

**“FROM MARGIN TO CENTRE”: SUZANNE ALEXANDER IN
KENNEDY’S *OHIO STATE MURDERS***

Latifa Ismaeel Jabboury
University of Mustansiriyah

ABSTRACT

Kennedy’s theatrical work reflects a great amount of anxious consciousness of the black American woman who is often confused and on disputes with the world around her. These elements of confusion, anxiety and despondency work as main tools to depict the life of black women in everyday situations in the 1950s American society. Kennedy’s Ohio State Murders portrays Suzanne Alexander, a famous writer from Cleveland who has been invited to her “alma mater” to recite a lecture about her experience in the past and her literary career. The present paper investigates the power relations in Kennedy’s play through the framework of black feminism. Therefore, the study focuses on the intermingling aspects of race, gender and class in the play. Analyzing the play within the intersectional perspectives helps to shed a light on the way these aspects collaborated to form the disenfranchisement of the protagonist Suzanne Alexander when she was a young woman. This study is built on three axes; the first axis presents an introductory discussion on Ohio State Murders, the second axis is a reading on the intersectionality perspectives through the context of power relations in the play, the third axis concentrates on the agents of empowerment in the play. The paper ends with a conclusion which brings out the findings of the study.

KEYWORDS: power relations, black feminism, *Ohio State Murders*, marginality, oppression.

1. Introduction

Adrienne Kennedy is considered one of the most celebrated playwrights to arise in the African American theatre of the 1960s. Her literary talent had been flourished within the exact period of the Civil Rights Movement; her early plays have left a great impact to change the traditions of the African American stage (Barnett, 2005). Jabboury, Hashim and Satkunanathan (2016, p. 120) suggest that studying the classical theatre in relevance to her major study of English and American literature had aided Kennedy to provide American theatre with her significant and spectacular plays, such as *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) and *The Owl Answers* (1965). Kennedy's plays illustrate elaborately the traumatic racial struggle in American history. Yet, instead of discussing this struggle through the direct manner, Kennedy employed the experimental and surrealistic manner in conveying the racial issues.

Sollors (2001, p. viii) points out that Adrienne Kennedy has been given various literary and theatrical rewards, among which the OBIE-Award, which she had been granted for three times. Kennedy plays, actually, reflect a sort of surrealistic dreams "characterized by fragmentation, ritualistic repetition and variation" (Sollors 2001, p. vii). However, Many critics have cheered Kennedy's plays; for example Jenny Spencer (2012, p.19-23) has acclaimed Kennedy for enjoying a profound dramatic technique in presenting fragmental identities and for the way in which she reveals her thoughts about racial strife. Enriching her plays with such passion, Kennedy participated in the changing of the African American theatre of the late twentieth century.

In relation to the traumatic struggle of the African American women in the late decade of the 1940s and the early decade of 1950s, Kennedy depicts the image of Suzanne Alexander as a representative marginalized character who will be able to achieve her dream at the end and will be in the centre of her world by being a famous writer. In the present paper I look at the transformation of Suzanne from the margin life to the centre of her world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In spite that much has been written about Kennedy's plays, very little has been written about *Ohio State Murders*. I think that in a play with a profound and deep character as Suzanne Alexander, it is significant to trace the character through the power relations in her society. As such, I interrogate *Ohio State Murders* through an examination of the connection between black feminism and power relations.

2.1. BACKGROUND OF CORPUS

Kennedy's *Ohio State Murders*- which had been written in 1991 and published in 1992 - presents the story of the past Suzanne when she was "a student attending Ohio State from 1949 to 1952" (Kennedy, 2001, p. 151). Actually, the play presents the theme of violence against women of color through the interlocking ways of Suzanne's identity represented in race, gender, class, age and even through the violence against her motherhood by killing her kids. At the beginning of the play Suzanne Alexander says "I was asked to talk about the bloody imagery in my work; bloodied heads, severed limbs, dead father, dead Nazis, dying Jesus" (Kennedy, 2001, p. 152). The present mature Suzanne now in the 1990s is a famous writer invited to give a lecture at the very university she had attended as a student in her youth.

