



## **Abstract:**

The present research paper is supposed to create a black feminist study of Kiley Reid's *Such a Fun Age* (2019). To appropriately conduct this study, we have used Patricia Hill Collins' theoretical concepts developed in her book entitled *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and Politics of Empowerment* (2000). We have taken from the theory two major concepts associated with our primary source, which are developed, in our discussion section. This piece of research comprises two main chapters within the primary chapter; we studied the concept of the "outsider within" in relationship to the feminine protagonist of the novel. Within the second chapter, the focus has been placed on the "matrix of domination", by showing the assorted types of oppression to which black people (women) are targeted to in supremacist society. The first chapter of our research has been commenced by analyzing the novel through the concept of "outsider within", which is divided into three sections which are; the role of black women in white American society. It has been experienced through the female protagonist Emira. Second section is devoted to the life of black women, which is explored within the experience of the protagonist in the white American society. In addition, the third section is devoted to the social role of white women in black American society, which is indicated through the visit of Alix Chamberlain to the house of Emira Tucker. The second chapter is devoted to the study of the novel within the concept of "matrix of domination", which is divided into four sections. The first explores the concept of the structural domain of power. The second section analyses the concept of the disciplinary domain of power. The third section is devoted to the concept of the hegemonic domain of power and the last section is devoted to the concept of the interpersonal domain of power. The key findings of our research demonstrate that racism is imbedded within the American society and developed its roots through multiple oppressive stains that gave birth to what is known today as "systemic racism", which means, how racism is shown in our society across institutions and society.

**Key words:** Gender, matrix of domination, outsider within, patriarchy, race, social class, systemic racism, white supremacy.

*I dedicate this work to:*

*My beloved parents, my brothers and all my family who supported me*

*all along my curriculum from primary school to master 2*

*All my friends that helped me accomplish this research paper*

*My beloved girlfriend and partner Melissa.*

*To the memory of my late grandmother.*

*S. Djaffer*

*I dedicate this work to :*

*My dear parents and sister who supported me both financially and mentally during this research, my amazing friends who encouraged me and pushed me towards the best and especially to my partner both in life and in this research, my beloved boyfriend Djaffer.*

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## **I. General Introduction:**

The United States of America is a wide and vast country with a diverse population. There are different ethnic groups who fall under the name of “minorities” such as Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, Arabs and African-Americans. The latter had been the subject of controversial debates and were subjected to racial segregation. Since their arrival as slaves in the early of the seventeenth century, black people experienced diverse forms of racism whether it is direct or indirect. The summit of oppression through racism and xenophobia is mainly experienced by the African black woman; whose society alienates her because of her skin color as well as her gender.

From police brutality to verbal violence, the African-American activists never stopped denouncing the patriarchal white supremacist country. Even if the Civil War (1861-1865) and the abolitionist activism of eighteenth and early nineteenth century freed black people from slavery, they still experienced racial segregation and marginalization. White supremacy comes from nativism, a movement that stemmed from the fear of “the other”. It emerged in the 1830s aiming to protect and preserve American white identity while excluding all foreign people and ideologies. However, African-Americans who were born in America still faced oppression due to their skin color. During the early nineteenth century, the black population grew stronger thanks to the Harlem Renaissance; a cultural, artistic and literary movement that started in 1917. The movement aimed to glorify the unique African-American culture. White associations such as the Ku Klux Klan terrorized the black community by massive slayings such as “*Red Summer*” events in 1919, left unpunished by the government. Activism rooted in the early twentieth century for equality and fairness within the black community. It was only in the mid sixties that African-American citizens were granted laws that protected them from discrimination. Nonetheless, racism persists.

During the twenty first century, it became trendy to be “woke”; which means that it is cool and popular to be against racism. Said in that manner, it seems to be a significant factor in abolishing racism. Even if it helped diminish discrimination, it created other issues such as white saviorism, fetishism, and unconscious racism. Although human rights activism peaked in the 2000s, social issues are still thriving in the US.

For decades, many literary works have depicted the kinds of racism and misogyny targeted towards the African-American women. An outstanding book that combined racial issues and the hellish situation faced by black women in the post-modern world is **Such a Fun Age** (2019) written by the Afro-American author Kiley Reid. The novel is a plot-driven story that describes the flaws of American society through different perspectives. This novel will be the root and corpus of our research in order to dig deeper inside the social issues faced by black women in the USA, as presented by the author in her novel.

The present work is backed by using the theory of Black Feminism by Patricia Hill Collins in her book **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment** (2000). If we have chosen to use such theory it is in order to prove the claims that, social and racial issues as developed by Kiley Reid fall harder on Black women’s back. From class struggle to fetishism, Kiley Reid’s novel explores the place occupied by the black woman in a white supremacist and patriarchal society.

### **Review of the Literature:**

From its publication in 2019, Kiley Reid’s book **Such a Fun Age** becomes a best seller in 2020, and received large bulk of criticism conducted by many reviewers through various angles and perspectives. Among them, we may mention Anthony KARAMBELAS who wrote a review of the novel about racism and class. In his article entitled “*how fun, really?*”(2020) KARAMBELAS focuses on the theme of racism in general and black women

in particular. He claims that the novel is written to show and denounce the social situation that black Americans experienced. KARAMBALAS reinforces his claim at the end of his article by stating that “On the outside, Reid’s debut novel is a tale of an interracial love triangle, but at its heart, it is an urgent examination of race politics in America and the discriminatory behaviors we still let slip”<sup>1</sup>. Through this quote, the critic explains that what appears to be a simple plot is in fact full of more or less condemning facts about the American Society. According to the critic, the novel is an inimitable hit for many readers, bringing an insight into the social struggle experienced by black people.

Another interesting article is put forward by The BBC, entitled “*Such a Fun Age- the hit novel that skewers white privilege*” by ArwaHaider (2020), who revisits the theme of white saviorism raised in the novel. According to the critic, the novel dissects the dynamics of white privilege. The character of Alix Chamberlain as a white woman is more successful in life than Emira Tucker, the main character, as a black woman. This critic also argues that Kiley Reid is inspired by James Baldwin’s quote: “whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably what they do not know about themselves.”<sup>2</sup> (1962). Reid arrives at the point of an uncomfortable truth that leads her to condemn white privilege in her novel. Haider writes to support her point that “*Such a Fun Age* arrives at a point where the transatlantic mainstream ostensibly appears more open to the uncomfortable truths that critique white privilege.”<sup>3</sup> White privilege is omnipresent in the novel and contributes to the struggle of African American citizens.

Claire Armitstead’s issue on The Guardian entitled “*Kiley Reid: ‘The premise that literary fiction has to be a drag is so silly’*” (Dec 27, 2020) scopes the feminist aspect of the book and how the impact of the life of the author herself inspired the story and the struggles that went by the main character of the novel. In this regard, the critic says the following:

Which brings us to another troubling issue: the relationship between

racism and sexism in a society which often acts out its guilt by fetishising young black women? Reid toys with the conventions of the romcom – setting up a broken love triangle involving Emira, Alix and Kelley, the Good Samaritan from the shop – before pushing past to something far more nuanced and uncomfortable.<sup>4</sup>

According to Armitstead, the mix of racism and gender issues comes in different forms. The critic claims black women share the same alienating experience regarding feminism as they are excluded even by white feminists.

### **Working Issue and Hypothesis:**

As seen in the above review of the literature, it is obvious that Kiley Reid's novel **Such a Fun Age**(2019) received a great amount of criticism which explored the novel through many frames and perspectives. Nonetheless, to our best knowledge, no research has so far ventured to study the novel in relationship to gender and racial issues. The previously mentioned critics limited their scope to the theme of racism which in our opinion lacks in depth exploration of the subject. Therefore, our research aims to add a richer and more fulfilled analysis on racism and other gendered social issues raised by Kiley Reid regarding the white supremacist and patriarchal American society of the post-modern times. In doing so, we will explore and investigate the triple edged discrimination lived by the black folk through their color, gender and societal status. In the novel, Reid develops the issue through the experience of the characters.

For instance, Emira Tucker, the main character finds herself in a loop of white saviorist characters who invade her life and feelings. She struggles with her skin color as she is seen as a dangerous person in a prestigious market depot situated in a white upper class neighborhood. It shifts from outsiders to personal acquaintances as Kelley (her white boyfriend) feels entitled to openly speak about racial issues with her while she is uncomfortably doing so. Emira then discovers that Kelley tends to fetishize her and have only relationships with black women as part of his white savior complex. In society, minorities

struggle to have a high societal status because of the systemic racism and discrimination. Alix Chamberlain, the white main character and also the employer of Emira Tucker as a babysitter, is successfully working on a self employed feminist enterprise. While claiming to defend women's right in the business plan, she tends to omit minorities and excludes Black women. She is aware that Emira is struggling financially and tries to over-compensate her "guilt" by offering useless gifts such as a fancy wine bottle. Emira on her side struggles with professional life as she does not have "a grown up job". All these events written by the author are examples of her in depth exploration of the previously mentioned triple edged discrimination lived by Black women. Reid dives into social issues to demonstrate her view on the today American society.

### **End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Karambelas. (march18th, 2020)*How Fun, Really?: A review of KILEY REID'S 'SUCH AFUNAGE'* (accessed on: February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021), New York.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> ArwaHaider. (February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020), *Such a Fun Age: the hit novel that skewers white privilege*, [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), (accessed on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021). London.

<sup>4</sup> Claire Armitstead, (December 27<sup>th</sup>,2020), "Kiley Reid: 'The premise that literary fiction has to be a drag is so selly", [www.the-guardian.com](http://www.the-guardian.com)

## **II. Methods and Materials:**

### **1. Methods:**

In order to develop fully the previously mentioned issues; the need for theoretical ground and critical elements that would enable us to approach the novel from black feminist lens rises itself. To do so, we have opted for Patricia Hill Collins theory put forward in her book **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Politics of Empowerment** (2000).

Black Feminism is perceived as a contribution to Feminist theory in general; as it acknowledges the inseparability of race, gender and class discrimination. Such a movement emerged in the 1960s along with the Civil Rights Movement as Black Women's voices were silenced and excluded from leadership, no matter how big their contribution to that often mentioned movement. It is finally established in the 1990s within the second-wave of feminism.

Patricia Hill Collins is an African-American theorist and scholar whose expertise revolves around race, gender and class discrimination. She published her first book **Black Feminist Thought** in 1990, while she later revisited it into a second edition for its ten year anniversary in 2000. She gained notoriety from that book due to her analysis and her position around the topics of feminism, racism and class struggle. Collins's focus on "Black Feminism" stems from her own experience as a marginalized minority whose contribution in feminism is silenced as she explained it in her book:

Traditionally, Many U.S. White feminist scholars have resisted having Black women as full colleagues. Moreover, this historical suppression of Black women's ideas has had a pronounced influence on feminist theory<sup>1</sup>.

