

Racial Discrimination and Matrix of Oppression: A Critical Race Analysis of *Wahala* by Nikki May

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Abstract

This study conducts a critical race analysis of Nikki May's novel *Wahala* (2022), employing Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a foundational framework. It aims to unravel the interplay between race, gender, and power dynamics within the narrative. Additionally, the study incorporates Collins' (1990) Matrix of Oppression from her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* to deepen the exploration of intersecting systems of oppression. Through textual analysis method, this study explores how race shapes the identities, interactions, and experiences of discrimination among the characters. It engages with CRT's fundamental tenets, such as the ordinary nature of racism and interest convergence, to identify subtle yet pervasive instances of racial discrimination embedded within the characters' lives. Furthermore, it investigates the intersections of race and gender, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by mixed-race women within the narrative. The findings reveal the profound impact of racial discrimination on the characters' lives, relationships, and self-perception, emphasizing the interconnectedness of race and gender in fostering systems of oppression. To sum up, this research seeks to raise awareness, encourage meaningful conversations, and advocates for the dismantling of oppressive systems to promote social justice.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, Identity, Mixed-Race, Matrix of Oppression, Racial Discrimination

1. Introduction

British-Black English literature, arising from the experiences of the African diaspora, is a diverse tradition characterized by a fusion of African oral traditions with the English language. It delves into themes of identity,

resistance, and resilience. Writers in this tradition utilize a unique linguistic style, incorporating elements of African languages and vernacular expressions, providing a powerful voice to the marginalized. Addressing racism, colonialism, and the pursuit of freedom and equality, this literature explores the complex African diasporic experience. Moreover, it serves as a poignant testament to the enduring impact of racial discrimination intricately interwoven with the matrix of oppression. Through literary works, writers navigate the intersections of race, class, gender, and identity within this matrix. Themes of racial discrimination depict the systemic barriers faced by British-Black individuals, capturing the raw realities of oppression. Literature becomes a powerful tool for resistance and empowerment, offering a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted struggles endured by marginalized communities. By addressing the matrix of oppression, British-Black English literature fosters a collective consciousness that transcends borders, speaking to the universal quest for justice and equality.

Born in Bristol and raised in Lagos, Nikki May, an Anglo-Nigerian author, brings a unique perspective to *Wahala*. *Wahala* published in 2022 is being adapted into a major BBC TV drama. In Nigerian culture, the term *Wahala* denotes trouble or turmoil, embodied by Isobel in May's (2022) novel. Set within a close-knit circle of Anglo-Nigerian friends, the narrative offers a rich sensory experience, in a vivid world of sounds, colors, tastes, and aromas. The protagonists- Ronke, Boo, and Simi - navigate the complexities of relationships, familial tensions, and career challenges. Isobel's arrival disrupts their lives, exacerbating vulnerabilities, unveiling secrets, and shaking the foundations of their friendships. *Wahala* (2022) skillfully captures the Nigerian diaspora experience in London, integrating colloquialisms and portraying everyday encounters with racism and clashes of culture. The shared experience of growing up as mixed-race individuals in Nigeria and England strengthens the bond between the characters. For readers seeking an immersive literary journey, *Wahala* (2022) unfolds as a tale of friendships under strain, past events resurfacing, and a collective confrontation of challenges.

The narrative, offering intimate insights into each character, presents candid portrayals of flawed individuals within a story of female friendships. As readers delve into the story, they find themselves rooting for the characters, experiencing moments of frustration, and sharing in their laughter. Analyzing *Wahala* (2022) through Critical Race Theory and its allied notions regarding the matrix of oppression and its four domains of power, the study contributes to discussions on the evolving roles of women, interracial relationships, and the complex dynamics of multicultural identity. This research focuses exclusively on the novel *Wahala* (2022) specifically on the four female characters. It employs CRT to qualitatively analyze the text, exploring the themes of racism and gender discrimination.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To explore the dynamics of race and gender as presented in in *Wahala* (2022).
- To highlight the impact of racial discrimination on the lives of mixed-race people in *Wahala* (2022).

