

Alienation and Intersectionality in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

**Latifa Ismaeel Jabboury¹, Ruzy Suliza Hashim^{2*} and Anita Harris
Satkunanathan²**

¹*Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts The University of Mustansiriyah,
Baghdad, Iraq*

²*School of Language Studies and Linguistics, FSSK, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor,
Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

Adrienne Kennedy, in her oeuvre, has addressed the intersecting complications of gender and race. Most of her plays have examined and explored the ways in which these categories are constructed in American society. Through her focus on the experience of African American female characters, Kennedy's theatrical work has illuminated the ways in which African American women are doubly oppressed. From this perspective, Sarah of the *Funnyhouse of a Negro* presents one of the most significant issues discussed by contemporary African American literature, which is the intersectionality of oppression. *Funnyhouse* was written in 1964, and the theory of intersectionality was established in 1989. Therefore, investigating the play through the lens of intersectionality reflects that *Funnyhouse* had advanced the time in which it had been written. The present paper aims to illustrate alienation through the lens of intersectionality to examine oppression and suffering experienced by Sarah. To accomplish this aim, the paper will focus on three dimensions presented in the play: race, gender issues and hybridity. Approaching these intersectional dimensions in the play helps to provide a full image of the alienation that Sarah was facing and suffering from the perspective of intersectionality..

Keywords: Alienation, intersectionality, black feminism, oppression, *Funnyhouse*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 21 September 2015

Accepted: 15 January 2016

E-mail addresses:

latifa_gammach@yahoo.com (Latifa Ismaeel Jabboury),

ruzy@ukm.edu.my (Ruzy Suliza Hashim),

aharris@ukm.edu.my Anita Harris Satkunanathan)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Adrienne Kennedy was one of the most prominent African American playwrights to emerge in American theatre of the 1960s. Kennedy's literary career blossomed during the turbulent era of the Civil Rights

Movement, and her early plays actually overturned the traditions of the African American stage (Barnett, 2005). Educated in the traditions of classical theatre in combination with her study of English and American literature, Kennedy has enriched American theatre with her distinctive and provocative plays, namely, *Funnyhouse of a Negro (Funnyhouse)* (1964), *The Owl Answers* (1965), *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976), *She Talks to Beethoven* (1989) and *The Ohio State Murders* (1992). Kennedy's plays represent a unique response to the traumatic racial strife in American history and reflects the struggle of African Americans, which led to the Civil Rights Movement. Although Kennedy's contemporaries discussed the racial turmoil of the period in a more direct manner, Kennedy presented the racial issues in a surrealistic and experimental way.

Kennedy has been awarded prizes in theatre and literature, such as the OBIE-Award, which she won three times (Sollors, 2001:viii). Kennedy's plays have had a great impact on African American theatre since the first presentation of her masterpiece *Funnyhouse* in (1964). Her literary work reflects an autobiographical inspiration that comes from personal experience of racial conflict in America. Her most significant plays display the tragic condition of her characters. Sollors (2001) notes that Kennedy's plays are surrealistic dreams "characterized by fragmentation, ritualistic repetition and variation, and radical experimentation with character and plot" (p. vii). Kennedy's plays actually

encourage reading and rereading as they confront profound psychological and social issues. Her plays have been praised by critics such as Claudia Barnett (2005) and Jenny Spencer (2012) for possessing unsurpassed dramatic technique and presenting fragmental identities and for the manner in which she conveys her thoughts on racial strife and gender disparity. With power and passion in her work, Kennedy contributed to the transformation of the American theatre in the 20th century with a wealth of plays whose significance will continue to inspire coming generations in the field of drama.

