

IDENTITIES AT THE CROSSROADS: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE BALKAN TRILOGY AND THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

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Abstract: The concept of identity raises crucial questions that shape our understanding of differences and mutual recognition. Identity is not a static entity but rather encompasses dynamic processes influenced by race, gender, class, language, culture, and other sociocultural and historical factors. These elements open up space for complex analyses of how individuals identify themselves and how they are perceived by society. In contemporary literary studies, intersectionality theory has become essential for understanding the intricate aspects of identity and social dynamics. This theory explores how different factors interact and shape individuals within society. This paper presents a comparative analysis of *The Balkan Trilogy* by Serbian author Gordana Kuić and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by American author Zora Neale Hurston, examining different cultural and social contexts, to investigate the complexities of women's experiences and identities through an intersectional lens.

The Balkan Trilogy explores transformations in the identities of the Salom family women, particularly the shifts among Sephardic women influenced by social, historical, and religious forces. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* centers on the journey of Janie Crawford, an African American woman striving for autonomy and self-determination within the confines of a patriarchal and racially oppressive society in the southern United States. The analysis of Janie's experience focuses on the impact of racial, gender, and class dynamics on her identity.

By applying an intersectional critical framework, this research aims to provide deeper insights into how social norms, patriarchal structures, global historical events, and class relations shape women's identities. It will contribute to discussions on the universality and specificity of women's experiences,

offering a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of women's identities across different cultural contexts.

Keywords: intersectionality, identity, *The Balkan Trilogy*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

1. Introduction

Contemporary society increasingly confronts the complexity of identities, which result from the interplay of various factors such as race, gender, class, language, culture, and historical context. Identity is not a fixed entity but a dynamic process that is continually shaped by these determinants. In this context, intersectionality theory becomes crucial for understanding the intricate aspects of identity and social dynamics, particularly in the realm of literary analysis.

This research paper aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the novels *The Balkan Trilogy* by Serbian author Gordana Kuić and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by American author Zora Neale Hurston. Both novels provide fascinating insights into the dynamics of identity, placing their protagonists in the face of challenges arising from a range of factors that shape their lives. *The Balkan Trilogy* follows the generational transformations of the women in the Salom family, while *Their Eyes Were Watching God* narrates the life of Janie Crawford, an African American woman who navigates and challenges the constraints imposed by the patriarchal and racially discriminatory structures of the American South.

The methodology of this research is based on a qualitative analysis of the novels through an intersectional critical framework. The focus will be on identifying key themes and motifs in the novels that illuminate the complexity of women's identities in different sociocultural and historical contexts.

2. Intersectionality

Three decades ago, Black feminist, legal scholar, and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” as an analytical framework addressing the specific position of African-American and other non-white women within the context of civil rights law and the civil rights movement. Her central idea was that different aspects of identity, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, intersect and shape individual experiences. This concept has become one of the most significant contributions to feminist theory, particularly Black feminism, over the past twenty-five years. In her works

from 1989 and 1991, Crenshaw challenged established models of thinking about race and gender, emphasizing the importance of incorporating the multidimensional experiences of Black women (Crenshaw 1989; Crenshaw 1991).

In her essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, Crenshaw highlighted the shortcomings of a “single-axis” analysis when viewed in relation to the “multidimensionality of Black women's experiences.” She pointed out that such an approach erases “women of color” from the processes of conceptualizing, identifying, and combating racial and gender discrimination by focusing solely on the experiences of the privileged members of those groups. The critique of the “single-axis” framework reveals a broader challenge, as “these problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women in existing analytical structures” (Crenshaw 1989, 140). Crenshaw underscores that the “intersectional experience” is more complex than the mere additive effects of racism and sexism, and analyses that do not consider intersectionality cannot adequately capture the specific forms of subordination faced by Black women. She concludes that these observations require a fundamental restructuring and rethinking of existing political frameworks (Crenshaw 1989, 166–167).

In her subsequent work, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color*, Kimberlé Crenshaw emphasizes that intersectionality should be viewed as a tool for understanding the complexity of identity and the struggle for rights. She argues that intersectionality cannot be used as an absolute theory of identity but rather as a concept that encompasses various dimensions of social domination. Crenshaw introduces three key aspects of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational (Crenshaw 1991, 1245).

Through the concept of structural intersectionality, Crenshaw demonstrates that social interventions focusing on only one dimension of power are insufficient to address the needs of marginalized women. Structural intersectionality, as explained by Crenshaw, explores how the intersection of gender and race impacts the experiences of women of color who face domestic violence and sexual assault (Crenshaw 1991, 1245). She highlights how factors such as unemployment, poverty, and childcare responsibilities exacerbate the challenges these women encounter. Crenshaw stresses that the intersection of race, gender, and class shapes specific obstacles that women of color face, making it harder for them to access resources and support compared to white

women (Crenshaw 1991, 1246–1250). The fact that women from minority communities experience subordination alongside institutional expectations based on inadequate non-intersectional contexts further limits opportunities for meaningful intervention on behalf of these women.