Suzanne will show the audience a shocking array of violence and the horrors of American racism and sexism. Violence in the play is revealed through the descriptions of kidnapping, images of infanticide, and gunshots which break across the dialogue. However, the shocking of violence results from the way this violence is retained at the periphery of the play. The atmosphere in which those murders presented is terror. Barnett (1994, p. 24) points out that Hampshire kills his own twin daughters for the sake of eradicating the evidence of the prohibited and "impossible union between himself and Suzanne" (Barnett, 1994, p. 24). (Al-Atawneh, 2002, p. 32) views that the play is one of four plays written as a series concerned with the life of "Suzanne Alexander". In this play Suzanne tells the story of the kidnapping and murder of her twin infant daughters which happened in her early youth life.

Ohio State Murders presents a portrait of a young black female's struggle in the racial American community. In the play Kennedy investigates the overlapping of hatred and social violence in the life of a sensitive young black woman student, Suzanne, who dreams to be a writer in a society of white male domination. The play is presented through the technique of flashback sequences that narrates the study years of Suzanne in Columbus. The narrative structure in the play links present to past and facilitates the way in which the present Suzanne narrates the repressed events of fears on the stage. The plot of the play jumps backs, forward, and ahead, and at the center stands the autobiographical protagonist Suzanne Alexander, an author presenting a lecture at her Alma Mater at Ohio State University (Cummings, 2000,

p.2). As Suzanne remembers scenes from her undergraduate days, the horror of racial prejudice and violence against women in dorms and classrooms come to life.

3. METHODOLOGY

In social hierarchies the African American women come at the bottom of constructions of subordination. The concept “multiple dimensions of identity” is used by Crenshaw (1991, p. 1299) to refer to the various categories that share in the structuring of the individuals and groups. Crenshaw (1991, p. 1251) realizes that the oppression Black women suffer comes “from the effects of multiple subordination”, coupled with institutional expectations” which explains the multiple dimensions of segregation and subjection black women suffer. This shows how “interlocking” categories of oppression are actually organized in the system of power to reflect social inequalities and social oppression.

Addressing disenfranchisement issues in relation to the interlocking concerns of oppression, this paper is going to discuss structural, political, representational, and interpersonal power of intersectionality against Suzanne Alexander in Kennedy’s *Ohio State Murders*. Disenfranchisement of the African American women is linked to kinds of oppression they endure. Collins (2002, p. 4) asserts that oppression refers to “any unjust situation” where a dominated group treats the oppressed group as objects without a regard to their personality or dignity. Oppression exists when the oppressor diminishes the valuation of the subjectivity of the oppressed.

In the present paper I will trace events in the play to reveal how American community in the Ohio University had treated and oppressed Suzanne Alexander. The theme of oppression in the lives of African American women is very complicated due to the multidimensional factors; historical, biological, social and psychological. The everyday experience of African American woman shows her enduring of intersectional oppressions. The concurrence of these sources of oppression has constructed the political context for African American women’s intellectual work such as Kennedy.

Crenshaw’s (1991, p.1245) design of intersectionality which has been extended by Collins argument (2002, p. 276) in the *Black Feminist Thought* provides the basic ground for the discussion of Kennedy’s play in this paper, also there will be references to Crenshaw’s (1989) and (1997) comments of intersectionality linking to the power relations in the play. In

the examination of intersectionality via power relations and in connection to the ways of oppression the African American women suffer by race, gender, class, and age.

3.1 THE CONTEXT OF POWER RELATIONS

According to the previous discussions I elaborated in the above sections, I view that in *Ohio State Murders*, Suzanne has been oppressed through various categories of her identity; first she was not able to pursue her courses in English major because of the racial discrimination interwoven into her life experience; here she has been oppressed by her race, second she has been seduced by her white professor because of her naivety and innocence as a young female student, here she has been oppressed by her gender and age, third she is victimized as a mother when her twin have been killed by their own white father. Suzanne has been abused and neglected by those she interacts with in the both White and Black communities. In short, Susanne Alexander has experienced the oppression and discrimination because she is an African American woman. The discrimination and oppression she confronts comes from overlapping ways.

