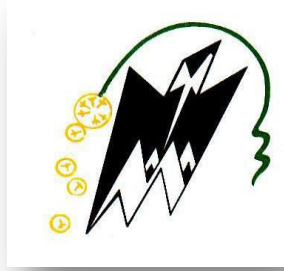


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**Theme:**

**Gender, Race and Class in Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996)**

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**N° d'Ordre : .....**

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To:

My sweet parents, sisters and brothers,

My best friends Hayet et Yasmine,

All those who love me and whom I love,

My mate Lydia and her respected family.

Thilelli

To :

My beloved parents,

My brother and sister,

My dear husband,

My best friend Sihem and my mate Thilelli and her respected family.

Lydia

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## **Abstract**

*The aim of this present study is to examine the issues of Gender, Race and Class in Alice Childress's Wine in the Wilderness (1969) and Muthal Naidoo's Flight from the Mohabarath (1996). To highlight the harsh conditions and reality in which women live, in the African American society, we have borrowed some theoretical concepts from Bell hooks's feminist theory From Margin to Center (1984) to investigate women's struggle for liberation from the old cultural beliefs. We have also made reference to Judith Butler's feminist theory of Performativity in Gender Trouble(1990) to demonstrate the subordinate position that women occupy in society. As a conclusion, we have noticed that the two playwrights share the same views despite their different backgrounds and periods of life. However, women fight to get their rights and show that they have the same position as men in society.*

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## Introduction

The twentieth century was characterized by the emergence of the Afro-American literature. In its early decades, all kind of literature (novel, poetry and drama) was considered as a feminist literature. Many Afro-American female playwrights negotiate issues of body manifestations and the evolvement of this manifestation from one decade to the next. Race and gender became prominent issues which attracted the attention of a wide range of scholars and writers such as Judith Butler, Bell hooks and many others. That period witnessed also several attempts of violence against women whose voice had been muzzled under the patriarchal system.

In fact, feminine voices emerged in Black African drama to challenge their silence and their exclusion from public discourses. Moreover, female playwrights such as Alice Childress, Muthal Naidoo, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Pearl Cleage complained about their conditions and rights in front of their masculine-based society. Indeed, they used drama as a powerful tool to influence attitudes and social changes. Black women, however, are often portrayed as defenders of the physical self and protectors of identity.<sup>1</sup>

The present research paper attempts to explore the issues of gender, race and class discrimination in two different literary works: Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Muhabarath* (1996). Indeed, we attempt to explore the issue of gender identity in South Africa and the United States. We also intend to examine the way in which women have been during the civil right movements in United States of America(1960) and during the Apartheid movement in South Africa (1948) a subject of legal discrimination based on their gender, and how they are



portrayed by the Afro-American playwright Alice Childress and the South African playwright Muthal Naidoo in their afore mentioned plays.

In the United States of America , black women's resistance against oppression reached at peak during the Civil Rights Movement era (1948). Indeed, this was integrated among the black resistance against racism and in their fighting to get civil rights through the organization of several marches during the 1950s. A lot of reformers supported in this struggle for freedom , the Black Church and preacher's voice played a crucial role. Marcus Garvey is one of the great figures, who has contributed in the development of black nationalism during the Harlem Renaissance in New York City . He called for black economic independence from whites that he developed in his program "**the Universal Negro Improvement Association-UNIA**" which helped the blacks to be proud and self-confident far from north America.<sup>2</sup>

In South Africa , women's progress in their way to get their rights can be traced back to the Apartheid political era. In addition to this, the « non white» inhabitants of South Africa were marginalized by the National Party Government of South Africa between 1948 and 1993. The government of South Africa also practiced the same discriminatory policies while occupying South West Africa known after 1966 as Namibia. Racial segregation started during the colonial times; however, the system of the Apartheid, considered as an official policy, was introduced following the general election of 1948. New legislation classified inhabitants into racial groups (Black, White, Coloured and Indians), and residential areas were segregated. In 1958, black people were deprived of their citizenship. Therefore, the government segregated education, medical care, and other public services inferior to those of white people.

Therefore, Apartheid signifies an internal resistance and violence as well as a long trade embargo against South African and Indian societies. Since 1980, a series of popular uprisings and protests were met with the banning of opposition of anti - Apartheid leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk.<sup>3</sup>

### **Review of Literature :**

Both Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996) received much criticism. Alice Childress's play *Wine in the Wilderness*(1969) reveals the harsh black African living in the United States of America during a race riot in Harlem, New York City (1950s). Therefore, it has received much attention and literary criticism from different perspectives. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, in her critic *Images of Blacks in Plays by Black Women*(1990). She praises Childress as a creator of plausible heroines in her dramatic works, particularly *Wine in the Wilderness*(1969). For her, the latter is the best illustration handling of characterization commenting her heroines, in general, as being once courageous, discerning, vulnerable, insecure, and optimistic. In short, they are human and real. Further, Brown-Guillory observes that Childress writes largely about poor women for whom the act of living is sheer heroism. She notes that the character of Tommy epitomizes the typical heroine who pictures Childress's play, in the sense that, she steadily moves in the direction of wholeness. Tommy's triumph over her circumstances is celebrated by Brown-Guillory, who continues, "Regardless of the fact that her bourgeois acquaintances almost destroy her, Tommy moves to a state of completeness, i.e., develops a positive sense of self."<sup>4</sup>

Another critique, made by Omo Folabo Ajuyi-Soyinka in *Black Feminist Criticism and Drama : Thoughts On Double Patriarchy* (1993), explains in *Wine in the Wilderness*(1969) an idea that contrasts the events of the rioting outside. The critique

also discusses Bill's three paintings of the triptych symbolises the evolution of African American woman from a little girl standing for the African queen or the "Wine in the Wilderness" to a new African American type of woman who behaves like man. Therefore, for Folabo the events outside are dehumanizing, and exploiting African Americans by white people. He adds that those African Americans are struggling to get their rights.<sup>5</sup>

Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch also criticised Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness*. In their introduction to *Plays by and about Women*, they praise Childress for creating a heroine in the character of Tommy:

Tommy has neither money nor recognition, but she has a vitality and knowledge of what human beings are and should be. She is a grass-roots woman who has survived the rats, the roaches, the riots, and the landlords of Harlem. With Tommy, Miss Childress has created a strong new black woman character to contrast with the traditional strong "Mammy" type. Bill's self-serving notion that he is "better" than Tommy not only is defeated but he comes to recognize that her ability to survive is the wine in the wilderness that has enabled the whole black race to survive in America.<sup>6</sup>

As far as Muthal Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarath*, It has also received a large bulk of criticism. Throughout her career thanks to her works that are of great interest, especially her play *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996). In her essay "***Silence in Muthal Naidoo's Flight from the Mohabarath : Disruption the Power of Categories in South Africa in a South African Play***" (1999) Paula Richman considers that though rarely does a play-script make audible the mechanisms of silencing, Muthal Naidoo manages to do so. She argues that the play depicts the Mohabarath, one of Hinduism's two preeminent epics, as keeping its characters not only imprisoned, but also invested in categories that

resist to silence . She adds that fixed categories see themselves as the other which lead to great change in the lives of South Africans. While the first section of the essay examines the way the silenced people tell their stories, the second analyses how to subvert against the ancient values. In the third however, dwells the difference between the elite and non elite in the way they tell their stories. In the end , she argues how the ‘‘flight’’ can illuminate categories on the self and the other<sup>7</sup> .

Then, Pratibha – P is one among the best known authors who comments on Muthal Naidoo’s work *Flight from the Mohabarath (1996)* in her article entitled **“Unleashed Claims of Divinity and Gender : An Interpretation of Muthal Naidoo’s Flight from the Mohabarath”** (2012) . She argues that Naidoo’s play can be read from a feminist perspective. Indeed, it is the only version of the Indian epic Mohabharata . The author argues that feminist groups who struggle for women rights ask always dominance over men. Pratibha-P adds that Naidoo’s play shows the misery of women is seen as a universal issue that women’s experience over the world.<sup>8</sup>

Another critic who studies Muthal Naidoo’s play *Flight from the Mohabarath* is NeelimaV. In her article entitled *Emergence Of Third Space: An Analysis of Naidoo’s Flight from the Mohabarath*. She argues that the South African theatre considered as shared by a few Indian women like Muthal Naidoo and Saira Essa, and there were also some Indian male voice who participated with them. She claims that they considered it as a means to go out of their hard situation and struggle against the male voice. She asserts that they use theatre as a tool to get equality. Therefore, she claims that Muthal Naidoo’s play which is a distinctive version of the Indian epic Mohabarata was written from the female standpoint. In addition Neelima.v adds, Muthal Naidoo unfailingly describes the male version character Arjuna and Amba respectively. They want to free themselves from responsibility and create new space for them.<sup>9</sup>

## **Issue and Working Hypotesis :**

It appears from this review of the literature that both plays *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and *Flight from the Mahabarath* (1996) are subject of criticism and received much attention from several perspectives. To our knowledge , no previous comparative study of the two works has been set and undertaken as a subject matter before.