Political intersectionality, the second concept Crenshaw introduces, examines how women of color navigate their identities within at least two subordinated groups, often with conflicting political agendas (Crenshaw 1991, 1252). Crenshaw also explores how racial and cultural factors contribute to the suppression and marginalization of domestic violence among women of color (Crenshaw 1991, 1257). She argues that both anti-racist and feminist discourses often focus on broader issues, neglecting the specific challenges faced by women of color, which leads to the continued marginalization and invisibility of these problems (Crenshaw 1991, 1257–1258). Crenshaw emphasizes the importance of recognizing the intersection of racism and patriarchy in effectively addressing domestic violence, asserting that women of color should not have to wait for the elimination of racism to experience safety and justice. She, therefore, underscores the necessity of exploring the relationship between racism and domestic violence:

Racism is linked to patriarchy to the extent that racism denies men of color the power and privilege that dominant men enjoy. When violence is understood as an acting-out of being denied male power in other spheres, it seems counterproductive to embrace constructs that implicitly link the solution to domestic violence to the acquisition of greater male power (Crenshaw 1991, 1258).

In her work, Crenshaw also critiques approaches that frame domestic violence exclusively as a problem within minority communities, advocating for broader recognition of its prevalence across different demographic groups (Crenshaw 1991, 1258–1259).

In the final category, “representational intersectionality,” Crenshaw examines the cultural construction of “women of color”, analyzing how controversies in their representation in popular culture can obscure their unique position and, in doing so, become a source of intersectional disempowerment.

Both of Crenshaw's essays have had a significant impact on the evolution of feminist theory, emphasizing the need for new paradigms in approaching the experiences of Black women. These essays have driven changes in the very core of feminist theorizing, highlighting the necessity of creating an analytical framework that relies on powerful

metaphors to uncover the essence of power mechanisms and their interactions. Additionally, they have clearly linked the political goals of inclusive democracy with the theory and portrayal of power. As a tool for analyzing power, intersectionality has directed attention to the specific forms of subordination and oppression inherent in the intersectional and multiplying experiences of racism and sexism within legal systems.

2.1. Critiques and Challenges

Since its inception, intersectionality has become a significant paradigm in academic discourse, activism, and policy formation. Within feminist studies, intersectional analyses have broadened the understanding of gender inequality by exploring the experiences of “women of color”, “queer individuals”, and other marginalized groups (hooks 1984). Similarly, in the field of Critical Race Theory, intersectionality has illuminated the complexity of racial discrimination and highlighted the intersections of race, class, and gender in shaping the lived realities of individuals (Crenshaw 1991). Despite its contributions, intersectional theory has also faced critiques and challenges. Some scholars argue that intersectionality has become depoliticized, losing its radical potential (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2013). Others express concerns about its limitations in incorporating the experiences of individuals who occupy intersections of various privileges (McCall 2005).

One of the challenges intersectionality also faces is the insufficient recognition and integration of Jewish women’s experiences within this theoretical framework, despite the critical importance of including their dual marginalization as both women and Jews. Their experiences encompass complex forms of discrimination stemming from this combination of identities, including gender-based, ethnic, religious, and other forms of discrimination. This particular experience of Jewish women has not been adequately reflected in existing intersectional analyses, posing a challenge to creating a more comprehensive theoretical framework. Additionally, the lack of inclusivity toward Jewish women's experiences may result in inadequate strategies for combating injustices and fostering a more inclusive society. Therefore, acknowledging and integrating the experiences of Jewish women into the intersectional approach represents an important step toward a deeper understanding and more effective struggle against all forms of marginalization.

In the research paper *Placing Jewish Women into the Intersectionality of Race, Class and Gender*, Jessica Greenbaum

thoroughly analyzes the complexity of Jewish experiences through the lens of race, class, and gender (Greenbaum 1999). Through a substantive analysis of historical transformations in the perception of Jewish race, Greenbaum raises key questions about the evolution of Jewish identity from a “racial” to a “non-racial” status, while simultaneously highlighting the problematic assumption that Jews are “not quite white” (Greenbaum 47). The author underscores the importance of recognizing the multifaceted identities of Jewish women, while also rejecting a one-dimensional portrayal of Jewishness solely through the prism of religion and challenging the constraints of being categorized solely as white. Greenbaum also explores class divisions within the Jewish community and emphasizes the need for an inclusive approach that recognizes marginalized segments such as the working class and poor Jews, particularly women and the elderly (Greenbaum 44–45). One of the key challenges Greenbaum highlights is contemporary antisemitism and the need to recognize and confront it. The author warns against the marginalization of Jewish women’s experiences within feminist and antiracist movements and stresses the importance of inclusivity and solidarity among different subordinated groups. She also opposes the emergence of “competition of oppressions,” which overlooks the specificity of the Jewish experience and advocates for the recognition and fight against all forms of aggression without isolating or relativizing individual experiences (Greenbaum 55–58). Through this interdisciplinary research, Greenbaum raises important questions about identity, power, and inclusion in contemporary society and calls for a deeper understanding and recognition of the complexity of Jewish experience within the broader context of racial, class, and gender dynamics.

In addition to these challenges, debates persist over the feasibility of applying intersectionality in research and activism, including questions of methodology and terminology. After more than a quarter-century of study within feminist academic circles, there is growing concern that intersectionality may be losing its analytical relevance. Some suggest, perhaps indirectly, that an intense focus on depicting the social conditions of Black women in the U.S. may limit the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework applicable to a broader spectrum. Others express disappointment that intersectionality cannot fully encompass the complex aspects of identity in relation to various and multiple social categories, such as sexuality, nationality, religion, age, and abilities, which becomes evident in contemporary intersectional debates. Nevertheless, the political significance of paradigms that make the interactive processes of social marginalization

visible is undeniable. The institutional transformation of the position of non-white feminism in the academic world is a direct result of the political engagement of intersectional approaches. Thus, there is tension over the potential rejection or reexamination of the theoretical role of intersectionality, while still maintaining a focus on its core goals of social justice.