The following discussion in this paper will show the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power that have colluded against Suzanne in shaping the oppression she has endured in the first half of her life.

3.2 ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURAL POWER

Collins (2002, p. 276) confirms that the structural domain of power “organizes oppression” against Black women. Crenshaw (1997, p. 249) calls the structural domain of power as “structural intersectionality” and she describes it as the “material consequences of the interaction of these multiple hierarchies in the lives of women of color”. This “material consequences” of interlocking structures of oppression is involved both external experiences of subjection and internal responses to those experiences. Based on their race and gender, black women are located at the marginal structure of subordination in which they face various types of physical and psychological assaults. Black woman’s experience of race and gender is completely different from that of a black man and a white woman. Accordingly, her experience is definitely different.

Among the main issues in *Ohio State Murders* is discrimination based on the structural power in American society. In the play we see how Suzanne is longing to study English courses “how much I loved literature” she says (Kennedy, 2001, p. 156). Yet, in her quest to become English major, Suzanne came across the prejudice over black students and she narrates how “Negro” was not allowed to take more than two freshman courses (Kennedy, 2001, p. 152). In spite the fact that she had a talent to make brilliant analysis of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Suzanne has been deprived from becoming an English major because she is a Negro, as illustrated in her remarks “I didn't know there were no ‘Negro’ students in the English Department. It was thought that we were not able to master the program” (Kennedy, 2001, p. 154). The few fields open to the black female students, included the elementary education degree, which Suzanne eventually took up after being denied a chance to pursue her dream of studying English literature. In the play Kennedy employs drama as a political tool in the discussion of black women's issues. *Ohio State Murders* reveals the awareness of the black woman dramatist of the significance of drama as a part of revolution against social and legal oppression.

In *Ohio State Murders* Suzanne came face-to-face with racial prejudice in the university; there were only a few black female students where she felt ostracized by the dominant white classmates. Segregation is evident in all over the campus, where black girls are segregated from their white counter parts. In a dorm of over six hundred girls, there were only twelve black girls congregated in six places, two in a single room. In the campus life, the White girls refused to speak to blacks and when they see them “coming down the corridor they would giggle and close their door ... It had devastated me” Suzanne says bitterly (Kennedy, 2001, p. 167). As an African American girl, Suzanne fitted all manners of negative definitions which make her to be considered as an outsider ostracized of different culture. Suzanne and her fellow black students were segregated on grounds of color that informed the kind of prejudiced they face in campus.

Moreover, in the university, some places were reserved for the whites. Suzanne narrates that the High Street above the university was a no-go zone for the Negros. She said that personally, she never visited this place until the time when she visited Bobby and this happened to be where her daughter was murdered later on (Kennedy, 2001, p. 154). Segregation extends even into the dining room; Negro girls have a place of their own where they sit away from the white counterparts (Kennedy, 2001, p. 157).

3.3. EXAMPLE OF POWER RELATIONS

The pain that black females experience in the white patriarchal societies is illustrated through Suzanne's interactions with the white male in the play. Her suffering and that of her close friends is as a result of the cruel patriarchs they form relationships with. In *Ohio State Murders* professor Hampshire seduces his student Suzanne and exploits her innocence and made a sexual relationship with her, then after getting pregnant he out-rightly denied her (Kennedy, 2001, p.155-58). Hampshire rejected the pregnancy and completely ignored Suzanne because he is a White powerful professor and Suzanne is a black powerless student; this stress of power relations reflects social injustice and inequality.

Themes of race and gender under "the bias of domination" show how differences among people avail as oppressive gauges against them, and then show how such differences work in the oppressive system to persecute them, and eventually affect their experiences of living in society (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). The details of how categories of intersectionality are working in the system of persecution are embodied in the intersectional approach within the broader scope of contemporary "identity politics". Through their subjection to the overlapping shapes of oppression built upon the categories of race, gender, and class marginalized individuals/groups suffer shapes of oppression.

