

**From Silence to Recognition:
Giving Voice to Minority Girls in Rita
Williams-Garcia's *One Crazy Summer* (2010)
and Cynthia Kadohata's
The Thing About Luck (2013)**

**20th-Century and 21st- Century British and American Children's
Literature**

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Abstract

It is widely known that the United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. Some researchers assure that the several settlements and the massive immigration to the country have contributed to the plurality as well as to the enrichment of its society, but they also state that, as a result, minorities have had to undergo a systematic process of racial discrimination. The purpose of this paper is to explore how this discrimination affects Delphine and Summer, the protagonists of the acclaimed middle-grade novels *One Crazy Summer* (2010), by the African American author Rita Williams-Garcia, and *The Thing About Luck* (2013), by the Japanese American author Cynthia Kadohata, as well as to prove that this is not the only discrimination they suffer: being children in a world ruled by adults and being female in a patriarchal world complicates to a great extent their integration into society. The first part of the analysis deals with the implications of belonging to a minority, both in terms of how this belonging affects the way the protagonists perceive themselves and in terms of how they are treated by the society of the country they live in. Secondly, it will be described how the main characters, for being children, are forced to rely on the behavior of the adults in their families – particularly on the figures of the mother and the grandmother – and how that dependency is often emotionally painful for them. Finally, the third section shows how the protagonists, for being women, must adapt to the gender roles dictated by a patriarchal society. This essay also aims at highlighting the value of children's literature as a means to educate its young readers in the enrichment minorities bring to any society as well as in the importance of embracing our differences instead of using them to discriminate our fellow human beings.

Keywords: Childhood, gender roles, discrimination, American minorities, equality.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical background.....	2
3. <i>One Crazy Summer</i> (2010) and <i>The Thing About Luck</i> (2013): the difficulties of growing up as minority girls in the United States of America.....	3
3.1. Belonging to a minority.....	5
3.1.1. Self-perception.....	5
3.1.2. Social implications.....	8
3.2. Intergenerational relationships: being children in an adult world	12
3.3. Gender roles in a patriarchal society	16
4. Conclusion	19

References

1. Introduction

The existence of ethnic minorities in the United States has been a largely discussed matter over the history of the country. The US is one of the countries characterised by its diversity of cultures, and the assumption is that its minorities have assimilated. The plurality of American society, a consequence of settlement and immigration in the nation, is widely known all around the world. Furthermore, American society can be defined on account of its different cultures: all of them enrich the society, but at the same time some minorities are disfavored because of their differences.

It is worthy to mention that immigration in the US has varied throughout its history depending on different circumstances – a result of mainly social, economic or political reasons. According to Starck (2006), the immigration phenomenon has challenged integration, accommodation, adaptation and assimilation in the country. The distinct ethnic groups in the US have had different processes of adaptation influenced by mistreatment and inequality led by the whites' supremacy.

This paper will discuss minorities in the US and the discrimination that they suffer. Cultural stereotypes have played an important role in creating this historical distinction. What is more, many researchers have pointed out the importance of erasing these differentiations within American society in the hopes of ensuring a painless process of adaptation for minorities. Focusing on the African American and Japanese American protagonists of the two novels analysed in this paper, it is important to consider the influence of American history in order to understand their current conditions. The concentrated population of African Americans in the South due to slavery, as well as the massive immigration of Japanese Americans throughout the nation, are factors that have reinforced the discrimination towards them.

Taking this into consideration, this paper's goal is to show how this discrimination affects the protagonists of *One Crazy Summer* (2010), by Rita Williams-Garcia, and *The Thing About Luck* (2013), by Cynthia Kadohata, as well as to demonstrate that this is not the only discrimination they suffer: being children in a world governed by adults and being women in a patriarchal world makes it even more difficult for them to integrate in society. In the first section, the implications of belonging to a minority will be analysed,

both in terms of how this belonging affects the way the protagonists perceive themselves and in terms of how they are treated by other people. The second section focuses on how the protagonists, for being children, depend on the behavior of the adult figures in their families – particularly the figure of the mother and the grandmother – and how that dependency is often emotionally painful for them. Finally, the third section shows how the protagonists, for being women, must follow the gender roles dictated by a patriarchal society.

Throughout the paper, the 7th edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) style will be used to quote and reference sources.

2. Theoretical background

Before delving into the analysis of the novels, it is important to clarify the following terms: children's literature and minority literature.

One of the possible ways to classify a literary work is to consider the age of its potential readers. According to that parameter, books can belong to one of these three groups: literature for adults, literature for young adults and literature for children. As Mínguez asserts (2012), children's literature is geared towards – as the name itself explains – children. These types of books help them to become familiar with language, also contributing to their education (as cited in Mínguez, 2014). Besides, children's literature also has the purpose of entertaining its readership (ibid.). The books that are going to be discussed throughout this paper are addressed to middle grade children and fall into the category of children's literature but, because of the age range they are addressed at, are close to young adult literature.