We find that in a play with such depth and which has such a conflicted character as Sarah, it is important to examine the motivations of the character as well as the playwright in her presentation of Sarah's mental illness in relation to her suffering. As such, we interrogate *Funnyhouse* through an examination of the connection between alienation and intersectionality within the aforementioned play. Alienation is a condition that affects disenfranchised individuals and is one of the factors that led to the Civil Rights Movement. Although much has been written about Kennedy's memorable play, not much has been done in relation to the intersectional aspect of the split self in *Funnyhouse*. Most studies concentrated on surrealism and expressionism and studying the 'mind'. Amber West (2012) was one of the researchers who tackled *Funnyhouse* through the lens of intersectionality and paved the way for this study to evolve

and expand on her discussion. We look at intersectionality specifically in relation to alienation and extend upon West's discourse to examine the ways in which the intersecting axes of marginalisation (race, gender and hybridity) contribute to the alienation of self that is experienced by the protagonist of *Funnyhouse* Sarah.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Background of Corpus

Kennedy's *Funnyhouse* is one of the best plays introduced off Broadway. The first time it was produced for the stage in New York City in 1964, the play won the OBIE award. Deborah Thompson (1997, p.14) writes that in *Funnyhouse*, "the distinction between 'black' and 'white' 'identities' is already unhinged before the play ever begins, "primarily because Kennedy is writing not just from the point of 'ethnically mixed heritages' but from points of breakdown of racial classification." This acknowledgment of "mixed ancestry" creates what Thompson (1997, p.14) calls a "breakdown of racial classifications," which has problematised readings of this play by other scholars. *Funnyhouse*'s protagonist is the student, Sarah, who grapples in her mind with her conflicted racial identity. Elin Diamond (1992) observes that Sarah has a divided psyche and is apparently searching for identity through a presentation of multiple selves: Negro-Sarah, Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, hunchbacked Jesus and Patrice Lumumba. Diamond (1992, p.134) suggests that these selves are "various Cultural Icons" of Sarah. We read

in these selves a schism that reflects the alienation experienced by Sarah because of her hybrid cultural heritage and her paranoia caused by her issues of identity. These issues connect to what Diamond calls Sarah's lack of an "ontological secure space" (p. 134). Sarah has clearly invented these selves to form the "superimposed on the rhythms of her monologues" (p. 134). It is a comfort which allows Sarah to explore her multiple selves, caused by her bi-racial heritage.

Although many scholars believe that Kennedy wished to escape her black identity through Sarah's character in *Funnyhouse*, West (2012) sees Kennedy as a social critic who should be acknowledged as such. In her article concerning both Kennedy and Notzake Shange, West asserts that Kennedy is a pioneer theorist of black feminism because of her effective ways in representing black women's experiences of constitutional intersectionality. West also avers that Kennedy produces a vandal revision of Sarah's "tragic ... figure in order to depict the complex and distinct manner in which black women experience intersecting forms of oppression" (p. 140). West concludes that Sarah was severely hurt by her experience of personal and political discrimination, and she was trying to find a way to resist racism. West then finds that "political intersectionality" (p. 149) occurred to Kennedy as an individual, and the marginalisation of her views had a wider "political consequences for black women as a whole" (p. 149).

Claudia Barnett (1994) suggests that Sarah was pushed by her ontological

birth and identity; she was snared by psychological and mental constraints, which were imposed on her by birth (p. 35). Barnett points out that Sarah was inspecting her identity as an African American woman. Barnett also notices that in *Funnyhouse* Kennedy was investigating the power of history and the ways in which this history has an impact on Sarah's divided psyche. The argument about the problematics of identity has also been discussed by Paul Carter Harrison (1997), who points out that Sarah grapples with "the crisis of black identity by projecting [herself] in a hostile universe in a guise that valorizes European role models" (p. 572).

Funnyhouse reflects the conflict between blackness and whiteness. In her research into the character of Sarah in *Funnyhouse*, Barnsley Brown (2001) discusses the nature of the struggle between the binaries of black and white, which are depicted not only in this play, but also in Kennedy's early plays. Brown agrees with Amiri Baraka that at a time when most African American writers hankered to depict "black heroes, not black victims" (p. 282), Kennedy invented a protagonist who entirely refuses her blackness and tries to embrace whiteness in a deathly manner. Owen Dodson (1977) observes that the conflict in Sarah's mind clarifies the strife of African Americans against oppression.