Through the character of Suzanne Alexander Kennedy depicts the effects of intersecting oppressions on African American women. Suzanne's oppression results from her struggle to fit into the white patriarchy's hierarchal binary system of White/Black, man/woman, and powerful/powerless. Kennedy's analysis of the structural power in the play is originated in presenting the constructed nature of these oppositional binaries, which Collins (2002, p. 101-2) describes as a part of the institutionalized oppression in the intersecting systems. *Ohio State Murders* reveals the physical and psychological trauma implanted on black women through structural power. Such discussion locates the play as a definite example of a black feminist theorizing on intersectionality.

In her article "from seeking one's voice....." Barrios (2003, 612-617) had made an extensive discussion about the structures of oppression that black women endure. Through Suzanne's suffering Kennedy has created the images of race and gender that have been built in Western thought to show the readers and audience the oppression of those who placed at the bottom of

structures of oppression. In the play Kennedy portrays the complex discriminated manner in which Suzanne experiences intersecting forms of oppression. Kennedy's portrayal of structural intersectionality centers on the ways in which interlocking systems of oppression infect physical and psychic violence on Suzanne in order to continue their subjugation. *Ohio State Murders* is drawing attention to the false and socially constructed nature of race and hierarchical racial binaries. Moreover, it stresses the silenced history of American miscegenation.

Within the theme of oppression African American women encounter, there are two historical facts; one is linked to the era of racial segregation in urban housing that made "the majority of African-American women lived in self-contained Black neighborhoods" (Collins, 2002, p. 9-10) where their children go to Black schools, and where they themselves go to Black churches and similar community organizations. The impacts of "institutionalized racism" still visible and work strongly. Collins confirms that African American women experience "racism in everyday situations" (Collins, 2002, p. 23). Within such situation African American women endure a distinctive set of social practices that linked their particular history to a unique matrix of domination formed by intersecting oppressions.

Another example of discrimination in the play is represented through the oppression against Black women in the university. Concerning her experience of grading in the Ohio State University, Suzanne recalls and compares between the schools she had attended before and the university she attends now saying that in Cleveland students "were judged on grades. But here race was foremost" (Kennedy, 2001, p. 154). In another scene, after getting pregnant Suzanne was expelled from the dorm and her status of being unfit for campus life (Kennedy, 2001, p. 161).

The world of *Ohio State Murders* is essentially a world of racism in which African American women were forced to live in the 1950s. A college campus that was indeed enthusiastic for its white students but a social estrangement for black women students; a world brings a heart-breaking mix of innocence and indignation for the young African American women. Moreover, such world presents teachers keep students with little knowledge and guidance. In the play the academic instructors have been minimized to a single white professor who restrained knowledge from his black students.

In the description of the multiple dimensions of subjection black women suffer, Crenshaw (1991, p. 1251) points out that the interlocking categories of oppression are actually organized in the system of power to reflect social inequalities and social oppression. The interlocking systems of oppression upon the African American women are formed by the matrix of domination of race and gender. Oppression happens because the “choices” in the life of black women are very limited that they are often devastated. The various “material consequences” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1297) of the oppression black women face examines the intersectionality of their identities.

Many women of color who are victims of oppression of racism and gender bias are almost burdened with issues such as lack of job skills, poverty, and childcare responsibilities (Collins, 2002, p. 46). These burdens are largely as a result of class and gender oppression combined with racial discrimination in society. In *Ohio State Murders* these views are well exemplified through Suzanne’s situation. Suzanne has been rejected by her parents. Her boyfriend, the white professor, had abandoned her. She was jobless, pregnant, and poor, the only one helped her was Aunt Lou. After giving birth, Suzanne has had the burden on taking care of twins as a single mother. The intersectional categories of race, gender, and class reflect the domination converging in Suzanne’s experience life. Such overlapping concerns of her identity (as being a young poor jobless black single mother), then, collude on increasing her oppression. The intervention systems of oppression in this case have located Suzanne in a space of limited “choice”. Another example is represented when the institutionalized system of racism denied Suzanne the opportunity to study what she really loves, the only other opportunity available to her was that of an elementary teacher.