In the Preface of her first edition she added:

I saw nothing wrong with being who I was, but apparently many others did. My world grew larger, but I felt I was growing smaller. I tried to disappear into myself in order to deflect the painful, daily assaults designed to teach me that being an African-American, working class woman made me lesser than those who were not. And as I felt smaller, I became quieter and eventually was virtually silenced.<sup>2</sup>

Through these few lines, we understand that her aim is to explore and explain the discriminations experienced by black women on a daily basis; which is why the Black Feminist Theory lays perfectly with our research as it fits the novel of our choice. Both authors share the same race and experience as well as the plot of the novel revolves around the struggles of a Black woman. Indeed, **Black Feminist Thought** is essential to our piece of work as it delves into gender, racism and class issues and mainly black Feminism:

First, we will explore the novel from the “outsider-within” concept. The latter is a term coined by Patricia Hill Collins in her book **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Politics of Empowerment** (2000). It refers to a person getting knowledge and intimacy in a dominant group without gaining as much power as them. In **Such A Fun Age**, Emira a black woman aged 25 years is still struggling in her professional life. She babysits for the Chamberlains, an upper class white family. The outsider-within is Emira who is stuck inside a white family. Collins claims “In their White “families”, Black women not only performed domestic duties but frequently formed strong ties with the children they nurtured and the employers themselves”. This is Emira’s case as she has a bond with the toddler she babysits.

However, we find Emira as an exploited worker, or as a black stranger who works under the mercy of her white employers. Her painful experience draws her to work even during the day of her own birthday. Thus, in this case, we see Emira as an “outside within” individual whom the Chamberlain’s white family deliberately marginalizes and exploits.

Then, we will review the novel through Collin’s concept ‘The Matrix of Domination’

as another means of oppression that functions according to four categories of power. The structural Domain of power, divides the oppressor from the oppressed, as there are black neighborhoods and white neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods do not have the same opportunities in terms of education and jobs. In the novel, Emira had to change neighborhoods to find a better job opportunity. The hegemonic Domain of power which is a system of ideas agreed upon by the dominant group and thus prohibits a positive evolution of society towards minorities. This is exemplified by Alix who had a black nanny, employed for her children, things never changed and Alix does not feel bad about it, because it does not concern her directly. The interpersonal domain of power, that refers to how the individual's behavior and morals affect others. This is seen in the novel when teenage Alix calls the police for the black guys who entered her house, she did not think of the repercussion of her actions on others and ended up terminating the scholarship of Robbie and gave herself a racist reputation. The same as she did when she outed Emira's video only thinking of her own benefits. The disciplinary Domain of power determines the degree of oppression allowed by the majority towards the minority. It is systemic racism put into practice. When Emira was approached by the shop worker, he claimed to do out of concern; however a black woman holding a White baby was the real problem. During the incident in the shop, when the worker is afraid to approach Emira directly and gestures her to hand out the baby. This incident shows how she is viewed as a bulky black woman, or a Briar's mom who does all. Throughout the novel, Emira is basically Briar's mom and does all the difficult "motherly" tasks in contrary to her counterpart Alix.

## **2. Material:**

### **a) The Life and Times of Kiley Reid:**

Kiley Reid was born in Los Angeles California in July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1987. She is an African American author, who grew up in Tucson, Arizona and graduated from Salpoint Catholic

High school. She then graduated from Iowa's Writers Workshop. Reid wrote many short stories and articles before writing her first debut novel **Such a Fun Age** in 2019. As an African-American, she wrote that novel in order to raise questions around issues of race, gender, and class in a non-polemic manner. In her interview with Brandon T. Harden from the Philly Inquirer, Reid explains that her aim is to acknowledge that people are not "good" or "bad" but that there American society are bigger factors leading them to act in a certain way such as systemic racism, since the American society has always lived in flaws within itself; race, gender and class are factors of oppression and determine one's status and integrity.<sup>4</sup> Kiley Reid's novel, although a fiction, it mirrors perfectly the modern American society that roots from its deeply racist and misogynistic past. Systemic racism is a current issue for African-Americans who fight against it. From fetishism to class struggle, Black women suffer the modern US society.

**b) A Short Synopsis of the Novel:**

**Such a Fun Age** is a novel published in 2019 in California, it describes the life of Black American woman through the protagonist Emira Tucker, a young black woman. When Emira finished her own studies, and as she newly graduated from college, she started working for a white American family, as she was engaged by the Chamberlain's family to work as a babysitter for Alix and take care of her first born girl Briar. In this context, the author shows the level of racism against black at the first by telling how a security guard in a grocery accused Emira of kidnapping Briar while she was doing her job of babysitter during a family emergency in chamberlain's house. This incident makes Emira very upset. The grocery store incident reinforces Alix's resolve to get and know her babysitter, but for Emirait is just a sign that she needs a real job, one that provides health insurance, care and paid vacation. The relationship between Alix Chamberlain and Emira Tucker after the market depot incident shows the amount of the inferior position of black women in white America,asAlix starts to

check the phone of Emira without her permission which is considered as a violation of her private life.

At the end of the novel, Kiley Reid shows the real face of the white supremacist people through describing the relationship between Emira and her boyfriend Kelley. The latter is very possessive as he tells her to leave her work as a babysitter just because he has a relationship with her boss in the past.

### **End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Patricia Hill Collins, 2000. *Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.p.05

<sup>2</sup>Ibid;

<sup>3</sup>Kiley Reid. 2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P. Putman's sons.p.167

<sup>4</sup>Brandon T.Harden, 2019. *Meet Kiley Reid the Philly author whose novel Such a Fun Age is about to take over the world*. Philadelphia (accessed on June 04<sup>th</sup> 2021).

### **III.Results:**

We decided to read Kiley Reid's novel **Such a Fun Age** in light of Black feminist theory as provided by Patricia Hill Collins's **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment** throughout this research project. As stated in the working issue and hypothesis part of our work, this piece of research aims to investigate the depiction of the U.S. society's flaws through Kiley Reid's novel **Such a FunAge**. Our discussion on this issue had led us to some major findings, which are as follows.

First, we discovered that the social experience for a black person is different than a white person's experience. As a matter of fact, in a patriarchal white supremacist society, the black woman finds herself as an outsider-within. As Emira, the main black character is still a babysitter at the age of 25 years old and struggles to find a decent job even though she graduated, as it is harder for her to find an employer, she often sends her CV without her picture. She is also stuck in the White family to whom she works for and is exploited at certain degree in comparison to white women of her age.

Then, we found out that oppression is functioned through the Matrix of Domination which enables the dominant groups to act with oppression upon minorities. For instance, we find Alix had always been racist because she belongs to a dominant group that allows her and does not reprimand her for her racist comments. Her husband, Peter, feels free to make a racist comment on air and he was not reprimanded by his company until people reacted and he still did not get the consequences of his actions.

## **IV. Discussion:**

The following section of our research will analyze the major findings in Kiley Reid's novel, which we have already come through all along our research. Thus, while reading Kiley Reid's **Such a Fun Age** from a black feminist perspective as documented by Patricia Hill Collins in her theory. Our discussion will be divided in two main chapters. In the first chapter, we will shed light to the concept of "outsider within", by examining the way Kiley Reid makes of her main character as a prototype of an "outsider within", while the second chapter will be devoted to the theme of black oppression in relation to the "matrix of domination" in the American white society.

### **Chapter One: Outsider Within in *Such A Fun Age*.**

#### **Section One: The Role of Black Women in the White Society:**

The first chapter of the discussion will shed light on Kiley Reid's **Such a Fun Age** (2019) with a particular focus on the notion of the "outsider within" as mentioned in Collin's **Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment** (2000). Generally speaking, the "outsider within" is another means or forms used against oppression on minorities by the dominant group in the American society of the modern times. Through it, black people are excluded from leadership and their contribution in building the white society without any benefit in return, they are considered as slaves. In this regard, Collins assets: "my initial use of the term described how a social group's placement in specific historical context of race gender, and class inequality might influence its point of view in the world."<sup>1</sup> which means that the black people especially black women are only good in doing all what white people refuse to do. According to Faye Venetia Harrison in the article entitled *Outsider Within: Reworking Anthropology in the Global Age* (2008), "outsider within" may be defined as a person who has a particular knowledge and power relationship one of

gaining knowledge about or if a dominant group without gaining full power according to members of that group<sup>2</sup>.

According to Collins, the majority of afro-Americans are marginalized although their intellectual level contributes on the building of the social, economic, intellectual and political nation. Black people are usually stereotyped by white supremacist society<sup>2</sup>. It describes the experience of black women and their situational identities. (Collins, 1986).

After announcing all of the above arguments about the concept of “outsider-within” and as far as Kiley Reid’s **Such a Fun Age** is concerned, a novel that basically recounts or describes the daily life of Emira Tucker, a twenty five years old black girl, who is like many other black female people of her age represents perfectly the “outsider-within” norm. For instance, we are told earlier in the novel, that Emira is working as a babysitter under the mercy of a white supremacist family. Thus, after graduation, Emira was forced to work in order to satisfy the economic as well as financial needs of her family and herself. However, we also learn that although she found this job, this does not allow her to be an integral member of the white family to whom she is working as a babysitter. As she is abused inside the family as well as outside by the rest of the American white society, because, she is still misconsidered or simply seen as an outsider. Thus, we may argue that despite the many advances the American society had experienced through time, and mainly to issues of gender and color, yet, in the world that Kiley Reid depicts to us, there is still a kind of modern racism basically made of the inconsideration of the black people, mainly women, because of the “outsider within” norm, as explained by Patricia Hill Collins in her study.