1.2 Research Questions

- How does the dynamics of race and gender intersect in *Wahala* (2022)?
- How is a matrix of oppression operated in *Wahala* to create a complex web of systematic barriers and discrimination for mixed-race people ?

2. Literature Review

The evolution of Black British literature is intertwined with pivotal historical moments, showcasing a tapestry of resilience and cultural evolution. Allison (1791) delves into the roots of Black British literature, tracing it back to the 16th and 17th centuries when African slaves were first brought to Britain during the transatlantic trade. Notable works from this era, such as Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), serve as foundational pieces in early African American literature, shedding light on the harsh realities of slavery and racial discrimination. The 19th century marked a pivotal period for Black British Literature, coinciding with the abolition of slavery in the British Empire and the expansion of the colonial empire in Africa and the Caribbean. Literary figures like Samuel Coleridge, Mary Seacole, Marcus Garvey, and Edward Wilmot Blyden made significant contributions, challenging dominant narratives and establishing Black British Literature as a distinct and influential genre. The 20th century witnessed the Harlem Renaissance's impact on Black British Literature, fostering a vibrant and diverse literary community. The Windrush Generation, comprising West Indian immigrants post-World War II, added rich cultural perspectives. Works like C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938), George Lamming's *in the Castle of My Skin* (1953), and Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) portrayed the complexities of identity, community, and colonialism.

Collins (1990) introduced the concept of The Matrix of Oppression which is central to understanding the interconnected systems of oppression in Black British Literature. This matrix creates a complex web of systemic barriers and discrimination that Black individuals navigate and resist. Collins delves into the intricate intersections of race, gender, and class. Collins emphasizes the autonomy of African American women and the transformative power of knowledge within Afrocentric feminist ideology.

Ratansi (2000) focuses on the intricate sociocultural forces that have orchestrated significant shifts in ethnic identities within Britain, emphasizing the destabilizing currents that impact hybrid identities like

Black British and British Asian. These hybrid identities are discerned to be persistently ensnared within an intricate web of destabilizing currents, a phenomenon that the study thoroughly examines.

Lloyd (2007) explains Butler's contributions to the realm of gender politics, post-feminist, and queer studies that have been widely regarded as groundbreaking and innovative. The inclusion of the phrase thus, it is argued is proposed to be valuable in social work practice and education, especially when considering the impact of structure on the individual. Specific concepts from Butler's works, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), have been selected to analyze the marginalized female experience within contemporary society. Within Butler's influential texts, the discussion revolves around gender identity and its association with performativity under regulatory discourse. Additionally, the texts delve into the formation of intelligible subjects under the heterosexual matrix and the masculine signifying economy. Moreover, Butler's concept of subversion imparts critical ideas concerning contesting oppressive structures and honoring the diversity, dignity, and worth of each person within society; principles that align with social work values. It is further suggested that Butler's concepts offer innovative perspectives on enduring issues in social work practice, including (1) advocating for social justice, (2) recognizing the power of discourse in shaping oppression and exclusion, and (3) acknowledging and embracing diversity.

Hough and Amie Marie (2010) opine that traditional notions of female adolescent development assume identity formation as a central issue that is achieved or solidified to reach a psycho-developmental milestone. While identity is traditionally theorized as being agentic, the concept of identity itself remains in contention as it does not capture the fluidity of the interaction between the person and their environment, particularly if the environment is oppressive and exclusive. Consequently, this paper suggests how social work can incorporate innovative critical and post-structural theory when analyzing the marginalized female adolescent, by introducing Judith Butler as a new voice for social work, whose work on gender identity the feminist critique has been argued to be some of the most important advancements in the area of feminist and political studies in the twentieth century.