As stated in the introduction, this research focuses on minority literature. As Deleuze and Guattari (1995) state, minority literature is a “literary production that is created by a minority using the majority language” (as cited in Cergol, 2015, p. 62). This type of literature gives the opportunity for its readers to be aware of the cultural misconceptions and social marginalisation minorities suffer from. Besides, as Cergol (2015) describes, minority literature is a means for minorities to share respect and tolerance towards their members and to highlight their identity. In the case of this paper, both protagonists of Rita Williams-Garcia's *One Crazy Summer* and Cynthia Kadohata's *The Thing About*

Luck belong to US minorities and show how they respect themselves but also all the other characters of the story; thus, it is clear that there exists an overall sense of empathy marked throughout the story. Minority literature opens its doors to society in order to allow readers to encourage equality and to erase discrimination.

3. *One Crazy Summer* (2010) and *The Thing About Luck* (2013): the difficulties of growing up as minority girls in the United States of America

Before focusing on the analysis of *One Crazy Summer* (2010) and *The Thing About Luck* (2013), it is convenient to briefly present the works of Rita Williams-Garcia and Cynthia Kadohata, together with the summaries of the novels that are going to be studied. The children's and young adult's literature author Rita Williams-Garcia was born in Queens (New York) in 1957. She has published several novels, such as *Blue Tights* (1988), *Fast Talk on a Slow Track* (1991), *Like Sisters on the Homefront* (1995), *Every Time a Rainbow Dies* (2002), *No Laughter Here* (2004), *Jumped* (2009) and the trilogy consisting of the novels *One Crazy Summer* (2010), *P.S. Be Eleven* (2013) and *Gone Crazy in Alabama* (2015). Her most recent novel is *Clayton Byrd Goes Underground* (2017). During her life as a writer, she won the Newbery Honor Award, the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction and the Coretta Scott King award in 2011 for *One Crazy Summer*. Afterwards, she won the PEN/Norma Klein Award. Three years later, her novel *P. S. Be Eleven* (2013) won the Coretta Scott King Award. Moreover, *Gone Crazy in Alabama* (2015) won the Coretta Scott King Award in 2016. Her novel *Clayton Byrd Has Gone Underground* (2017) is one of the finalists for the National Book Award for young people's literature (Williams-Garcia, 2020).

Turning to *One Crazy Summer* (2010), the first part of the trilogy mentioned in the previous paragraph, Williams-Garcia tells the story of three sisters: Delphine (11), Vonetta (9) and Fern (7). The story begins with their father wanting them to go to stay one summer with their mother Cecile, who abandoned them when they were very little, so that they can get to know her better. Although Big Ma, the children's grandmother, disagrees with that decision, the sisters finally travel to Oakland, California, to spend the summer of 1968 with Cecile. The story is told from Delphine's point of view. As she is the big sister, she has a few memories of when their mother was with them.

When they arrive in California, the three children discover that their mother is part of the Black Panther Party, a revolutionary political organisation. Throughout the story, the three girls get to know the Black Panthers and attend their revolutionary lessons. As to their mother Cecile, the sisters will discover that her distant personality does not fulfil their expectations of what a mother should be like. Gaining her trust and love will become a challenge for the little girls and, as the story develops, both Delphine and Cecile will get to know each other better. With historical references of the recent American history, Rita Williams-Garcia breaks the stereotype of the father abandoning their children by putting the mother into the spotlight, and manages to show the thoughts of three children who had lost their most supportive role model.

As to the other author selected for this research paper, Cynthia Kadohata is a Japanese American children's literature and young adult's literature writer born in Chicago (Illinois) in 1956. In addition to having written *The Thing About Luck* (2013), which was awarded with the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, Cynthia Kadohata is the author of *The Floating World* (1989), *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* (1992), *The Glass Mountains* (1995), *Kira-Kira* (2004) – which is her best-known novel and was awarded with the Newbery Medal and the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature – *Weedflower* (2006), *Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam* (2007), *Outside Beauty* (2008), *A Million Shades of Gray* (2010); *Half a World Away* (2014); *Checked* (2018) and *A Place To Belong* (2019) (Kadohata, 2020).

In *The Thing About Luck* (2013), a story that takes place in the 2010s, Kadohata writes from the point of view of Summer, a twelve-year-old child who has experienced what bad luck means in the last year. Having been sick of Malaria because of a mosquito bite and suddenly having recovered, her parents need to go away to Japan because of an emergency and leave Summer, her brother Jaz and her dog Thunder in the Midwest with their grandparents, Obaachan and Jiichan. In the absence of her parents, Summer's grandparents need to go on harvest in order to pay the bills, and that is the moment in which Summer has to take on the responsibilities of an adult. In comparison with her little brother, she does all the work: she helps Obaachan in her cooking service for the workers, she takes care of her brother and she falls in love for the first time in her life. Summer shows how a child manages her feelings in a situation in which she feels pressured by one of her role models – in this case, Obaachan – and longs for independence.

In the next section, the three types of discrimination suffered by the protagonists will be analysed: their belonging to a minority, their being children in an adult world and their female subordination in a male-centered world.