Due to their intersectional identities in the matrix of oppression, black women reveal complication states of alienation; their disenfranchisement is a result of the interaction between many systems of marginalization. In the discussion of intersectionality and identity categories, Crenshaw (1991, p. 1241) argues the experience of black women comes out of various intersecting oppressions which touches the essential theme of identity politics. Crenshaw (1991, p. 1242) asserts “in the context of violence against women . . . [the] elision of difference in identity politics is problematic” because the violence African American woman experiences is often shaped various facts as gender, race, class, and age which are central to the issues of intersectionality.

4. Results

Interpersonal Domain of Power shows the routine way of the “discriminatory practices” which are unnoticed because they are parts of everyday life. Collins (2002, p. 299) describes this domain of power as the “strategies of everyday racism and everyday resistance”. According to Collins the domination in this area works by seducing or forcing Black American women “to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group’s specialized thought” (2002, p. 287). This domain focuses on the everyday relations among individuals that shape the “practices of how people treat one another” (Collins, 2002, p. 87). Each individual, Collins says, has various types “of penalty and privilege” from the various systems of oppression which shape the life of each one.

In the play we see the theme of class discrimination directly linked to racial issues that are evident in the manner in which houses and suburbs of people are designed and planned. The city is said to be planned in accordance with the dictates of the society. Blacks are not allowed to tour such places. “There was no need for Negroes to walk in those blocks” (Kennedy, 2001, p. 159). While the white girls had the option of living in dorms only in the first year and they later move to The House, black girls did not have access to any “houses”, they remained in dorms for their entire lives in campus.

In professor Hampshire’s office, it emerged that black students must get special permission to further in English courses. Despite that Suzanne has a good hand in writing about English literature, the professor cast doubt on her ability. He questions her whether she wrote the paper herself. It seems like the professor is not convinced that black student can perform well in English tests. Then, Professor Hampshire does not respond to Suzanne’s plea despite expressing her willingness to study literature. He completely ignores her despite inviting her for a conversation in his office. This leaves Suzanne psychologically tortured on what was the essence of the appointment (Kennedy, 2001, p. 156). Later, Professor Hudson often gave Suzanne “C mark” in every of her English paper. He was doing so just to prevent her from taking further English courses. Even in her efforts to seek clarification as to why, she was never granted permission to do so. As a result she was deemed unqualified to take further English courses.

Crenshaw (1991, p.1259) asserts that representational, political, and structural aspects of violence directed towards African American women, especially young and poor women, have been formed through the intersecting of race, gender and class in their lives. The events in Suzanne's life reveal the link between race, gender, age, and class oppression which shows how violence results from white dominated society, since the key perpetrators in this regard are white and male dominating over black females. It shows the extent of how endemic racism and sexism work in society, as I mentioned early in the discussion. Intersectionality in Suzanne's identity highlights the diversity that exists within different categories of her life as an African American woman.

The political dimension of power has deprived African American women the rights and privileges routinely given to White male citizens (Jackson, 2007, p.4-6). Preventing Black women the routine things available to the white men, excluding them from public office, and treating them with inequality in their social life and in the criminal justice system all show the political subordination of Black women. Societies have also fostered this kind of depriving education. The American institutions in the past had deprived teaching slaves reading and writing and segregating black women to underfunded, relegated Southern schools revealed that a quality education for Black women stayed the exception rather than the rule (Jackson, 2007, p.4-6). However, even later those who could attend the White educational institutions they experienced new forms of disenfranchisement. This is what we have already seen in Suzanne's situation with all the details.

5. Discussion

In this section I will discuss the agents of empowerment that helped Suzanne Alexander to get over her predicament. In spite of the disenfranchisement she experienced to fit with the American community, Suzanne Alexander was able to go on struggling in order to achieve her dream. Actually, Kennedy has provided Suzanne with specific agents to enable her establishing a self-reliant personality. Suzanne Alexander represents a strong African American woman capable of confronting her suffering by relying on her consciousness in establishing a "self-definition" to struggle in the American community. Suzanne achieves her dream and becomes a famous writer in spite of the obstacles the American community plants in her way.