Moreover, Emira does not have her own social life, she has been deprived of some (if not all) intimate and private life of white society. She is always in the service of her employer, even after finishing her ridden buses of eight hours, she is called late at night to work. One

night, while she was celebrating a birthday, that was interrupted by a call from her boss. Reid describes that scene in the following words:

It was almost astonishing that Emira's daily babysitting job (a place of pricey onesies, colorful stacking toys, baby wipes, and section dinner plates) could interrupt her current night time state ( loud music, bodycon dresses, lip liner, and red solo cups). But here was Mrs. Chamberlain, at 10:51 p.m waiting for her to say yes. Under the veil of two strong mixed drinks, the intersection of these spaces almost seemed funny, but what wasn't funny was Emira's current bank balance: a total of seventy-nine dollars and sixty cents.<sup>3</sup>

Another important event that highly teaches us more about Emira's "outsider within" norm happened at the same night in the grocery:

Ma'am", the guard said. Emira looked up at this largemouth and small eyes. He looked like the type of person to have a big family, the kind that spends holidays together for the entire day from start to finish, and not the type of person to use ma'am in passing. "It's very late for someone this small", he said. "Is this your child?" "No." Emira laughed "I am her babysitter." "Alright, well..." he said, "with all due respect, you don't look like you have been babysitting tonight."<sup>4</sup>

From the above quotes, While Emira and her friends were celebrating their friend Shaunnie's 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Mrs. Chamberlain called her late at night to ask if she can take Briar somewhere and she would pay her double. In this section of the novel, Emira feels as an outsider, while all her friends are celebrating this party, she should work at night because of her need of money. The author describes the high degree of racism to which Emira is targeted to, as well as the inferior position she holds in the eyes of her white employees. It is also in this section of the chapter, that the author shows the various forms of oppression, stereotypes that black people faced. For instance, Emira was judged as a liar just because she has a black skin, and she is considered as a stranger although she belongs to the same society as the guard. She faces a kind of racism and her role was insignificant, that is the case of the majority of the Afro-Americans. At that night, Emira was accused of kidnapping the girl she

was babysitting. A guy tries to interfere between them, but the guard asks to not interfere with a “crime”, these words made Emira astonished:

“Holupholup, a crime?!” Emira felt as if she were plummeting. All the blood in her body seemed to be buzzing and sloshing inside her ears and behind her eyes. She reached down to swing Briar in to her arms, placed her feet apart for balance, and flipped her hair into her back. “What crime is being committed right now?” “I’m working. I’m making money right now, and I bet I’m making more than you.”<sup>5</sup>

In this quotation, Emira is seen as a criminal and a dangerous person, because of her skin colour. This kind of view is considered as an outside view of a person while she is accomplishing her tasks at a moment where she pretended to take rest, she was harassed by a white racist. We deduce from this incident that the black women are usually considered as strangers in white dominant society. Reid shows the daily sufferings of minorities, as this event makes Emira think about getting a real job. As it leads to the conclusion that, black people will never be considered as an integral part of white society, they are always considered as strangers. This means that their role is limited, to accomplish tasks that seem to be difficult from the view of the dominant society. After all, what happened in the market depot, Emira started to look for a real job, because she knows finally that she does not belong to the ideal norms of this white family. In doing so, Kiley Reid aimed to show the real injustice to which black women were subjugated in the American modern society, where racism against this category of people still exists. : In order to further investigate this concept, we believe that a few analysing of the relationship that exists between Alix and Emira is needed. So when Emira looks for another job, Alix tried to seduce her with money because this late knows that Emira needs money:

Just as Emira decided to distance herself from the now three-year-old girl, to check Craigslist and Indeed every day, and to only apply for jobs that hired adults and offered very adult benefits, Mrs. Chamberlain stepped in hard... since that night, Mrs. Chamberlain started returning home at six forty-five, sitting down across from Emira, and referencing conversations that they’d never had. “Emira,

remind me what you are majored in?” “Tell me where you live again?” “Did you say that you had any allergies?” The timing couldn’t have been worse. These were the questions you asked at the beginning, and not at what Emira was trying to make the end. But for a part-time gig, the money was decent, making it difficult to get excited about potential jobs that offered less money and zero Briar. Every other Friday, Alix handed Emira an envelope with six hundred seventy-two dollars inside.<sup>6</sup>

In this quotation, the author shows that the black women are considered as “objectified others”, as these words show the real face of Alix after being afraid of losing the only person who accepted to work as a babysitter with all the difficulties and short amount of money. In fact, this incident tells the reader that although Emira lives and cohabits with the white Chamberlain, she is mistreated and she looks not like the rest of the family members.

Furthermore, Reid describes another incident which shows the place of black women (Emira) in the white American society. This is illustrated through the relationship of Emira and her white fetishist boyfriend Kelley Copeland, who is the ex- boyfriend of Alex Murphy before she changed her name to Alix Chamberlain. In this part of the novel, Reid tells the story of the first meeting between Kelly and Emira in the market depot, and then in the train before she started dating him hoping that she finally found a person with whom she can share the best moments, and in hope to be a part of the white people’s team. However, when Emira and Kelley were invited for a thanksgiving dinner, Alix feels that Emira is a stranger as the author says: “Alix stared across the table at her sitter, feeling as if she had been very publicly uninvited to a gathering that she herself had organised”<sup>7</sup>. This is the feeling of most black people who are living in a white society, but this time is the feeling of a white woman who lived in her own society.

All people around this table are telling about their experiences, and their life success but Emira has nothing to say, because she does not have any of these moments, as she is a black woman who is living in a white society. So she had not a social role, no social importance and

no social status, except working as a babysitter to raise a white little girl. These moments let notice that Emira reconsider the fact that she does not belong to the same social rank as all the people who were invited to that same dinner. Therefore, and in relationship to Collins' theory and the concept of the "outsider within", we see how a "social group places in a specific, historical context of race, gender and class inequality"<sup>8</sup> influence the social position of black women.

For, while all people in the house were talking to each other, Emira was asked by Tamra (Alix's friend) about her goal in life, and this question was so embarrassing to her because she did not think about it, and her surroundings were not a motivation for her. All her friends were successful and they were ambitious, but Emira was not like them, she did not have the right to be like them, life was so hard to her, she feels as a stranger where she lives. At that night Emira was the only person who remarks Briar when she was sick, although she is here just to have fun and not to work, but she didn't sit at her place around this table, so she tried to be more useful by having an eye on the little girl especially and the whole house in general. The author describes this episode with the following words:

... Emira realized that if she'd answered Tamra's question truthfully, no one would have heard her. She could have placed a sweet hand underneath her chin and said, *if I had a "biggoal", do you really think I'd be sitting at this fucking table right now?* But just then Briar started to gag. And when Emira grabbed what she knew was a very expensive napkin and dove across the table to cover the toddler's mouth, Jodi the first to notice and scream.<sup>9</sup>

From the above quotation, the reader realizes that Emira feels inside herself that she is not in the right place with the right people. For, all her dreams and goals in life are not like those of her surroundings, she knows that she does not belong to that social group, because her "outsider within" status has provided in her mind a special thinking, a special behaviour.

Throughout the novel, and in order to make the “outsider within” more clearly, Kiley Reid compares the life of Briar and that of Emira by saying that:

In Emira’s family, Justyne was so obviously the favourite, but Emira was her brothers favourite and so it seemed to even out. Her mother favoured Alfie when it came to Christmas gifts, and her father favoured Emira when it came to birthdays and phone calls. Emira didn’t figure this out until high school, but Briar was doing so at the tender age of three. Emira looked at the little person on the toilet and felt as if she were pushing an enormous boat out the ocean. She slumped as if the situation were completely out of her hands.<sup>10</sup>

In this part of the novel, we deduce that Emira feels as a stranger even with her own family, she is here just to serve others, as she said: ‘because that’s what family means. Family means no favourites.’<sup>11</sup>. “The car rolled along in the glittery snow, and for the first time since they’d been dating, Emira felt that Kelley was acting particularly white”<sup>12</sup>In this passage which suggests that, Emira had the feeling of being outsider within her own boyfriend, this quotation led to the conclusion that black women were treated as stranger, and they did not get what they deserve even with her closed people, their friends, their families and then their boyfriends.

Another outstanding situation which shows the feeling of an outsider that takes place when, Kelley and Emira stopped at a bar of white people, and she felt as a stranger in this place, so her own will is to come back to Kelley’s house to be more comfortable, because she didn’t feel at ease:

Kelley ordered a beer. Emira declined, she wanted to go back to his apartment and back to Kelley’s bed because the idea of laughing away the awkwardness of the evening still didn’t seem completely far-fetched. It wasn’t bothered by the night disclosure, but –she thought this as Kelley kicked one boot up on the footrest and kept the other balanced on the soiled floor- at the end of the day.<sup>13</sup>

In the passage mentioned above, the author tries to show the real feeling of a person who feels stranger in a particular place. The status of the “outsider within” is more reinforced by the

author in the novel, when the characters tell stories about strangers as for instance, when Reid describes the stories of Kelley by saying:

Kelley owned nice things, but owning a baby was next level. Emira tried to keep her voice even as she said ‘I don’t understand why you care so much.’ ‘I don’t care so much. Okay listen...’ Kelley sipped the top layer of his beer and bent his head lower to speak to her. “Emira ... the fact that Alex sent you to a grocery store with her kid at eleven p.m. makes a lot more sense now. You are the first black woman Alex had hired to work for her family, and you probably won’t be the last.”<sup>14</sup>

All this would let us say that black people were not having the same social standing as the whitepeople; Emira is still working for Alix and not more than this according to Kelley:

Emira had met several “Mrs. Chamberlains” before. They were all rich and overly nice and particularly lovely to the people who served them. Emira knew that Mrs. Chamberlain wanted a friendship, but she also knew that Mrs. Chamberlain would never display the same efforts of kindness with her friends as she did with Emira... It wasn’t that Emira didn’t understand the racially charged history that Kelley was alluding to, but she couldn’t help but think that if she weren’t working for this Mrs. Chamberlain, she’d probably be working for another one.<sup>15</sup>

This part of the story sheds light to how black people see the white dominant society. They have the feeling that there is no choice for them; they lost all hope for having a better life. Knowing that Alix Chamberlain has a racially charged history, Emira accepted this just to avoid working for others like her, she is seeing herself apart from this kind of people and social belonging. The minorities are still suffering from the mistreatment of white dominant society.

