migrations of the Spirit and the Heart. *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History*.
- Wolf, M. (2000). *Homi Bhabha's Theory of Hybridity and Cultural Negotiation*. *Cultural Theory Journal*, 5(2), 130-140.
- Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own*. *Feedbooks*.
- Young, R. J. (2012). Postcolonial remains. *New Literary History*, 43(1), 19-42.
- Young, R. J. C. (2001). Postcolonialism: an historical introduction.
- Zarrinjooee, B., & Kalantarian, S. (2017). Women's Oppressed and Disfigured Life in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(1), 66-71.
- Zhao, H. (2024). Navigating Identity: The Intersectional and Postcolonial Feminist Perspective on Immigrant Women's Dilemmas. In *SHS Web of Conferences* (Vol. 183, p. 02006). EDP Sciences.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Savannah HATEM graduated from Ibn Rushd College of Education, specialising in the Department of English Language and Literature at Baghdad University in 2010. She obtained the Certificate of English Language Teaching from the Faculty of Education at Baghdad University in the same year. In 2017, she completed her MA in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts, Al-Mansura University in Egypt. She earned another Certificate of English Language Teaching in 2018. Since 2011, she has been teaching at various schools in Baghdad. Currently, she works as a lecturer at the Open Education College / Al-Rusafa Centre in Baghdad.