The protagonist Suzanne Alexander has been presented as a woman who learns to tussle with the responsibilities of option, strife, and commitment. Suzanne has been presented as a character of strong will, rather than a victim of society. Her power comes out of the consciousness of her “self-realization”. She was center to her personality rather than forced out from an ego adaptation. Suzanne reflects the awareness of the African American woman whose consciousness represents part of revolution against social oppression. In this play Kenney proved to employ drama as a political tool in the argument of black feminism.

In the discourse of Black feminism Collins has discussed two important themes to empower the African American women; to possess a sense of “consciousness” and to have “Knowledge”. Within these two themes she has discussed many points of empowerment. She also suggested the “power of love” and the power of “self-definition” represent significant personal empowerment.

One of the important politics of empowerment Africa American women should possess is the power of consciousness. Eaton, Livingston, and McAdoo (2010, p. 814) suggest that individual Black women can empower herself and her personality through “cultivating consciousness”. Change does not occur literally outside only; it may also happen by improving the private space of an individual woman’s consciousness. Equally fundamental, this kind of consciousness is also personally empowering.

In the play Suzanne was able to stand the pain of being rejected by her family and after losing her loved children still she was able to carry on with her normal life; she says “I thought I would die. David told me years later that he believed I was unable to go on” (Kennedy 2001: 173). However, Suzanne proved to be a strong character both mentally and psychologically. Kennedy here portrays Suzanne as a resilient woman despite the constant bashings, sorrows, and miseries she undergoes in the hands of her oppressors, she still soldiers on. Suzanne is also self-determining. She spent her college life and their after completely manipulated and living around people who tried to control and determine her life in one way or the other. However, she was still able to stand her ground and redeem herself. After all what had happened in her life, Suzanne could go on to pursue her studies again.

As a historically oppressed group, African American women have established social thought to oppose oppression “it can take the form of poetry, music, essays, and the like ... African-American social and political thought analyses institutionalized racism, not to help it work

more efficiently, but to resist it” (Collins 2002: 9). As an African American woman writer, Kennedy’s consciousness pushed her to write such plays to stimulate resistance of her African American sisters.

Kennedy does not make Suzanne Alexander guilty of what happens to her even though she might be culpable; this is an evidence to prove Kenney as a Black feminist. Despite the insecurities and social mishaps surrounding her, Suzanne still has a successful and fulfilling life thereafter in both professional and personal realms. Kenney presents Suzanne as a strong character psychologically, a person who could overcome the difficulties bravely; “I remembered again during the quarter that I had taken the trial course I became quite” she says (Kennedy 2001: 171).

In his interview with Paul Bryant-Jackson, Gerald Freedman (1992: 215), director of *Cities in Bezique* and the workshop productions of *Ohio State Murders* in (1991), refers to the linking between Kennedy’s writing and the contemporary developments in the theatre of her time, such as the work of Robert Wilson. Freedman refers to Kennedy’s challenge in the formulating of her devious and dominated-recurrent theme on the stage from the perspective of action. In his talking about the aspects of her theatricality and dramaturgy, Freedman has said, “Adrienne Kennedy...uses theater materials to create...a prism of refraction -story, event and character filter through by indirection, impression, and consciousness on the edge of awareness” (Freedman 1992: 215). In *Ohio State Murders* Suzanne explains her relationship with English literature. Suzanne tells how she was violently excluded from the program because of her race and how she insisted to prove herself back into it through her self-definition and persistence.

Barbara Christian (1985: 176) has discussed that the heroines of 1940s Black women’s literature had been frustrated not only by social reality but by their “lack of self-knowledge.” In contrast, the female protagonists after 1950s started to reflect a significant shift toward “self-knowledge” as a sphere of freedom. I think that Kennedy’s readers have noticed how “self-estrangement” in the first phase of her early playwriting pushed the protagonists (as Sarah and Clara) to their tragic ends, while in this phase Suzanne’s “self-knowledge” helps Suzanne to overcome all difficulties. Suzanne Alexander was confident of her ability of writing and she did not give up her dream. When found herself in a real crisis after being dismissed from university and rejected by boyfriend, parents and society, she tried to find

help of Aunt Lou and also she searched for a job; she could find a humble job as a “stock girl” with Mrs. Tyler (Kennedy 2001: 165).