## **Section Two: The Life of Black Women:**

According to Kelley Copeland, the Murphy’s family (Alix’s parents), had always an outside view on their workers, they pretend that those workers are considered as family members but their behaviour seems to be not the same as they pretend, as Kelley thinks of Emira: “ Emira,

this was different. The woman who worked for them? They made her wear a uniform. At first I just thought she wore the same polo a lot, but then I saw that it said Murphy on it and I was like[...]"<sup>16</sup>. The act of forcing,that woman to wear a uniform made her feel that she is not belonging to that particular white family.As orders Emira: “you should get to wear your own clothes with people who deserve you.”<sup>17</sup>.This means that Alix did not deserve Emira, and this later would stay an “outsider within” the Chamberlains. This situation makes Emira sees this family from another view; as she does not have any idea of what to do after all what Kelley said about her employer. At first she thought that she found a person who can admire her and give her what she really deserve, but finally the situation has changed after knowing the reality of her employer with whom she is living.In this part of the novel the author shows that Emira feels inferior to Kelley:

“Emira threw her coat over her arm and held it close. You don’t get to tell me where I should and shouldn’t work. You literally have a cafeteria in your office. You wear T-shirts to work. And you have a doorman, Kelley, okay? So you can one thousand percent go fuck yourself. The fact that you think you’re better than A-leeks or Alex or whatever is a joke. You will never have to even consider working somewhere that requires a uniform, so you can chill the fuck out about how I choose to make my living.”<sup>18</sup>

The fact that Emira sees herself inferior to Kelley leads us know that she thought that she would never had this opportunity of being successful and having the same advantages as white people. The behaviour of the white people in front of black people let them see themselves as strangers and they did not have the right to be successful as their neighbouring whites. According to Patricia Hill Collins, it is this self-realization that leads black people mainly black women to their own self-valuation which will create authentic images about themselves.<sup>19</sup>

In a passage of chapter eighteen, the narrator explains:

Emira almost wanted to roll her eyes and ask, are we really gonna do this? How are you gonna tell your parents? If I'd walked in here when they were still on the screen, how would have introduced me? Are you gonna take our son to get his hair done? Who's gonna teach him that it doesn't matter what his friends do, that he can't stand too close to white women when he's on the train or in an elevator? That he should slowly and noticeably put his keys on the roof as soon as he gets pulled over? Or that there are times our daughter should stand up for herself, and times to pretend it was a joke that she didn't quite catch. Or that when white people compliment her... it doesn't always feel good, because sometimes people are gonna be surprised by the fact that she showed up, rather than the fact that she had something to say when she did.<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, Emira felt as an outsider within her relationship with Kelley, and she was questioning about her future and the future of her children. The main question that turn in her mind is the reality she is living today. The situation let her to be confused and she didn't to know how really Kelley's parents would think about her. Her status in society is limited to those questions that turn in her mind.

However, everyone wanted to be friend with Emira, but the reality is so far, she never feel as nearby to someone except Kelley. As we read:

We had such nice time at thanksgiving, and we were so glad you guys came. But... I am sure it was a little odd for you as well. First and foremost? Thank you for being as well a superwoman that night. I know I said it before, but once again you completely saved us... And second... Alix displayed both her palms. I don't want you to feel awkward at all about the fact that Kelley and I dated each other way back when.<sup>21</sup>

Through this conversation, we can notice that Alix is showing admiration to Emira, but the reality is that she is trying to push her away from Kelley, and this are not things we can do for a family member. Alix should be happy for Emira. By the following Alix talked about her past with Kelley Copeland and his racist past. But Emira who had met many guys like what Alix said, she didn't find this on her boyfriend. Alix has the habit to see people from an outside view, she used the word "oriental" in reference to Asian people, and she also used the word afro-Americans in reference to black people. In this context, the author contends that:

Kelley had a penchant for othering black culture that had started in high school and continued to develop in adulthood. He still didn't think that what he was doing was wrong. What had Kelley told Emira to make her reject this information? In high school, Kelley's admiration for Robbie (black man) and his friends had been so palpable and excruciating.<sup>22</sup>

Black people are seen as "others" by the whites in the American modern society. By this affirmation of Kelley's into his own friends and why he likes this category of people, the Afro-Americans are still strangers as Indians and oriental people: "Alix knew she was doing the right thing, but she somehow felt the same way she had when her roommate had looked at her over a cup of nudules to say; dude, you can't say oriental unless you're talking about a rug."<sup>23</sup> While Alix was looking for Kelley in his own place of work, she didn't feel that she is in her place. She for the first time felt as an outsider and a stranger. Kelley was with two black people who were working with him. Alix approached them and when she came next to Kelley and his friends, she said: "I need to talk to you, right now."<sup>24</sup> She was ordering him as if he is working for her. The two men next to Kelley took a step back from her as if she were contagious. From this reaction we deduce that Alix is an outsider in this place and that Kelley is scary.

Through this conversation, Alix ordered Kelley to stay away from her sitter because of his fetishist past of a white man. Alix pretends that Emira was like a family to her, but her behaviour informs us that Emira was not considered as what Alix pretends, but she still loves Kelley and because he breaks up with her, she doesn't want him to be with her sitter. This reflects a kind of selfishness in the behaviour of Alix. Kelley was totally in disagreement with all this, and he claimed that he probably thought that black people are cooler than white ones. He sees a difference between them and he was not a fetishist, but he just like black people. Emira is considered as an objectified other which makes her as a stranger person. The author is alluding to an act committed by Alix that makes Emira in a place of an outsider within, so Kelley tells:

Emira deserves a job where she gets to wear her own fucking clothes... you act like what happened to you was worse than what happened to Robbie. If you love Emira so much, then let her wear what she wants. I'm sure I didn't handle things well back in high school. It was seventeen, I was an idiot, but at least I'm not still requiring a uniform for someone who works for me so I can pretend like I own them.<sup>25</sup>

From this conversation, we can understand that Alix was treating Emira as an outsider with pretending that she is like a member of her family. Through this quotation the author shows the real face of rich white people who pretend giving a best life to black people who work for them. But the feeling of those black people is totally different of what their employers think is best. They are forced to do things that they did not like, because they need to work and they need to make money, as it is the case of Emira Tucker. In this regard Reid adds: “yeah, you guys are family, right? Is that why you're making her work on her birthday?”<sup>26</sup>. These words affirm the conversation and confirm the fact that Emira is an “outsider”, if she is compared to Alix Chamberlain. Also Alix came back home she remembered that she let Catherine (her youngest girl) alone, which reinforces her feeling of being a stranger:

You never leave a baby. It's unlikely something will happen to it, but what about to you? Alix could barely remember walking home. What if she'd been hit by a car? What if she'd had a seizure and was left unconscious? Emira and Briar would be at a movie and God knows where else for hours, and Catherine would just be by herself in a fleece zip-up sack? How could she forget a person who'd been strapped to her for the past five years? Had Kelley really made her forget her own child? Her brand-new baby, who already looked like a replica of herself?<sup>27</sup>

So all this makes of Emira as not being a member of this family, as she is just here to take care of Chamberlain's children that Alix can write her book and do her job of blogger, without being disturbed by her children, and in exchange, at her birthday, Emira would have a present, since she cannot buy it by herself. The narrator explains: “As she opened her last birthday present, a new phone cover to replace her faded and cracked one, Emira unstuck her heel from the floor and said, oh my God, thanks, Z. She began to rip to packaging open using

side of her black nail.”<sup>28</sup>. This quotation is a proof that Emira had not received enough money from her job, and she was treated differently from her friends who had more money than her. This proves also that she never received such a gift from anyone neither her boss who pretended that she is a family member nor her own family. During this birthday celebration, for a moment, Emira felt stranger and awkward as it is mentioned in the following passage:

Emira watched her girlfriends hold their shots up and lick the excess from their fingers. For a moment, she felt the way she did when Briar saw a picture of a flower, sniffed it, and said delicious, but she pushed these feelings aside so that she could speak she sat up and raised her voice above the bass and steel drums.<sup>29</sup>

After this feeling, Emira felt for the first time that she is well treated and she gets what she deserves from her friends. Emira had a bad year, and she was treated badly by the society and she really needs help from nearby people. She had so many difficult year and grace to her friends she is now happy and feel better. During this special day of her life which was her birthday, she took Briar to watch movie, which was requested by Mrs. Chamberlain, while she was supposed to celebrate and being rewarded for the difficult past year that she lived, from the market depot incident. As the following passage shows:

So I have been a little cranky and like... broke these past few months. And I really appreciate you tolerating me. Next year is gonna be different and I'm really thankful for you guys helping me get my shit together. Sefa, thank you for helping me print out my resume on nice paper...Shaunnie thank you for emailing me about new jobs [...] I officially have an interview next week.<sup>30</sup>

At the same night Emira's friend Zara came and tells Kelley: “did you see I upgraded your girl”<sup>31</sup>. She makes allusion to the new phone she gave to her, which made Emira feel so embarrassing. Emira answered by treating Zara of rude, who apologizes and affirms that they care about her. That celebration had been interrupted by terrible news, which was the sharing of Emira's video in the market depot. That video where Emira was treated as a dangerous and

kidnapper, it was a very embarrassing moment. After having fun for the first time with her boyfriend. “Is that the black woman in the grocery store video?”<sup>32</sup> these words made Emira feel that moment again, she thought that she had finished with that, but the situation didn’t seem finished, so she was in an “outsider within”, as the following quote affirms:

No nononono, Emira found herself backed up against the filthy stall wall covered in stickers and sharpie and names and numbers. Her eyes and chest immediately felt sober but it was taking limbs and hips longer to catch up. There was a part of her that hadn’t reached how did this happen?! And was still amazed by the technology that put her in this bathroom and on the screen simultaneously. As if from another universe, Emira heard her voice again.<sup>33</sup>

In this position, the author has put Emira in an “outsider within” position, which made her feel that situation again. That same situation destroyed everything she was trying to build all this time; her relationship with Kelley, the future she dreamt about. That video made her feel that her place was not in white society. The video was introduced by this citation:

Black Girl Almost Gets Arrested for Babysitting. Black Girl Destroys Security Guard Who Accuses Her of Kidnapping. Just Another Black Girl Trying To Do Her Job and Getting in Trouble for It. Philadelphia Babysitter Accused of Kidnapping. #BelieveBlackWomen. #AreWeFreeToGo. Sassy Black Woman Lets Security Guard Have It.<sup>34</sup>

That video made Emira in a position of having doubts in everyone in this location, stating from her boyfriend, who was the only one who possess that video. After these Emira was so furious and she made her in an outsider within position and she tells Kelley:

you hate that I live in Kensington and you’ve never even been to my apartment...you make jokes about me not having health insurance when I’m obviously trying... you hate that I babysit for living, which is fine, it’s whatever. But it’d also be easier if you’d just fucking admit it.<sup>35</sup>

### **Section Three: The Social Status of White Women in Black Society:**

In chapter twenty-three, Kiley Reid reversed the roles, the role of an outsider within has been given to Alix Chamberlain who is trying to go to Emira's apartment through this part of the novel. The author deals with the location of white American people in black American society, as Alix felt as a stranger in this part of the town. She was othering people and places as if it was not the same town as hers and the author confirmed this by telling: "An older black man passed by on the sidewalk with his hands in his jacket pockets. He glanced up from underneath a blue baseball hat and looked at Alix as if she were lost. Briar pointed directly at him and said, that man is driving the train"<sup>36</sup>. In this passage, we can deduce how white people are seen in a black society. They are stranger and weird people. Also through the reaction of Briar, we conclude that people were not born racist, but they become through coming older. Alix defined this visit of the popular avenue as an adventure. This shows that the location of black people is still marginalized even in their own places.