In the context of analyzing the novels *The Balkan Trilogy* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, intersectional theory is essential because it enables us to understand how different factors intersect and shape the identities of female characters. By analyzing the interaction of factors such as race, class, gender, and religion, we can better understand the complexity of women's experiences in different cultural and social contexts. Additionally, intersectional theory helps us to illuminate the intricacies of social power structures that influence the formation of identities and individual experiences. By recognizing and integrating the experiences of Jewish women into this theoretical framework, we expand our understanding of intersectionality and contribute to the construction of a more inclusive understanding of identity and a more just society.

3. Intersectional analysis of *The Balkan Trilogy*

Gordana Kuić's *Balkan Trilogy*, despite its, shall we say, narrative and artistic shortcomings, is an important work because it spans almost the entire 20th century in its temporal setting and extends geographically from the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and then to the wider world. It traces the fate of a Jewish Sephardic woman. We refer to her as a woman based on our initial premise that the characters in this work are portrayed in a two-dimensional manner, with the individual destinies of the heroines being viewed as a process of transformation of a woman/women from the mentioned group. By two-dimensionality, we mean the fact that all of them experience minimal character changes, which are predetermined the moment they appear on stage. The changes they undergo pertain to the external dimension, specifically the manifestation of identity across different generations of the Salom family. Each heroine is thus presented as a finished product, and the differences among them, conditioned by the socio-historical context, actually offer a developmental picture of potential changes on an individual level – beyond the scope of this text. Research on this linguistic material could be valuable and lead to a re-examination of whether the Jewish woman even deserves to be considered in the context of intersectionality, first and foremost, and could also serve as

material for a comparative analysis of this theory on material related to nominally the same groups, but belonging to different temporal-spatial frameworks.

The initial identity of the women in the Salom family is predetermined by the facts of gender, nationality, and religion.⁴ The first in the line, the mother, Estera, is fully aware of these predeterminations and strives to raise her three daughters in accordance with them. Her advice to Blanka is grounded in the centuries-old traditional life of a Jewish woman, as she says:

Never before has it happened that a Jewish woman or a Jewish man marries a non-Jew. That cannot and must not happen, and that's that! (Kuić 32).⁵

Her attempts to prevent Blanka's relationship with Korać are argued not only by national, religious, and social differences but also by what the role of a Jewish woman is:

(...) your life is not just your own. We women must think about our children, about the preservation of our people. If we don't have enough children, we will disappear, our people will disappear. That is the only thing that can sustain us, scattered as we are around the world.(Kuić 49).

In addition to the youngest daughter's extramarital relationship, two marriages bring particular shifts in the family – Nina's, with the Orthodox Christian Škoro, and Klara's with the Catholic Ivo. In fact, this second marriage is even more problematic, “because a Catholic was a degree worse than an Orthodox Christian” (Kuić 55), and “another ‘non-Jew’ interfered in the shaky procession of Sephardic grooms” (Kuić 54). However, despite centuries-old tradition, the community, led by the family as the closest-knit unit, cannot prevent the Salom daughters' departure from it. The reactions of the wider community are mentioned

⁴ Jelena Filipović (2014) explored the linguistic dimension of the identities of the heroines in the novels *The Blossom of Linden in the Balkans*, *Twilight in the Balkans*, and *Ghosts over the Balkans*, which she classifies as autobiographical fiction. Her analysis focuses on female identities within the Sephardic world of the 20th century and the use of Ladino, as discussed in her article *Identity Construction through Discursive Practices and Code-Switching in Autobiographical Fictional Narratives by Rosa Nissán and Gordana Kuić*.

⁵ All references and quotes from Kuić's novel are from, Kuić, G. (2021). *Balkanska trilogija*, Beograd: Vulkan izdavaštvo. All quotes in the text from this edition were translated from Serbian by the author.

almost in passing, but in reality, they could hardly be reduced to the humorous remarks presented, such as the father Leon being expelled from the Jewish society and banned from entering the temple, or Nina avoiding certain streets for a while – streets where she was stoned. Despite efforts to keep Klara's marriage in Zagreb a secret, the contemporary press reported on this sensational event, and the Sarajevo public learned about the new defiance of the Salom family. Of all the daughters, only Buka followed the traditional path by marrying a Jewish man; however, his mental illness soon began to erode the family, with only a single hint given as to what might have caused his illness – Buka, after Klara's wedding, wistfully thinking that if she had married a non-Jew, she might now have a husband as well.⁶

In addition to the public scandal caused by their choice of non-Jewish partners, with the added complication in Blanka's case – since, in addition to this deficiency, her chosen one refuses to marry her for fourteen years while providing her with an apartment and supporting her – the Salom daughters committed several other outrageous acts. Born and raised in a poor family, they – primarily Nina, who was joined by Klara and even Blanka as a child – decided to pursue economic independence by opening a hat shop. While there was some approval due to the general benefit, the Sarajevo public was scandalized because:

...in Sarajevo, something like this had never even been imagined: a young, poor Jewish woman, and above all a woman without serious male backing, opening her own shop! (Kuić 24).