Hill says no matter the amount of oppression an individual woman feels, the power to strengthen the self lies within the self. Other Black women can also aid their sisters in this journey toward personal empowerment, but the real responsibility to reach the self-valuation and self-definition should lie within the individual woman herself (Hill, 2019, p. 5-7). Accordingly, I see that Suzanne Alexander in Kennedy’s play could strengthen her own personality by having a “self-knowledge”, also she asked the assistance of Aunt Lou who stood by her side till the end.

In an interview with Paul K. Bryant-Jackson and Lois More Overbeck (1992: 7) Kennedy confirmed “I think that as a black person in America, you almost have to force yourself on society.” In *Ohio State Murders* Suzanne Alexander struggled to study English literature. Though she had been prevented from continuing her courses in English literature, Suzanne later finished her university study, and then she improved her ability in writing till she became a famous writer at the end. In the play Kennedy deconstructed the negative stereotype of the “controlling images” which had been established by monolithic hegemony and media against African American women to destroy the very spirits inside them and to prevent them from going on. These images work to feed the sense of “inferiority” inside the African American women. The administration in English department tells Suzanne that she cannot go on in her courses because they think that African American women “were not able to master the program” (Kennedy 2001: 154). Anis (2006, p.67-69) views that as an educated African American woman who read a lot in history, Kennedy was fully aware of the role the hegemonic domain of power to destroy the very spirit and psychology of the African American woman. In her attempt to give a voice to the African American women, Kennedy presents Suzanne Alexander as a woman of “self-knowledge” who is confident of her talent in writing.

Referring to Martin Luther King, Jr., Collins discusses the great significance of “the relationship of love and justice” and she finds that “love is active, dynamic, and determined and generates the motive and drive for justice”. Collins then asserts that “love begins with self-love and self-respect”, self-love is an essential point that leads African American women “toward the self-determination and political activism” to achieve social justice and freedom. By longing to this simple and profound question of love, African American women resist

multiple types of oppression” (Collins 2002: 171-172). Love, represents a good source of personal power that may lead in forming collective power of the community. In another place Collins assures that people become more empowered primarily in the context of a community, when they seek connections and interactions they can be empowered (Collins 2002: 26).

At the end of the play we see how Suzanne Alexander could get over her predicament with the power of love; the love of Aunt Lou and the love of David who will be her husband later. First “Aunt Lou came to Columbus to be with us” Suzanne said (Kennedy 2001: 166); this is when Suzanne’s twins were still alive. Aunt Lou helped Suzanne a lot and stood by her side till the end. Aunt Lou supported Suzanne to get over the suffering of losing her twins, and then helped her to go back finishing her study in the university: “Sue, I have a little money saved. I am going to help you go back to school” (Kennedy 2001: 165). Then in the university Suzanne met David who “sensed ... [her] sorrow and ... treated [her] ... with such great tenderness” (Kennedy 2001: 168). Alice, David’s sister, supports Suzanne spiritually; she was always sending beautiful things to the twins Cathi and Carol before they had been killed, and later she stood by Suzanne’s side. Suzanne and David got married the following year after these events (Kennedy 2001: 170-173).

Jordan (1981, p. 141) discusses the relation between feeling and human empowerment, and in this sphere I borrow her words: “as I seek to evaluate the potentiality, the life-supportive commitment/possibilities of anyone or anything, the decisive question is, always, *where is the love?*” Jordan asserts that love is the essential of community, and community represents the domain for moral agency. Collins (2002, p. 171) assures that “only love of self, love between individuals, and love of God can shape, empower, and sustain social change”. Actually I can say that love is a real power to change things.

Collin’s discussion proved to be right as we see how Suzanne reflects a strong personality through the respect and confidence of herself. We noticed how Sarah and Clara Passmore in first phase of Kennedy’s playwriting had been destroyed by the way they hate themselves. In this phase Suzanne respects the human inside herself, after she got pregnant and had been rejected by almost all people inside and outside university she insists to go fighting in life. “I continued my routine of working as a stock girl” she said, and she was thinking “try to figure out what I was going to do with my life” (Kennedy 2001: 164).