This comparative study is based on the assumption that though the two plays are written by different playwrights in different places and periods of time (1969, 1996) ,they can be collaborated and studied in a single work. Therefore, we propose a study of the two authors on the basis that they share in the representation of the image of the coloured women through feminist drama in the African-American and the Indian society.

To develop our topic, we intend to adopt some theoretical concepts by Bell hooks from her book *From Margin to Center* (1984), We will also rely on Judith Butler's concept of *Performativity* as explored in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). Both theories will help the two plays mirror the perception of gender and women's discrimination in the African-American and Indian societies. These theories will serve to show the way women are silenced, and how their rights and voices are confiscated from them.

## **Methodological Outline**

To give our work a methodological orientation, we will present the Methods and Materials. In Methods, we will provide an insight on Bell Hooks's theory *From Margin to Center* (1984) and Judith Butler's theory of Performativity in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). In Materials, we will provide brief summaries of the two plays *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996) with the biographical backgrounds of the two playwrights Alice Childress and Muthal Naidoo. The Results section will shed light on the

general findings of our research. The Discussion, which is the third section, comprises two chapters. The first, focuses on the understanding of women's discrimination under the patriarchal society and the combination between the three concepts race, gender and class. The second explains the socially gendered identity in the African-American and Indian societies taking into consideration the significant period of time between the two plays. To end with ,the general conclusion of our dissertation will be a restatement of the main ideas as the reached results of our work.

## **Endnotes**

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- 3- Nelson.Mondela, *Racism Under Apartheid in South-Africa(The Unesco Press), Paris,1999.*
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- 5-Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, *Black Feminist Literature and Drama Thoughts on Double Patriarchy* *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* .p 161-174 (spring,1993) , viewed on May10<sup>th</sup>,2017.
- 6-Victoria Sullivan, *Plays by and about Women*, 2002.
- 7-Paula Richman , “Silence in Muthal Naidoo’s *Flight from the Mohabarath*: Disrupting the Power of Categories in a South African Play” (Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, USA). 1999.
- 8- Pratibha-P, “Unleashed Chain of Divinity and Gender: an Interpretation of Muthal Naidoo’s *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996)”. The IUP Journal of Commonwealth Literature.vol IV;N01,pp 48-55 (January,2012).

9-Neelima.V.Emergence of the Third Space: An Analysis of Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath*(Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences)2B:pp 289-291(2014,2).

## **Methods and Materials**

### **1-Methods:**

This part of our work deals with the theoretical framework. We have borrowed some concepts, which are suitable for our subject from both Bell hooks's Feminist Theory in her book *From Margin to Center* (1984) and Judith Butler's theory of Performativity in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990).

#### **a-Bell hooks's From Margin to Center :**

Bell hooks is an American social activist and feminist thinker. She is mainly known for her writings that cover a broad range of topics on gender, race, class and education. Her ideas on black feminism gives her an important place as she is among the leading public intellectuals of her generation. She has well explained in her book : *From Margin to Center* (1984) that women are marginalized in society. In fact, she drives her epistemic premise from her lived experiences of her own self , as well as other women like her who have been victims of social system which propagates an ideology she describes as ‘White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy’<sup>1</sup>.

Bell hooks defines feminism as a struggle to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression <sup>2</sup>. She presents the feminist struggle against domination as a tool for women to have the ability to control their own bodies. However, she disagrees with whom who think that women's freedom is limited only in her sexual choice or by accepting abortion. In fact, she rejects the Christian thought that God has created women only to be obedient and subservient to men <sup>3</sup>.

Indeed, Bell hooks cristalizes the importance of the black women in the feminist movement. She argues that Afro-American women suffer from both sexism and racism.



She maintains that when learning one another's culture and respecting women's differences, a woman of colour feels a sense of community and sisterhood. For this, she advocates for women to accept each other whatever the differences which may exist between them. Then, women must acknowledge even though they all suffer in some way, black women are seen as doubly oppressed.<sup>4</sup>

Another important feature that Bell hooks introduces in her theory is her interest in the inclusion of men in the feminist movement. She asserts that this inclusion alienates many poor and working class women, particularly black women, from the feminist movement. Nevertheless, she also asserts that men suffer also. In fact, she states that men do not suffer from sexism, but there are ways in which they suffer as a result of it<sup>5</sup>. According to Bell hooks, these negative effects can be used as a way to motivate them into collaboration in feminism.

However, black feminism, according to Bell hooks, is a movement that aims to make an end for gender exploitation, racism, and oppression in all its forms. For her, feminism is an appeal to end the harsh reality and the stereotype that women are just properties, objects in the hands of men and means to fulfil their desires. It is, then, a way for liberating women from discrimination.

### **b-Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity :**

Judith Butler is an American feminist, intellectual and gender theorist whose works have influenced political philosophy and even the fields of feminists, queer and literary theory. She is most well known for her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), which is considered as one of the major feminist works that has dealt with the experiences of women throughout history.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explicitly challenges biological accounts of binary sex, reconceiving the sexed body as itself culturally constructed by regulative discourse. Her theory is based on important points such as the coherence of the categories of gender, sex and sexuality. For example, masculine gender and heterosexual desire in male body is culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized “acts”. Therefore, Butler argues that the terms “gender” and “sex” are socially constructed. In this context, she explains that the performance of gender, sex and sexuality is not a voluntary choice but rather forcible citations of the norm<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, this approach reinforces two binary categories of gender relations: men and women. She states that feminists should focus on providing an account of how power functions and shapes our understanding of womanhood, not only in the society at large but also within the feminist movement.

Finally, for Butler all gender is a form of parody, and some gender performances are more parodic than others. She uses drag (cross-dressing) as an example of gender subversion. The parodic performances such as drag effectively reveals the imitative nature of gender identities. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself as well as its contingency. However, it is possible to repeat one’s gender differently, as drag artists do<sup>7</sup>.

## **2-Materials**

### **A- Biography of the Authors:**

#### **-1) Biography of Alice Childress:**

Alice Childress is the first African American female playwright whose works have been produced during the 19s. She is a major figure in the history of African American literature. She is born in Charleston South Carolina on October, 1920. At the age of nine, she was raised and inspired to write by her grand-mother. When she was a teenager, she was inspired by Shakespeare's play that she once has seen in theatre and became interested in pursuing a career as an actress. She has attended two years in high school but left without receiving a degree. She joined the American negro theatre in Harlem where she worked as an actress, playwright and director for the next twelve years<sup>8</sup>.

However, after eight years she got married with the actor Alvin Childress who was playing the role of Amos in the controversial television show *Amos and Andy*. They produced together *The American Negro Theater (ANT)* and *Ama Lucasta (1944)*. Her first work that appeared in print was *Florence (1949)*. *A Hero Aint Nothing but a Sandwich (1973)* is a novel which made of her widely known in the African American community. Among her other works: *Through the Trees (1952)*, *Wedding Bang (1966)* and *Wine in the Wilderness(1969)*. Five years later, Alice Childress died in the hospital of New York City due to a cancer<sup>9</sup>.

#### **-2) Biography of Muthal Naidoo :**

Muthal Naidoo is a South African dramatist, director and teacher, born in 1900 in Pietermaritzburg, but she lived in Body Smith Pretoria in Durban. She worked at the high

school, where she taught children theatre. Then, she became a founding member of Durban Academy of Theatre of Arts (DATA), then she left DATA to form Shah Theatre Academy with her friends in 1963. She had a PHD in theatre and drama from an Indian university in the USA in 1965, where she held several status. Hence, her first position was with the renowned dancer Katherine Durban in her drama program, then a teacher of English at Southern Illinois University and a worker with the Black Artist Group College<sup>10</sup>.