In his study about Kennedy's play, Philip C. Kolin (2005) describes the inner conflict of Sarah's character as a reflection of Kennedy's conflict. He observes that the play contains deep roots of autobiographical

elements. Kennedy asserts that she uses playwriting as a psychological tool which aids in her search for identity, as she confirms by saying:

I struggled for a long time to write plays – as typified by Funnyhouse – in which the person is in conflict with inner forces, with the conflicting sides to their personality, which I found to be my own particular, greatest conflict. (qtd. in Kolin, 2005, p. 49)

In an interview between Kolin and Billie Allen (2007), Allen declares that the play reflects the complications of African American racial heritage. When Kolin questioned Allen's motif in returning to *Funnyhouse* as a director "after starring as Sarah in 1964" (p. 166), Allen answered that the play never left her and she was deeply involved with Sarah. She said that as time passed and she grew in experience, as a mature adult, she was able to look at her experiences more honestly. She also declared that she was much more aware of the importance of this play in the life of all African Americans. Allen added that the play had not changed, but after 43 years since its first production, she was "able to look at this play and take this journey with Sarah with truth and understanding" (p. 167). Kolin (2007; p. 165) considers *Funnyhouse* "a challenging work to study, to teach, [and] to perform," for it reflects racial torture, which is the main feature of the 1960s civil rights movement.

Intersectionality Studies: An Overview

Intersectionality has developed to the point in which it has become associated with multiple fields of study, but it is a theory of feminist sociological studies that emerged in 1989. Kimberley Williams Crenshaw, after her publication of *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, discovered that there was an urgent need to examine the interaction between race and sex together, rather than to investigate them separately. Sumi Cho along with Crenshaw and McCall (2013) have subsequently deployed the theoretical apparatus of intersectionality to inspect various cultural and biological points of contention such as race, gender, sex, class, ability and identity, which intervene on numerous levels.

Crenshaw (1991) adopted intersectionality in the study of the identity of black women by concentrating on two related issues of the oppression against women i.e. assault and rape. In her study, Crenshaw finds that the hardships experienced by black women are due to the intersecting axes of oppression related to both gender and race. She confirms that this suffering tends not to be explained within the discussion of “either feminism or antiracism” (p. 1244). She adds that for the sake of a better understanding of this suffering, there should be a study of both dimensions together within instructional style. Because of the overlapping identity of being both black and women within the discussions that are formed to answer one or the other, black women are doubly

oppressed. Crenshaw notices that much of the suffering black women face is not listed within the conventional borders of sex or race segregation as these borders are now understood. This suffering leads to and exacerbates the condition of alienation, which is studied in relation to intersectionality in this research.

Alienation

There are various definitions for the concept of alienation. According to various fields of study, alienation may reflect negative or positive aspects. However, alienation in this paper concentrates on negative aspects, focussing on issues that affect the individual’s psychological health and cause problems related to depression and anger. Some critical cases of alienation can lead to suicide, as in Sarah’s case in our present study.

In his debate on alienation, Melvin Seeman (1959), in his article, *On the Meaning of Alienation*, discusses five types of alienation, according to “the social-psychological point of view” (p. 784). The types are powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. In this study, we concentrate specifically on self-estrangement, as this seems to be the type of alienation suffered by Sarah. This form of alienation controls the individual’s personality completely and shuts out social reality, and is likely to push the alienated individual to mental illness, and may very well result in suicide.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our conceptual framework connects Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality to Seeman’s study on alienation. Following this, we will illustrate the interweaving of alienation and intersectionality in Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse*. Through intersectionality, the paper will investigate the overlapping of race, gender and hybridity to demonstrate the ways in which the intersecting of these aspects exacerbate the system of oppression that has inveigled Sarah’s ontological state.