6. CONCLUSION

Kennedy's playwriting in the decade of 1990s represents a turning point in her literary career; in these plays the portrayal of the black women is different in mood and presentation due to the fact that Kennedy has empowered her protagonists with personal and external agents to help them getting out of their predicament. The focal point of discussion in this paper has illuminated how Kennedy's character reacts against the intersectional oppression she endured and how she has been empowered with a specific agent to get over the disenfranchisement element. In *Ohio State Murders* Kennedy's protagonist, Suzanne Alexander, possess some personal agents that enable her being more aware of the world around her, and Kennedy empowered Suzanne to be far from the "internalized oppression" which had been suffered by the other characters in her oldest plays. The change in mood in this play is accompanied with agents of empowerment Kennedy provides her protagonist; a reason why images of alienation and marginalization are replaced with agents of empowerment; for instance, "self-estrangement" (one of the images in Kennedy's oldest plays) is replaced with an agent of empowerment that is called "self-knowledge". This "self-knowledge" has been cooperated with "consciousness" and "love" to empower Suzanne and aided her to be a famous writer.

REFERENCES

- Al-Atawneh, A.S. (2002). *The Search for Self, Place and Identity in Adrienne Kennedy and Ghassan Kanafani*. Pennsylvania: Indiana University Press.
- Anis, R. (2006). *Three multiracial American women playwrights of trans-cultural consciousness: Adrienne Kennedy, Velina H. Houston, and Diane Glancy*. Pennsylvania: Indiana University Press.
- Barnett, C. (1994). *This fundamental challenge to identity: Reproduction and representation in the drama of Adrienne Kennedy*. Ohio: The Ohio State University.
- Barnett, C. (2005). "An evasion of ontology: Being Adrienne Kennedy," *The Drama Review*, 49(3), 157-186.
- Barrios, O. (2003). *From seeking one's voice to uttering the scream: The pioneering*

journey of African American women playwrights through the 1960s and 1970s.
African American Review 37(4): 611-628.

Bryant, P.K. (1992). "Adrienne Kennedy: An Interview," *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota.

Christian, B. (1985). *Black Feminist Criticism, Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon.

Collins, P.H. (2002). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Edisi Pertama. New York: Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1997). *Beyond racism and misogyny: Black feminism and 2 live crew*, *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, ed. Diana T. Meyers, New York and London: Routledge, Chapter 13, p. 246-261.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). *Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color*. *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-99.

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*, p.139-67.

Cummings, S. T. (2000), "Invisible career: Adrienne Kennedy steps into the light", *Theater Reviews*, The Boston Phoenix, March 30 - April 6, 2000.

Eaton, S. C., & Livingston, J. N. (2010). *Cultivating Consciousness Among Black Women: Black Nationalism and Self-Esteem Revisited*. *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(5), 812–822. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648607>

Freedman, G. (1992). *An Interview by Bryant-Jackson & L. M. Overbeck (eds.)*, *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy*, hlm. 206-215. University of Minnesota.

- Hill, M. R. (2019), "Set Thine House in Order: Black Feminism and the Sermon as Sonic Art in The Amen Corner", Special Issue: 10(4), 271; (p.1-13), Rutgers University available online <https://doi.org/10.3390/re110040271>
- Jabboury, L. Hashim, R. & Satkunanathan A. (2016). Alienation and intersectionality in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science & Humanities* 24 (S): 119-132.
- Jackson, T. (2007) "Educational Malpractice in Our Schools: Shortchanging African American and Other Disenfranchised Students," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 2 : No. 1 , Article 15. Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol2/iss1/15>
- Jordan, J. (1981). *Civil Wars*. Boston: Beacon.
- Kennedy, A. (1991). *Ohio State Murders*. *The Adrienne Kennedy Reader*, edited by Sollors, W. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sollors, W. (2001). *The Adrienne Kennedy reader*. Minnesota: Minnesota University Press.
- Spencer, J. (2012). Emancipated spectatorship in Adrienne Kennedy's plays. *Modern Drama*, 55(1), 19-29.