The living apartment seemed to be stranger to Alix who has the habit to live in richest houses; this is so different to her. She felt for the first time what Emira feels all over her life while living with white people. Alix observed all the details of that apartment as it is another world and not the same where she lives. And now Alix started to understand Emira's need of making more money. In this part, the author shows the "outsider within" location through a white character. This image was illustrated as the following:

When she sat down on Emira's couch, Alix spotted something else. On the wall opposite the futon was a ten gallon fish tank on the floor. There was no lid on top, and there were no fish, but there were about a dozen potted plants and their green leaves shot up and over the sides. It was completely unexpected, and Alix was grateful that Briar raced to it, so she could figure out how both a lumpy futon couch and this lovely aquarium could exist in the same space.<sup>37</sup>

Through the same chapter, Reid dealt with the social class struggle between Afro-Americans and white people, through mentioning details of Emira's house by mentioning:

But there were so many things Alix wanted to mention. She couldn't wait to reach a point in their relationship where she wouldn't have to sit on opportunities for growth that Emira would hopefully carry with her for the rest of her life. This video you're embarrassed of? Alix wanted to tell her, it's honestly not bad, and it shows how much you love my kid. And this water bottle you've been using? It might give you cancer so let's get you a new one with glass or stainless steel. And this thing you did by accident, with the plants and the aquarium? It's so, so lovely and your instincts were spot on. And I know that a couch is a huge investment but it's one of those things you'll want to spend money on...<sup>38</sup>

All these details on Emira's apartment reflects her social class, and all these questions that turn in the mind of Alix reflects her point of view on middle class people. She felt that she is never belonging to this category of people. The social class struggle is one of the marks of racism in the modern American society, and it is also a form of being an "outsider within".

After the visit of Mrs. Chamberlain to Emira's apartment, and all the advantages that she proposed to Emira to stay working for her, an event had taken the place of Emira which confirmed her "outsider within" position in the Chamberlain's family. The reaction of Emira was first denying the idea that Alix chamberlain could do this to her, she says: "she probably means this news thing. Like this video we're about to shoot."<sup>39</sup> But it was not the case unfortunately. All this had destroyed the feeling of having a family, and confirmed that Emira is an outsider within Alix. As a reaction to this:

But as she said it, Emira realized that if that was constantly pointing out the instability of her current situation, specifically so that other people didn't have to. The implications of Zara's allegation took their time to be hardened in her mind, and for the moment, all Emira could think was, Mrs. Chamberlain was talking shit about me? I thought we had a deal.<sup>40</sup>

That act confirmed to Emira that she would never belong to this family, and she would always be in an "outsider within" location and this would never change. The behaviour of white

American people is the same through all times, they have the only purpose of getting what they want, without taking into consideration the implication and the efforts committed by black people to build the American society. Emira came back to the beginning, she was jobless after she decided to leave Chamberlain's house: "suddenly she was back to where she started. The idea of scouring the internet and checking Craigslist and seeing disgusting children on the street and thinking, *could I learn to love you?* Put a twist inside her chest that brought her shoulders forward."<sup>41</sup>. The feeling of being outsider is still turning in the mind of Emira, any place where she went made her have this feeling, just because she is a black woman which belongs to the middle social class.

Alix Chamberlain had prepared an interview with a local channel which can permit to Emira and her family to clarify the situation about what happened in the market depot; pretending that was the best way to make Emira stay working for them as a babysitter. But the act of sharing that video in social media had destroyed everything that had been built all that time. This can make Alix finish her book in the New Year, as it was said in this quotation: "and I hear that Emira will be around a lot more often in the New Year? Laney looked for confirmation from both Emira and Alix. As you continue to write your first book?"<sup>42</sup> Alix has confirmed this. But Emira had another point of view: "but this video being released has definitely put some things in perspective and ... due to some creative differences, I will no longer be working here. But you can find me at the front desk at the Green Party Philadelphia office because ... yeah. That, that's where I will be."<sup>43</sup> This is the first time that Emira took a good decision by leaving the place where she didn't belong to. Emira's experience on identity crisis, at the end of her journey she was convinced that she does not belong to the white environment.

What Mrs. Chamberlain did was not in the favour of Emira, before they get separated, Alix pretended that all what she did all the time Emira worked for her was because she loved her, but Emira didn't have the idea, if she really loved her, she would never try to solve a problem by creating another incident. That was a form of bad treatment through the personality of that black woman.

After working in Green Party office, Emira became an administrative assistant. She had never had full time for herself, she had only one purpose is working and making money. But this time the situation had changed, she was asked by her boss about her life planning, but Emira had no idea about this. At the end Emira had finally the feeling that she belongs to a particular and this is her place, since she is accepted, respected and integrated. Emira was so nostalgic, she missed Briar, although she had a better lie now but she still think about how Briar become.

To conclude, we may say that Kiley Reid gives us a portrait of a sociologically marginalized character (Emira), because of her specific historical context of gender, race and unequal social position in front of the white dominant society (Chamberlain's family), whose main concern was to sustain, consolidate and maintain this kind of social sexism and unequal injustice. However, in writing the novel, Reid aims also at illuminating the social role of black people in America, since Emira stands to represent the case of many black people who succeeded to move from the "margins to the centre" to use Bell Hooks works. After reconsidering their own inferior marginal or simply "outsider within" status, black people (women) turns to their own self-definition, and self-valuation, which led them to value their life and their culture.

The life of Black women can be represented through the novel of Kiley Reid, this research is a result of labour and many efforts of Afro-American authors, who aims to show that the their social status is still inferior and to reconsider their role in building the society.

Black people, especially women try to integrate the white dominant society, by fighting and making efforts to expose their situation which still inferior and how they can shift from this to progress in the American modern society.

## End Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Faye Venetia, Harrison. (2008). *Outsider Within: Reworking Anthropology in the Global Age*. University of Illinois USA.

<sup>2</sup>Patricia Hill, Collins. (1986). *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*. University of Cincinnati USA.

<sup>3</sup>Kiley, Reid. (2019). *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P. Putman's sons.p01

<sup>4</sup>Ibid; 06

<sup>5</sup>Ibid; 09

<sup>6</sup>Ibid; 43

<sup>7</sup>Ibid; 125

<sup>8</sup>Patricia Hill, Collins. (1986). *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*. University of Cincinnati USA.

<sup>9</sup>Kiley, Reid. (2019). *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P. Putman's sons.p131

<sup>10</sup> Ibid; 136

<sup>11</sup>Ibid

<sup>12</sup>Ibid

<sup>13</sup>Ibid; 137

<sup>14</sup>Ibid; 138

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup>Ibid; 139

<sup>17</sup>Ibid; 140

<sup>18</sup>Ibid; 141

<sup>19</sup>Patricia Hill, Collins. (1986). *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*. University of Cincinnati USA.

<sup>20</sup>Kiley, Reid. (2019). *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P. Putman's sons. P144.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid; 159

<sup>22</sup> Ibid; 162

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid; 164

<sup>25</sup> Ibid; 168

<sup>26</sup> Ibid; 169

<sup>27</sup> Ibid; 171

<sup>28</sup> Ibid; 173

<sup>29</sup> Ibid; 174

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid; 177

<sup>32</sup> Ibid; 179

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid; 185

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 2000. *Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. p300

<sup>37</sup> Kiley, Reid. (2019). *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P. Putman's sons. p187

<sup>38</sup> Ibid; 194

<sup>39</sup> Ibid; 199

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid; 202

<sup>42</sup> Ibid; 212

<sup>43</sup> Ibid; 213

## **Chapter II: The Matrix of Domination in *Such a Fun Age***

In this second chapter, we will examine Kelley Reid's portrayal of the strains or systems of powers and domination in the world of her protagonist Emira Tucker through the lens developed by Patricia Hill in her aforementioned theory. In doing so, we will focus our study on the concept of "The Matrix of Domination". The latter is basically a theoretical concept that is categorized according to four domains/systems of powers; the "structural domain of power", the "disciplinary domain of power", the "hegemonic domain of power" and the "interpersonal domain of power". According to Patricia Hill, these systems are made subsequently in relation to the marginalization black Americans<sup>1</sup>. We will use these domains to extract the U.S sociological, racial and cultural flaws embedded in **Such a Fun Age** which lead black people to struggle for equality most importantly the case of black women.

The "matrix of domination" is a concept coined by Patricia Hill Collins in her book **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment**. For Patricia Collins, in the marginalized world of black people, these strains are used as means of oppression by the dominant American white supremacists in several interconnected forms. Therefore, in order to fight them, they should be categorized into distinct domains, because the "matrix of domination" is an intersectional combination of race, gender, class and sexual orientation which heavily influenced Afro-American, most notably the black woman.

As far as "the structural domain of power" is concerned, it arranges oppression in social institutions in general. Since the structural domain of power functions according to one's class/gender/race, this will affect the societal status who is submitted to such oppression, as for instance it creates difficulties in housing, education as well as working<sup>1</sup>. According to Collins, this domain of power lessens mainly the Black women's ability to a regular citizenship in contrast to the dominant individual -white Americans-.

Moreover, the “disciplinary domain of power” manages oppression. It engenders the rules and policies that permit oppression to have control over the marginalized blacks. Thus, the latter are managed by bureaucracies and sometimes by governmental legislation. This domain focuses on limiting Black women’s moves by monitoring them in their workplace/institutions. It is a modern way to racially discriminate minorities through regulations and surveillance. While the “hegemonic domain of power” justifies oppression through shaping the images and ideologies of the minorities. It leans on mass media and pop culture to give out a low image of the targeted minorities including Jews, Indians, blacks and all those who do not belong to the predominantly white supremacist American society.

For the last domain of power which is “the interpersonal domain of power”, it involves the individual as well as all the surroundings. It influences the individual and the communities’ experience towards oppression.

**a) Structural Domain of Power:**

In the American society, many citizens give a grand importance to social status. Thus, there is an uncertified social ranking based on race, gender and class of the individual. However, as far as history taught us, in the American society the most privileged ones are the white wo/men and the less privileged are the black people most notably the black women who are submitted to double marginalization because of their race and gender.