Based on our conceptualisation of the procedure of analysis, we have connected the theories of intersectionality and alienation as shown in Figure 1. Firstly, intersectionality supplies visions of the significance of Kennedy’s work in facing the dominant images of oppression that lead to alienation. Secondly, intersectionality extends our grasp of black women’s sophisticated experience of overlapping forms of subjection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In her discourse on oppression, Crenshaw (1991) writes that intersectionality may be defined as the “interlocking” of diverse hierarchies in the experiences of black women. Crenshaw adds that, based on race and gender, social hierarchies locate African American woman at the bottom of constructions of subordination. Accordingly, her experiences of race and gender are clearly different from that of a black man or white woman. Being the daughter of a white mother and a black father, Sarah finds herself in a narrow space between whiteness and blackness. Her alienation was a result of the intersectional dimensions of race, gender and hybridity. Olga Barrios (2003) notes that the multiple characters of Sarah in the play provide good evidence of her shattered consciousness, which we think reflects her deep alienation. All the time, she was rejecting the reality of her black ancestry.

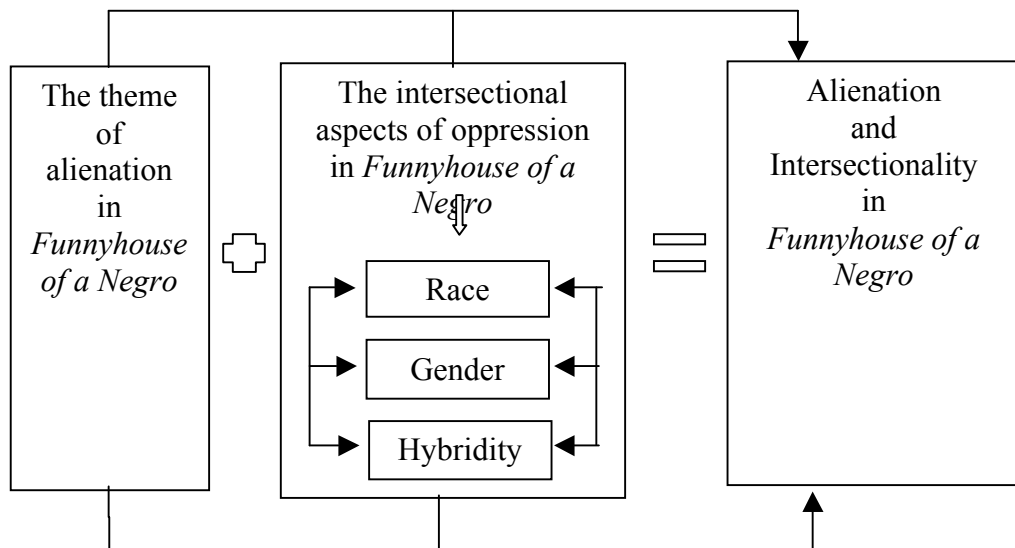


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of this paper.

Actually, Sarah represents the socio-cultural operation of subjectivity.

Crenshaw (1991) analysed the ways in which the suffering of black women is mostly the result of the relationship between race and gender by “focusing on two dimensions of male violence against women – battering and rape” (p. 1243). The repetition of the theme of rape in *Funnyhouse* works in many dimensions; the rape of her mother pushes her mother to madness and leads to her ending up in an asylum. Sarah’s obsession with her mother’s rape induces in Sarah an abject horror at the prospect of facing the same destiny. This fear eventually drives her towards suicidal ideations. The idea of rape recurs in Sarah’s second monologue as she narrates that her father started to drink and subsequently raped her mother. This recurring motif of rape has an impact on the women in the audience who are made to feel not just Sarah’s fear and trauma in relation to rape, but the ways in which this is connected to her visceral aversion to her own blackness.

The opening scene of the play presents Sarah’s mother in a white gown muttering to herself. The second time she appears in the play she speaks her only line, which is an ironic echo of racist speech, “Black man, black man, I never should have let a black man put his hands on me. The wild black beast raped me and now my skull is shining” (Kennedy, 1964, p. 4). These words are a satirical statement on colonial ideology and the racial construction of stereotypes of blackness as connected to savagery and bestiality. In relation to the depiction of

rape, Bell Hooks (1981) finds that there was a specific image about the early times of slavery in the United States, connected to the image of the black man as a bestial and savage being, capable of rape because of his dark passions. The sexual exploitation of black women is more dehumanising than the racial exploitation of her being a servant in domestic households or as a worker in the fields. The female slave was living with that perpetual fear of her sexual vulnerability that any man may victimise and assault her.