Azab (2011) delves into the utilization of exploratory factor analysis for formulating a numerical depiction of Collins' matrix of domination. As per Collins (1990), the contemporary American matrix of domination comprises interconnected frameworks of subjugation, encompassing race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, disability, and age. Utilizing exploratory factor analysis, a matrix of domination scale was developed in the study. An online survey (n=448) was launched through the social network Facebook to gather data. The findings from the factor

analysis revealed that the constructed matrix of domination accurately represents the current social hierarchy in the United States. Furthermore, it was observed that the constructed matrix of domination effectively predicted the likelihood of experiencing domestic abuse, aligning with available statistics on the subject.

Dupuis (2016) challenges prevailing paradigms by conceptualizing the state as an active participant in systems of domination. This perspective prompts a reconsideration of established notions, inviting contemplation of the complex interactions between the state and other systems of dominance.

Tau (2023) highlights the unique challenges encountered by Women of Color leaders within the context of non-profit organizational structures, depicting their role as the Outsider within. Regardless of years of experience or education, leaders experience barriers to their thriving that have nothing to do with their ability to do the job. This qualitative dissertation argues that nonprofits are contested spaces where Black and brown women innovate to resist the institutional manifestations of the matrix of oppression. The research methodology included in-depth interviews with nine women of color who were deeply committed to social justice work and community impact. Seven of the nine women interviewed were or had been executive directors at large and mid-size national organizations. Their narratives provided a vivid picture of the challenges and resistance strategies that characterized their professional life and provided the data to expand existing feminist, critical race, and organizational studies theory.

The exploration of Black British literature transcends mere literary discourse; it encapsulates an intricate tapestry of history, cultural evolution, and societal struggles. From the early roots intertwined with the harsh realities of slavery to the 20th-century literary explosion, it has evolved into a vibrant and diverse genre. Collins (1990) conceptualization of the matrix of oppression remains a central theme, elucidating the systemic barriers faced by Black individuals. Authors and scholars continue to dissect and delve into this matrix, highlighting the intersections of race, gender, and class, presenting a profound perspective on societal complexities. Ultimately, the continuum of Black British literature is not only a testament to cultural resilience but also a poignant mirror reflecting societal struggles, resilience, and the ongoing quest for equality and justice amidst adversity and systemic oppression.

3. Theoretical Framework

The exploration of societal structures, especially in the context of *Wahala* (2022) reveals intricate webs of racial and gender-based oppression. This examination is framed within the theoretical paradigms of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Matrix of Oppression, both indispensable tools that elucidate the interlocking systems of discrimination and inequity. The Matrix of Oppression, introduced by sociologist Collins in her book *Black*

Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment (1990) is a framework that analyzes interlocking systems of oppression, including race, gender, class, and other social categories. The matrix is organized through four interrelated domains of power:

1. **Structural Domain:** This domain organizes oppression through large-scale social institutions, such as law, polity, religion, and the economy. It shapes the subordination of marginalized groups, like Black women, who have historically faced barriers to voting and other rights
2. **Disciplinary Domain:** This domain manages oppression through the organizational practices of social institutions, such as policies and rulings. It controls certain sub-populations and shapes power relations.
3. **Hegemonic Domain:** This domain justifies the practices of dominant groups through ideology, culture, and consciousness. It normalizes ideas that support the position of the dominant group, often leading to the endorsement of these ideas by members of subordinated groups.
4. **Interpersonal Domain:** This domain affects all of us in everyday life through routinized practices of interaction. It perpetuates the subordination of others and requires conscious actions to change everyday relationships.

Collins' theory emphasizes the interdependence of these domains and the importance of understanding how they interact to create and maintain systems of oppression. The matrix also highlights the complexity of oppression, as individuals can be both oppressed and oppressors, depending on the context. "Oppression is filled with such contradictions because these approaches fail to recognize that a matrix of Oppression contains few pure victims or oppressors" (Collins, 1990, p. 287)

Collins' theoretical framework underscores the interconnected and interlocking nature of these oppressive systems, challenging simplistic victim-oppressor dichotomies. Rather, she posits that individuals may simultaneously occupy roles of both oppressed and oppressor, contingent upon the context and their positioning within the matrix of oppression. The present study aims to delve into the mechanisms through which race and gender intersect to create systems of oppression within *Wahala* (2022). CRT, with its foundational premise that racism is not merely individual prejudice but is structurally embedded in societal institutions, provides a lens to dissect these systems. It asserts that racial hierarchies are not accidental but deeply ingrained within societal structures, perpetuating unequal power dynamics.