In order to make evidence of what we have said above about the “structural domain of power”, and as far as Kelly Reid’s novel **Such a Fun Age** is concerned, we have in fact a typical example of a dominated/objectified individual who is without doubt the female protagonist Emira Tucker. Thus, as an oppressed black woman, Emira Tucker at the age of twenty-five years old is struggling to fit into the world of adulthood in order to satisfy her financial needs. However, since she did not have any stable job, she thus accepted to work part time as a babysitter and part time as a transcriptionist. In the first chapter, we are told that

Emira is at a party with her friends, when her boss Alix Chamberlain, asks her to babysit for few hours due to an incident. Her friends refute and beg her to stay in the party; but because of her need of money, she decided to leave as she says “I need the cash”<sup>3</sup>. Here we get a hint at Emira’s financial rank which defines her class. According to Collins in her explanation of the “structural domain of power”, society defines people through different social ranks according to skin color, class and gender<sup>4</sup>. “Gotdamn. This is a rich people grocery store”<sup>5</sup> says Zara, Emira’s friend while they are out babysitting at night. Collins explains that the structural “domain of power” is sustained by the separate but equal policy from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century until it was out ruled in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>.

But with the persistence of the racial segregation in America, a lot of reforms and laws many have been ratified and many forms of racism have been abolished. Yet, these laws created a kind of camouflaged racism partly practiced by governmental reforms and consolidated by the white supremacist American society. For example, in the previously mentioned chapter, and the various passages of the novel, we noticed that Zara and Emira who are black middle-class women are not used to the environment of the store; they are located in an upper-class neighborhood which is actually a white neighborhood. That is why they are seen as a possible danger inside the market depot which caused the racial “incident” in the market depot. This incident reaffirms and explains the fact that both of Zara and Emira are not welcomed or accepted as equal people in this supposedly white place.

In the third chapter of the novel, we learned also that Emira lives in Maryland in a town named “Sewell Bridge” a place destined for minorities. She went to Temple University, thinking that she would end up doing menial work just like her family. She is the first to go to college among the Tuckers. Emira, like many other black women, had to move out of the environment where she grew up in order to get a proper education as much as an opportunity towards a professional life. With the matrix of domination, it is noticed that black women

often have to go miles away from their original neighborhoods and towns in order to succeed<sup>7</sup>. This is due once again to the separate but equal policy that imprinted itself on nowadays in the U.S. society. Indeed, Black neighborhoods lack proper housing as well as schooling opportunities and adequate living conditions in contrast to those of whites. Also, throughout the novel, we noticed the difference between Emira's and Alix's lives. Alix, out of nothing started a flourishing business under the name brand of "Let Her Speak", while Emira struggles to find a stable job to fit for her environment. Emira's life is more complicated as she comes from a low middle-class black background.

Skin color does play a big role in the professional area. The novel demonstrates it not only through Emira and Alix but also through Emira's friends. Shaunie, a friend of Emira, is a light-skinned upper-class black woman who comes from a mixed family. We notice that her "lightness" gives her privileges. In the tenth chapter, Shaunie gets a promotion and announces that she will look for her own apartment. Emira compares herself to her and feels inferior to her as she does not have a stable job and her apartment is located in a poor neighborhood, as said in the book "Emira wondered if there was an appropriate amount of support and enthusiasm you needed to have for a friend, because if there was, then Shaunie was hitting her retainer. Every week it was something."<sup>8</sup> In the "structural domain of power", colorblindness is a cursed gift; it encourages not seeing or treating people according to their skin color. This latter leads to erasing the problems that stem from it. Thus, it opens a door to camouflaged racism as documented in Patricia Collins's theory. For, camouflaged racism resides in being racist without even alluding to race<sup>9</sup>. In the previously mentioned chapter, we see that Emira feels as if she were the last one of her friends group. This group of friends itself refers to the life of privileged people according to their skin color. Josefa, a white woman has a scholarship and is getting a higher education than the rest of them. In other words, having a light skinned color, Shaunie, gathers internships and promotions as well as having a nicely

luxurious apartment with Josefa, Zara, a black woman, graduated and works as a nurse, while Emira is the darkest of them and has a cheap apartment with no stable job. In this case, and because of the ‘Structural domain of power’ which functions according to race, Emira, with a black skin is excluded from the privilege of living in the same apartment like the rest of her friends.

In the eleventh chapter, Emira is invited by her boss to a Thanksgiving dinner. Her boss also offers her a bag of groceries in an attempt to gain her trust and get closer to her. In order to get Emira to accept the bag, she says “I’m sure you have food at home, but this is better than anything you will find at a grocery store right now”<sup>10</sup>. This act seems more like charity rather than a friendly gift. A white woman who has extra food gives it to a black woman who works for her. Alix always tries not to be racist but can’t help but think of Emira as lesser than her. First it is because she works “for” her and then comes Emira’s status as a black woman who is close to a middle-class woman. The previous quote suggests to the kind of grocery store Emira would shop at and also to her quality of life, Alix gives her a hint that her groceries are better than what Emira had at home. This whole chapter provides an insight to Emira’s relationship with her boss. Alix does her best to “sympathize” with Emira but she is unable to do so because of their social ranking difference held by the matrix of domination that provided them with different experiences.

#### **b) The Disciplinary Domain of Power**

America is very keen on its professional area. Many people struggle to find stable jobs with sufficient wages to be able to sustain a proper and healthy lifestyle; however, the professional life experience differs between people, from the whites to blacks. Indeed, minorities tend to have a hard time finding employment as well as exerting their profession. After the abolition of racial segregation in the 1960s, bureaucracies unleashed their creativity to perform racial discrimination discretely. As a black woman, Emira finds herself facing

many sociological regulations and rules in her professional life. In the first chapter, Emira finds herself caught in a racist altercation in a grocery store while babysitting. A woman and a security guard believe that she kidnapped Briar, the white child she babysits. This incident happened due to the difference of her skin color as much as her “uniform” as claimed by the guard “You don’t look like you’ve been babysitting tonight”<sup>11</sup>. This sexist behaviour actually stems from the objectification of black women’s bodies, reducing them and deducing their career, lifestyle and class from their clothes or body forms. They carried on harassing Emira without letting her explain, all while invalidating her words. In fact, they preferred to interrogate the three year old white child rather than Emira who is an adult black woman. This proves how much society believes in white people no matter their age or social status to a black person telling the truth. The “logical” excuse behind this type of racist behavior is that the grocery guard is just doing his duty while the white woman is simply a concerned mother. However, this would never have happened if it was a white woman holding a black child.

Moreover, the guard’s comment on her appearance is a typical paradigm of the patriarchal white supremacist American society; it is the “disciplinary domain of power” of the child that dictates his conduct. Thus, his privilege makes him feel entitled to the behavior he holds towards Emira -a black woman-, while the white is performing what is referred to as “surveillance” method as explained in Collin’s “disciplinary domain of power” as she states that she is a mom herself and she was scared in behalf the child’s mother. In other words, the minorities; -the case of black women-, tend to get patrolled more than usual for “safety reasons” or to “follow the rules”. Maintaining the surveillance concept, in the sixth chapter, Alix creepily watches Emira’s steps. Indeed, she “spied” on Emira’s phone through her notifications and messages to learn more about her. This habit carries on until she starts referring to Emira as her own as shown in chapter thirteen “Kelley Copeland was dating Emira? Her Emira?”<sup>12</sup>.

Alix started to develop a feeling of ownership towards Emira which allowed her to intervene in Emira's private life. In chapter seventeen, the author writes "Alix found herself ready to slap Kelley's wrists away from her sitter. In the same voice and motion she uses almost every day, she felt herself almost say, No nono. Don't touch. That's Mama's"<sup>13</sup>. Here, we see that Alix accepts the idea of owning Emira because she works for her. Her obsession towards her babysitter is racially motivated as she feels throughout the novel that Emira is quite unfortunate to be a minority. This allowed her to face Kelley Copeland on behalf of Emira without her consent. She warned Kelley to expose him to Emira as she truly wants to protect her while he confronts Alix about the uniform she made her wear. Truthfully, the uniform is another form of possession for Alix as it had the name of her brand imprinted on it. Alix excuses the uniform by saying "Because she wouldn't have gotten in trouble that night if she'd been wearing a uniform, would she?"<sup>14</sup> it is only after saying that statement loudly that she realizes how wrong it was. Indeed, she understood that the uniform implied ownership towards Emira, since many black women are only legitimate in their workplace wearing uniform or "professional" attire.

The whole relationship of Alix and Emira looks like modern day slavery, as the owner is in complete denial of her oppressive impact and influence over the slave's life. Alix supervises Emira whether indirectly by spying on her phone or directly by intervening in her personal life. Another sign of disciplinary domain of power lay in the video tape of the incident in the first chapter. As a matter of fact, Alix Chamberlain went through Emira's emails and found the video tape that Emira did not want to make public which Alix did later in chapter twenty-two anyway. This proves again the power of the disciplinary domain and the power/ownership of Alix over Emira. All of this led to comments on social media about Emira. "Sorry, but she does NOT look like a babysitter"<sup>15</sup> "If she acts that way in front of a camera, I wonder what she's saying to the kid when no one's around"<sup>16</sup> adds Alix.

People felt entitled to comment about how Emira should act accordingly to the situation because as a black woman, she ought to watch her steps. Every flaw or misstep made by black women are naturally connected to their gender and race, thus, it is normalized that they are exposed to everyone's opinions, rules and regulations in order to act as society wants them to. Eventually, Emira herself is aware of the "disciplinary domain of power", as we see it in chapter two, wherein "Emira Tucker's profile did not come with a picture. Her description said that she was a Temple University graduate, that she knew beginner sign language, that she could type 125 words per minute."<sup>17</sup> Emira did not put a profile picture not because she is ugly or shy but because she is black. She knows that being black will altercate with her professional life, she is aware that her race can and will be a problem in the working area. As a matter of fact, she has the ability to write 125 words by the minute and she would definitely be needed for a full time job at Green Party Philadelphia where she was only working for a part time. Her boss, Beverly, only offered her a raise after the video of the grocery went public. This shows that she knew Emira's capacities but she did not want her until she became notorious. This could possibly be motivated by racial discrimination as Emira's value only grew important because of her incident on how she was "mistreated" and people started to show mercy. Otherwise, people would not offer her jobs or interviews.