3.1. Belonging to a minority

White supremacy has been a substantial issue throughout the history of the United States. Since unknown times, white people have been the ones in charge of the country, what has affected groups of people defined as minorities. African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos represent a large part of the population of the United States. For example, according to the Office of Minority Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019), African Americans represented 12.7 percent of the population. Over the last century, demographic growth has been evident in the US, resulting in multicultural American heritage. At the same time, the definitions of racial identity and ethnicity have been discussed largely over the years, and the question of whether it is necessary to have a racial identity in order to have an identity has emerged. (Omi and Winant, 1994). What is more, Omi and Winant (1994) assure that “the presence of a system of racial meanings, and stereotypes, of racial ideology, seems to be a permanent feature of the US culture” (p. 13), showing that this controversy is still something prevalent in the United States. In this section, two aspects will be analysed regarding the impact of belonging to a minority: firstly, its internal implications for the protagonists of *One Crazy Summer* and *The Thing About Luck*, that is, how the girls perceive themselves as members of a minority; secondly, the external implications that the characters of the stories have to face in their daily lives – in other words, how society discriminates them.

3.1.1. Self-perception

In both books, the education of the protagonists will heavily depend on their grandmothers. In the case of Delphine, the protagonist of *One Crazy Summer*, Big Ma is an important influence for her when she and her little sisters Vonetta and Fern travel to Oakland and Delphine is the one taking care of them. In other words, Big Ma is Delphine’s role model. Big Ma, whose past is rooted in the southern state of Alabama, will teach her granddaughters the attitudes of modesty and humility she was raised with.

Those values are, by the way, a by-product of the discrimination and racial segregation exerted by White people. As Hinton describes (2018), “acts of self-sacrifice and service to others as presented by Big Ma are reminiscent of accommodationist values that were likely prevalent in her southern community” (p. 318).

Thus, Delphine follows Big Ma’s instructions on how to behave around White people. As it can be seen in one of the first occurrences of the novel, the three sisters are in an airplane where the majority of people are White. Delphine feels responsible for controlling herself and her sisters in order to not be the centre of attention. Just as their grandmother and their father have taught them, that would be very negative: “The last thing Pa and Big Ma wanted to hear was how we made a grand Negro spectacle of ourselves thirty thousand feet up in the air around all these white people” (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 2). Just as Big Ma expects her granddaughters to behave in order to avoid their being rejected by the White people, she hopes to receive a kind of feeling of togetherness from the Black community for the simple fact of belonging to a minority, a thought that not all African Americans understand:

“These my grandbabies. You look out for them, y’hear.” The snappy Negro lady had been nice enough to smile but hadn’t returned the look that Big Ma expected – and Big Ma had expected the look Negro people silently pass each other. She’d expected this stranger to say, as if she were a neighbor, “They’re as good as my own. I’ll make sure they don’t misbehave or be an embarrassment to the Negro race.” (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 6)

Through this type of comments, Big Ma represents how white supremacy has been present during her life and how she has found backup from other negroes when she lived in Alabama.

As to the protagonist of the novel, her thoughts during the flight to Oakland, where her mother Cecile lives, reveal how Delphine feels around white people: “Even though there were only eight Negroes on board, counting my sisters and me, I had managed to disgrace the entire Negro race, judging by the head shaking and *tsk-tsking* going around us. I shifted my behind into my seat and tightened my seat belt” (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p.11). This conclusion indicates that she is aware that she belongs to a minority and knows that they must have manners in front of white people so as not to give them the opportunity to make generalised assumptions about black people. The

discrimination she feels has been instilled in her throughout her life, and it creates a clear distinction: on the one hand, the whites; on the other hand, the non-white minorities.

Furthermore, there are several incidents in the novel that indicate how Delphine perceives herself and how she feels when she has to speak up or act around white people. Delphine is the one who answers to white people on behalf of herself and her two sisters, and she is also the one who best knows how to show respect towards the White people, although she also ironises about them:

I did as Big Ma told me in our many talks on how to act around white people. I said “thank you” but I didn’t add the ‘ma’am’ for the whole “Thank you, ma’am” ... The lady opened her pocketbook, took out a red leather change purse, and scooted coins around, searching the right amount for adorable, well-behaved colored dolls. (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p.16)

The situation for the three sisters changes once they are at their mother’s home in Oakland. That will be the first time that Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern will be free from Big Ma’s teachings. Cecile is the character that indirectly helps Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern to be themselves, without expecting them to be conditioned by the sense of belonging to the African American race, and gives them the necessary freedom to confront situations on their own. At the same time, Cecile is not the type of mother that the three sisters expected. Despite the fact that she is implicated on the defense of the rights of her race, she also ironises about herself and the ones belonging to her community, something that Big Ma would not be able to do (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 57).

When the sisters arrive at the queue of the free breakfast offered by the Black Panthers,¹ the revolutionary organisation their mother is a member of, Delphine shows how even herself creates racial expectations about her own race and about other races different from hers when she sees the Black Panthers for the first time, as she did not think that people from different ethnicities would be accepted by the organisation (Williams-Garcia, 2012, pp. 63–64).

¹ Also known as the Black Panthers Party, it was a revolutionary political organization founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California. Its aim was to end up with the injustices and with the police brutality due to racism against the African American community, and they also formed one of the biggest Black Power movements throughout history.

Another example of stereotyped thinking occurs when Delphine sees a man with very frizzy hair: “I’d have called it an Afro, except it was on a white guy’s head. I wondered if that made a difference” (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 159). According to Omi and Winant (1994), “the content of such stereotypes reveals a series of unsubstantiated beliefs about who these groups are and what ‘they’ are like. In this respect, there is an automatic response of disorientation when certain racial rules are not accomplished” (p. 12).

Summer, the protagonist of Cynthia Kadohata’s *The Thing About Luck*, also reflects on the meaning of belonging to a minority. In fact, she is interested in the family traditions, in the values and in the vision about life of her country. She also uses her manners to represent the Japanese American race, just as Delphine does with the African American race. Besides, she has also internalised a series of stereotypes about what a Japanese American should be like and even look like, as even the fact of having frizzy hair instead of straight hair makes her feel different from other people of Japanese origin (Kadohata, 2013, p.14).

Apart from that, the fact of having been born and raised in the US makes Summer different from her grandparents, who arrived in the country when they were adults. Summer can speak perfect English and in her the American and the Japanese identity are forced to coexist. This reality creates feelings of envy in her grandmother, who is less integrated into the American society than her granddaughter, as she does not have a good command of the English language. According to the findings of Tarn et al. (2005), old Japanese American women tended to speak Japanese rather than English, that is, they did not develop the ability to communicate in the language of the country they lived in.

As a result of her envy, Summer’s grandmother ironically calls her “Miss Talk So Good”, as she is the one who asks for questions or recommendations from Americans because she speaks better English (Kadohata, 2013, p.248).

3.1.2. Social implications

Apart from the reflections of both protagonists on their identity and on the internal implications of belonging to a minority, both books express the racial discrimination the protagonists suffer. In *One Crazy Summer*, the main characters suffer racial discrimination because they belong to the African American minority in the US; the novel

The Thing About Luck, in turn, expresses how being Japanese American affects both the protagonist and her family.

One of the clearest expressions of racism in *One Crazy Summer* is that exerted over the Black Panther Party. The media, under the power of white people, describes it as violent, what contradicts the way Delphine had perceived the party when she interacted with its members:

It wasn't at all the way the television showed militants—that's what they called the Black Panthers. Militants, who from the newspapers were angry fist-wavers with their mouths wide-open and their rifles ready for shooting. They never showed anyone like Sister Mukumbu or Sister Pat, passing out toast and teaching in classrooms. (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p.87)

The Black Panthers were not as bad as the media pictured them, but the public opinion tended to depict the black community in a biased way.

Apart from being represented in a distorted manner, the Black Panthers also suffer police oppression because of racial discrimination. This is illustrated when Delphine, the mother of the protagonist, is arrested for belonging to the Black Panthers even if she is a peaceful person who writes revolutionary non-violent poems and has not committed any crime. So, when the little girls see that the police are arresting their mother in front of her house, they cannot but feel indignant: “Why had the police arrested Cecile? She wrote ‘Send us back to Africa’ poems and ‘Movable Type’ poems. She didn't write ‘Off the Pig’ poems and ‘Kill Whitey’ poems, that is, if writing poems were a crime” (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p.169).

In any case, this problem also affects other black citizens, even if they do not belong to any organisation. There is a clear example of this in the story when Delphine recalls one time that she and her sisters were travelling to Alabama with their father, and suddenly, at nightfall, they decided to stop and get some rest on one side of the road. What happened was that the police showed up and discriminated and insulted her father in front of them. When that happened, Delphine felt alarmed for him, completely aware that it could be risky for them if their father decided to defend himself or reply to the policeman. For this reason, the three sisters felt alleviated when their father kept silent and kept driving down their grandmother's home. When they arrived at Big Ma's, she asked them how the journey was, and the only thing Pa had to answer was “same old”

showing that these kinds of problems were habitual (Williams-Garcia, 2012, pp. 124–125).

Racial discrimination is common against African American individuals, and in the 1960s they were portrayed as different and aggressive human beings, as it can be seen in the novel. On one occasion, the three sisters are planning to go on a trip to San Francisco, and Cecile warns them that white people tend to treat them as they were strange creatures or as if they were going to commit a misdemeanor at any moment. In fact, when they visit Chinatown, a family stares at them and takes photographs of them as if they were animals. Delphine remembers what their mother has told them, and in one shop of souvenirs when the store clerk seems to be vigilant because they are there, she says “we are citizens, and we demand respect” (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 164), a sentence she has learnt from the Black Panthers, and takes her sisters away to find another shop. This is not the only time the children suffer the consequences of racism: in the last part of the book, we can see how a white man approaches them at the airport and asks them to pose. When that happens, Cecile defends her daughters in front of him, asking for empathy and questioning him what would happen if they were his daughters (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 214).

Apart from realising the amount of prejudice and violence suffered by African American people, Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern are also aware of the lack of visibility black people receive in the US. For example, the protagonist describes how she and her sisters count how many black people appear on TV and the number of words they say and how they appear and talk less than white people, although some shows starring black actors are beginning to emerge (Williams-Garcia, 2012, pp. 118–119). This analysis coincides with the assertion of Wilson & Gutierrez (1995) and Gandy (1998):

In a media environment in which the primary audience is not expected to be Black, portrayals of African American characters need not be sympathetic. Indeed, the history of minorities in media suggests that the use of negative stereotypes tends to dominate the portrayal of those groups, at least prior to their emergence as a valued audience segment, or an active political force. (as cited in Gandy, 2001, p. 602)

In *The Thing About Luck* (2013), the stereotypes towards minorities are also common. One example of this is when Summer, her brother, grandparents and another Irish worker arrive at a southern farm in order to continue their job during the harvesting they are

working on. The farmer says to Jiichan, Summer's grandfather, that he has never seen a Chinese man, and Summer feels the necessity of correcting him, saying that they are Japanese. The reason why she corrects the farmer is that she gives importance to her Japanese ethnicity and she feels offended whenever people confuse her race with other Asian races, as it is a way of stereotyping them (Kadohata, 2013, p. 209).

With reference to this, it is important to mention that Japanese Americans not only suffered the prejudices derived from being a minority in a prejudiced society, but also marginalisation and violence since their arrival to the United States of America. After the exclusion of Chinese immigrants with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, there was a high demand for Asian laborers in America, and the majority of Japanese people migrated to Hawaii and North America in the nineteenth century in search for a better life. Additionally, anti-Japanese movements began, and there was a decrease in emigration from Japan. However, with World War I, the Japanese began to migrate again to the US to do cheap labor. After the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, these people were perceived as a threat to the country and were taken to concentration camps. From 1945 until the 1970s, there was a population growth of Japanese and Japanese Americans in the nation with the returning from the concentration camps and with the arrival of temporary immigrants, such as students or workers (Onozawa, 2003).

In an essay she writes at school, Summer puts forward the story of how her family settled in the United States, stating that her grandparents made a "long visit" to the country, probably for work reasons. Moreover, the protagonist shows admiration and respect for the hardships her grandfather has gone through during his life. He is a role model to her and the one who makes her feel proud of her ethnicity (Kadohata, 2013, p. 222).

In summary, being part of a minority affects how the protagonists perceive their own identity, and at the same time it also affects how they are perceived by a prejudiced society that tends to discriminate those who look different. Besides, it can also be said that those same stereotypes are sometimes embraced by themselves as a result of the education they receive by their grandmothers. Luckily, in the case of Delphine and her sisters, Cecile helps them broaden their perspective on minorities.

3.2. Intergenerational relationships: being children in an adult world

Firstly, it is important to mention that the relationships between family members are very present in both *One Crazy Summer* and *The Thing About Luck*. Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern, the three sisters from *One Crazy Summer*, have a strong relationship with their grandmother, and, at the same time, they are trying to build up a good relationship with their mother, who left them after Fern was born. In fact, the three of them expect to win back their mother's love, but it will turn into a challenge when they realise that Cecile is not who they expected her to be. Similarly, in *The Thing About Luck*, Summer tries to maintain a good relationship with her grandmother, even though she is tough in terms of her education and puts more pressure on her than on her brother Jaz.

Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern will travel to Oakland to visit their mother Cecile in order to build the mother-daughter relationship that was lost when she left them. Instead of a mother, the three sisters have had their grandmother, Big Ma, and their father, Papa. Hence, the three of them received an education from Big Ma, who is from Alabama, a southern state of the US. As Hunter (1997) and Kivett (1993) put forward, "the centrality of the grandmother in Black families, in particular, has been documented with emphasis on how Black grandmothers have active parenting styles that convey deep levels of involvement, influence, and support" (as cited in Hinton & Branyon, 2016, p. 15). Big Ma has been the caregiver of the three children since their mother Cecile left, teaching them proper manners, religious beliefs, food preparation and giving them affection, among other things. When they fly to Oakland, Delphine becomes responsible for remembering those lessons and taking care of her sisters, as she is the oldest sister (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 2). Even though Big Ma does not want them to go with Cecile, Papa deems it convenient as he appears confident that they will recover the relationship with their mother, and trusts Delphine, who is 11 years old, to keep Vonetta, who is 9, and Fern, who is 7, safe: "Papa had kissed Vonetta and Fern and told me to look after my sisters. Even though looking after them would have been nothing new, I kissed him and said, 'I will, Papa'" (Williams-Garcia, 2012, pp. 6–7).

After the flight, the sisters arrive at the airport in Oakland and start searching for their mother. They expect an amazing meeting after so many years without seeing each other, but things turn out differently: Cecile approaches them and only tells them to follow her and to hurry up. Delphine is the only one of the three sisters that has some memories of

her mother, but for Vonetta and Fern she is a total stranger. Cecile appears distant and does not feel interested in her daughters' needs, what makes Delphine feel disappointed, as did not expect this kind of treatment from a mother (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 31).

Moreover, Cecile will appear cold and selfish towards the three kids whenever she finds annoyance of some kind in the atmosphere and cannot concentrate, and she will even say that she regrets having given birth to them (Williams-Garcia, 2012, pp. 26–27). In addition, their mother will establish certain rules in her home if they want to stay there. For instance, Cecile's sacred place is the kitchen, as it is where she writes her revolutionary poems and does not want to be disturbed. Delphine, Vonetta and Fern are going to learn how not to disturb Cecile throughout the story, even if that entails tolerating their mother's negligence.

The three little girls remain ignorant about the life details of their mother throughout the story, even though there are things Delphine gets to know from her. One of those details is her name: she is now called Nzila, not Cecile, which represents how her life has changed and evolved. Besides, she is now one Black Panther, from the Black Panthers Party. That is why, from the very first moment, she sends her daughters to the Free Breakfast Center; she wants her daughters to receive revolutionary lessons about politics and civil rights to make them aware of racism, what at least shows that she wants them to be aware of their own rights even if at home she is sometimes negligent.

Additionally, as the story goes on, it is fundamental to observe that the mother-daughter relationship is developing little by little. The three daughters try to understand the reasons why she left them and why she acted in such a selfish manner. In one of the rallies² organised by the Black Panthers, Cecile recites a poem that makes her daughters feel that she feels something for them or that she laments abandoning them (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 176).

After that episode, Delphine has the opportunity of getting to know her mother better, as Cecile opens her heart to her. She confesses that she could not have provided them with a good life and says Delphine's life is better next to her grandmother and her father. Besides, she answers Delphine's questions, she explains who she is and how she came to how she came to adopt the name "Nzila" as a result of wanting to be an emancipated

² Rallies are revolutionary events in which debates are staged about how to combat racism and poems are recited.

woman. Despite her mother's effort, Delphine still feels angry because she abandoned them, and she never had a mother to be with (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 209).

Little by little, after the whole summer and their mother's poem recital in the rally, Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern demonstrate their strength and courage by reading Cecile's poem in a risky event in front of all the Black Panthers, including her mother. Proudly, Cecile appears less rough to her three daughters and shows more kindness towards them. Briefly, she has not been the mother they dreamed of, but even so the girls want to experience her love, as we can see in the last part of the book:

My first move was to comfort her. I went to reach out to Fern, but she bolted from the line, ran, and jumped on top of Cecile. Vonetta and I didn't hesitate. We broke off from the line and ran over to hug our mother and let her hug us.

How do you fly three thousand miles to meet the mother you hadn't seen since you needed her milk, needed to be picked up, or were four going on five, and not throw your arms around her, whether she wanted you or not? Neither Vonetta, Fern, nor I could answer that one. We weren't about to leave Oakland without getting what we'd come for. It only took Fern to know we needed a hug from our mother. (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 215)

Unlike Delphine, Summer will not experience these ups and downs with Obaachan, her grandmother, but she will constantly compare how Obaachan treats her and how she treats her brother Jaz. During the harvesting, there are several moments in which she feels desolated, mostly because of the relationship with her grandmother, who puts lots of pressure on her but lets Jaz play freely and be on his own. In fact, she thinks that Obaachan loves him more than she loves her, although she knows that Jaz deserves to receive lots of love because of his extremely withdrawn character (Kadohata, 2013, p. 20).

Summer feels that Obaachan educates her the Japanese way and finds it authoritarian. This educational style makes her miss her parents because, in comparison to them, her grandmother is strict and tells them how to do everything: how to eat, drink and even live (Kadohata, 2013, p. 26). Summer does not have the option of feeling free about what she thinks and how she acts, and she has even less freedom where the harvest is concerned: there, the only thing they need to do is work all the time. The protagonist also covers the necessities of the family and feels responsible for doing the hard work with which the adults of her family cannot comply (Kadohata, 2013, p. 149).

Nevertheless, Summer feels confused about the relationship she has with Obaachan, since sometimes she appears to be kind, but, on other occasions, she scolds her for any reason, what makes her feel unloved and tears her apart. Summer, having previously been sick with malaria because of a mosquito bite, has seen Obaachan taking care of her. However, since her recovery from the illness, she has seen another type of grandmother, a grandmother who does not let her make her own decisions and who treats her badly. Thus, she has the feeling that the good and the bad coexist in Obaachan at the same time. Her grandmother appears caring when Summer is vulnerable, and severe when she is safe. This could be because she does not want the protagonist to accommodate and she feels the necessity of educating the little girl as she was educated time ago: she wants her to be a strong woman in the future, but when Summer appears sick and cannot do anything by herself, Obaachan is the first one who is there for her:

I lay in bed thinking, trying to figure it all out. There was Obaachan the ogre, and there was Obaachan who let me sleep late. There was Obaachan who scolded me night and day, and there was Obaachan who did as much of the cooking as she could, despite her pain, so I wouldn't have to. There was Obaachan who supposedly lived at the hospital when I was sick, and there was Obaachan who taunted me for, well, for everything. I mean, there was only one me, one Jaz, one Mom, one Dad, and one Jiichan. But it seemed like there were two Obaachans – the good one and the bad one. (Kadohata, 2013, pp. 240-241)

On the contrary, her grandfather, Jiichan, appears in the story as somebody who lets Summer take her own decisions as she grows up, who unconditionally supports her and who shares his own life experiences with her in order to help her face her own life challenges.

Both novels similarly focus on the protagonists' relationships with their adult family members, that are characterised by painful feelings that are increased because, as children, they totally depend on them. In the relationship between Delphine and her mother Cecile, the child feels neglected. At the same time, though, her mother gives her more freedom to think by herself than her rigid grandmother Big Ma, who has been her role model throughout her childhood. In the case of Summer, she feels pressured and unloved by Obaachan, her grandmother. Luckily, her grandfather provides her with the support and self-confidence she does not feel in the relationship with her grandmother.

3.3. Gender roles in a patriarchal society

Both Rita Williams-Garcia and Cynthia Kadohata share feminist values in *One Crazy Summer* and *The Thing About Luck* by showing the negative effects patriarchal gender roles had on women in the United States during the 1960s and in the 2010s. In the case of *One Crazy Summer*, it can be observed in the main character, Delphine, has internalised patriarchal values from her grandmother. Big Ma supports the idea that a strong Black woman must be Christian, modest and domestic, and she has indirectly acquired racist and sexist stereotypes (Hinton & Branyon, 2017). Other than that, as Giddings affirms, “Black women had shown their physical and mental strength since slavery; next, they turned their attention to convincing others of their moral strength” (as cited in Hinton & Branyon, 2017, p. 329). As a result, Big Ma makes sexist comments to her granddaughters about Cecile because she does not respond to what is expected from a woman and has no value at all for her; she keeps judging Cecile’s actions and work, so the girls’ mother is depicted as a failure at mothering as well as a weak woman, and Big Ma does not want them to resemble her:

I took a bar of Ivory soap and one of Cecile’s washcloth and scrubbed away at the black ink scrawled all over Miss Patty Cake. Big Ma taught me to be a hard washboard scrubber. To not accept dirt, dust, or stains on clothes, floors, or walls, or on ourselves. ‘Scrub like you’re a gal from a one-cow town near Prattville, Alabama,’ she’d tell me while Vonetta and Fern ran around and played. ‘Can’t have you dreaming out of your head and writing on the walls. That’ll only lead to ruin.’ (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p. 95)

As to Delphine, the author shows how she appears to have internalised Big Ma’s judgmental tendencies, as she tends to be competitive with other girls. In Oakland she meets Eunice, who also has two sisters and goes to the center to get breakfast and receive lessons. One time when both girls are talking, Delphine admits to herself that she hates telling her that she is going into the sixth grade because Eunice is older and feels this will make Eunice feel superior to her. Hence, in order to make herself feel better, she thinks that she is taller than her. But suddenly, Delphine forgets about her own competitive attitude, and tells Eunice that her dress is nice. That is the moment when she realises that Eunice is not the kind of girl who judges her and thinks her clothes are better than hers or who wants her to feel ignorant. In fact, she notices that they have quite a few things in common and that they are the oldest girls in their families (Williams-Garcia, 2012,

pp.138–139). Delphine comes to understand that the other girls are equal to her and that there is no need for women to judge each other or to compete against each other. This way of thinking shows that Delphine is an empowered female who can think by herself instead of following the judgmental precepts of her grandmother.

As to Cecile, despite having abandoned her daughters, when she is with them in Oakland she gives them the autonomy they need and helps them to think by themselves. Nonetheless, it is precisely Cecile's absence what has impeded the empowerment of Delphine and obliged her to be subdued to her grandmother Big Ma, whose patriarchal values oppress her as a woman. After being empowered by her mother, Delphine feels certain ambiguity, as she understands her mother but at the same time she does not forgive that she has not assumed the role of a mother and that, as a consequence, Delphine has felt obliged to be a motherly figure for her little sisters.: "I was spilling over. 'I'm only eleven years old, and I do everything. I have to because you're not there to do it. I'm only eleven years old, but I do the best I can. I don't just up and leave.'" (Williams-Garcia, 2012, p.206).

The same happens in *The Thing About Luck*, since Summer is forced to follow Obaachan's rules in order to appear as a proper young lady, rules that her brother Jaz does not have to follow. Obaachan is the one who is in charge of her family, the one setting the rules, what turns her into an empowered woman, but at the same time she defends the sexist, patriarchal values she has internalised throughout her life. These values are also represented by her job during the harvesting. Summer is aware of the fact that both she and her grandmother fall into the stereotype of domestic women, as their job is to cook for the male workers instead of driving the combines (Kadohata, 2013, p. 48).

Apart from the gender stereotypes Summer has to follow, her grandmother also controls her relationship with the opposite sex. Obaachan has a very traditional vision of romantic relationships, and she does not allow her to look at any boy, threatening to ground her if so. Summer's grandmother has this attitude when the little girl falls in love with Robbie, the son of the bosses of one of the farms in which they work (Kadohata, 2013, pp. 52–53).

Another way in which Summer suffers her family's sexist behavior is the different treatment she and her brother receive. She is forced to be what her family wants her to be, contrary to her brother, who is given all the freedom he wants. Summer defies her

grandmother when she kisses Robbie, but that kiss makes her fall into another type of oppression: she starts feeling the pressure of gender stereotypes about what a girl should look like or do in order to attract a man. In fact, she starts obsessing about the reasons why a boy would like to be her boyfriend:

Unfortunately, I couldn't think of a single reason why a boy would want to be my boyfriend. Some girls in my class already had boyfriends. They wore makeup and had cell phones and polished their nails. I tried to polish my nails once, and it smelled so horrible, I knew I could never do that again. Then I thought of one reason I'd make a good girlfriend. "I'm a good cook," I said triumphantly. "Men don't care about good cook until ready to get married," Obaachan said. "You think fourteen-year-old boy want you to roast him chicken?". (Kadohata, 2013, pp.143-144)

This worry about how the opposite sex perceives her shows how the heteropatriarchy obliges women to be dependent on men in order to be valuable and worthy in a male-dominated world: "Crud. The way we were splitting up, I probably wouldn't see Robbie for days. Seeing him was the highlight of my harvesting existence. Right then he was sitting and looking toward the fields, one of his legs impatiently shaking up and down" (Kadohata, 2013, p.171). It seems that Summer feels empty and incomplete without him and she attributes all the joy she feels during the harvest to Robbie.

In conclusion, Rita Williams-Garcia and Cynthia Kadohata express the development of their protagonists concerning gender roles in different ways: In *One Crazy Summer*, there are several role models that the three sisters take into consideration for their development, such as Cecile or Big Ma. Delphine, in comparison to Summer, has the opportunity to develop her ideas about feminism with more than one woman in her life: with her grandmother she sees the negative part, she experiences the oppression of the patriarchy, whereas with her mother she learns to have a more emancipated mentality. At the same time, Delphine represents strength regarding the tough situations she goes through during the novel and she can be an example of empowerment for her little sisters. In contrast, in *The Thing About Luck*, Summer only receives the patriarchal values of her grandmother, but she lacks from a feminine referent who is able to make her feel emancipated.

4. Conclusion

This paper's purpose was to demonstrate how, in spite of the fact that their stories take place in different times and settings – *One Crazy Summer* takes place during the summer of 1968 in Oakland, California, and *The Thing About Luck* takes place in 2013 in Kansas, Texas and Oklahoma – the protagonists of both novels suffer a triple discrimination for belonging to a minority, for being women and for being minors in a racist and patriarchal society in which children are on the bottom rung of the social ladder and totally depend on adults who not always treat them with the respect they deserve.

Regarding the concept idea of belonging to a minority, both its internal implications – how the protagonists of the novels reflect on what that belonging means to them and how discrimination affects them – and its external implications – the subtle or overt ways in which society discriminates them – have been observed. In the case of Delphine, the protagonist of *One Crazy Summer*, it is necessary to consider that the book's setting time is the summer of 1968, a life-changing time for black people in the United States when the fight for freedom was the order of the day. Delphine, being the caretaker of her sisters Vonetta and Fern, is aware of the pressure she usually feels when white people are around. The indispensable good manners and politeness manifested by the three sisters are a symbol of self-defense of their own race and a way to avoid feeling misjudged. However, the constant police attacks in Oakland, as well as what she learns from her mother Cecile, have Delphine in line and conscious about the injustices against minorities and makes herself question her desire of appearing faultless in front of white people.

Summer, the protagonist of *The Thing About Luck*, feels discrimination differently from Delphine; the novel takes place in the 2010s, and Summer perceives the prejudices she sees in a way that highlights the role of stereotypes towards minorities, as well as the effect of immigration to the country. At the same time, she values her belonging to the Japanese American minority, and she is interested in the history of her family. Both girls illustrate discrimination similarly, giving their readers the chance to put themselves in the shoes of children whose reality is not full of privilege.

With respect to the relationship between the protagonists and the adult figures in their families, both Delphine and Summer find themselves in difficult situations, although in a different manner. In the case of Delphine, it can be remarked that her education has depended on her grandmother, Big Ma, who instills southern manners in her

granddaughter. Suddenly, when she arrives in Oakland and gets to know her mother after several years of feeling her abandonment, she feels displaced, lonely and not loved. Cecile, an egocentric and selfish character, does not act motherly in spite of the fact that this is what society and her daughters expect from her. What is more, Cecile changes her name to “Nzila”, representing her search for her own identity but also her decision to forget a life that included her daughters. During the story, Delphine feels discrimination from her own mother and tries to feel love from other people at the centre the three sisters are attending. However, it is not until the end of the novel that Cecile takes an interest in her daughters and their relationship appears to be recovering.

In the case of Summer, she feels that her relationship with her grandmother is a lost cause despite her best efforts. The old woman does not know how to accompany Summer’s changes and growth and puts many obstacles in her way. Summer finds herself stuck in her situation, and Obaachan punishes her every time she tries to make a personal decision. Also, Summer’s supportive figure appears to be the man in the family – Jiichan, her grandfather –, as she does not have the opportunity to receive advice from her grandmother. This creates a constant confusion in the protagonist’s personality and an exceedingly difficult environment for developing her own identity. Nevertheless, Delphine and Summer appear to be strong enough to endure the tough situations their relatives make them go through, on top of the discrimination exercised by their society, and show the power of resilience.

Regarding the gender roles of the novels, we can analyze the third type of discrimination Delphine and Summer undergo. Taking into account the feminist approach of the books, the girls appear to have felt sexism from a very young age. Big Ma and Obaachan will be the ones embodying this discrimination, while Cecile – Delphine’s mother – will defy traditional gender roles. Throughout the novels, similar symbols of sexist education are noticeable in both characters. Big Ma portrays a negative picture of their mother, Cecile, for their granddaughters and gives importance to sexist values learnt in the South, where she lays her roots. Furthermore, she teaches them to be correct and feminine. Cecile is more neutral throughout the story, which indirectly gives her daughters the chance to be independent. In *The Thing about Luck*, Obaachan controls Summer to the extent of forbidding her to approach the boy she likes and expects her to do the household chores, while her grandfather and her brother are exempt from them.

All things considered, taking into account that *One Crazy Summer* and *The Thing About Luck* occur in different settings and times, we can see that Rita Williams-Garcia and Cynthia Kadohata are able to show how female children of such minorities in the United States suffer the triple discrimination mentioned at the beginning of this research paper. Their works, addressed at middle-grade readers, not only allow their readers to feel identified with the protagonists, but also help them be more open-minded and tolerant. Moreover, both novels make their readers aware of the enrichment minorities bring to the American society. Children's literature gives us hope that, in a country where everything seems to be possible, discrimination can be erased once and for all.

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