In *Funnyhouse*, the theme of hybridity is conveyed through the representation of Sarah’s white mother and black father, which always emerges through Sarah’s monologues to reflect the history of her African father, who represents all African Negroes. The recurring question concerning the knocking sound in the play is discussed by the Duchess with Victoria at the very beginning of the play. Thompson (1997) connects this to the “return of the ebony-black father, who ‘raped’ Sarah’s very light-skinned black mother to produce the brown-skinned Sarah” (p. 15). Thompson connects this to Sarah’s “fear and hatred of the black father and of blackness” (p. 15). This recurring motif of the knocking and Sara’s fear of the dark father underscores the theme of race, the main issue which has captured her mind completely. Jacqueline Allen Trimble (2002) suggests that this African father could never regain his children because they turn to another shape as they become a “Westernized hybrid” (p. 32). Their common blood and history, which bound them once, has been replaced by

much change expressed in songs of sorrow and slavery narratives, “freedom, and even baseball, apple pie and Chevrolet” (p. 32).

In his study concerning the meaning of self-alienation, Seeman (1959) agrees with Fromm (1955) that alienation is an experience in which the individual suffers a sort of displacement and relegation, which changes into self-estrangement. Obviously, the hypothesis here is linked with the idea of the ways in which a person is estranged from human condition. In the *Funnyhouse*, Kennedy deliberately does not give Sarah any physical room. She symbolises Sarah’s room as a space in the centre of the stage, while the other rooms of the house have been given physical space on stage; this suggests that Sarah is a lost soul with no specific location in this universe. Brown (2001) points out that Sarah occupies a “liminal space” (p. 284) in her house, which reflects her experience of being a mixed or multicultural girl who finds herself marginalised in this world. Therefore, we believe that the feeling of self-alienation puts Sarah in such a confused psychic state and pushes her to invent the other versions of herself: Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus, the Duchess of Hapsburg and Patrice Lumumba. This reading of self-alienation may be extended towards Sarah’s interpretation of bi-racial coupling as “rape” and her extreme reactions to blackness, which results in her estrangement from her own self.

Sarah is restricted by the intersectional dimensions of suffering: her sense of guilt towards her father, her refusal of her black identity and her inability to feel a sense

of belonging within the white world. This exacerbates her self-alienation, causing her to be suicidal. In the end, Sarah, like her father, hangs herself. Sarah has alienated herself deliberately to resist her self-consciousness, as she states, “I find it necessary to maintain a stark fortress against recognition of myself” (p.6). What leads Sarah to alienation is her complete separation from history, ancestors and self. She is living between madness and death. Rosemary Curb (1992) suggests that:

The character of the Negro-Sarah is a consciousness set on three continents at war among themselves. As both rapist and raped, Sarah’s body recapitulates the rape of Africa by white Europeans. In relation to her parents, Sarah is both betrayer and betrayed. Kennedy mocks the hypocrisy of her four historic selves in the penultimate jungle scene by having them appear with nimbuses as “saviours” of Africa, still obsessively narrating the story of the father’s rape of the mother. (p. 151)

Seeman sees that the image of the loss of satisfaction is embodied in “the inability of the individual to find self-rewarding” (p. 790), which is reflected in the loss of identity. The loss of identity of any individual certainly may lead to a sort of alienation. Brown (2001) suggests that *Funnyhouse* stands on four pairs of contrasts: the first discusses blackness versus whiteness; the

second is associated with sanity versus madness; the third is a debate on the real versus the unreal; and the fourth is linked with the discussion of belonging versus unbelonging. According to Seeman and the other theorists mentioned formerly, this last point of unbelonging actually holds the exact meaning of alienation. Kennedy shows that when a woman is a product of various “socio-historical forces” (p. 283), her consciousness comes to be multi-fragmented. Kennedy formulates her character to reflect various attitudes. We see that Sarah cannot escape the physical and psychic space of her place; she is trapped and imprisoned in her alienation. Sarah’s confused identity and fragmented consciousness are aligned with her psychic and physical alienation.