5. Textual Analysis

Wahala (2022) by Nikki May is a novel set in London that intricately weaves the lives of three Anglo-Nigerian women: Ronke, Boo, and Simi. The narrative explores the multifaceted dimensions of modern city living, shedding light on women's evolving roles in both domestic and professional spheres. The characters, Ronke, a successful dentist in a complex

relationship with Kayode; Boo, a married woman longing for excitement amid her domestic routine; and Simi, grappling with imposter syndrome and secrets in her long-distance relationship with Martin, form a close-knit group. The story introduces Isobel, a wealthy childhood friend of Simi, whose presence initially adds excitement and encouragement to the trio's friendship. However, as the plot unfolds, Isobel's manipulative nature is revealed, causing turbulence in the lives of Ronke, Boo, and Simi. The novel skillfully navigates themes of friendship, toxic relationships, love, and second chances. Set against the backdrop of contemporary urban life in London, the novel incorporates cultural elements, including references to Nigerian cuisine, language, and connections to Lagos, Nigeria. These elements enrich the narrative, offering a vivid portrayal of the characters' experiences, challenges, and relationships. Overall, *Wahala* (2022) delves into the complexities of female friendship, illustrating how intimacy can transform into enmity. The dark side of these relationships is explored with depth and nuance, making the novel a compelling and textured exploration of the lives of these three women in the dynamic setting of London.

4.1 Intersecting Dynamics of Race and Gender in *Wahala*

The complexities of societal dynamics encompass the intricate interplay of various elements within a community, ranging from cultural norms, power structures, and institutional systems to individual beliefs, identities, and interactions. These dynamics are multifaceted, shaped by historical legacies, social constructions, and ongoing shifts influenced by evolving ideologies. Within the intricate web of societal structures, the intersectionality of racial discrimination and gender oppression manifests in a stark portrayal. This is exemplified when Ronke thinks to withdraw money from cashpoint on her way to restaurant, but she is afraid of her card being cloned as she heard a story a card which was cloned at Buka, so she wants to pay in cash. "She stopped at the cashpoint anyway and withdrew a hundred pounds. The girls teased her, told her it was an urban myth, but ever since Ronke had heard the story about Simi's cousin's friend getting her card cloned at Buka, she'd paid in cash" (May, 2022, p. 1)

Ronke's precautionary measure suggests a level of mistrust or concern related to her financial transactions, which may be influenced by broader societal perceptions or experiences of discrimination. Societal structures also contribute to the marginalization and discrimination of individuals based on their mixed-race identity. Ronke's decision to withdraw cash reflects the influence of structural issues in the financial system, adherence to disciplinary measures, and the impact of hegemonic cultural narratives. The interpersonal domain, manifested through teasing and cautionary tales, underscores the complexity of individual choices within the broader framework of interconnected systems of oppression. Similarly, these individuals from mixed races often face linguistic discrimination in social settings. Isobel and Simi are talking about the initial days of their

acquaintance when they were known as half caste kids in the school. “Ronke laughed in spite of herself. ‘How do you two know each other?’ ‘We met when we were five,’ said Simi. ‘The only half-caste kids in our class’” (May, 2022, p. 3)

The use of racially insensitive language like *half-caste* reflects the deep-rooted racial discrimination that women of color may encounter, both within and outside their communities. The term *half-caste* reflects a structural issue related to the categorization of individuals based on racial background. Context of discussing racial terms hints at the interpersonal challenge women of color or people of mixed-race identity face in their daily lives. The experience of being the *only half-caste kids* in the class exposes potential structural issues in the educational system, questioning representation and inclusivity. This categorization implies disciplinary aspects in how mixed-race individuals are perceived, shaped by educational policies. The use of *half-caste* reflects hegemonic cultural norms, normalizing ideas about racial purity, while Simi and the speaker's early bond underscores the interpersonal need for companionship amid potential social isolation, aligning with Collins' (1990) Matrix of Oppression.

Race and gender, as intricate and intersecting social constructs, play a pivotal role in shaping systems of oppression within the novel *Wahala* (2022). Here it is aimed to delve deep into the exploration of the reasons behind the formation of this system, shedding light on the complex dynamics between race, gender, and oppression. Through a critical analysis of the text, it is being investigated how race and gender intertwine; creating a matrix of oppression that permeates the lives of the characters. This analysis examines key moments, character relationships, and societal structures, underlying mechanisms and ideologies that contribute to the perpetuation of racial discrimination and gender-based oppression in *Wahala* (2022). “Urban was her way of saying black. Simi had downed her champagne through gritted teeth. She wanted to win because she was good – smart, creative, persuasive – not because she was black” (May, 2022, p. 67). These lines reflect an important aspect of racial discrimination and the impact it has on the protagonist, Simi. These particular lines highlight Simi's experience of racial discrimination and the use of coded language to convey racist attitudes. The phrase *Urban was her way of saying black* suggests that someone, presumably another character in the novel, uses the term urban as a euphemism for black. This usage implies that the person is attempting to avoid directly acknowledging Simi's racial identity or making racially biased judgments. Simi's reaction to this statement is significant. She drinks her champagne through gritted teeth, indicating her discomfort and frustration with the racial implications behind the remark. Simi wants to be acknowledged and recognized for her personal merits, such as being intelligent, creative, and persuasive, rather than being reduced to her race. Simi's discomfort with the term *urban* reflects hegemonic cultural norms

reinforcing racial distinctions. Her desire to be recognized for merit over racial identity raises concerns about structural issues in competitive settings, questioning institutional influences. Simi's interpersonal struggle against racial categorization emphasizes the need to overcome stereotypes for recognition. Her rejection of winning based on race challenges disciplinary norms, advocating for acknowledgment based on individual abilities within Collins' (1990) Matrix of Oppression.

Moreover, this line underscores the complexity of racial discrimination, as it demonstrates how individuals may try to mask their biases through subtle language choices. It also highlights Simi's desire to be valued based on her individual abilities and achievements, rather than being defined solely by her racial identity. Overall, this analysis sheds light on the racial dynamics presents in the novel and the challenges faced by mixed-race individuals like Simi, who must navigate both racial discrimination and the need to assert their personal worth beyond stereotypes and biases.

“He won’t marry you, Ronke. Girls like us are for messing around with. Not for keeps” (May, 2022, p. 288). This excerpt from *Wahala* involves a conversation between Isobel and Ronke. Here, Isobel reveals to Ronke that she had a previous romantic involvement with Kayode, and there are unsettling aspects to his behavior. Isobel suggests that Kayode may not be sincere in his intentions with Ronke, sharing her own experiences of being romantically involved with him. The conversation takes a dramatic turn when Isobel discloses her encounter with Kayode's family, particularly his mother, who holds prejudiced and spiteful views. According to Isobel, Kayode's mother disapproved of their relationship due to racial prejudices, expressing the belief that mixed-race girls are not suitable for marriage. Isobel's warning to Ronke is rooted in her personal experience of a failed relationship with Kayode, influenced by the oppressive attitudes and biases within Kayode's family. The text touches upon themes of racial prejudice and the impact of societal expectations on personal relationships. Collins (1990) also endorses the systemic biases and discriminatory attitudes, in this case, based on race, can affect individuals' lives and relationships. Racism and sexism intersect and compound each other, influencing people's experiences and opportunities. In this context, the character Isobel faces discrimination not only for her romantic choices but also due to her racial identity. These lines highlight how hegemonic cultural norms perpetuate stereotypes, diminishing the value of women of color in romantic relationships. Structural issues in societal expectations limit opportunities for long-term partnerships, reinforcing systemic inequalities. The devaluation of women of color in interpersonal dynamics fosters a sense of disposability, challenging disciplinary norms and emphasizing the need to resist and restructure societal expectations for equal treatment in relationships and marriage.

The statement implies a discriminatory or prejudiced perspective regarding certain individuals, including Ronke and possibly others who share a similar background or characteristics. The phrase *Girls like us* indicates that the speaker sees themselves and Ronke as belonging to a specific group, which could be based on race, social status, or other shared attributes. The speaker suggests that individuals within this group are only suitable for casual relationships or *messing around*, implying a lack of serious commitment or long-term intentions. The statement carries a tone of resignation and acceptance as if the speaker believes that this is the prevailing view or expectation for individuals like Ronke. It reflects a discriminatory perspective that limits the potential for meaningful, committed relationships based on preconceived notions or biases. This passage sheds light on the experiences of individuals who may face prejudice or limited prospects for long-term commitment based on societal perceptions. It raises themes of racial or social discrimination and the challenges faced by individuals in finding authentic love and acceptance.

Overall, this analysis underscores the discriminatory views presented within the novel, highlighting the character's encounter with prejudice and the potential impact it may have on their relationships and self-perception. It contributes to the exploration of racial discrimination and the effects of societal expectations on personal lives and aspirations.

4.2 Racial Discrimination in *Wahala*

The novel *Wahala* (2022) addresses the issue of racial discrimination, shedding light on the systemic challenges faced by the characters. Through the author's portrayal, the book offers a perspective on the impact of discrimination on individuals and communities, contributing to a broader conversation about race relations and social justice. The narrative delves into the complexities of racial discrimination, inviting readers to reflect on its implications and the potential for change. Simi, the protagonist in the text, reflects her experiences with racial identity and discrimination. Simi, a mixed-race individual, navigates the complexities of her identity in both Nigeria and the UK. "After all, yellow girls were the hottest, prettiest and richest. Except if you were one of those people who thought they were diluted, wild, immoral or downright wrong" (May, 2022, p. 27). The lines reflect harmful stereotypes and racial discrimination against women of color, particularly those of Asian or mixed-race descent. These lines perpetuate the objectification and exoticization of women based on their race, contributing to the oppression faced by women of color. Sociologist Collins' concept of the matrix of domination and oppression explains how race, class, and gender form interlocking systems of oppression, and these lines can be analyzed within this framework to understand the interconnected nature of the discrimination faced by women of color. The lines exemplify the cultural representations and stereotypes that contribute to the marginalization of

women of color within larger societal power structures. The text reinforces hegemonic beauty standards, contributing to the marginalization of women with darker skin tones within the broader cultural context as endorsed by Collins (1990) in *Matrix of Oppression*.

The text focuses on the experiences of female characters, particularly Anglo-Nigerian women, and their friendships, while also addressing cultural clashes and conflict of identities. How they have to racial discrimination in daily lives is evident from the following lines: “Typical,” said Isobel. “They hate black people. You should see them in Nigeria. There’s a Chinese restaurant in Lagos and it’s segregated. I’m not joking. There’s a separate area for Nigerians. You don’t even get the same food”(May, 2022, p. 196). Isobel describes a segregated Chinese restaurant in Lagos, revealing a pervasive issue of racial segregation indicative of institutionalized discrimination. Disciplinarily, her remark implying hatred towards black individuals suggests a potential contribution to the reinforcement of segregation based on racial identity. Interpersonally, the establishment's provision of a separate area for Nigerians and distinct food options reflects dynamics that could lead to direct and explicit discrimination against women of color, particularly Nigerian women. Hegemonically, the segregated restaurant exemplifies prevailing racial norms and power dynamics, contributing to a broader narrative of racial inequality and discrimination faced by women of color within the novel. The existence of such segregation points to systemic issues within societal structures, normalizing discriminatory practices that perpetuate racial inequalities. This underscores the challenges faced by women of color in specific settings, where physical and social separation contributes to daily interactions marked by racial discrimination. Examined through the disciplinary domain, the segregated restaurant exemplifies norms upholding racial discrimination, enforcing exclusionary practices disproportionately affecting women of color and illustrating the complex intersection of race and gender within discriminatory environments as endorsed by Collins (1990) in *Matrix of Oppression*.

