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Modernity and Personal Experiments in Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)

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<p>Keywords:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Womanism- Liberation- Oppression-African American- Self-Identity-Personal Experiment <p>Article Info</p> <hr/> <p>Article history:</p> <p>Received: 2-9-2021</p> <p>Accepted: 1-10-2021</p> <p>Available online</p> <p>23-1-2022</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>Women in the modern era have been defined as being revolutionary and opposed to the traditional representation of their lives. Alice Walker (February 1944-) a Pulitzer Prize-winning figure is an African-American novelist, critic and poet who has vigorously defended women's modernist innovations and African American civil rights in her works. Her novel <i>The Color Purple</i> (1982) explores the African American female experience through the life and struggles of the narrator of the novel. What distinguishes <i>The Color Purple</i> is the very feature of psychological state of the heroine whilst struggling for her minimal rights of being a woman and black. The heroine of the novel Celie is revolutionary and anti-traditional. Walker planted her own personal experience within <i>The Color Purple</i> through the sufferings and traumatic life of the female characters. Walker through "Womanism", a term coined by herself representing Black feminism, combines critical elements in <i>The Color Purple</i>, namely the importance of black history and heritage and the centrality of female creativity and competence in that heritage, which are often symbolized by quilts, sisterhood, liberation, self-identity, double consciousness and other symbols. Further through exhibiting</p>
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	<p>African American woman's twice-oppressed state, as they were double-discriminated racially and sexually by Americans, on the one hand by white Americans, on the other, by their fellow black male counterparts. The epistolary style of <i>The Color Purple</i> is probably an essential feature of modern literary output. The letters are used to manifest Celie and other characters' lives to readers. