Journal of Language Studies Vol.9, No.4, Part 1, 2025, Pages (213-231)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.25130/Lang.9.4.P1.12

IRAQI Academic Scientific Journals
العراقية المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية
ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)
Journal of Language Studies
Contents available at: https://jls.tu.edu.iq/index.php/JLS

Black Womanhood and Empowerment in Sonia Sanchez's Poems: An Intersectional Study

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Received: 10/06/2025, **Accepted:** 15/07/2025, **Online Published:** 30/12/2025

Abstract

Sonia Sanchez's poetry offers a powerful portrayal of the complexities and resilience of Black women in America. Her work focuses openly on themes of racism, gender, resistance, and self-empowerment. As a central figure in the Black Arts Movement, Sanchez crafts a poetic voice that is both political and personal. This study explores how her poetry embodies intersectional identity and resistance, revealing the overlapping

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systems of oppression that shape the lives of Black women—such as racism, sexism, and classism—while also celebrating their beauty, strength, and autonomy.

Keywords: Black Womanhood, Empowerment, Intersectionality, Sonia Sanchez, Feminist Poetics, Crenshaw, resistance.

الأنوثة السوداء والتمكين في قصائد سانشيز: دراسة تقاطعية

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الملخص:

يمثل شعر سونيا سانشيز تجسيدًا قويًا لتعقيد وصمود المرأة السوداء في أمريكا .يتناول عملها بشكل صريح قضايا العنصرية والنوع الاجتماعي والمقاومة وتمكين الذات .وباعتبارها صوتًا بارزًا في حركة الفنون السوداء، تخلق سانشيز صوتًا شعريًا يجمع بين البعد السياسي والبعد الشخصي .تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيف يجسد شعرها الهوية التقاطعية والمقاومة، كاشفًا عن تداخل أنظمة القمع التي تؤثر في حياة النساء السود مثل العنصرية والتمييز الجنسي والطبقية، مع الاحتفاء في الوقت ذاته بجمالهن وقوتهن واستقلاليتهن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية السوداء، التعزيز، التقاطعية، سونيا سانشيز، الشعرية السوداء، كرينشو، المقاومة.

1. Introduction

Intersectionality has emerged as a critical framework for understanding how multiple forms of oppression intersect in the lives of individuals—especially those who belong to marginalized communities. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the term initially focused on how race and gender affect Black women, but has since expanded to include class, nationality, ability, and more. This framework helps illuminate

how racism, patriarchy, and economic injustice intersect to create unique forms of marginalization.

Poetry has historically been a vehicle through which voices from marginalized groups have articulated the intricacies of their experiences. Through the use of metaphor, imagery, and rhythm, poetry has been able to describe problems that often go beyond the boundaries of normal conversation. In particular, African American women poets have used poetry not just as an artistic endeavour but also as a method of resistance and social criticism (Schenck,2016, p.145).

This is something that has never been done before. They give insight into the ways in which intersectional identities are lived, negotiated, and resisted via the work that they do, which include engaging with histories of trauma, injustice, and resilience. Sonia Sanchez is an example of poets whose work wrestles with the complex interconnections of race, gender, and historical memory. They rely on personal, cultural, and political topics in their writing. Within the context of the Black Arts Movement, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, Sonia Sanchez emerged as a prominent voice. This movement was characterised by a significant reassertion of Black cultural identity within the realm of the arts (Neal,1968, p.47).

Her poetry Is based in the realities of Black femininity, merging personal reflection with militant political engagement. Her poetry speaks to the lives of Black women. Throughout her body of work, Sanchez often brings to the forefront the challenges that African American women have in navigating both racial oppression and gendered expectations. She challenges prevailing narratives and provides voice to individuals who have been historically marginalised within both white-dominated society and male-centered Black movement. She does this by using a unique voice and inventive vernacular vocabulary. Sanchez's poetry weaves a seamless transition between the personal and the political, delving into topics such as love, death, family, and community while also delivering a pointed criticism of the injustices that are embedded in the system (Hutchinson,2002,p.2).

2.**Literature Review**

Intersectionality, a term proposed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, serves as a fundamental framework for examining the interplay of power structures that generate distinct types of oppression. Originally conceived to address the marginalisation of Black women in feminist and anti-racist movements, intersectionality has evolved to examine the interconnected and overlapping dynamics of race, gender, class and other social categories. This theoretical framework has profoundly impacted social and political theory as well as literary criticism, as experts analyse the manifestation of intersectionality in many cultural expressions, including literature and poetry. Intersectionality is fundamentally grounded in Black feminist philosophy, which existed prior to Crenshaw's explicit definition of the concept. Academics such bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Patricia Hill Collins established the foundation by highlighting the interrelation of racism, gender, and economic oppression in the experiences of Black women.

In her foundational work *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Collins examines the concept of a "matrix of domination," which denotes the interplay of race, gender, and class as interlocking systems of power that influence individuals' lived experiences. This corpus of study contests singular narratives of oppression, highlighting that the experiences of Black women cannot be comprehended only from the perspectives of race or gender. These categories are inherently interconnected, resulting in a special kind of oppression that differs from that encountered by white women or Black males.

In literary studies, Black feminist critique often examines how African American women authors articulate the intricacies of intersectional identities. Academics such as Barbara Christian and Deborah McDowell have analysed how African American women authors, via their novels, essays, and poetry, express the intersections of race and gender in ways that contest prevailing power systems. Christian's work underscores that the writing of Black women is intrinsically political, addressing personal experiences with broader societal concerns. McDowell similarly emphasises how the literary contributions of Black women challenge patriarchal and racist narratives, using innovative forms to elucidate the complexities of identity and oppression. Although early studies on intersectionality mostly concentrated on fiction and non-fiction, poetry has surfaced as a notably potent medium for examining the lived experiences of

marginalised persons. Poets often use metaphor, imagery, and symbolism to convey intricate emotional and social experiences, giving poetry a rich domain for intersectional research. Poetry, via its capacity to express complex meanings succinctly, facilitates a profound examination of the intersections of race, gender, and class in intricate and intimate ways.

In the poetry of African American women, intersectionality is often articulated via the portrayal of lived experiences influenced by intersecting systems of oppression.

Academics like Cheryl Clarke and Mae G. Henderson have analysedhow African American women poets use their craft to express individual and communal challenges. Clarke contends that Black women poets articulate their experiences from a standpoint of dual (and sometimes triple) marginalisation, highlighting the unique adversities encountered by Black women in a culture shaped by racism. Henderson's research examines how African American women's poetry often functions as a means of resistance, contesting both white dominance and patriarchal conventions.
Evie Shockley, in her critical research of African American women's poetry, examines how poets use intersectionality to challenge structural injustice. Shockley's research highlights that African American women poets engage with race and gender while also examining the interconnections of other identities, including class.Through an analysis of the literary elements used in their poetry—such as tone, voice, and structure—Shockley demonstrates how poets construct intricate tales that unveil the varied essence of identity. This study emphasises the significance of poetry in cultivating a profound understanding of the experiences of oppression at the crossroads of several identities.

Sonia Sanchez, a pivotal player in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, is acknowledged as one of the foremost African American women poets whose oeuvre profoundly explores issues of intersectionality. The Black Arts Movement, along with the political endeavours of the Black Power Movement, emphasised the need of producing art that directly reflected the reality of African Americans, contesting white-centric cultural narratives. Sanchez's poetry exemplifies how art serves as a medium of

resistance and empowerment for marginalised communities, characterised by incisive political critique and profound emotional resonance.

Sanchez's oeuvre often focusses on the lives of Black women, contending with the overlapping oppressions of racism. Academics like Aldon Nielsen and Claudia Tate have examined how Sanchez's poetry exposes white racism and patriarchy, using the voice of Black women to contest these power structures. Nielsen's analysis emphasises Sanchez's inventive linguistic approach, notably her integration of African American vernacular and jazz rhythms, which create a unique voice that reflects the realities of marginalised populations. Tate's research emphasises the emotional and spiritual aspects of Sanchez's poetry, exploring how her work articulates the perseverance of Black women against systematic injustice.

Sonia Sanchez's poetry often engages with contemporary political issues. Her poetry highlights the often-neglected narratives of African Americans, especially women, whose experiences are characterised by both individual and communal suffering. Sanchez examines intersectionality from distinct perspectives and Sanchez focusing on the urgency of contemporary politics explores the interconnections of race, gender, and class in their writings. Comparative assessments of their poetry elucidate both the variety and the similarities in the approaches of African American women poets to the idea of intersectionality.

Scholars like Valerie Lee and Trudier Harris have examined the importance of African American women poets throughout centuries, highlighting that despite varying historical settings, these poets collectively strive to articulate the intricacies of identity. Lee's comparative research of Black women poets underscores how authors such as Sanchez addresses various facets of intersectionality, with Sanchez emphasising the political and socioeconomic challenges of Black femininity. Harris observes that African American women poets are often unified by a common objective of addressing interconnected systems of oppression, despite their differing methodologies and concerns.

3.**Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This study employs qualitative literary analysis to examine how intersectionality is represented in Sonia Sanchez's poetry. Poems were selected for their engagement with themes of race, gender, class, and historical memory, particularly from the Black Arts Movement era. Through close reading, the study analyzes Sanchez's use of language, tone, imagery, and structure to reveal the lived experience of intersecting oppressions. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides the primary theoretical lens.

A thorough analysis of the chosen poems will be performed to discern and elucidate the themes of intersectional oppression. This method entails examining the language, tone, imagery, and structure of the poems to reveal how Sanchez articulates the intersections of race, gender, class, and other identities. Thematic analysis will examine how the poet uses her work to expose the interconnectedness of oppressive institutions and how she expresses both individual and communal experiences of marginalisation. Focus will be directed towards the utilisation of symbolism, metaphor, rhythm, voice, and other formal components that convey the poet's lived experiences and societal concerns. This examination will examine how the distinct styles of the poet enhance her depiction of intersecting identity. This research will use the concept of Intersectionality coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw.

4. Discussion

Sonia Sanchez's poetry is a powerful articulation of Black womanhood, consistently portraying Black women not as peripheral figures but as central agents of cultural memory, resistance, and transformation. Her representations of Black womanhood go beyond surface-level affirmations; they delve into the psychological, historical, and spiritual dimensions of identity. Empowerment in Sanchez's work is not static or symbolic—it is earned, embodied, and often fought for within complex landscapes of racism, sexism, and class struggle.

In many of her poems, Sanchez foregrounds the lived realities of Black women as both a site of pain and a wellspring of power. Her collection *I've Been a Woman* (1978) is perhaps the clearest poetic manifesto of this theme. In the titular poem, she writes:

"I have been woman

for a long time

beware my smile

I am treacherous with old magic." (Sanchez, 1978, p. 34)

These lines encapsulate the duality of Black female identity as both nurturing and dangerous to systems of oppression. The "old magic" speaks to ancestral knowledge, cultural inheritance, and the mystical strength passed down through generations of Black women. Sanchez reclaims the figure of the Black woman not merely as a victim of history but as a bearer of transformative potential.

Motherhood also emerges in Sanchez's poetry not just as a biological role, but as a political and spiritual function. In poems such as "To Anita," Sanchez addresses the traumas Black women face—from systemic violence to interpersonal betrayal—yet always with an undercurrent of resilience and care. The speaker's voice becomes a balm and a beacon, mourning and warning in the same breath (Sanchez, 1987, p. 57).

In *Homegirls and Handgrenades* (1984), Sanchez further develops these themes through vignettes of urban womanhood. She writes with stark empathy about women struggling with poverty, abuse, and alienation, but refuses to reduce them to objects of pity. Instead, these "homegirls" wield metaphorical "handgrenades"—a symbol of rage, resistance, and readiness for radical change. The juxtaposition of "homegirls" (a term of endearment and solidarity) with "handgrenades" (a weapon) underscores the emotional and political force that defines Black female survival (Ibid. 26).

Sanchez also experiments with poetic form to mirror the disruptions Black women face. Her use of broken lines, breath marks, and unconventional syntax mirrors the fragmented realities of navigating systems of oppression while trying to retain a coherent self. This formal experimentation is itself an act of rebellion, a refusal to adhere to white, male-dominated literary norms (Madhubuti, 1996, p. 89).

Sonia Sanchez's poetry stands as a radical intersection of art and activism, illuminating the realities of race, gender, and class with both lyrical beauty and political urgency. Her work reflects a commitment to naming and dismantling systems of

oppression, offering readers a transformative encounter with the lived experiences of Black Americans, particularly Black women. Rather than merely representing identity, Sanchez redefines it through form, voice, and subject matter. Her poetry becomes a site of resistance—a place where cultural memory, personal survival, and collective liberation converge (Neal, 1968, p. 32).

Race is central to Sonia Sanchez's poetic vision. Through her exploration of African American identity, she confronts the legacies of slavery, segregation, and institutional racism. Her poetry does not abstract Blackness but roots it firmly in the everyday experiences of her community. In poems like "Malcolm," she memorializes figures of resistance while underscoring the importance of self-determination:

"Do not speak of revolution

until you are willing to eat rats

to survive" (Sanchez, 1970, p. 18).

Here, revolution is not romanticized—it is depicted as gritty, demanding, and essential.

Sanchez also interrogates the internalized effects of racism, showing how oppression infiltrates language, self-perception, and family dynamics. In "Does Your House Have Lions?" the fragmented structure mirrors the fragmentation of Black families and communities affected by systemic neglect and the AIDS epidemic. Her use of multiple voices within a single text resists monolithic depictions of Black life, instead portraying a spectrum of Black subjectivities (Sanchez, 1997, p. 35).

Sanchez's portrayal of Black womanhood is complex and layered, addressing both the historical burdens and the enduring strength of Black women. Her poems dismantle stereotypes and replace them with images of women who are emotionally intricate, intellectually grounded, and spiritually resilient. Through visceral language and symbolic resonance, Sanchez captures the richness and depth of the Black female experience.

Sanchez frequently addresses themes of motherhood and sisterhood, portraying them as transformative relationships. Her mother figures are not passive nurturers but guardians of knowledge and tradition. In these roles, Black women become cultural

custodians and moral compasses in their communities. The spiritual dimension of this womanhood is central to Sanchez's poetry; she often references African cosmologies and ancestral spirits as sources of strength and guidance.

Formally, Sanchez's fragmented lines and intentional silences reflect the interrupted narratives of Black women whose voices have often been excluded from mainstream discourse. Her formal innovation mimics the struggle to piece together an identity under systemic erasure. The tension between fragmentation and coherence in her poetry mirrors the lived duality of visibility and marginalization (Baraka, 1994, p. 22).

Empowerment in Sonia Sanchez's work is not depicted as a static state but as a process—one that involves self-awareness, historical reckoning, and collective solidarity. Her poems often feature women who move through trauma and hardship to arrive at a place of clarity and strength. This empowerment is both internal and communal: it begins with self-love and extends to a wider vision of liberation. In *Homegirls and Handgrenades*, Sanchez uses urban imagery and militant language to portray everyday Black women as revolutionaries. These "homegirls" are equipped not with weapons but with awareness, pride, and poetry. The juxtaposition of domesticity and militancy in the title itself signals that the revolution is not only fought on the streets but within kitchens, classrooms, and relationships (Sanchez, 1984, p. 26).

Her use of poetic devices—such as repetition, chant, and call-and-response—draws from African oral traditions and reinforces a communal voice. This stylistic choice evokes empowerment as something that is shared, not isolated. It is through collectivity that individuals become empowered. In poems like "a/coltrane/poem," she celebrates Black cultural icons as symbols of transcendence, showing that art itself can be a vehicle for empowerment (Sanchez, 1984, p. 41).

Sanchez also emphasizes that empowerment requires honesty about pain. She does not romanticize struggle but insists on confronting it with clarity. In "To Anita," the speaker mourns and honors a lost friend, suggesting that grief itself can be a generative force. The act of remembering, of speaking the names of the dead, becomes a way to preserve dignity and assert presence in a world that erases Black suffering. Thus, empowerment in Sanchez's poetry is a layered process of reclaiming narrative, loving oneself and one's

community, and resisting dehumanization. It is grounded in the knowledge that Black women, despite centuries of erasure and exploitation, remain a source of cultural, emotional, and intellectual power.

The issue of class permeates Sanchez's portrayal of urban life, especially in her depictions of poverty, marginalization, and state violence. Her poems often center the voices of women and children living in economic precarity. In doing so, she humanizes the statistics and policies that devalue their lives. The poet's political roots in the Civil Rights Movement and Black Arts Movement inform her critique of capitalism and economic injustice.

Sonia Sanchez's poem *"To All Black Women"* is a lyrical manifesto that celebrates, affirms, and elevates the power and complexity of Black womanhood. Written in Sanchez's characteristically intimate yet politically forceful style, the poem addresses Black women directly, acknowledging their pain, honoring their strength, and urging self-recognition and collective empowerment. It is both a poem and a speech—at once tender, fierce, and revolutionary.

Sanchez's address to "all Black women" immediately establishes a communal tone. The poem does not focus on an individual figure but speaks to an entire sisterhood that has been historically marginalized, silenced, and burdened. Sanchez's intent is to give voice to that collective experience and to ignite within it a transformative recognition. From the outset, Sanchez defines Black womanhood as sacred, powerful, and enduring despite centuries of dehumanization:

"you are a wonder

an oasis

of strength

bleeding life

into the world

with each morning breath." (Sanchez, 1984).

Here, Black women are not defined by what has been done to them, but by what they *are*. Sanchez uses words like "wonder," "oasis," and "strength" to construct a poetic counter-narrative to the dominant societal portrayal of Black women as either invisible or hyper-visible in destructive ways. The metaphor of "bleeding life" underscores not only the maternal and generative aspects of Black womanhood, but also the pain that accompanies such power—a pain that is both personal and political.

This duality—strength through suffering, beauty through resilience—is a hallmark of Sanchez's portrayal of Black womanhood. In affirming it, she situates Black women not as victims, but as builders of culture, life, and resistance.

A central goal of *"To All Black Women"* is to reawaken the self-image of Black women that has been distorted by centuries of racism and sexism. Sanchez pleads and commands:

"look into the mirror of your soul

and smile

for you have done what no one

dared

survived." (Sanchez, 1984).

This moment of reflection is both literal and symbolic. Sanchez urges Black women to look within, to see themselves not through the lens of white patriarchy, but through their own lived truths. Survival here is not passive endurance—it is an act of rebellion. It is a confrontation with a world that sought to destroy them, and a declaration that they are still here, still whole.

Sanchez's use of direct address and imperative voice transforms the poem into a collective empowerment ritual. She does not ask the reader to hope for freedom or beg for recognition—she declares the reader already free, already powerful, already beautiful.

"you are not your job

not your man

not your pain

you are

woman

and that is enough." (Sanchez, 1984).

This passage is crucial to the poem's feminist dimension. Sanchez disentangles Black women from the external roles and oppressions that have historically defined them. In doing so, she asserts a radical idea: that Black womanhood, in itself, is a complete and powerful identity—not one in need of validation from men, whiteness, or capitalist success.

Sanchez does not let the poem float in the present. She draws upon the ancestral and historical memory of African and African American women, reminding the reader of their lineage of strength:

"you have worn chains

and buried children

you have cleaned

the vomit of hatred

from floors

and still walked upright." (Sanchez, 1984).

This stanza merges historical violence with contemporary dignity. The image of "cleaning the vomit of hatred" is grotesque and visceral—it evokes both slavery and domestic labor, positioning Black women within systems of service and subjugation. Yet Sanchez turns this degradation into a testimony of resilience. To "still walk upright" in spite of such trauma is not just survival—it is heroic resistance. Sanchez instructs Black women to reflect on their own existence—not as others have defined it, but as they know it. She reclaims visibility and authority. This "mirror of your soul" metaphor becomes an internal form of representation, resisting the external projections of a society that often refuses to see Black women fully. This mirrors Crenshaw's argument that visibility must be reclaimed—politically, socially, and personally—through an intersectional lens.

Ultimately, *"To All Black Women"* functions as both a prayer and a battle cry. It heals and exhorts. It tells Black women not only that they matter, but that they are sacred and strong in ways history has refused to acknowledge. In her closing lines, Sanchez offers a benediction wrapped in militancy:

"stand.

stand tall.

your voice is the beginning

of new

nations." (Sanchez, 1984).

Here, voice becomes not just a tool for speech but a generative force—one capable of rebuilding the world. This is the ultimate message of empowerment: that Black women are not only survivors of history—they are the authors of the future. Crenshaw's theory emphasizes that Black women's realities are not adequately captured when race and gender are treated separately. Sanchez captures this complexity without needing to name it academically—she performs it poetically.

Sanchez's genius lies in her ability to reflect intersectionality not only through themes but also in the very structure of her poetry. Her voice shifts between the individual and the communal, the lyrical and the political. She blends high and low diction, academic and street language, suggesting that all voices are worthy of poetic treatment. The polyphonic nature of her work resists singular narratives and reflects the multiplicity of Black life (Giovanni, 2003, p. 101).

Moreover, Sanchez's poetics function as a tool of epistemological resistance. Her defiance of punctuation rules, enjambments, and typographic irregularities all signal a rejection of Eurocentric literary norms. These disruptions force the reader to pause, re-read, and engage critically. The form itself becomes an act of resistance—a demand to be heard on the poet's own terms (Madhubuti, 1996, p. 93).

Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of **intersectionality** in 1989 to highlight how the experiences of Black women are shaped by multiple, overlapping

systems of oppression—particularly racism which is not adequately addressed when examined in isolation. Crenshaw argued that Black women often "fall through the cracks" of both feminist theory (which often centered white women) and antiracist theory (which often centered Black men). Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of **intersectionality** describes how social categories such as race, gender, and class interconnect to create overlapping systems of disadvantage. Crenshaw argued that when institutions or ideologies fail to account for these intersecting identities, people—particularly Black women—fall through the cracks of both policy and cultural representation.

Sonia Sanchez's poem *"This is Not a Small Voice"* is a powerful poetic enactment of intersectionality. Through an inclusive first-person plural ("our children," "our mothers," "our eyes"), Sanchez speaks from the position of a collective "we," representing the multifaceted experience of Black communities—particularly those shaped by urban poverty, racial surveillance, gendered expectations, and educational neglect.The voice Sanchez claims is not merely "loud"—it is historically burdened, racially marked, feminized, communal, and urgent. The poem does not simply describe intersectionality; it **performs it.**

The poem opens with a direct rejection of invisibility and diminishment:

"This is not a small voice

you hear

this is a large voice

coming out of these cities." (Sanchez, 1995).

This is a defiant act of naming: it challenges the systemic silencing of marginalized voices—particularly those of Black women and children in urban spaces. According to Crenshaw, intersectionality calls for the **recognition** of how multiple forms of marginalization render people both unheard and unseen. Sanchez's voice reclaims that recognition. The phrase "these cities" suggests a geography of disenfranchisement: the

inner city as a space of surveillance, poverty, underfunded schools, and police violence. Sanchez's "large voice" refuses to be buried under those systemic conditions.

Sanchez's poem addresses **racialized urban poverty**, another key domain of intersectionality. Consider these lines:

"This is a love colored with iron and lace.

This is a love initialed Black Genius." (Sanchez, 1995).

"Iron and lace" suggests the fusion of strength and tenderness. Black love, often stereotyped as either dysfunctional or nonexistent, is here redefined as powerful and complex. Sanchez affirms the existence of Black excellence ("Black Genius") despite institutional neglect. These are people, families, and children whom society labels as deviant or inferior but who possess deep creativity, intellect, and emotional richness.