However, Nina Salom remained steadfast in her decision. The only way to independently decide her own life is clearly stated by Riki Salom:

Blankica, understand, we are independent women, capable of earning and supporting ourselves, and therefore capable of deciding our own lives! (Kuić 67).

In this analysis, we will also examine the development of Blanka Salom's identity. She first becomes aware of what she is as a little girl when she receives a ham sandwich – a food that is definitely not kosher – from a classmate for lunch at school. At that moment, she experiences a conflict between her social and religious/national identity, and, perhaps not fully consciously, she realizes that in a conflict between bare

⁶ We believe these are genetically predisposed diseases that have arisen due to the lack of intermarriage between members of the Jewish community and those of other ethnic groups.

existence and moral postulates of a different kind, with certain compromises, priority can be given to the existential. She adheres to this existential, personal principle throughout her life, despite being declared by members of the immediate Salom family as the only true successor of her mother Estera and the Jewish lineage. Namely, on the eve of World War II, after marrying Marko Korać, she becomes aware of the following:

No, now it will be Branka. When she cooks, buys, embroiders, goes to the market, reads, and plays the piano, she will always be Branka Korać (Kuić 145).

This decision is further solidified during her pregnancy when she decides that her daughter, since she is already convinced she will not give birth to a male heir, will be raised in the spirit of her husband's faith and nationality:

She will be baptized in an Orthodox church, raised in the Serbian spirit, and given a Serbian name. She will learn that she has Jewish blood, but let that come later. After all we've been through... no! My people have always suffered too much... so let everyone condemn me, but I want my girl to belong to them as little as possible (Kuić 237).

This decision is finally strengthened during the war, which changed her. In those moments, filled with an unknown compassion for herself or perhaps for the Blanka who disappeared, she defines herself as Branka Korać. However, it is interesting to note that Blanka's/Branka's actions in practice and her identity, as perceived by others, differ somewhat from these stated views. Despite allowing Marko's masculinity to dominate throughout their relationship so that she could ultimately have her way, and despite dedicating her entire life to the needs of her family, she is drawn closer to the profile of Estera Salom. At one point, Riki says, "...you are a bridge, yes, a bridge between different people, between the past and the present. You are the only one who continues Estera's line" (Kuić 259), which Klara confirms in a letter:

All of us have gone astray in one way or another, and if it weren't for you, after Buka's death, our tradition would no longer exist. I don't mean celebrating Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, but that deeply ingrained Sephardic womanhood (Kuić 355).

Despite her revolutionary activities, though provoked, as always, to protect her family, our heroine becomes truly aware of her identity after revisiting the Sarajevo of her childhood (in 1964), which Riki confirms for her:

But this is more than just memory, this is her true self. –
Blanka Salom – whispered Branka Korać (Kuić 497).

Riki: sister, believe me, you are still Blanka Salom, and you will always remain so (Kuić 514).

The third generation of Salom women, primarily represented by Vera Korać, will be analyzed here. We will highlight just a few facts given in the text regarding the formation of her identity. On the eve of one Christmas, Riki, to brighten the gloomy, impoverished post-war life caused by the new state order that declared their family domestic traitors, makes a Christmas tree and organizes gift-giving. In her childhood, Vera is joyful, but this event is overshadowed by her father's statement:

And the Christmas we celebrate has nothing to do with ours! Who has ever seen gifts and a tree with Orthodox Christians? But let the child be happy! (Kuić 360).

Thus, Vera grows up amid stories about the Salom family, her mother's semi-traditional Jewish cooking, multicultural Christian customs, and the achievements of the new state order, in which the Korać family are representatives of the world of former people, negative phenomena, domestic servants, obstacles to "superhuman efforts and self-sacrificing struggle to build the country and the new socialist society," even though Marko was nearly killed in Sarajevo for being a prominent Serb whose daily newspapers consistently denounced the Ustaša leader Ante Pavelić, and she – Branka, who could have been taken to the execution ground any day as a Jew (Kuić 272).

After growing up in the new society, with all its turbulence and difficulties, as well as the remnants of the Salom family's traditions, Vera Korać becomes, we would say, a bitter and wounded woman, ill, devoted to science and unsuccessful loves. Her finale is revealed in the last part of the trilogy, *The Calm of the Day in the Balkans*. She thus grows into a representative of:

the kind that is dying out in this plastic, standardized, empty end of our epoch! Utterly consistent in her stance and opinion and everything she represents, and she represents a world of honesty and decency. She deserves admiration, not judgment... She is... she is the tradition of this land in the best sense of the word (Kuić 661).

However, she sees herself as:

the center of the world and its last waste. Depending on the situation. Both as waste and as the center, she is most important to herself. She is not like her mother, who always put Marko and her ahead of herself. Not even love for Ivan changed that. Vera doesn't like her conclusion, but she knows it's true (Kuić 672).

She also sees herself, confronted with the descendants of her uncle Elijas, as a family outcast, but this contrasts with the constructed image of her in the eyes of these same women, because Estera says, although acknowledging that she is a Korać: "I love your humor. You're a true Jewess... from origin to exile" (Kuić 781). Despite the socio-historical blows during her upbringing, Vera embodies both the cross and the Star of David (Kuić 688), and all the good in her comes from her mother Branka/Blanka, while her father gave her Slavic weight and Herzegovinian strictness (Kuić 778).

We will conclude with Elijas's three daughters, who physically do not resemble the Sarajevo Saloms, but flash their bright eyes like assertive Israeli women and speak directly what's on their minds:

They are attractive, but devoid of coquetry and European refinement. They are not rough, but they are bluntly honest. They defy all fossilized Jewish stereotypes (Kuić 706).

One of them, although she has been living in America for fifteen years, has not succumbed to acculturation; rather, she has converted her husband, an American Jew, into an Israeli. We are left to wonder if the author's remarks are directed toward the idea that under the mentioned stereotypes we should understand external adaptability and mimicry, which perhaps manifests in all the characters in this trilogy who live in multinational and multiconfessional environments, while growing up in a nationally and religiously monolithic environment excludes such behavior.

In conclusion, we return to the beginning and affirm that the portrayal of the Jewish community members in Kuić's trilogy, despite the aforementioned literary-artistic shortcomings, poses a research challenge within the framework of our established approach.

5. Intersectional analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

The novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston explores the life of Janie Crawford, an African American woman who

faces complex challenges in her quest for autonomy and self-realization within the patriarchal and racially oppressive context of the rural southern United States. Through an analysis of Janie's life, the novel provides insight into the dynamics of racial identity, gender, and class within the African American community.

Janie Crawford's three marriages serve as an illustration of the complex dynamics of patriarchal norms and their impact on the lives of African American women. Through a layered narrative of her experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of how gender identity and roles evolve and transform through marital relationships, economic dynamics, and social interactions.

Gender dynamics, as a key element of intersectional analysis, are highlighted through the lens of power, control, and subversive strategies within the patriarchal system. Janie's journey reveals how stereotypical relations between men and women not only empower men but also constrain women, creating deep social inequalities. This perspective is not only prevalent among men but is often internalized among women as well, as evidenced by the example of Janie's grandmother.

Janie's grandmother, who lived through slavery and poverty, does not believe that Black women can live independently without the help of men. This skepticism toward female independence is why she insists that Janie marry. When she saw Janie kissing Johnny Taylor at sixteen, her grandmother remarked:

What Ah seen just now is plenty for me, honey. Ah don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin' yo' body to wipe his foots on (Hurston 13).⁷

The grandmother believes that material security is the only guarantee of her granddaughter's safety and well-being. She does not believe in love and is unconcerned that Janie does not love Logan Killicks, the older man who is interested in her. She tries to explain to Janie how she understood the role of women in society:

Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can't stop you from wishin'. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob 'em of they will. Ah didn't want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neither. It sho wasn't mah will for things to happen lak

⁷ All references and quotes from Hurston's novel are from Hurston, Z. N. (2006). *Their eyes were watching God*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

they did. All even hated de way you was born. But, all de same Ah said thank God, Ah got another chance (Hurston, 2006, p.16).

This perspective of the grandmother shows how gender dynamics within the African American community reflect broader societal pressures and historical traumas. Her insistence on material security through marriage demonstrates how gender roles have been shaped over generations, through experiences of slavery and economic insecurity. This emphasizes the complexity of the intersectional approach in analyzing gender dynamics, showing how individual lives and decisions reflect broader social and historical processes.

Patricia Hill Collins, a prominent American scholar and sociologist who has made significant contributions to the study of gender, race, and class, uses the concept of intersectionality in her work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* to analyze how different forms of oppression, such as race and gender, intersect and collectively contribute to injustice. She introduces the concept of “controlling images” to explain how these overlapping oppressions are organized, emphasizing that structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power are repeated through various forms of oppression (Collins 18). In this context, Janie’s journey can be seen as an example of resistance to the patriarchal structures that Collins describes. Janie’s struggle for independence and autonomy, despite the pressures from her grandmother and the broader community, reflects the subversive strategies that Collins identifies as crucial for the empowerment of Black women. The grandmother, through her insistence on marriage as the only path to security, represents the hegemonic domains of power that limit women’s freedoms and reproduce gender inequalities. Like many African American women, the grandmother resisted the controlling images of the “work-ox” and “brood-sow,” but since she was a slave, she did not have the right to fulfill her dreams of what she should do and what kind of woman she should be. “She saw the constraints on her own life but managed to keep the will to resist alive. Moreover, she tried to pass on that vision of freedom from controlling images to her granddaughter” (Collins 93).

Janie, though reluctantly agreeing to marry, does not cease hoping that when she marries Logan Killicks, she will achieve the love she longed for. However, instead of love and respect, she faces reality: Logan saw her as a helper in the household and the fields, not as a partner. Janie’s first marriage to Logan illustrates traditional gender

roles where men dominate the public sphere, while women are confined to the private sphere. Marital relationships and roles are shaped by economic inequality and patriarchal norms. Janie, immediately after entering marriage, makes a clear distinction between male and female roles, believing that women should engage in household chores while men are responsible for physical labor. However, Logan ignored this division, suggesting that she has "...no particular place." Her place was "wherever Ah need yuh" (p. 31). These words reflect how Logan perceived traditional gender roles and how he used his power to impose his norms. Since his home, like those of men similar to him, according to Crenshaw, was a "safe haven" where he did not have to face the racist society, he used that same place as an opportunity to show that he was the one in charge and that his power was visible at least there (Crenshaw 1991, 1257). Feeling that Janie disagreed with his views and that she might leave him because of them, Logan resorted to insults as a way to preserve his pride and power, often comparing her to his first wife and using his dominance to control her and prevent her from leaving, which inevitably happens soon. These dynamics clearly illustrate how traditional gender norms shaped marriage and power within it.

The second marriage to Joe, a wealthy farmer and soon-to-be mayor of Eatonville, illustrates how power and prestige can be used as tools of control over a partner while reflecting traditional gender roles that expect women to be submissive and obedient. Joe's behavior toward Janie, including public humiliation and restricting her self-expression, demonstrates how easily he could degrade and completely subjugate her. For example, when opening the store, the gathered crowd was excited and wanted to hear a few words from Janie, the mayor's wife, which Joe immediately cut off, saying that his wife "don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'." He added that he "never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home." (p.43). With these words, he openly displayed how easily he could humiliate her in front of others, showing a complete disregard for her feelings, which underscores the gender roles women were expected to adhere to at that time. Additionally, Joe forbade Janie from discussing what he deemed inappropriate matters with the people gathered on the store's porch, as this was not fitting for the mayor's wife. However, the more apparent reason for this restriction was his jealousy, which became evident when he ordered Janie to always tie her hair up in a headscarf in the store so other men wouldn't be able to admire it. Like Logan, Joe, as Janie realized, married her to ensure her unwavering obedience. He believed that women needed to be told what to do and were incapable of thinking for themselves. This realization, similar to the

moment she stood up to Logan, drove her to find her voice, which developed as her relationships improved and fight for her freedom (Racine 283). "Ultimately, just like the titular caged bird, she conquers her state of captivity by releasing her voice" (Stanković 980). This provoked Joe to hit her in front of everyone, showing her that she had stepped beyond the boundaries he had set for her. By standing up to him, Janie managed to shake his firm grip on Eatonville's power system, over which he had held unchallenged control. After his death, Janie felt the relief and freedom she had always longed for. Her liberation was symbolically captured in her burning all the headscarves she had used to tie her hair the very night Joe died.

Patricia Collins points out that the empowerment of Black women through resistance to patriarchal structures is a key element of Afro-American feminism, which can be applied to the analysis of Janie's liberation from traditional gender roles. Collins discusses the subversive strategies women employ to resist patriarchal norms and achieve autonomy (Collins 24). Thus, Janie demonstrates resistance to patriarchal expectations and seeks her freedom in various ways, such as refusing to conform to traditional gender roles or burning the scarves that symbolized her status. "Instead of adhering to gender-conditioned roles and being passive object(s) of male desire," she becomes an active agent in shaping her destiny (Janjatović & Popin 452). Her journey from "obedient granddaughter and wife to a self-defined African-American woman can be directly traced to her experiences with each of her three husbands" (Collins 24).

The third marriage to Tea Cake offers a contrasting image and shows how traditional gender norms can be questioned and challenged. Tea Cake is the first husband who truly loves Janie and allows her to engage in activities traditionally associated with men. This relationship shows how solidarity and balance can transcend patriarchal power patterns. Through shared activities such as fishing, shooting, hunting, or playing checkers, which are typically associated with men, Janie begins to discover herself and her identity outside of stereotypical roles, and their relationship becomes an example of a non-traditional gender dynamic between a husband and wife who complement each other in everyday responsibilities.

However, even in this relationship, jealousy and a sense of insecurity can cross boundaries and lead to violence, illustrating how love can still be susceptible to patriarchal power patterns. Despite his love, Tea Cake becomes abusive under the influence of fear that he might lose Janie to another man. This shows that even in loving relationships, gender roles and power can still play a crucial role, and

that love cannot always overcome deeply ingrained norms. Tea Cake does not want to hit Janie, but he feels, rather than thinks, that he must.

Their relationship represents the linking of sexuality and power, the potential for domination within sexualized love relationships, and the potential for using the erotic, their love for each other, as a catalyst for change (Collins 160).

The reason Janie doesn't react this time is that the act of violence occurs within a relationship that still has love. However, Janie realizes that she has once again become subordinate and that even a great love like theirs cannot exist outside the influence of gender roles.

Janie Crawford's prescribed gender role undoubtedly intertwined with her racial identity, the complex dynamics of which were unexpectedly revealed during her early childhood. Her journey from an innocent childhood spent in a mixed environment to facing the harsh truth about her origins highlights how racial identity can be complexly inherited and shaped through generations. Janie, who grew up without parents and with a grandmother who worked for white people, initially didn't see the difference between herself and the white children she grew up with. It was only when she recognized her Black heritage in a group photograph that she realized her identity was much more complex than she had previously thought. Upon realizing that the long-haired Black girl was actually her, she exclaimed, "Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!" (p.9). Until that moment, she had not understood her racial identity. It revealed that she was of mixed race, that her father was a white rapist, and that her mother was the child of a Black slave and a white slave owner.

Through the character of Janie's grandmother, who passed on her trauma to Janie, the novel emphasizes the continuing influence of the past on an individual's present and future. As a slave who had experienced the dehumanization of slavery, Janie's grandmother believed that Janie's secure life would be ensured through marriage to a wealthy man, imagining that Janie would live "lak de white madam" (114). This reflects the racial inequality that often reproduces itself through institutional mechanisms that mirror existing power structures (Crenshaw et al., 1995, 396). This can be seen in the grandmother's expectations for Janie and the idea that the key to her secure future lay in marrying a wealthy man, illustrating the social norms and expectations arising from racially differentiated power structures. Janie's resistance to her grandmother's expectations and her desire to find her path to freedom are key themes in the novel, illustrating the

individual's ability to break free from the chains of the past and shape their identity.