Individuals from mixed race are not free from racial discrimination in professional settings, being a member with certain racial background often poses challenge for them and offers multiple layers of discrimination as is exemplified by the following lines describing Simi’s interview experience with CEO. “The interview with the CEO was toe-curlingly embarrassing for both of them. He quizzed her on media planning, fired questions at her in a language Simi didn’t speak – ROI, reach, frequency OTS, direct buy vs pragmatic buy, engagement, platform preferences, flighting, pulsing”(May, 2022, p.196).

The text portrays Simi, potentially a marginalized individual, undergoing a distressing interview experience that reveals the intricate intersection of racial discrimination and oppression in professional settings.

The discomfort, described as *toe-curlingly embarrassing*, goes beyond routine scrutiny, indicating profound humiliation linked to her racial identity. The CEO's use of unfamiliar technical jargon symbolizes a linguistic barrier, reflecting exclusion and potential efforts to disadvantage those outside the dominant culture. Simi's unease underscores power dynamics, emphasizing systemic barriers faced by individuals from marginalized racial groups in professional settings. This incident exemplifies the matrix of oppression, highlighting the need for inclusive, culturally sensitive environments and reforms to dismantle structural biases for a truly equitable workplace.

The interview scenario reflects the pervasive influence of hegemonic cultural norms within professional settings, exemplified by the CEO's quizzing of Simi in language unfamiliar to her. This perpetuates a hegemonic discourse that disadvantages those who diverge from the dominant communication style, potentially disproportionately affecting women of mixed race. The situation points to structural issues within the professional environment, indicating a structural constraint that hinders individuals, especially women of mixed race, in navigating a predominantly homogeneous corporate culture. Simi's discomfort emphasizes the interpersonal impact of racial discrimination, with the CEO's language contributing to a sense of exclusion that may affect performance. In the disciplinary domain, the CEO's language choice represents industry norms that may exclude individuals not conforming to established communication practices, contributing to the perpetuation of racial discrimination, particularly impacting women of mixed race dealing with intersecting identity challenges. Collins' (1990) Matrix of Oppression provides a lens to understand the complex interplay of hegemonic, structural, interpersonal, and disciplinary factors contributing to racial discrimination in this professional context.

Individuals from mixed race often face challenges in professional settings as they come from some specific social background. This portrays the systematic inequalities prevalent in the corporate world. Not giving due credit to someone for their achievement can be viewed as a form of suppression and discrimination, women of color in the text do face this professional discrimination "She missed having her own projects, seeing her name in byline. She resented other people getting credit for her work"(May, 2022, p. 18). Simi's yearning for recognition and frustration at not receiving credit for her work in a firm, signaling a potential experience of racial discrimination and oppression. Simi's desire to have her own projects and see her name in the byline reflects a quest for professional acknowledgment and visibility, suggesting that her contributions might be overlooked or undervalued. The resentment towards others taking credit for her work implies a systemic issue where women of color, like Simi, may face challenges in having their achievements acknowledged within the

professional sphere. Women of color face unique discrimination at the intersection of race and gender, which shortchanges them in terms of wages, job opportunities, and recognition for their work

Moreover the lines underscore the challenges women of color face in professional contexts within Collins (1990) Matrix of Oppression. The pursuit of autonomy and recognition reflects a resistance to hegemonic cultural norms that marginalize certain identities, addressing the perpetuation of racial discrimination in the workplace. The mention of missing personal projects and resentment over unequal credit distribution points to potential structural issues, highlighting systemic constraints disproportionately affecting women of color. Resentment towards others receiving credit exposes interpersonal dynamics marked by potential racial discrimination, compounding the struggle for acknowledgment. Furthermore, the desire to challenge industry norms for proper recognition represents a disciplinary aspect, emphasizing the need to dismantle biased practices hindering the equitable acknowledgment of women of color in professional spheres. Together, these aspects emphasize the multidimensional nature of racial discrimination and the call for systemic changes to ensure equity and recognition in the workplace. The struggle for recognition and the frustration at not receiving credit underscore the intersecting layers of oppression faced by women of color in the workplace. The matrix of oppression is evident as Simi navigates a system that, consciously or unconsciously, hinders her professional growth and diminishes the visibility of her accomplishments based on her social background.