In addition, she was a lecturer at Washington University until 1976 where she taught black drama and history. She developed a black theatre program, then she came back to Durban (South Africa) to work with Shah Theatre Academy and as a teacher at the high school. Unfortunately, she did not receive importance because of her status as a woman. However, Muthal Naidoo was involved in political movements and witnessed a great development in Boycotting school in 1980. She was identified with the students who were against the Apartheid and the inferior system of education. Then, she left teaching and followed her career in the professional theatre. Muthal Naidoo's plays are usually political, social and humorous. Among her literary works *Of no Account* which was her first play produced at the market theatre in 1982 and other works include *The Three Kings* (1992) and *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996). Naidoo is at present Head of Department of Drama at the Giyani College of Education.<sup>11</sup>

## **B- Summeries of the plays:**

### **1) Summary of *Wine in the Wilderness* :**

*Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) is a play written by Alice Childress which deals with Bill Jameson, an African American artist, who is working on a triptych entitled "**Wine in the Wilderness**", during a race riot in Harlem. This triptych is a series of three paintings meant to express Bill's statement about black womanhood. In fact, he has finished

with the two first paintings; the first one is a young black child who represents the innocence of childhood, and the second one is a beautiful African American woman in African clothing that is, for Bill, the ideal black woman “an African queen” or the “wine in the wilderness “. The third painting is not yet finished, since he is looking for the image that society has made of woman at that moment. Then, Bill’s friend introduces Tommy for him, who is apparently less educated and poorer than Bill , as a model he has in mind.

However, the model according to him should have a number of characteristics such as coarse, unfeminine , rude , vulgar , poor and dumb. Later on, Tommy discovers the truth and Bill’s intention to paint her as a woman who models all these characteristics . Nevertheless, she gets furious and rebels against Bill and his friends saying that women are not less than men in the African- American community. Yet, when Tommy changes her clothes , Bill changes his mind and makes of her the true “African Queen”. He has changed his mind after a long belief that women have dominated African American men in the past and should learn to be subservient to them in their life. Tommy , however, has always believed that a woman like her, strong , energetic and yet vulnerable, should be celebrated by African- American men and the community as a whole<sup>12</sup>.

## **2 ) Summary of *Flight from the Mohabarath* :**

*Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996) is a play written by Muthal Naidoo, a South African female playwright. It is an eight acts play performed in South Africa during and after the Apartheid. The play is a distinctive version of the Indian epic Mahabharata written from the standpoint of the leading female characters in the epic. While Draupadi, Radha, Subhadra, Kunthi, Hidimba, Urvashi, Uttarai, Ghandhari and other women conquer the

centre stage , the playwright unfailingly depicts the male characters too , but with a slight variation. Brihannala and Sikandi occupy the stage as the female versions of the male characters Arjuna and Amba . These characters in pursuit of freedom , tired of the bondage and responsibilities thrust upon them, literally flee from the hard conditions of the epic and create a new space for them.

At the end of the play , the actors and actresses who began as South Africans in a rainbow nation have now finished playing the roles as epic characters and as cast members retelling their stories in a play within a play. As their drama ends , they step back into South Africa's rainbow patriarchy<sup>13</sup>.

## Endnotes:

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- 3-Bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody : passionate Politics* ,Cambridge, South End Press , 2000, 2.
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- 8-Victoria solivan and James Hatch , *Plays by and about Women* , New York , p 425.
- 9- Steven g: Fullwood, *Alice Childress papers*. New York, p1-9.2005.
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## **Results:**

In this paper, we have explored the issues of gender, race and class in American and South African societies taking Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness*(1969) and Muthal Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarath*(1996) as case studies. Our investigation has tried to demonstrate the harsh living conditions of women in such patriarchal societies. The implementation of Bell hooks' feminist theory *From Margin to Center* and Judith Butler's theory of "Performativity" in her book *Gender Trouble* has revealed that the two authors rehabilitate the image of women and the blacks by granting them a narrative voice. They are strong defenders of such issue which is represented by the protagonist. They struggle to revise women's and the black's inferior status. They aim to emancipate the former from the patriarchal rule and the latter from white racists.

Moreover, this study attempted to demonstrate that women have been represented in relation to their social class, race and gender. In fact, the bourgeois women have gained some respect and importance in the patriarchal society in relation to their way of living as wives and mothers, contrary to women from the lower class who are regarded as worthless. Therefore, women sought to liberate themselves from social and cultural domination which profaned their rights just to satisfy men's desires. This is why women accept cultural beliefs which prevent them to resist white supremacy.

Our study of the issues of gender, race and class in both plays has revealed that women have been oppressed during the nineteenth and the twentieth century both in American and South African societies, despite the different periods during which the two plays were written. Throughout the analysis of the two texts, we have noticed that the role given to women has created negative attributes to them and forced them to remain submissive and in a constant state rather than searching for equality with men who have been dominant for a long time.



## **Discussion :**

In this part of our dissertation, we will discuss the position of women as highlighted in Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996). The first chapter discusses the Patriarchal Power focusing on criticism of the White Supremacist Capitalist Power in the two plays in terms of gender, race and class that have an immense influence on how women are treated by men. It also deals with the revision and the permanent questioning of society's beliefs through cultural literacy knowledge, transgressive education and acknowledgement of cultural contradiction. The second chapter of our discussion deals with the performative gendered identity in both plays, and it also includes an analysis of a revision of socially gendered identity.

### **Chapter One: Patriarchal Power in Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* and Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath***

#### **1-Criticism of the White Supremacist Capitalist of Power**

Bell hooks discusses in depth the kind of intense intersections between the concept of gender, race and class ,and how these three categories merge to formulate the experiences of the poor black women . Her formulation leads to the coinage of “White Capitalist Power or Patriarchy”<sup>1</sup>; a concept which describes a set of values. Therefore, it is a system which does not refer to any specific individual or group regardless of gender, race or class, but it is a question of values.

Many stereotypes are raised by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy which restrict women's roles in public spheres. In fact, the black women's voice is stilled.<sup>2</sup> While some of them resent and dislike the move of black men to oppress and subvert them to a secondary

status, the majority of them give in to the subversion and oppression of their own men. However, this discrimination pushes them to accept the cultural prejudices.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the white supremacists use mass media as a weapon of oppression in order to reinforce their position all over the world. The patriarchal society uses women's image in advertisements and movies only for their benefits. In fact, it controls almost all the representations of women's images. The ideal image of womanhood emerging from African-American communities is seen as quite different, as she is depicted as pure, submissive, and domestic. Moreover, black motherhood is destined to live a life of sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

In *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), the playwright Alice Childress has fully demonstrated how women are depicted through mass media. The protagonist Tomorrow Marrie, known as Tommy, is a victim of her body through Bill's intension who wants to paint her only to finish his triptych. For him, Tommy must represent the realistic image of the black womanhood, which he tries to register in his art. In reality, she represents the direct opposite of "Wine in the Wilderness", the second painting which mirrors the perfect black womanhood in her noblest form. Bill sees her as an ugly woman who has no feminine characteristics, poor and uneducated. This following quotation is necessary to illustrate Childress's view of the patriarchal system in the black art era "She's as far from my African queen as a woman can get and still be female, she's as close to the bottom as you can get without crachin' up..... She's ignorant, unfeminine, coarse, rude..... vulgar..... a poor, dumb chick".<sup>5</sup>

According to Bell hooks, the educational system within schools is very biased by the whites. The academic "under achievement gap" ignores historical inequalities. Teachers used to teach the whites how to keep their racist prejudices toward the blacks and alienate them. Thus, some black students are ridiculed for being smart, while other students judge themselves

as intelligent.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, black girls have been subject of oppression not only by men but also by other women who gained respect.

In *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), the female character Cynthia is a social worker and middle class woman, contrary to Tommy, gains a status in society due to her opportunity of being educated. Tommy, the protagonist of the play, is an uneducated and poor woman who aims to get knowledge and have a position in society.

Also, in *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996) the female characters are deprived of having access to learning and getting knowledge. The only female character who is educated is Ganga who works in a bank and organizes meetings with people. She is considered as a rebellious female character who has a position in society because of her strong personality contrary to the other women in the play whose only occupation and role is to serve and obey men.

Naidoo depicts ignorance through her characters including the villagers who want to kill Hidimba, believing that she is a witch craft, in the last scene. Hence, Radha tries to aid Hidimba by convincing the villagers and make them see that they let fear and ignorance lead them to the brink of murder. She says:” Instead of being victims of our fear, we can learn to understand, and take control of our lives; then we will be free”.<sup>7</sup>

### **1-a- Race in *Wine in the Wilderness* and *Flight from the Mohabarath*:**

Race is a form of oppression and discrimination. It has usually been related to a racist thinking and behaviour against black people. In this regard, Bell hooks claims that the White Supremacist has always been great if not the greatest power and authority over black people. The latter’s lives are dominated by the white racist supremacists. In this light, hooks argues

that the central issue for the feminist activists is to struggle to give women the right to control their bodies.<sup>8</sup>

The forms of oppression experienced by white middle class women are different from those experienced by black, poor and disabled ones. Feminists sought to understand the ways to delimit women's destiny. However, they think that whiteness is a perfect race so white women have the opportunity to gain more respect in society than black women. In fact, they are taught from their childhood that they are marginalized and invisible because of their black skin. According to bell hooks, racism conditioned the black women to devalue their femaleness, and she also points out that race is the only relevant label of identification.<sup>9</sup>

In her play *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), Alice Childress foregrounds the uneducated heroine as the true Africanist who is proud of herself and her blackness. She stands in a stark relief to bourgeois and intellectual blacks whose white assimilationist and classist values expose their racial dishonesty.