The rooms are my rooms; a Hapsburg chamber, a chamber in a Victorian castle, the hotel where I killed my father, the jungle. These are the places myself exist in. I know no places. To believe in places is to know hope and to know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world. I find there are no places, only my funnyhouse.
(p. 7)

Funnyhouse may be better grasped by studying the psychology of a woman through the intersectional perspective of race and gender, as the struggle of Sarah represents the struggle of all African American women against gender and race.

The play then examines the amalgamation of these categories together and their intersectional alliance to create the alienated-self of Sarah. Each one of these categories raises Sarah’s sense of herself as an alien and an outsider. So, in *Funnyhouse* Kennedy employed writing as a weapon against the intersectional dimensions of her alienation.

Seeman adopts Merton’s suggestion that one of the tools through which we realise alienation is the individual “rebellion,” which leads “man outside the enviroing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say, a greatly modified, social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards” (qtd. in Seeman, p. 789). Building on this former discussion about alienation and based on our earlier debate of intersectionality, *Funnyhouse* explores the thoughts of the intersectional oppression of Sarah through the external stories told about her and the internal stories she tells through her monologues. The intersectional image of her alienation is obvious through the multiple characters she invents to rebel against oppression. Sarah invents four characters for herself: Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Patrice Lumumba and Jesus. If we trace the history of these characters we will find that each character represents a special kind of alienation; according to Rida Anis (2006), Queen Victoria, the mother of nine children, excluded herself from society for more than two years and was nervous after the death of her husband, Albert. The Duchess of Hapsburg went crazy after her husband was tricked by Napoleon, who

pushed him to believe a lie that the Mexicans wanted an emperor. Jesus was betrayed by his followers, who left him to face his fate alone. Patrice Lumumba, Prime Minister of the Congo, was excluded by the President after three months of service and was later killed for his political beliefs (pp. 24-25). Sarah is a reflection of all these characters. Debby Thompson (2003) believes that Sarah was searching for an outlet from her fruitless world; her “metempsychosis” of many characters is therefore a self-hatred, which contributes to the disintegration of her inner self.

According to Seeman, self-alienation means “to be something less than one might ideally be if the circumstances in society were otherwise – to be insecure, given to appearances, conformist” (p. 790). Part of the strategy Sarah uses to escape her alienation is to invent the stories about herself and her father. Because she cannot accept the fact of her race, she rejects her father, and in the end she rejects even the idea of her existence. At the beginning of the play we hear knocking on the door of Queen Victoria, one of Sarah’s characters, who clarifies that the source of the knocking is her father, who “comes from the jungle to find [her, and] he never tires of his journey” (p. 3). This knocking may refer to an idea that persists in Sarah’s mind like a constant knocking, and this idea is never stops as she thinks about it all the time; it is the idea of rejecting her race. The reply given by the Duchess asserts the idea of her unconscious rejection of her race, as she says:

How dare he enter the castle, he who is the darkest? My mother looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman’s. And at least I am yellow, but he is black, the blackest one of them all. I hoped he was dead. Yet he still comes through the jungle to find me. (p. 3)

This is a clear and effective rejection of Sarah of the race of her father and at the same time there is an implicit reference that her father may desire to enter the world of the coloniser as he desires to enter the castle of Queen Victoria. As she rejects blackness as a sign of her race, Sarah confirms the idea that her mother looked like a white woman. According to the stage direction, the knocking was something real, whether the source is the father or someone else we have no idea as the father does not appear at all; we see him only through the mind of his alienated daughter.