Janie's marriage to Logan Killicks reflects the discrepancy between her grandmother's view of marital privileges and the reality of racial discrimination that Janie faced in her marriage. Logan was rough and controlled every aspect of their life, while Janie felt trapped in the relationship. Her feelings that "de world wuz cryin' extry" and that she didn't "read de common news yet" (p.114) symbolize her inner conflict and sense of imperfection and unfulfillment in that marriage.

Janie's relationship with Tea Cake, a working-class Black man, challenges traditional racial norms and prejudices within the African-American community but gives Janie the opportunity to find true love and autonomy. Although both belonged to the African-American community, their different social statuses – Janie from the middle class after her marriage to Mayor Starks and Tea Cake from the working class – created different perspectives on racial identity. Due to Janie's previous status and the expectation that she would marry someone of higher class, their relationship was not met with approval. Furthermore, the community was suspicious of Tea Cake, believing that his interest in Janie was motivated by her money and that he would only "throwin' away whut Joe Starks worked hard tuh git tuhgether" (p.111). This perception highlights the deep-seated prejudices and social differences that shaped their relationships. As a working-class African American, Tea Cake was exposed to significant levels of racial discrimination in society, which was connected to his economic status. Despite this, both of them demonstrated resistance to racial inequality through their behavior and mutual relations, reflecting their determination to fight against prejudice and stereotypes.

Their shared experiences, including going hunting, fishing, going to the movies in Orlando, dancing, gardening, and learning to drive, indicate their closeness and constant mutual support. Despite their conscious differences, they spent much of their free time together, illustrating the possibility of overcoming racial differences and the importance of broader racial horizons and embracing diversity within the African-American community.

It is not uncommon for class affiliation to intertwine with racial and gender identification, creating complex patterns of social inequality (Collins 69). Janie faces economic challenges and constraints due to her socioeconomic position, further complicating her experience as a Black woman in a society deeply imbued with class inequality. Janie's journey from relative wealth to poverty and the recreation of her life illustrates the complexity of economic mobility and social inequality in American

society. Faced with the pressures of social norms and expectations imposed on Black women in American society, Janie actively “builds her identity” by resisting conventional ideas of what it means to be a woman, Black, and lower class. At the beginning of the novel, Janie is part of a poor working-class community in rural Florida, where her life is shaped not only by her economic status but also by social expectations arising from her racial and gender identity. Her first husband, Logan Killicks, a Black farmer, bears the burden of racial and class marginalization, but he has a certain financial security that promises stability. However, Janie faces an internal conflict because, although her marriage to Logan satisfies some practical needs, it lacks deep emotional connection. This conflict between practicality and the desire for true emotional connection highlights the complexity of her situation.

Her second marriage to Joe Starks, a wealthy farmer, elevates her to a new social class and brings with it different challenges. Joe Starks uses his economic wealth as a tool of control within a patriarchal society, demonstrating how class dynamics intertwine with gender power relations, creating a complex web of domination and subordination (hooks 118). Janie becomes increasingly aware of the importance of economic independence as a means of liberating herself from male control and asserting her own identity. However, through her development, Hurston emphasizes that economic power is not the sole factor shaping life choices, but rather part of a broader identity set, as bell hooks also discusses:

Before women can work to reconstruct society, we must reject the notion that obtaining power in the existing social structure will necessarily advance feminist struggle to end sexist oppression. It may allow numbers of women to gain greater material privilege, control over their destiny and the destiny of others, all of which are important goals. It will not end male domination as a system (hooks 92).

The exploration of class dynamics in the novel reveals how economic inequality and social mobility affect the lives of characters, particularly within the context of racial and gender prejudices. Janie faces discrimination as a black woman of lower economic status, which further complicates her struggle for autonomy and freedom in the face of racial and economic discrimination. Her class status influences how other characters perceive her, with some viewing her marriage to Joe Starks as a privilege, while others treat her with hostility due to her origins. This shifting perception illustrates how class shapes social

perceptions of an individual in the context of race and gender (hooks 84–95).

An intersectional analysis of class dynamics in the novel also reveals how economic inequality is reflected in Janie's relationships with other women. Through her interactions with characters like Phoeby Watson and Mrs. Turner, we see that class affiliation can shape relationships among women in the community, often leading to tension and rivalry rather than solidarity and mutual support.

bell hooks, a prominent black feminist and intellectual, in her study *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, analyzes the impact of past and present on identity, as well as the importance of solidarity in the fight against discrimination. This can be applied to the relationship between Janie and Tea Cake, where their bond challenges traditional racial norms and offers hope for overcoming racial divisions (hooks 68–83). Kimberly Crenshaw also discusses this in her study *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, noting that African-American individuals must struggle not only against external forms of racial discrimination but also within their own community, where they face internal racism and pressures to conform to stereotypes: "The ideal was to transcend stereotypes in favor of treating people as individuals free from racial group identification." (Crenshaw et al. 1995, 129). Through the encounter between Janie and Tea Cake, representatives of different social strata within the African-American community, the conflict between traditional racial norms and individual autonomy is revealed. The relationship between Janie Crawford and Tea Cake illustrates a complex interplay of economic, racial, and gender factors. Although Janie, coming from a higher economic class and being financially stable, feels an inner void, her relationship with Tea Cake, a poor laborer, brings her the emotional fulfillment she lacks. For instance, when Tea Cake suggests they go together to the Everglades to pick beans, he offers Janie what material wealth cannot – deep emotional connection and an adventurous spirit. Their relationship transcends class divisions and shows how different forms of wealth can contribute to happiness and fulfillment in life, as illustrated by his courageous actions and ability to provide emotional support. Through their romantic relationship, we see how they confront prejudices and stereotypes. Their love and mutual support illustrate the importance of a collective struggle against racial inequality and the need for solidarity within the African-American community, as Crenshaw emphasizes: "group solidarity was necessarily to change existing power relations" (Crenshaw et al. 1995, 145).