However, Alice Childress presents Bill as a black man who is so detached from his blackness that he paints black womanhood in a racist and stereotypical way. Yet, in the play, there is a black man who creates a vision of racist fiction. Bill's racist thinking is illustrated in his conversation with Tommy when Bill says "Let's face it, our folks are not together. The brothers and sisters have busted up Harlem, .... no plan no nothin. There's your black revolution heads whipped, hospital full and we still in the same old bag".<sup>10</sup> Still, by saying this, Bill forgets that he is also a black man. This shows that he is racist and so detached from his blackness.

Nonetheless, once Tommy is introduced, it becomes clear that she, not Bill, is the true Africanist. Her sense of self-worth emanates from her racial pride. Bill's separatist view

however makes him self-hating and critical of blacks, who are poor and uneducated. Therefore, Childress depicts the image of racism through Bill's attitude who does not take the riot seriously. He prefers to retreat into the abstractness of his art, rather than to engage in the flesh-and-blood realities of life in Harlem. This attitude is expressed when his friends Sonny-man and Cynthia call him from a bar. When he learns that they are still alive, he makes a light-hearted joke of the matter when he says: "Thought yall was dead. I'm sittin' here drawin' a picture in your memory...."<sup>11</sup>

However, in Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996), women witness a harsh oppression in the epic, the place where they live, since they experience male's dominance. Throughout the play, we can notice that they suffer from violence. For instance, Ganga, a female character in the play, is oppressed because she does not want to be a mother and bear children. Moreover, Santanu's mother insults Ganga's origins and does not accept her in her house because she comes from a sacred river of India. She declares: "This woman you brought home from the Banks of Conges, this woman, who you could not live without; this woman is barren".<sup>12</sup> The quotation shows the racist beliefs of Santanu's mother and her self-hating for Indian women, therefore it stresses the difference between the epic and play through its costumes. Ganga defines the stage as a space where women remain true to themselves. Then, she prefers abortion rather than being a mother.

### **1-b : Gender in *Wine in the Wilderness* and *Flight from the Mohabarath*:**

Gender is represented as another way of women's oppression. Indeed, it is seen as the basis of all forms of prejudice, discrimination and marginalization. Women's status is influenced by gender inequality because they have been burdened throughout their lives by the patriarchal system. Bell hooks claims: "Like most men, most women are taught from

childhood that dominating and controlling others is the basic expression of power. Even though women do not kill in wars, do not shape government policy equally with men, they believe in the dominant ideology of the culture".<sup>13</sup>

From the above quotation, we understand that on the one hand, the patriarchal society gives man the role of dominator, oppressor and exploiter; on the other hand, it associates women with the lowest position in society. Whereas masculinity is defined as sexual dominance, femininity is viewed as sexual submissiveness. Bell hooks, in her feminist theory *Feminism is for Everybody* (1985), claims that men consider themselves superior and patronisers because of their sex<sup>14</sup>.

Therefore, women in the patriarchal society are imprisoned within the domestic sphere. Their only role is to be obedient, submissive and subservient to men's desires. They are stagnated and their position in society remains the same<sup>15</sup>. Bell hooks insists on sensibilizing women about the oppression that the patriarchal society imposes on them in their everyday life<sup>16</sup>. In this respect, men enforce women to accept the cultural norms imposed by society and assume their gender.

In *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), the female protagonist Tommy is considered as a stagnated and submissive woman who is searching for a man with whom she will live. Gender difference is shown through Tommy who used to live under the oppression of the patriarchal society. In fact, she is seen as less independent and more submissive. She even laughs at the notion of matriarchal society, as her friend Cynthia thinks if a matriarchal society exists, black women must have power. This is shown in her conversation with Cynthia:

**Cynthia:** The Matriarchal society.

**Tommy:** What's that?

**Cynthia:** A Matriarchal society is one in which the women rule... the women have the power... The women head the house.

**Tommy:** we didn't have nothin' to rule over, not a pot nor a window. And my papa picked himself up and run off with some finger-poppin' women and we never hear another word' till ten, twelve years later when an undertaker call up and ask if mama wanta come claim his body. And don'cha know, mama went on over and claim it. A woman need a man to claim, even if it's a dead one.<sup>17</sup>

However, Tommy's interest in Bill, whom she knows has "Black uppity" and high handed ways, proves that she needs a man in her life. Hence, her pursuit for Bill comes to a halt, when she realizes his original intent of meeting her. In fact, while Bill prepares to paint Tommy, he places himself in the position of authority in his conversation with her.

Nevertheless, as she looks around Bill's apartment, Tommy is eager to learn more from him, but Bill dismisses her interest by occupying her with the domestic field as Bell hooks's assertion that women's role in society is limited to the domestic sphere. Childress shows domesticity in *Wine in the Wilderness* through Tommy when she says "Great day, Great day, the world's on fire, great day... Honey, I found the coffee, and it's ready. Nothin' here to go with it but a cucumber and a Uneda biscuit"<sup>18</sup>. Thus, by preparing coffee to Bill, Tommy shows the domesticity of a woman.

Furthermore, Bill considers Tommy as a piece of art as he says to her that the best thing she can do to help blacks in America is to be put down on canvas. At this point, Tommy remains in a silenced state and puts Bill's sexist perspective aside and allows him to decide what her position is in the world. In this regard, bell hooks affirms "gender dominance tendency in western patriarchal mind is the sole determinant of women's fate and destiny".<sup>19</sup>

In addition, in Muthal Naidoo's play *Flight from The Mohabarath (1996)*, Ghandari refuses to flee from the epic with other women. She is dominated by the patriarchal society that designs her just an object. Her duty is to help her husband, to obey him and always to assume

a subordinate role. However, man is associated with all positive behaviours and values such as domination and supremacy. Hence, Gandhari has internalized with her husband and children, and she is conscious of how she is perceived; so, she attempts to live as she is expected to be. For this, she refuses to go with the other women to the new space; a place they have created to live in and have their freedom.

Moreover, Gandhari is considered as a silent and submissive woman who accepts her husband's unfaithfulness. Hence, in order to protect the image of her marriage, her motherhood and the image of the pure black womanhood, she decides to return to the epic and remain silent, submissive and obedient. In her conversation with the women of the epic, Gandhari says:

**Gandhari:** But why does she say I am wasting my life? I have dedicated my whole existence to my husband and my children. I put on this blindfold to join Dhritarashtra in his blindness so that he would understand he had a true, faithful and obedient wife. I bore him a hundred sons.  
**Draupadi:** And what about you? What do you want for yourself?  
**Gandhari:** But I've just told you. I want to be a good wife and mother.<sup>20</sup>

From the conversation above, we can clearly see Gandhari's submissiveness and her acceptance of male dominance. This means that she traces her way of life according to the patriarchal beliefs. Hence, Gandhari is described as a subject of oppression, since she experiences and accepts different ways and forms of male's dominance.

### **1-C : Class in *Wine in the Wilderness and Flight from the Mohabarath:***

Class differentiation is the division of society into multiple classes; the upper class or bourgeois, the middle class and the lower or working class. In fact, this division has created a kind of discrimination and domination between them. From this, we understand that classes



can be either privileged or oppressed. However, women from the lower class have received double oppression and exploitation. Hence, patriarchy reinforces the idea that women from privileged class groups are the only ones worthy of receiving attention as Bell hooks wrote in her work *Feminism is for Everybody*: “From the onset of the movement women from privileged classes were able to make their concerns the issues that should be focused on in part because they were the group of women who received public attention”.<sup>21</sup> In this light, hooks confirms that we live in a society where the poor has no public voice.<sup>22</sup>

The African American playwright Alice Childress puts emphasis on middle class men and women to feature the class conflicts between them. *Wine in the Wilderness (1969)* is set in a one room apartment in Harlem with an ordinary kitchen which is a part of the room. At the very beginning, Bill is intended to be seen as an intellectual who is in the position to teach other blacks about being right or conscious. His higher status is made known through a conversation he had with his old friend named Oldtimer. The latter, unfortunately, does not see himself as intelligent as Bill and makes a large distinction between someone like Bill and the masses of African-Americans. However, he places Bill higher than himself intellectually and socially, when he says to him “I don’t blame you for bein’ fed up with us.... Fella like you oughta be fed up with your people sometimes”.<sup>23</sup>

However, Childress exposes the myth that the African-American bourgeoisie is the only one in the position to help its community. In fact, through the characters Bill, Sonny-Man and Cynthia who represent the black bourgeoisie, Childress criticizes their unawareness and apathy toward the concerns of everyday African-American. Therefore, the mindset of the black bourgeoisie is illuminated as Bill reveals to Oldtimer the rational behind his visual series on black womanhood. In contrast to his second painting “Wine in the Wilderness”, his final one represents the lost chick or the nothing. For him, the black woman of the third painting is only

fit to be passed by and has no place in the world. This shows class conflicts and differences that exist between the characters.