West observes that *Funnyhouse* is difficult to classify for two reasons; the first is that the form of the play is highly experimental and the second is that the play “predated both the black feminist resurgence of the late 1960s and the feminist theatre movement of the 1970s” (p. 147). West writes that the play was excluded by many white critics such as Oppenheimer, who denied the benefit of the experimental avant-garde theatre, which was invented by a black woman dramatist. Moreover, Kennedy and her *Funnyhouse* were described “as neurotic and out of step with the black

nationalist movement of the time” (p. 147). Kennedy connects issues of race, specifically related to blackness with gender issues in order to interrogate systemic oppression within American society. During the 1960s and 1970s such an exploration of the intersections of oppression containing such complexity of form and content was something new and unfamiliar, which is one of the reasons why *Funnyhouse* was overlooked in academic circles until the early 1990s.

Brown (2001) writes that many critics have discussed the ways in which Kennedy’s play does not follow the prevalent ethos of the Black Arts Movement. For instance, Kennedy did not recruit her writings to create a black “triumphant” as what we see in the writings “of her sister playwrights—Childress, Hansberry and Shange” (p. 283). Brown suggests that this aspect of her writing “is neither a marker of her ‘apolitical naivete’, as Herbert Blau contends (p. 538), nor an indication of her allegiance to white culture” (p. 283). According to Collins (1989), “One key reason that standpoints of oppressed groups are discredited and suppressed by the more powerful is that self-defined standpoints can stimulate oppressed groups to resist their domination” (p. 749). Hence, West suggests that Sarah’s committing suicide at the end of the play is therefore a rejection of both the protagonist and the dramatist for “structural intersectionality.”

The construction of *Funnyhouse* presents the frame of black feminist theatre and shares with the invention of black

female identity in drama. Discussing the play from this perspective explores the many features of feminism and racism. A discussion of black feminism in theatre, as such, should concentrate on dramatic forms that contemplate women’s experience. West remarks that feminist drama rejects conventional oppression not only in form and content, but even in characterisation. In such perspective Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse* represents the key issue of rejecting the traditional, hierarchical construction of the male theatre.

Seeman avers that any comparison with the ideal human “reflects the original interest of Marx in alienation” (p. 790). Seeman is specifically alluding to that side of self-estrangement that is usually described as the loss of the essential meaning of life, a loss which has been described by Marx and others as an intrinsic aspect of modern alienation. In *Funnyhouse*, Sarah has lost this “essential meaning of life,” which pushed her to alienation. Because she cannot accept herself, Sarah refuses her whole life. In her monologue, she repeats the idea of rejecting her origins when she says, “I want to possess no moral value, particularly value as to my being. I want not to be” (p. 5). John Bellamy Foster (2000) confirms that Hegelian construction of alienation connects it to the apprehension of identity. This may shed light on the ways in which Sarah’s attachment to a Eurocentric perspective becomes a part of her strategy to negotiate the complications found at the intersection between identity, oppression and privilege. Her hybridity, her internal trauma over the

reality of the axes of oppression due to her racial identity has, therefore, contributed to alienation so intense that it leads to a schism in her mind.

CONCLUSION

Through her marginal and alienated world, Kennedy internalised the awareness of the suffering endured by the African Americans. The legacy of imperialism, slavery and the consequences of this upon ontological equilibria lead to the depiction of conflicted characters such as Sarah of *Funnyhouse*. In fact, Sarah is a vehicle via which Kennedy deploys the experience of alienation, and this is related to the intersectional axes of marginalisation represented by race, gender and hybridity. This approach of intersectionality allows us to probe the overlapping systems of oppression that push Sarah to alienation and lead to her tragic fate. When a woman faces an intersectional oppression that disturbs her existence, she should resist and struggle. But being so shattered, confused and weak, Sarah cannot endure the intersectional oppression in which she finds herself, so she chooses to put an end to her suffering by committing suicide.