5. Conclusion

According to Collins, Black women have been doubly subordinated and often viewed as “impure,” both because of their race and their gender. This dual stigmatization contributed to their profound marginalization (Collins 129), as can be seen in the case of Janie.

In the context of the novel, Janie's character symbolizes the resistance and struggle for the emancipation of Black women in American society. Janie's quest for love, freedom, and independence represents a universal desire for liberation from systems of oppression, “condemnation of the restrictiveness of bourgeois marriage, and exploration of interracial sexism and male violence” (Jordan 108). Through her courage and determination, Janie inspires other women to resist oppressive systems and seek their own freedom and justice. Janie's journey from subordination to empowerment highlights the complex interaction between gender dynamics, racial, and class factors, thus shaping intricate patterns of identity and experience.

On the other hand, the issue of Jewish women in Gordana Kuić's trilogy is presented through several generations in the 20th century. By following the women of the Salom family, we uncover the transformations of their identities, shaped by various challenges and struggles imposed by the conflicts between traditional life and dynamic historical changes, which specifically affected the Jewish community during this century. The novels explore the stereotypical constructions imposed on Jewish women and the ways in which they reconcile or resist these constructions, as well as the compromises they might achieve. Each of these women formed her identity differently, depending on the socio-historical and spatial context. Despite the literary shortcomings, this linguistic material is invaluable for analytical mapping aimed at potential broader research.

While it might seem unfounded to place the works of Zora Neale Hurston and Gordana Kuić within the same analytical framework, we believe that by doing so, we have at least partially succeeded in addressing some of the challenges mentioned in intersectional analytical approaches, especially those concerning Jewish women. Despite the obvious racial, religious, cultural, and social differences between the protagonists, they actually face very similar challenges in constructing their identities, as they are, first and foremost, women – traditionally the “Other,” positioned against an entire system. Therefore, such research supports the thesis that more inclusive approaches to material will certainly not diminish the analytical relevance of intersectionality. On the contrary!

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**ИДЕНТИТЕТИ НА РАСКРШЋИМА: ИНТЕРСЕКЦИОНАЛНА АНАЛИЗА
РОМАНА БАЛКАНСКА ТРИЛОГИЈА И ОЧИ СУ ИМ ГЛЕДАЛЕ У БОГА**

Рад „Идентитети на раскршћима: Интерсекционална анализа романа Балканска трилогија и Очи су им гледале у Бога” бави се истраживањем сложености женских идентитета кроз интерсекционални

оквир. Овај приступ омогућава сагледавање како различити фактори као што су раса, пол, класа и култура обликују искуства и идентитете ликова.

„Балканска трилогија” прати живот сефардске породице Салом, са посебним фокусом на женске чланове породице, кроз различите историјске периоде и културне контексте. У „Балканској трилогији,” ликови као што су Бланка и Нина се суочавају са двоструким изазовима у процесу самодефинисања, као жене и припаднице сефардске заједнице, што им отежава навигацију кроз друштвене и културне норме које су често контрадикторне. Кроз њихове приче, роман истражује напетости између очувања културног идентитета и асимилације, те како ове напетости утичу на индивидуални развој и самопоуздање.

„Очи су им гледале” у Бога прати животни пут Џејни Крафорд, Афроамериканке која тражи свој глас и место у друштву. Кроз Џејнину причу, рад истражује како раса, пол и класне разлике обликују њена искуства и њен развој као индивидуе. Херстон приказује изазове с којима се суочавају црне жене у америчком друштву, укључујући патријархалне и расистичке структуре које ограничавају њихову слободу и аутономију. Роман наглашава важност самоспознаје и личне слободе, док Џејни пролази кроз различите фазе живота, од младости у којој је спутавана друштвеним очекивањима, до зрелости у којој проналази сопствени глас.

Кроз анализу ових романа, рад користи теорију интерсекционалности како би се истражило како различити аспекти идентитета нису изоловани, већ се међусобно преплићу и обликују животне прилике и изазове. Интерсекционалност омогућава боље разумевање како се различити фактори као што су раса, пол и класа манифестују у животима сефардских жена у балканском контексту и црних жена на америчком Југу, наглашавајући специфичности и универзалности њихових искустава.

Упркос корисности интерсекционалности као аналитичког алата, рад се такође осврће на критике овог приступа. Једна од кључних критика јесте да интерсекционалност може бити деполитизована или недовољно специфична, што може довести до неадекватног препознавања јединствених искустава одређених група, као што су јеврејске жене, па се у закључку указује на потребу за сталним критичким преиспитивањем и прилагођавањем интерсекционалног приступа како би се осигурало да он остане релевантан и инклузиван.

Кључне речи: интерсекционалност, идентитет, *Балканска трилогија*, *Очи су им гледале у Бога*