Moreover, once Tommy arrives, she begins to unravel her new associates class bias. As a person, she has a strong personality contrary to her friends who are selfish and artificial . However, through the play ,Cynthia criticizes Tommy and other black women because a social worker like her is not fully aware of living and surviving in poverty. In fact, Tommy exposes Cynthia and Bill's self-imposed class and encourages them to rethink their identities.

Nevertheless, Muthal Naidoo depicts in her play, *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996), depicts the bourgeois and the lower classes through her characters. Naidoo opens her play with Draupadi's swayamwara, a seremony in which she must marry a prince, whereas she prefers to marry Arjun who is poor and lives a nomadic life in the forest. However, Draupadi's father Drupada refuses her relation with Arjun because he thinks that his daughter deserves to live a better and luxurious life and to have a better status.

**Radha(Duryodhana):** (Whirls in between them with his mace) you can not allow this. This is not a swayamwara. Besides, this man, my cousin, Arjun, is poor and lives a nomadic life in the forest. I am a prince in full standing; I claim your daughter as my prize.

**Ganga (Draupadi):** My daughter, you cannot marry a poor man. You are used to a life of luxury.

**Draupadi:** If I can not marry him, I will not marry at all.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996) criticise the patriarchy and shows the danger of classifying people in a ranked categories.

## **2- Permanent Questioning of Society's Cultural Beliefs:**

From their childhood, man and woman are taught that they have to respect some cultural beliefs. Stereotypes keep control over women, and the only thing they are raised upon is that

man has the supreme power. Whereas man occupies the first position in society, woman is given the subordinate place, since she must be obedient, submissive and faithful to man. In fact, their interest must be limited only to childbearing and domestic duties. In this context, Bell hooks argues:

Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually- women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority. A mark of their victimization is that they accept their lot in life without visible question, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage.<sup>25</sup>

According to Bell hooks, women protest to gain independence from the cultural hierarchies and stereotypes of the patriarchal society. Their revolt should be a revision of those prejudices and get rid of all forms of oppression, such as being just housewives, to create a new career and life for themselves. This what Betty Friedan, an American writer, activist and feminist claims: “I want something more than my husband and my children and my house”.<sup>26</sup> Besides, hooks stresses on destroying all cultural beliefs and forms of oppression which are based on race, gender and class and go beyond male’s control by cultural literacy knowledge, transgressive education and acknowledgement of cultural contradictions.

## **2-a. Cultural Literacy:**

Cultural literacy is a way used by women to get rid of the cultural beliefs and hierarchies imposed by the patriarchal society. Literacy is essential for the future of the feminist movement because the lack of reading and writing excludes many women from feminist consciousness. It also excludes many of them from the political process and the labour market. However, bell hooks regards “ Literacy” more than just being able to read and write. In fact, according to her, we must not be ashamed of not knowing how to read or write.<sup>27</sup>

Cultural literacy allows people, particularly those who are marginalized and discriminated in society, to acquire a critical consciousness. However, for bell hooks, education does not take place only in classroom, but also wherever people are and where they live. she states: “Typical classrooms at the University level do not promote critical thinking. Students are seeking knowledge that is meaningful and connected to their overall life experiences.”<sup>28</sup>

Although feminist activists focus and struggle against sexism in educational institutions, they have not explored deeply the connection between sexist exploitation of women in the patriarchal society and the degree of women’s education. However, bell hooks refers to the activist and scholar Charlotte Bunch who emphasises the political importance of literacy in her essay “*Feminism and Education*”. She states:

Revolutionary movements have almost always seen developing a general literacy as one of the most important tasks. Yet, in this country, where we assume that most of us can read and write, reading and writing are valuable in and of themselves, and women should have access to their pleasure.<sup>29</sup>

However, Bell hooks confirms that the political importance of literacy is still troubled in feminist movement today even though printed material has practically become the sole medium for expression of theory.<sup>30</sup>

In *Wine in the Wilderness*(1969) , Alice Childress demonstrates the way a person can be intelligent without literacy through her different characters. The middle class characters Bill, Cynthia and Sonny-Man demonstrate their higher level of education through their use of vocabulary and speech patterns. Hence, Tommy and Oldtimer, who are not well educated, have somewhat a different vocabulary. Tommy, for instance, calls the blacks in Harlem “Niggers” whereas Bill prefers to call them “Afro-Americans”. Childress, in fact, is particularly concerned with demonstrating that those who are less educated are equally intelligent like

those who have a degree. Tommy, for example, is very intelligent despite her lack of education, whereas Bill is ignorant in many ways, despite his high level of education. Bill is seen as ignorant because his intentions toward Tommy are false, as he ignores her true beauty and considers her just as an object which can make him popular and rich. This is shown in his conversation with Oldtimer, when he tells him:

**Bill:** She's gonna be the kinda chick that is grass roots, no, not grass roots,...I mean she's underneath the grass roots... She's ignorant, unfeminine, coarse, rude,... vulgar, poor ... there's no hope for her.

**Oldtimer:** Yeah, later for her. When you see her, cross over to the other side of the street.

**Bill:** If you had to sum her up in one word it would be nothin'!

**Oldtimer:** That call for a double!

**Bill:** Yeah, that's a double!

**Oldtimer:** When she get here let's stomp her to death.

**Bill:** Not till after I paint her. Gonna put her right here on this canvas.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, in *Flight from the Mohabarath*, Naidoo sheds light on the matter of reading and writing. Once on the stage, the female characters begin to read and perform each one's story; for example, when the characters begin to perform the story of Draupadi, Sikandi plays the role of the narrator who presents Draupadi's story as follows:

**Draupadi:** Oh, come on. Let's get on with it. Who is going to be the story teller?

**Sikandi:** I will. Bri has been teaching me.

**Ganga:** Sikandi, doesn't have any part right now. Let him do it. Now put on your sari and your wig.

**Sikandi:** (NARRATOR) We begin our story of Draupadi on the day she chooses her husband. She has organised a huge music festival. All the musicians, dancers and singers of the land are here to perform. People from all over the country have come to attend the festival. (A group of musicians, singers and dancers occupy centre stage. These are all the other women who were not assigned specific parts. They wear masks. They begin to perform. They can mime to background music because we already know that they are not the real musicians.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, by interpreting each other's stories, the silenced characters gain transformative knowledge of themselves and their society, allowing them to break the long-standing silence.

## **2.b. Transgressive Education:**

Education is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness. It is true that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know.<sup>33</sup> For bell hooks, learning is a place where paradise can be created. She believes that education is the practice of freedom. In this light, she invites women to struggle to improve their situation and liberate themselves from man's power and dominance by having access to education. However, it is necessary to bridge the educational gap between men and women. In this respect, she asserts:

To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter the values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone. Home was the place where I was forced to conform to someone else's image of who and what I should be. School was the place where I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself.<sup>34</sup>

In this quotation, hooks asserts the importance of learning in women's life in order to transgress all the cultural beliefs and values of the patriarchal society, and also to go beyond all forms of oppression and domination.

In fact, men consider women's education as dangerous because it permits them to improve their way of thinking and acting. Education gives them the power to transgress male's domination and permits them to gain their freedom and have a better status in society. By getting knowledge, women obtain several possibilities: they can think, question and take responsibility of their choices and actions and labour for their freedom. Bell hooks claims:

The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, demand of ourselves and our comrades to an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.<sup>35</sup>

In *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), Alice Childress presents Tommy as a poor uneducated woman with eighth grade who seeks for knowledge. She says to Cynthia: “Eighth grade, that’s all I had of school”<sup>36</sup> In the play, she asks Bill to help her to get knowledge and education; however, he refuses to do so and tells her that it would take him all his life to straighten her out. He advises her to search in the libraries. In fact, this dichotomy is revealed when he says that men are the great brains. For Bill, men think and women, especially poor women, don’t. This is illustrated in the following conversation:

**Tommy:** I heard-a her. But don’t put me through no test, Billy. This room is full-a things I don’t know nothin’ about. How’ll I get to know?