**c) Hegemonic Domain of Power:**

Throughout the history of the United States of America, Afro-Americans more than anyone have been profiled in a depreciative manner in the media. Whether by erasing their history or demeaning their culture, everything is controlled in order to create a negative image on black people. They show them as a permanent danger and less human than the other races. All of this is meant to shift people's ideologies in order to rationalize and legitimize racial discriminations. To relate what we have explained above and as far as the "hegemonic domain of power" which is more or less concerned with the way the white patriarchal supremacy in

America conceives, represents and thus construct a racist and heterosexist view of the Afro-Americans. It is worth mentioning again the racial incident that took place in the first chapter of the novel. Emira is facing a racist incident in a white neighborhood's grocery store, and she was being accused of kidnapping the white toddler she was babysitting, a white woman explained to her that "They were doing some...I don't even know...some booty dancing or whatnot? And I thought, okay, this doesn't feel right"<sup>18</sup>. This comes from the racial stereotype that black women are known for twerking and doing sexual dance moves. Indeed, Emira and her friend Zara did dance but they insured that it was a child friendly dance even while picking their song. However, the statement was not even questioned by the security guard as there is a tendency to believe white people over black people. Later on and in the same chapter, another man stepped in to film the incident as to show later the racially motivated event, the security guard says "You do not have the right to interfere with a crime."<sup>19</sup> Without need of proof, the guard accuses Emira of committing a crime. Both the woman and the guard's comments are nourished by the media and society interpreting black people as ghetto and dangerous. It is then in this case that the "hegemonic domain of power" works in order to legitimize racial oppression by controlling the interactions and consciousness of individuals. In this regard Patricia Hill Collins asserts that the "hegemonic domain of power" legitimizes oppression" as

People believe in it. This is the cultural sphere of influence where ideology and consciousness come together [...]. It is made up of the language we use, the *image* we respond to, the value we hold, and the ideas we entertain. And is produced through school curricula and texts books, religious teachings, mass media images and contexts, community culture and family histories<sup>20</sup>.

Black women are seen as "hoes" because of their bodies and how media portrays them. How many times have we seen music videos with black women in bikinis dancing in the background? This is why the security guard's sexist reaction is rationalized. Black Women

have been sexualized for centuries and to this day whether from their bodies or from their cultural dances, they never escape the perverted look of white men. So, Emira is both deemed to be seen as a danger as well as a sexualized object because of her skin color. In the second chapter, Alix has conducted an interview with Emira about babysitting Briar “They talked once on the phone before Emira came to the house. And when Alix opened the door and saw Emira for the first time, she found herself once again thinking, Huh.”<sup>21</sup> Alix’s reaction implies that she is surprised that Emira is black. Naturally, Emira did not put a picture of her on her online resume to create racial ambiguity so potential employers may not discriminate her while choosing for employees. It also shows that because Emira was a graduate who could type 125 words per minute that she did is not often deemed as black. Society tends to erase black women from the intellectual portrait, instead they are seen more fit to perform menial and bodily related works.

Emira working as a babysitter is a racial paradigm itself. Effectively, for centuries, black women raised white people’s children as they worked as nannies. This occurrence constructed a mammified view on black women, which means that they are only good at being white people’s caretakers. As she spends time with Briar, Emira finds that she is doing more than babysitting and that Briar is growing to be attached more to her rather than her mother and she realizes that she is in fact parenting, much like her ancestors who went through the hardships of parenting white children while their parents lived peacefully. In the fifth chapter, Emira finds herself on a first date with Kelley Copeland, the white man who filmed her in the grocery store. As they are getting to know each other, he asks “You must be a dancer, then, right?”<sup>22</sup> “You must be classically trained to do moves like...”<sup>23</sup>. Another commonly shared ideology is that Black women thrive in the sex work industry once again for their body and culture. In his inquiry, he implies that Emira dances for a living which reinforces the idea that black women are strippers and dancers because once again, they’re good at sex and menial

work only. When she tells him that she works as a typist in Green Party Philadelphia, he says “You don’t strike me a Green Party person”<sup>24</sup> and carries on telling her “My office pays a shit ton for transcription”<sup>25</sup>. She does not strike him as a Green Party person because she does not have the skin color of a person who works in a political field, he assumes that she does not make good money and offers her a job at his office. All of their conversation was filled with micro-aggressions from him. His behavior is allowed through the ideologies concerning black women.

In chapter eighteen, after the thanksgiving dinner with the Chamberlains, Emira and Kelley stop at a cowboy like bar which made Emira uncomfortable. In the middle of an argument, Kelley does not understand why she did not like that bar and said “But if it makes a difference, I’ve been there twice before, and I wouldn’t have taken you somewhere uncomfortable on purpose”<sup>26</sup> in which Emira replies “Well, yeah, but, that’s the point. You think it’s comfortable because it has always been that way for you”<sup>27</sup> in the whole argument, Emira explains to him that having black friends and girlfriend does not enable him to understand the struggle. The bar represents a south-like environment and as known to all, the south represents the symbol of slavery and that of racial problems. As she told him that the picture of John Wayne irks her because of his racist past, he cannot fully understand her. Their interracial couple leads to a cultural clash that creates ambiguities in their relationship. In chapter twenty-three, it is the turn of Alix to perform micro-aggressions, after the video was leaked; Alix went to visit Emira in her new apartment. We notice that it is a black people’s neighborhood with the stereotypical basket court and the old black man passing by; however, when Briar touched the building’s door which Emira’s apartment is located, Alix took out antibacterial gel and cleaned both of their hands. Alix would have never done this act in a white neighborhood. One of the most current stereotypes on black people is that they are dirty which Alix probably thinks true as she wiped her hands. Then, once she got into the

apartment, “Alix thought Okay, Phew, I can do this and then, Oh man, this is depressing”<sup>28</sup>. Instead of being compassionate, Alix immediately started to judge the apartment as if Emira had a choice. Their cultural differences could not allow Alix to understand Emira’s apartment. In the same chapter, one of the comments under Emira’s leaked video said “If she acts that way in front of a camera, I wonder what she’s saying to the kid when no one’s around”<sup>29</sup> Although Emira did her best to remain calm, she is still seen as resisting and aggressive. This goes to the ideological belief that black women are loud and mean. Emira only defended herself but people still saw her as mean. African-American vernacular English is viewed as a vulgar, menacing and language of ghetto which shifts Emira from the victim to the oppressor. Again this idea affirms the idea documented by Patricia Hill Collins’s theory of black feminism in the sense that oppression held on black people by the “hegemonic domain of power” is also caused not only by mass media manipulation but also by racial language

**.d) Interpersonal Domain of Power:**

Social relationships in the U.S have always been ambiguous when it involves race. Kiley Reid emphasized the awkwardness and hardships of these social and personal relationships in her novel **Such a Fun Age**. The “interpersonal domain of power” works through relationship with oneself as well as with others, regarding oppression. Interracial relationships whether intimate or professional often carry a racial motivation that will lead to the discrimination of the black person. White saviorism and fetishism are big part of nowadays interracial relationships and they can be included in the “interpersonal domain of power”. As seen in the first chapter of the novel, we get a first glimpse into Kelley Copeland’s white saviorism complex. Indeed, as Emira is subject to a racial discrimination, Kelley starts to defend Emira and films the whole event. He goes to Emira and says “I got the whole thing on tape. I would turn it in to a news station if I were you and then you can.”<sup>31</sup> Emira declines and he insists on turning the tape, the conversation ends with him emailing it to her. We perceive Kelley’s insistence as an

obligation for him to help Emira as she is a minority and he belongs to the privileged whites. According to Hill Collins, white people often like to dominate and regulate racial situations so they feel better about their inner being<sup>32</sup>.

However, and in order to further investigate the “interpersonal domain of power” in relationship to the novel under study, we think that this domain of power is more visible with the main character Emira and the latter’s interpersonal relationship with the rest of characters. So, let’s then see how does this domain of power function through the interpersonal relationship between Emira and the white Chamberlains as well as Emira with her own self

As far as Emira’s relation with the white Chamberlains, we are told in the first chapter that Emira is employed as the babysitter of Briar Chamberlain, the three year old child of Alix and Peter Chamberlain. During the racial altercation she experienced in the market depot, she offered the guard to call Briar’s father to prove herself. However, along the novel, we notice that Emira has almost no conversation with Peter. Yet, during the quarrel she preferred to call him over Alix, because in such circumstance Peter and Emira are the complete opposite of each other. For the guard who represents society, he considers Emira a threat and a public danger, while he looks at Peter, who is an old white man representing security. Furthermore, the non-existent relationship of Emira and Peter speaks louder on the term of racial ambiguity than any relationship in the novel. As for Alix, the relationship with Emira is filled with awkwardness as she tries to be oblivious to the race of her babysitter. Throughout the novel, Alix and Emira have different lifestyles due to their opposing backgrounds. Nonetheless, Alix is obsessed by Emira and tries to convince her that she relates to Emira’s struggles in order to feel better about her privileged self.

In the fourth chapter, Alix reacts to Emira’s altercation and calls her friends for advice. We notice that Alix, instead of being compassionate for her babysitter, she makes it all about

herself and acts like the actual victim. “I don’t know. I’m freaking out.”<sup>33</sup> Alix placed her elbows at her knees, “I’ve been terrible to her. She’s so good and she’s so on time... Briar adores her and I feel like I’m gonna lose her because of some stupid fucking grocery store cop.”<sup>34</sup> Alix completely turns the situation and makes it about herself. Alix attempts to comfort and convince herself that she is not racist. Ironically however, we find altogether the opposite Alix in chapter six as the author describes her:

There were moments like this that Alix tried to breeze over, but they got stuck somewhere between her heart and ears. She knew Emira had gone to college. She knew Emira had majored in English. But sometimes, after seeing her paused songs with titles like ‘Dope Bitch’ and ‘Y’all Already Know,’ and then hearing her use words like *connoisseur*, Alix was filled with feelings that went from confused and highly impressed to low and guilty in response to the first reaction. There was no reason for Emira to be unfamiliar with this word. And there was no reason for Alix to be impressed. Alix completely knew these things, but only when she reminded herself to stop thinking them in the first place.<sup>35</sup>

According to Hill Collins, oppression is viewed and experienced differently, as people do not seem to recognize that their thoughts impact the subordination of people<sup>36</sup> Alix is aware that she is racist and tries not to be, but she is unaware that her trying hard method actually does the opposite effect and provides awkwardness to her relationship with her babysitter. As she offers wine to Emira, Alix attempts to make herself “relatable” to Emira “Well, I used to be a boxed wine fan myself,” Alix said, “but you know I didn’t buy this, right?”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, this is another problem with Alix’s obsession to befriend Emira, she always tried to show her that she was not as privileged as Emira thought, which makes her seem ever more privileged. Back to Kelley in chapter seven, where, he is now in a relationship with Emira. As they are watching television in his apartment, he feels comfortable enough to say the N word in front of her:

Mom, why is Moesha nigger shit? Under the mariachi music that suddenly seemed quite loud, Emira’s eyes went wide and her mouth

twisted as if she'd found a hair in her food. Kelley went on. "My mom was like, 'What?' And my brother goes, 'Michael's dad told me to turn it off because...'" Well, I'm not gonna repeat it, but he obviously had no idea what that meant. But I was older, so I did. And I saw this kid's dad all the time. And I was like, Holy shit. You're a bad man, Michael's dad. I'm looking at evil when I see you at school.<sup>38</sup>

This was a typical attempt to demonstrate how "woke" he is and feels comfortable to talk about racial problems. However, Emira did not like it but still did not mention it; it made her uncomfortable because she felt as if he had no right to do so, however, Emira's silence stems from Kelley's persistence in everything and she tried to avoid it.