5. Findings

- Ronke's cautious approach to financial transactions, influenced by the fear of her card being cloned, reflects a level of mistrust possibly shaped by broader societal experiences or perceptions of discrimination for marginalized individuals or those belong to specific social background.
- The use of racially insensitive language like *half-caste* highlights the deep-rooted racial discrimination faced by women of color, contributing to societal challenges and interpersonal dynamics. The discussion around racial terms, such as *half-caste*, emphasizes how dominant cultural forces shape perceptions of race and identity.
- Linguistic discrimination, as seen in the use of coded language like *Urban* as a euphemism for *black*, reveals the challenges faced by individuals in daily interactions. Simi's reaction to being referred to as *Urban* emphasizes the complexity of racial discrimination, where individuals may attempt to mask biases through subtle language choices. Simi desires recognition based on her personal merits rather than being

reduced solely to her racial identity, highlighting the struggle against racial stereotypes.

- Isobel's warning to Ronke about Kayode's family's racial prejudices indicates how systemic biases can affect personal relationships. The statement suggesting that girls like Ronke are only for *messing around* reflects discriminatory perspectives that limit prospects for meaningful, committed relationships based on preconceived notions or biases.
- The term *yellow girls* perpetuates harmful stereotypes, objectifying and exoticizing women of color, particularly those of Asian or mixed-race descent. This contributes to the oppression faced by women of color, reinforcing hegemonic beauty standards and marginalizing those with darker skin tones.
- Isobel's description of a segregated Chinese restaurant in Lagos reveals institutionalized racial segregation, indicating pervasive discriminatory practices. The existence of separate areas and distinct food options reinforces prevailing racial norms and contributes to a broader narrative of racial inequality faced by women of color.
- Simi's interview experience reflects the intersection of racial discrimination and oppression in professional settings. The use of unfamiliar technical jargon by the CEO symbolizes linguistic barriers, reflecting exclusion and potential efforts to disadvantage individuals outside the dominant culture.
- Simi's frustration at not receiving credit for her work highlights a systemic issue where women of color may face challenges in having their achievements acknowledged in the workplace. The struggle for recognition underscores the intersecting layers of oppression faced by women of color, indicating that their contributions may be undervalued or overlooked.

6. Conclusion

The novel *Wahala* (2022) by May provides a nuanced exploration of the far-reaching effects of racial discrimination on women of color, offering insights into the systemic hurdles they encounter in both personal and professional domains. Through the experiences of the characters, the novel delves into the detrimental impact of stereotypes and objectification, which contribute to the marginalization of women based on their race. For instance, Isobel's narrative of a segregated Chinese restaurant in Lagos serves as a poignant illustration of institutionalized discrimination, underscoring the prevalence of racial norms and the perpetuation of inequality. Furthermore, Simi's distressing encounter during a job interview highlights the intersection of racial discrimination and linguistic barriers in professional settings, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive environments. The frustration stemming from the lack of recognition for one's work also underscores the systemic undervaluation of the achievements of women of

color, reflecting the complex layers of oppression they navigate. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of race and gender, showcasing the systemic oppression faced by women of color in the novel *Wahala* (2022). Further it emphasizes the multifaceted impact of racial discrimination on women of color within the novel, showcasing how it permeates various aspects of their lives, from personal relationships to professional spheres. In essence, *Wahala* (2022) makes a significant contribution to the discourse on race relations and social justice, prompting readers to contemplate the ramifications of discrimination and the pressing need for societal transformation. The novel serves as a compelling narrative that advocates for inclusivity, fairness, and acknowledgment, urging society to dismantle structural biases and cultivate environments where the diverse experiences of women of color are recognized and esteemed.

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