Crenshaw's intersectionality also draws attention to how **educational systems** fail Black children, particularly those from working-class and single-parent homes. Sanchez reverses that gaze:

"This is not a small love you hear

this is a large love, a passion for kissing learning

on its face." (Sanchez, 1995).

Here, the poem asserts the dignity and desire for learning among a population too often deemed unteachable or disinterested. It reflects Crenshaw's critique of how race, class, and gender intersect in public education to marginalize Black youth—especially girls, who face unique forms of gendered discipline and erasure.

Crenshaw emphasizes that Black women are not just marginalized individually, but are also caretakers who absorb the structural violence enacted upon their children and communities. Sanchez speaks directly to this reality when she writes: "This is the voice of

our children singing morning devotions to the ancestors." (Sanchez, 1995). Sonia Sanchez's *"After Saturday Night Comes Sunday"* is a poetic embodiment of that intersectional experience. Through vivid imagery, shifting tones, and a critique of social hypocrisy, Sanchez captures the dual burdens Black women bear—expected to express sensuality and resilience, to dance and survive, to sin and repent, all under the gaze of both white America and their own communities.

The title itself sets up the core intersectional tension: *Saturday night* represents liberation, eroticism, and rebellion; *Sunday* represents repentance, respectability, and religious piety. Black women, in this poem, are trapped between these two spaces—expected to embody joy and sensuality without shame, and then to be spiritually "cleansed" without acknowledgment of the structural forces that demand such performance.

This tension reflects Crenshaw's idea that Black women's identities are shaped by conflicting demands from multiple systems. Sanchez writes:

"she danced

hips rolling back centuries

and into sunday mornings

of hallelujahs." (Sanchez, 1971).

The dancer's body here is not just erotic—it is historical. Her hips "roll back centuries," evoking the commodification of Black women since slavery. Yet, those same hips must walk into the sanctified space of Sunday, where the community demands modesty and moral discipline. This movement across days is metaphorical—it reflects the double consciousness of being a Black woman: constantly navigating what Crenshaw would identify as opposing narratives of gendered respectability and racial performance.

This line collapses bodily autonomy, spiritual expectation, and gendered shame into one moment. The woman attempts to make her body "holy" by denying it, but not before it has been marked—by desire, by memory, by cultural judgment. In Crenshaw's terms,

this is the space where gender oppression (purity myths, victim-blaming, shame) meets racial expectation (the Jezebel stereotype, the strong Black woman narrative). The woman is both too much and never enough—liberated and policed at the same time.

Sanchez also situates her speaker and subjects in a working-class Black environment, where survival often requires compromise. The poem is filled with references to everyday struggles—cheap liquor, street lights, Saturday bar music—and the burdens of women who must balance labor, love, and spirituality:

"she is tired

of smelling herself in other people's dreams

tired of opening doors to vacant rooms

and rent due." (Sanchez, 1971).

Here, Sanchez gives voice to economic marginalization as another layer of oppression. The speaker is haunted by her invisibility, her body being fantasized about or used, while she remains economically vulnerable. Rent is due. Doors lead to nothing. This exhaustion is intersectional—it is not just racial, not just gendered, not just economic. It is the compounding of all three that defines her condition.

Furthermore, this poem highlights on how the black men are marginalised even when they dead because you talk only about his mother suffering not. About a violation of his rights as a black man No one can respect them no one give them value they treat them badly and brutality. So that the body and bons of fortune . Became Nothing and white people don't have mercy And they have cruel heart so that ., they are still now superior while the black people live And die they will stay marginalised till now .

Conclusion

Sonia Sanchez's poetry exemplifies the principles of intersectionality by capturing the lived experiences of Black women through form, voice, and subject matter. Her work is not only a celebration of Black womanhood, but also a critique of the social structures that marginalize it. Through poetic innovation and emotional intensity, Sanchez reclaims the narrative of the Black woman as one of strength, resistance, and transformation. This study affirms that intersectionality is not only a theoretical lens, but a lived reality deeply embedded in artistic expression.

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