**Bill:** Read, go to the library, book stores, ask somebody.

**Tommy:** Okay, I’m askin’. Teach me things.

**Bill:** Aw, baby, why torment yourself? Trouble with our women,... they all wanta be great brains. Leave somthin’ for a man to do.<sup>37</sup>

In *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996), almost all the female characters of the epic have never gained the opportunity to be educated women except Ganga who works at the bank. However, women of the epic have assumed the responsibility of their choice when they flee from it to the new stage without the permission of their husbands. In fact, once on the stage, they pull off their wigs and saris. By doing this, they demonstrate their rebellion, and they eventually break the norms and the conventions of the patriarchal society. This is illustrated at the beginning of the play in a conversation between the female characters:

**Draupadi:** We did it.

**Ganga :** This is our space.

**Radha :** Here I can speak. I have a voice. In the epic, the Mohabarath, I was just a footnote

**Draupadi :** We can be ourselves.

**Kunthi:** But Draupadi, your beautiful hair.

**Draupadi:** You mean this wig. This is not me. I wore it in the Mahabharata. It was bound and decorated when I was a respectable woman, loose and flowing after I had been defiled. Now my hair is short because that is the way I want it.<sup>38</sup>

the conversation above shows the rebellion of the female characters of the epic who have fled for a new stage and space created by themselves.

### **3.c. Acknowledgement of Cultural Contradictions:**

Since their childhood, men and women adopted some cultural beliefs. In the patriarchal society, people learn that man is created to be the leader and woman to be his servant and supposed to obey him. Nevertheless, women are most victimised by sexist beliefs. For Bell hooks, male's supremacist ideology encourages women to believe that they are worthless, and they can obtain some value only by relating themselves to men or bonding with them.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, it is necessary to overcome the cultural basis of male domination and discrimination which is based on gendering, classism and racism. To do this, bell hooks invites women to work in solidarity and calls for the union of sisterhood. In her book *From Margin to Center*, she asserts:

We are taught that our relationship with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are natural enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood.<sup>40</sup>

Although contemporary feminist movement provides a training ground for women to learn about political solidarity, Sisterhood is not viewed as a revolutionary accomplishment women would work and struggle to obtain. White bourgeois women have a belief that the only thing they share with lower class black women is a common oppression. Despite the



differences which exist between them, accepting each other's colour, culture and rank would give a result to live in serenity.

In her play *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), Alice Childress discusses the issue of Sisterhood through the two female characters Tommy and Cynthia. She tries to help Tommy to get Bill. In her advice to her, she suggests that she must talk less, or not at all. According to Cynthia, Tommy should learn to listen and ask.

**Cynthia:** Don't chase him... at least don't let it look that way. Let him pursue you.

**Tommy:** What if he won't? Men don't chase me much, not the kind I like.

**Cynthia:** Let him do the talking. Learn to listen. Stay in the background a little. Ask him opinion. . . What do you think, Bill?<sup>41</sup>

Then, Cynthia shows her Sisterhood in helping Tommy and encouraging her to change into a natural and better woman. In reality, she proposes to her to pull off her wig and tries to convince her that her natural hair is nicer than the artificial wig and that she should use her own hair to be more beautiful and attractive. This is explained in the following conversation between Tommy and Cynthia:

**Tommy:** I am just sick-a hair, hair, hair. Do it this way, don't do it, leave it natural, straighten it, process, no process. I get sick-a hair and talkin' 'bout it and foolin' with it. That's why I wear the wig.

**Cynthia** I'm sure your own must be just as nice or nicer than that.

**Tommy:** It oughta be. I only paid nineteen ninety five for this.

**Cynthia:** You ought to go back to usin' your own .

**Tommy:** I'll be givin' that some thought.<sup>42</sup>

Muthal Naidoo portrays the image of Sisterhood between the female characters in her play *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1969). Throughout the play, the female characters make a union between them to flee from the epic to the new space where they can find their freedom.

Sisterhood is also shown when Radha helps Hidimba to escape from the villagers who want to kill her. This is shown in their conversation as following:

**Radha:** We have to find a way. We can't go on like this. It's destroying us all.

**Hidimba:** You'll never change them. They are tied to their superstitions.

**Radha:** If they understood about lightning and other natural elements, they wouldn't feel so helpless.

**Hidimba:** They turn everything they don't understand into symbols. And symbols are difficult to demystify. I am a symbol of evil because I live alone, don't have children and make medicines.

**Radha:** That's it. It's the symbols. We have to explode the symbols. These symbols blind them to reason and rationalize their fears and insecurity.

**Hidimba:** Are you going to explode me? That will save them the trouble of trying to murder me.

**Radha:** Oh don't joke about it. We have to.<sup>43</sup>

In this chapter we aimed to depict the image of women in the two works. Then we came to conclude that the two female playwrights provide the reader with an insight on how women are inferior to men in two different societies and periods of time and how they stand against the gender inequalities. Also, they had shown the racist belief and thinking of the whites. Indeed, Childress and Naidoo also made reference to the class differences that exist between the characters of their play.

## Endnotes

1-Shubha Bhattacharya, *Indian Journal of Dalit and Tribal Social Work*. Vol.1 Cp No.1, December 2012.

2-Ibid, p1.

3- Bell hooks, *From Margin to Center*, South End Press, United States, 1984, p1.

4-Bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt 1995, p116-17.

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## **Chapter Two: Performative Gendered Identity:**

In this part of our dissertation, we will discuss performativity in Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996). This chapter stresses on the revision of socially gendered identity in relation to non natural roles of citational repetition and binary categories.

### **1-Revision of Socially Gendered Identity:**

Society draws many accusations against women from Greeks to our times. Though, they are born free by nature like men, both of them confined in a Patriarchal society. women and men are a social product and the role given to each is determined by their society and culture. In this regard, Judith Butler in her feminist theory *Gender Trouble* argues that “All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence”<sup>1</sup> a view she shares with Simone de Beauvoir who claims “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman”<sup>2</sup>. In other words, she wants to say that a woman is born free like all human creatures, but she lives in a world where society obliges her to accept certain living conditions.

Additionally, Butler insists on making women more conscious and subversive against oppression and sexism that the patriarchal society makes them bear in their everyday life. In this sense Butler argues:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating in the breaking or subversive repetition of the style.<sup>3</sup>

## A- Non Natural Roles of Citational Repetition:

From the beginning of their social existence, women are taught how to conform to social conventions, either by religion or by their families. They are not only taught how to be mothers and wives, but more importantly, to believe that they are inferior to men by nature.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the role given to women is traditionally imposed on them. For Judith Butler, identities constituted in society are the result of repeated acts. A woman is just a social product and the role given to her in society is a cultural rather than a natural one. For Butler, repetition is the main aspect of her daily life. She is always silent and innocuous and she cannot even defend herself against things that hurt her dignity. All of her gestures, styles and acts are imposed on her. In this sense, Butler argues:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender anthologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substance appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the social appearance of gender. <sup>4</sup>

In Alice Childress's play *Wine in the Wilderness*, the protagonist Tommy is not only a victim of men's oppression but also of the patriarchal society. The tradition obliges her to behave and dress in a particular way in order to be more attractive. Thus, Cynthia tells Tommy to change by throwing the wig and be natural with her long silky hair in order to attract men. This is well-illustrated in the following conversation between Cynthia and Tommy:

**Cynthia:** You ought to go back to usin' your own.

**Tommy:** I'll be givin' that some thought.

**Cynthia:** You're pretty nice people just as you are. Soften up.

**Tommy:** You might surprise yourself.

**Tommy:** I'm listenin'.

**Cynthia:** Expect more. Learn to let men open doors for you.<sup>5</sup>

However, in *Flight from the Mohabarat*, the character Draupadi is silent and unable to take decisions in the epic. She is considered as a voiceless woman. This mentioned in her husband's treatment and her acceptance of the situation she lives. She is aware about the difficulties she fights, but she stays with her husband and bears children. She is even obliged to wear specific clothes such as the sari and the wig. This is made clear when the women enter on the stage: "The women come running in, helter-skelter, through the audience. They are dressed in classical Indian style with loads of jewellery, hair bound up, tightly draped saris"<sup>6</sup>. It is also well shown when Draupadi asks the women for a change because the Indian tradition obliges them to wear the wig. It is argued when women tell about their oppression by wearing the wig and pack all the traditional clothes in the museum for the future generation:

**Uttarai:** Let's burn them. Make a huge bonfire.

**Radha:** No, we need to preserve them as reminders of the way in which we lived. They must go into a museum so that future generations of women can see them and never repeat the mistakes that we made (the women start to pack the items in a box)<sup>7</sup>

In addition to this, objectification is another oppressive issue that women face in the patriarchal society. They have always been subject to discrimination. Women's oppression and marginalization are reflected through the infidelity of men toward them. The patriarchal society considers them as sexual objects and instruments at the disposition of men. In this light, Butler argues:

The "body" appears as a passive medium on which cultural meaning is inscribed or as the instruments through which an appropriate and interpretive will determine a cultural meaning for itself. In other case, the body is



figured as a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cult meaning are only externally related<sup>8</sup>.