In chapter eleven, before Thanksgiving, Alix learns through Emira's phone that her flight is canceled and she cannot meet her family. Alix then asks Emira to check if her flight is canceled as she already secretly knew "Was this cruel? Trying to win a best supporting Oscar as she waited for Emira to learn her flight was canceled? Who cared, she'd make up for it anyway. The realization that Emira could have a seat at their Thanksgiving table made Alix practically high."<sup>39</sup> Yet, in the thirteenth chapter, we learn that it was not of pure hospitality that Alix invited her sitter "the fact she'd lain in bed the night before and been as pleased as she counted in her head how many African American guests would be present at her Thanksgiving table. This number had totaled to five."<sup>40</sup> Alix's white saviourist complex kicked in as she wants to feel better by the fact that she, a white woman, has black people in her table. She did all this in order not to appear racist and more importantly to ease herself. In reality, she did not care about Emira's feelings about the flight nor did she care about her guests, yet she cared about how she appeared to them. The whole situation creates an ambiguous relationship with Emira who only seeks professional relationship with her boss.

The interpersonal domain of power does not deal only with external relationships; it is also based on the feelings, thoughts and reactions within the self. Emira is self aware of herself and what happens around her. In the first chapter, she was afraid that something awful

might happen to her, yet she did not show or react it until she went home and cried. She knows that black women cannot fully defend themselves and that they cannot be vulnerable around others. Throughout the whole novel, she was aware of the events surrounding her but she stayed silent accepting that this is how things are made in white supremacist society.

When she was offered advice from either Kelley or Alix, she was already aware of the advice as it was given many times over:

Okay, first of all?" Emira turned to him. She threw her coat over her arm and held it close. "You don't get to tell me where I should and shouldn't work. You literally have a cafeteria in your office. You wear T-shirts to work. And you have a doorman, Kelley, okay? So you can one thousand percent go fuck yourself. The fact that you think you're better than A-leeks or Alex or whatever is a joke. You will never have to even consider working somewhere that requires a uniform, so you can chill the fuck out about how I choose to make my living. And second of all? You were so fucking rude in there! At a Thanksgiving dinner!"<sup>41</sup>

She added:

Like . . . I get it," Emira said. "You have a weirdly large amount of black friends, you saw Kendrick Lamar in concert, and now you have a black girlfriend . . . great. But I need you to get that like . . . being angry and yelling in a store means something different for me than it would for you, even though I was in the right. And I get that you wanna stick it to Mrs. Chamberlain or whatever to avenge your high school friend, but her life wouldn't change at all. Mine would. And I don't want anyone seeing it, especially as I start to look for a job."<sup>42</sup>

In these quotes we find proof of Emira's awareness of her situation but she does not do anything to change it. She knows that things do not change so easily and she feels helpless as a black woman. It was only after being separated from the persons who tried all their best to have control over her that her life seemed to take a toll to the better. At the end of the novel, we learn that Emira feel better when she quit Alix and Kelley. Her personal and professional life started to be important as getting consciousness of her own self far from Alix's and Kelley's control. Thus, it is this advice that Patricia Hill Collins draws in her book as far as black Americans are concerned particularly black women. It is also the lesson we learn from

Kelley Reid's **Such a Fun Age** as it perfectly embodies the matrix of domination to which Emira was initially thrown before getting totally out of it and thus looks for a better future.

All in all, the “matrix of domination” is a vicious vortex that implanted itself in the American society, as the “structural domain of power” shapes racism, the “disciplinary domain of power” regulates racism, the “hegemonic domain of power” excuses racism and the “interpersonal domain of power” puts everything into action in the interactive society.

**End Notes:**

- <sup>1</sup>Blackfeminisms.com. 2019. *The Matrix of Domination and the Four Domains of Power*.  
[Online] Available at: <<https://blackfeminisms.com/matrix/>> [Accessed 10 September 2021].
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid; 277
- <sup>3</sup> Kiley Reid,2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam’s sons. p02
- <sup>4</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 2000.*Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and thePolitics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. p 277
- <sup>5</sup>Kiley Reid,2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam’s sons. p03
- <sup>6</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 2000.*Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and thePolitics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. p 277
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid
- <sup>8</sup>Kiley Reid,2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam’s sons. p94
- <sup>9</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 2000.*Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and thePolitics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. p 280
- <sup>10</sup> Kiley Reid,2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam’s sons. p108
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid; 08
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid; 114
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid; 130
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid; 164
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid; 186
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid; 22
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid; 08
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid; 09
- <sup>20</sup>Patricia, Hill Collins.2000.*Intersecting Oppression*. <http://www.sagepub.com> ( accessed on

September 15<sup>th</sup> 2021).

<sup>21</sup> Kiley Reid, 2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam's sons. p22

<sup>22</sup> Ibid; 49

<sup>23</sup> Ibid;

<sup>24</sup> Ibid; 50

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid; 140

<sup>27</sup> Ibid;

<sup>28</sup> Ibid; 184

<sup>29</sup> Ibid; 186

<sup>30</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 2000. *Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. p 285

<sup>31</sup> Kiley Reid, 2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam's sons. p31

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 2000. *Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. p 285

<sup>33</sup> Kiley Reid, 2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam's sons. p31

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid ; 57

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 2000. *Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. p 287

<sup>37</sup> Kiley Reid, 2019. *Such a Fun Age*. New York: G.P Putnam's sons. p57

<sup>38</sup> Ibid; 67

<sup>39</sup> Ibid; 105

<sup>40</sup> Ibid; 115

<sup>41</sup>Ibid ; 138

<sup>42</sup>Ibid

## V. General Conclusion:

Throughout our close reading of Kiley Reid's **Such a Fun Age** within the lens documented by Patricia Hill Collins's of Black Feminism and critical race theory, we have come to the conclusion that in the aforementioned novel, the author describes a world where black people, mainly women are not considered as integral members of the post-modern American society, although they played a major role in building up the American nation. In other words, all along our analysis of **Such a Fun Age** from the "outsider within" concept to the "matrix of domination" as developed by Collins, we may say that Afro-American women are excluded and marginalized within the patriarchal white supremacist American society. This marginalization stems from the deeply rooted American structure known as "systemic racism". Both of the previously mentioned concepts complete each other as the "matrix of domination" is the reason that black women find themselves objectified and thus become outsiders within their own communities, because of the oppressive and racist strains which still exist in today's America despite the many advances which have been made as far as race, class and gender are concerned.

In her novel, Kiley Reid claims that black Americans are usually mistreated and oppressed, as they are often seen as strangers and outsiders in the modern American society. Even though all the sociological and cultural advances/evolutions that the American society had experienced throughout times from its foundation pretending to overcome issues of gender, color and class, yet, racism, gender differentiation and violence of all forms against black women still persist.

Moreover, in writing **Such a Fun Age**, Kiley Reid aims to show the degree of the marginalization/objectification of black women through her female protagonist Emira Tucker, who stands as a representative figure of post-modern American "systematic racism". This

resulted of course from the specific historical context of gender, race and unequal social position in front of the white dominant society epitomized by the Chamberlain's white family.

In the first chapter, we contended that Reid's novel sheds light to the social role of black Americans women, whose principal preoccupation was to undermine this kind of social racism and unequal injustice. Kiley Reid had made of her protagonist a representation of many black women who succeeded to move from the "margins to the centre". After reconsidering their own "outsider within" status, black people, especially women turn to their own self-definition and self-valuation, which led them to value their life and their culture. We have also deduced that Emira was the perfect representation of black woman whose quest for selfhood led her first to accept her initial outside status, before reaching at the end her own self valuation. This had been shown for instance when Emira felt as an "outsider within" her employers, while she was doing menial works for them, or with her own friends and her intimate relationship with her boyfriend.

In the second chapter of our discussion, we noticed that the oppression of minorities stems from years of hatred and bigotry which created a system that Patricia Hill Collins refers to as "the matrix of domination". The matrix itself gathers four domains of power that sometimes nourish and support the American racial oppression of Black people, particularly black women. After reading the novel carefully, we noticed the strong presence of "the matrix of domination" throughout the events that occur to Emira Tucker. The white supremacist American society relies on this matrix to maintain and obtain power over minorities such as black women.

First, through "the structural domain of power" we deduced that the U.S social order is based on social categorization which works through race, gender and class. To make evidence, the protagonist Emira represents all of them as she is a Black low-middle class woman. Also known as systemic racism, "the structural domain of power" has a deep impact on the quality

of life, indeed, based on race, gender, class and position in social structures such as education, healthcare, job and housing.

Then we noticed that “the disciplinary domain of power” is basically a helping hand which thrives with legal laws and with impunity. In this “disciplinary domain of power”, we find Emira facing more regulations and laws than a “normal” U.S citizen due to her skin color. This mindset is fortified by “the hegemonic domain of power” that allows racist behaviors and normalizes them. The American society portrays black people as thugs, ghetto and savage through its media. However, as seen in Emira’s interview about her video, black people are also used as a profit to white people so they can be the hero to the black victims; in other words, white saviorism.

As far as the “the interpersonal domain of power” is concerned, we say that it gathered all the three over mentioned domains of power. This is seen mainly through Emira’s facing all forms of powers which rendered her helpless as she knows that the whole society she lives in is constructed on “the matrix of domination”.

Finally, we may say that since research is an unfinished art, and as in all pieces of research, the latitude of this memoire did not allow us to analyze and explore all of the issues developed in the Kiley Reid’s novel, it remains the task of other researchers to probe and scrutinize deeper into the novel in order to complete it further through studying for instance the rhetorical image of black women and Black women and motherhood. Other researchers can explore also a theory of black women vs. white women’s feminism which we think might be an interesting issue.

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