The frame of intersectionality in *Funnyhouse* explains many of the sophisticated images of alienation. The alienation of the black woman is depicted in the play through the psychological protest of Sarah against the oppression of black women, where she invents the other characters to resist her alienation. Intersectionality,

then, is well suited in the interrogation of alienation in Kennedy's *Funnyhouse* for two reasons. Firstly, it helps in the exploration of the importance of Kennedy's play in facing the prevailing images of oppression that have driven Sarah to alienation. Secondly, intersectionality enhances our perception of Sarah's experience of interlocking shapes of subjection. Through intersectionality, this paper investigates the overlapping of race, gender and hybridity and explores the ways in which these aspects shape the system of oppression that captures Sarah in a complex dilemma of self-alienation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Work on this article is supported by the following grant for early career researchers: Geran Galakan Penyelidik Muda (Project Code: GGPM-2013-020).

REFERENCES

- Anis, R. (2006). *Three multiracial American women playwrights of trans-cultural consciousness: Adrienne Kennedy, Velina H. Houston, and Diane Glancy*. Indiana University of Pennsylvania, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (UMI Number: 3207883). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezplib.ukm.my/pqdtglobal/docview/uploads/19/11/2014/12:39Am/Material-Design.pdf>.
- Barnett, C. (1996). "This fundamental challenge to identity": Reproduction and representation in the drama of Adrienne Kennedy. *Theatre Journal*, 48(2), 141-155.
- 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.
- Brown, E. B. (2001). Passed over: The tragic mulatta and (dis)integration of identity in Adrienne Kennedy's plays. *African American Review*, 35(2), 281-295.
- Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs*, 38(4), 785-810.
- Collins, P. H. (1989). The social construction of black feminist thought. *Signs*, 14(4), 745-73.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (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*, 139-67.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-99.
- Curb, R. (1992). (Hetero) sexual terrors in Kennedy's early plays. In P. K. Bryant-Jackson, & L. M. Overbeck (Eds.), *Intersecting boundaries: The theatre of Adrienne Kennedy* (pp. 142-56). Minnesota: University of Minnesota.
- Diamond, E. (1992). Mimesis in syncopated time: Reading Adrienne Kennedy. In P. K. Bryant-Jackson, & L. M. Overbeck (Eds.), *Intersecting boundaries: The theatre of Adrienne Kennedy* (pp. 131-141). Minnesota: University of Minnesota.
- Dodson, O. (1977). Who has seen the wind? Playwrights and the black experience. *Black American Literature Forum*, 11(3), 108-16.
- Foster, J. B. (2000). *Marx's ecology: Materialism and nature*. New York: New York University Press.
- Harrison, P. C. (1997). The crisis of black theatre identity. *African American Review*, 31(4), 567-78.
- Hooks, B. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. Boston: South End Press.
- Kennedy, A. (1964). *Funnyhouse of a negro*: New York: Samuel French.
- Kolin, P. C. (2005). The fission of Tennessee Williams's plays into Adrienne Kennedy's. *South Atlantic Review*, 70(4), 43-72.
- Kolin, P. C., & Allen, B. (2007). Revisiting funnyhouse: An interview with Billie Allen. *African American Review*, 41(1), 165-75.
- Seeman, M. (1959). On the meaning of alienation. *American Sociological Review*, 24(6), 783-91.
- Sollors, W. (1991). Owls and rats in the American funnyhouse: Adrienne Kennedy's drama. *American Literature*, 63(3), 507-32.
- 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.
- Thompson, D. (1997). Reversing blackface minstrelsy, improvising racial identity: Adrienne Kennedy's funnyhouse of a Negro. *Post Identity*, 1(1), 13-38.
- Thompson, D. (2003). Is race a trope? Anna Deavere Smith and the question of racial performativity. *African American Review*, 37(1), 127-38.
- Trimble, J. A. (2002). *Confounded identities: Race, gender, culture in Adrienne Kennedy in one act*. Alabama: University of Alabama.
- West, A. (2012). Power plays: Two black feminist playwrights (en)counter intersectionality. In R. Dascal (Ed.), *Episodes from a history of undoing: The heritage of female subversiveness* (pp. 137-52). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