In *Wine in the Wilderness*, Tommy is treated as a piece of art and a winning card for Bill. He uses her body not just for his pleasure but also to satisfy his greediness for money. When Oldtimer explains to Tommy about Bill's triptych, he tells her that she will be a model "of the worst girl in town" for painting: "No, you gonna be this here last one. The worst gal in town. A messed-up chick that- that- (He unveils the third canvas and is face to face with the almost blank canvas, then real-izes what he has said. He turns to see the stricken look on Tommy's face.)"<sup>9</sup>

It is in the same way that the protagonist Draupadi in Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarath* conforms to an oppressed woman who is enslaved by Vysa's cultural norms. The epic (Mohabaratha) locks her into highly restricted rules by considering as Vysa's instrument and object. Draupadi here does not have the authority over her own body. Her agency is between the hands of her husband Arjun who will now share her with the five Pandavas brothers. She is identified just as a mother and a wife, but not as an individual and most of all she witnesses harsh situations like the protagonist Draupadi, however, is the victim of her husband in the epic. She is considered as a commodity divided equally among her husband and the five Pandavas brothers. Hence, in a patriarchal society, women are supposed to accept the mistreatment of their husbands and to follow the norms of society. Draupadi, and in order to satisfy Vysa's imagination, is obliged to marry four other men. She suffers from the tyranny of her father, because her only love is Arjun:

**Radha:** Draupadi, don't get carried away. Arjun was your husband in the epic. This is not the epic.

**Draupadi** (Dancing about.): Yes, this is not the epic. I am so glad. Arjun will be my husband and my only husband. I won't be saddled with four others just to satisfy Vysa's. Prurient imagination. I love Arjun. I love him. I love him. I love him.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, in the patriarchal society, women's worth is measured by her ability to bear children. The women who are barren are blamed even though it is not their mistake. They are considered as reproductive and children deliverers and the law is so oppressive against them. The cultural norms sit them as wives and mothers; thus, women's body is exploited only for maternity. In this context, Butler states:

She understands this exchange, however, as the cultural moment in which the maternal body is repressed, rather than as a mechanism for the compulsory cultural construction of the female body as a maternal body. Indeed, we might understand the exchange of women as imposing a compulsory obligation on women's bodies to reproduce<sup>11</sup>.

Yet, Bill in *Wine in the Wilderness* argues that a woman should be silent and the best image given to her is to be a passive who stays at home fulfilling gender roles as a wife and a mother. For him, she should only fulfil the desire of her husband and raise her children well. As Bill states in the play "The Matriarchy gotta go. Y'all throw them suppers together, keep your husband happy, raise the kids"<sup>12</sup>. Naidoo also claims in her play that women are considered by the Indian society as mothers and wives and their only duty is to bear children. Thus, Ganga is oppressed and marginalized by these patriarchal area which only desires women's productivity and child bearing during the mohabarath. This is explained when Ganga says:

**Ganga:** I am so glad to get rid of this ridiculous crown and with it the crazy notion that I have to be divine in order to be the mother of a hero of the Mahabarath. Women, I want you to bear witness: I give up this crown and with it the enslaving tradition of motherhood. (she flings the crown away.)

**Kunthi:** Have you never wanted to be a mother?

**Ganga:** Never.

**Subadhra:** Is that why you drowned seven of your babies right after they were born?

**Ganga:** I didn't drown them. Vyasa did. He wrote the epic.<sup>13</sup>

## **b- Binary Categories:**

The gender binary is the commonly held view that the individual belongs to one particular gender category: either male or female. It enforces conformity to socially-acceptable forms of gender expression, such as choices in clothing and careers. Therefore, either masculine or feminine act according to the social norms that refers to gender binary.<sup>14</sup>

According to Judith Butler, various laws are made in favour of the masculine gender, making the opposite one almost oppressed. Some strategies are planned in order to grant man power over woman. Thus, women should sacrifice their lives to comfort men. The humanist discourse conflates the patriarchal society that places man as the lord and woman as his slave. For Butler, one should rebel against these norms. In this sense, she writes:

Feminist theory which presupposes sexual difference as the necessary and invariant theoretical point of departure clearly improves upon those humanist discourses which conflate the universal with the masculine and appropriate all of culture as masculine property.<sup>1</sup>

In Alice Childress's play *Wine in the Wilderness*, Tommy is a female character who is not convinced by the cultural norms imposed by the society and goes beyond the domestic sphere. Hence, she is a social worker who lives alone in a small apartment in Harlem. For Alice Childress, Tommy represents the image of a modern woman who drinks and lives freely. This is illustrated in the following conversation between Bill and Tommy:

**Bill:** I got what you see and also some wine... couple a can a beer.

**Tommy:** I will take the wine.

**Bill:** Yeah, I knew it.

**Tommy:** Don't wanta start nothin' I can't keep up.

**Bill:** That's all right, baby, you just a wine.

**Tommy:** You the one that's got the wine, not me.

**Bill:** I use this for cookin'<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, according to Butler, one should go beyond the social constructed behaviour. For her, there is no natural fact that condemns a woman and heightens a man. Both of them should enjoy the same rights ; a reality which is absent in patriarchal societies. Butler writes:

The gender reality is created through sustained social performances, means that the notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, in Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath*, we notice that Ganga is a fierce woman who cannot stand the enslavement of the patriarchal system. She does not conform as the traditional woman. Thus, her refusal of the institution of marriage and bearing children is a rebellion against this position because she is always aware that she can have a better life. Then, the character Ganga continues to defy the role of motherhood by claiming "I am not going to have any children"<sup>18</sup>. Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarath* portrays also another rebellious female character: Draupadi. She is the kind of woman who wants to live freely; she flees from the old traditions in order to rebel against its ridiculous crown of the epic (Mohabarath) that obliges her to marry five Pandava brothers. She is very happy to meet Arjun because she wants to stay with her beloved and flee the other husbands. As Draupadi says: "**Draupadi** (Laughing.): Yes, I can see that. Well, go and change so that we can see my handsome warrior husband, Arjun, again<sup>19</sup>."

Though, a woman's role is rendered either to be either a wife or a mother, some of the bravest women do not desire to live as they are obliged to and want to change things instead of being confined to those who enslave them. However as Butler explains, the

subjects who seem different from the imposed role that society dictates are by consequence rejected and punished:

Hence, as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what humanizes individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished.<sup>20</sup>

In her play *Wine in the Wilderness*, Alice Childress has portrayed Tommy in her play Tommy as a rebellious woman who goes against all the norms imposed by the society. As mentioned before, she is an independent woman who denies man's authority. In reality, her father left her alone with her mother for twelve years. Thus, Tommy has lived with her mother in a matriarchal society where she had power as the head of the house.

However, during the race riot in Harlem, Tommy faces troubles with the Afro-Americans whom she calls "Niggers". They burn her house down and take off everything she had. Hence, what happens to Tommy and all what she has injured breaks her down as a punishment from the patriarchal society. In her conversation with Oldtimer, she says:

**Tommy:** Well the Afro-Americans burnt down my house.  
**Oldtimer:** Oh, no they didn't!  
**Tommy:** Oh, yes they did... it's almost burn down. Then the firemen nailed up my door... the door of my room, nailed up shut tight with all I got in the world.  
**Oldtimer:** Shame, what a shame.  
**Tommy:** A damn shame. My clothes... everything gone. This riot blew my life. All I got is gone like it never was.  
**Oldtimer:** I know it<sup>21</sup>.

In the same way, Ganga is seen as a subversive woman in Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarat*. She refuses to enact the social role imposed on her, so she is punished. Ganga searches for freedom and denies men's authority. She refuses to be the property of anybody. Santanu's mother refuses to take her as a wife for her son because she is not

fertile. For Santanu's mother, she is no longer a woman, since she cannot give her son children. More than that, she is excluded, punished and degraded to a "whore": "I told you not to bring that woman into my house. She's just a whore. Tell her to get out."<sup>22</sup>

In addition, before assuming the role of mother, women have to be bearers just like an utensils used for having children. The patriarchal society only desires woman's productivity. For Butler, the limited description of women as reproductive tools is an oppressive belief that should be challenged, and she affirms also that a woman is not only created to be a mother. She writes:

The effort to characterize a feminist specificity through recourse to maternity, whether biological or social, produced a similar factionalization and even a disavowal of feminism altogether. For surely all women are not mothers; some cannot be, some are too young or too old to be, some who are not mothers; and for some who are mothers, that is not necessary the rallying point of their politization in feminism<sup>23</sup>.

In Naidoo's play *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996), Ganga challenges the institution of motherhood as a prescribed role of the Indian female, proposed by her suitor Subadhra. Ganga does not conform to the traditional ascribed roles of wife and mother, but instead she is a subject that chooses for herself a way that suits her powerful personality; she constitutes her identity as a strong woman who relies on herself. Ganga's freedom is not given by the society, but she rebels against the patriarchal orders, the fact that she always refuses marriage. She asserts: "No, I just don't want the responsibilities of marriage"<sup>24</sup>. She defies also the institution of motherhood:

**Ganga:** Children? I am not going to have any children.

**Subadhra:** Don't you want children?

**Ganga:** No.

**Subadhra:** But that is unnatural.

**Ganga:** Why?

**Subadhra:** You are a woman. It is your function.

**Ganga:** No, not unless I choose it<sup>25</sup>.

Furthermore, the patriarchal society expects women to be obedient to all forms of oppression. For Judith Butler, each individual is free to perform his gender role as he wants, since gender is something unnatural. The need to forge one's identity and grasp one's freedom is a cause Butler pleads as she says:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the "integrity" of the subject<sup>26</sup>.

In Alice Childress play *Wine in the Wilderness*, Tommy is aware of the unnaturalness of the gender role given to women. She behaves differently from the socially expected ways in which a woman should behave. Furthermore, the social discourse that keeps women in the domestic spheres is not recognizable for Tommy. She is an independent woman who works in a factory. As Butler states above, Tommy is a subject that chooses for herself the way that suits her powerful personality. She constitutes her own identity as a strong and self-reliant woman. She behaves in an absolutely different way, comparing her with a traditional woman.

Moreover, Naidoo depicts Ganga as a subversive woman who is shown out of the domestic sphere. She is the representative of the modern woman of South African new democracy. She breaks down all the sexual stereotypes, as the type of women Butler refers to in her book *Gender Trouble (1990)*. Santanu's mother refuses Ganga's position because of her society, as Kunthi argues: "Love, love. What's all this rubbish about love? She's not a

woman. Attending meetings all day long. Meetings, meetings. Bringing all kinds of funny people here. And all they do is plant trees. Plant trees. I ask you. Tell her to go”<sup>27</sup>.

Rape or abuse is another kind of oppression that has been exercised upon women and has been widely discussed. Concerning this matter, Butler comments on the patriarchal thoughts about women and they blame her. Ie, if a woman is getting raped, the blame will be put on her, since she is supposed to stay at home with her husband and children. She writes:

A similar line of reasoning is at work in discourses on rape when the “sex” of a woman is claimed as that which establishes the responsibility for her own violation. The defence attorney in the New Bedford gang rape case asked the plaintiff, “if you’re living with a man, what are you doing running around the streets getting raped”<sup>28</sup>.

Then, Butler’s above quotation reflects the life of Amba in Naidoo’s play. Amba is considered by Bhishma not only as a slave but also a sexual object; Amba is raped, so no law can protect her, as Butler states above. Society always backs up men and blames women even after being raped. Amba expresses her deep hatred toward men, especially Bhishma, who ruins her life, and due to this she left the village. In fact, all what happens to Amba can be related to the sexual object role given to women by the patriarchal society. This tyranny clearly seen when Bhishma takes Amba by force from her lover Salwa:

**Sikandi (Amba):** Why did you bring me here? I want nothing to do with you. I want to go back. I will never marry you.

**Radha (Ambika) and Kunthi (Ambalika):** But we will. You don’t need her. We’ll make you forget all about her.

**Radha (Ambika):** You are so strong and brave; the way you vanquished all those other princes.

**Kunthi (Ambalika):** And you did that, just for us. Such a great prince. You wanted us! We are so grateful.

**Radha (Ambika) and Kunthi (Ambalika):** It will be an honour to be your wife. (They touch his feet.)

**Sikandi (Amba):** I will never marry you. I will kill myself first.

**Uttari (Satyavati):** (Melodramatically.) Oh, my dear Bhishma, you have brought three brides. You are so noble and pure of heart.<sup>29</sup>



Moreover, Butler affirms that gender imitation is parodied by drag, thus gender role is a social construction. For Butler, gender role is not a natural fact because changing one's style proves that gender role is just a parody. She states:

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity.<sup>30</sup>

In this sense, Amba seems to subvert her social role as a woman. She enjoys free sexual life as any man does. Muthal Naidoo shows Amba as a rebellious female character revenges from the king Bhishma, that forces her to marry, thus, she breaks the social norms. When Bhishma brings her to the counsellor; she speaks out in her turn in front of the counsellor without respecting anyone: “ **Draupadi (Salwa):** Excuse me; I need to confer with my Counsellor for a moment. (The group turn their backs on King and Counsellor.) Counsellor, what do you make of this? Why does he allow his wife to speak out of turn?”<sup>31</sup>

Then, Naidoo shows also a rebellious male character, Sikandi, who transforms himself a woman by reversing his gender role. He behaves and dresses like a woman. Sikandi, the grandson of Amba defies the traditional values and the binary categories of the patriarchal society that make of man the lord, the strong, and woman the slave and the weak. In the patriarchal society, man should not put make up, and he should put on man's clothes, but Sikandi breaks these laws when he dresses in women's clothes. When Sikandi explains how the epic has victimized and leads them to renounce epic bloodshed. When sikandi's aunt sees him dances with his friend and she assumed that he possessed by a demon, so she

brought an exorcist. The latter, beat Sikandi until he forces him to say he would never dress like a woman again. Sikandi then run away with a travelling drama troupe met with Brihanala, they become a couple. His mother does not like the manners and the way her son behaves. In this sense, Sikandi's mother claims:

**Ganga (Sikandi's aunt )** (Staring at Sikandi in shock.): It is your mother-in-law, Amba, returned from the dead.

**Radha: (Sikandi's mother):** Don't be ridiculous. This foolish boy is always getting up to this kind of nonsense. (She rubs the make-up off Sikandi's face.) Why do you keep on doing this? Haven't I told you, I don't want you dressing up in women's clothes? (Turning on Sikandi's friend.) And what were you doing? Encouraging him in this sick fantasy?<sup>32</sup>

From all what has been said relying on Butler's theory, the gender role given to woman is not something natural. Thus, for Butler, gender is created by religion and traditions. The patriarchal society sets man as the dominant and woman as the dominated and this is what leads feminists to resist against these injustice and ideologies.

## Endnotes

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3- Judith Butler, *Performative Acts*, p 521.

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5-Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p 43-44.

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7- Naidoo Muthal, *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996).In *Black South African Women:An Anthology of Plays*,Kathy Perkins. Routledge.Cambridge, 1998,p215.

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- 24- Judith Butler, *Contingent Foundation:Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p 15.
- 25- Naidoo Muthal, *Flight from the Mohabarath (1996)*. *Black South African Women:An Anthology of Plays*, Kathy Perkins. Routledge.Cambridge(1998), p223.
- 26- Ibid, p 233.

- 27- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p173.
- 28- Naidoo Muthal, *Flight from the Mohabarath (1996)*. In *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays*, Kathy Perkins. Routledge. Cambridge(1998), p236
- 29- Judith Butler, *Contingent Foundation: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994),p18.
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- 32- Naidoo Muthal , *Flight from the Mohabarath (1996)*. In *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays*, Kathy Perkins. Routledge. Cambridge(1998), p 246.
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## Conclusion :

Throughout this dissertation, we have come to conclude that Alice Childress and Muthal Naidoo share the same aspects in terms of gender, race and class as developed in their respected works *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996).As a case study. However, we have noticed that each writer depicts the lives and experiences of black American and South African female/ness within the civil right and apartheid eras.

We have tried to shed light on the way women are portrayed in the two works, relying on both Bell hooks's theory *From Margin to Center* (1984) and Judith Butler's theory of "Performativity" in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990).While the First theory has fully demonstrated the harsh living situation of women in a patriarchal society, the second explains how women are dominated by men, and the different ways on which women based in order to subvert against the patriarchal system.

Our comparative study has examined how the Indian and American identities are recognizable as a significantly male-dominated discourse. The playwrights made public the acts of implicit and explicit violence enacted by Indian and American male over their counterparts. Therefore, both Alice Childress and Muthal Naidoo in their works engage the act of resisting traditional customs and patriarchal discourses.

Our study of gender, race and class in both plays has also revealed that both authors have depicted the harsh discrimination of women and we have seen all forms of rebellions and challenges, We have studied also the non natural roles given to women during the civil

Right movement in the United States of America and during the Apartheid movement in South Africa

Indeed, we have reached the conclusion that women have attained a certain freedom in different domains of life by getting their rights and broke the taboos that prevent her to achieve their goals in society just like their male couterparts. However, our research does not cover all the issues that are related to the work of Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969) and Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mohabarath* (1996). So, we invite other students to explore other issues from other perspectives.

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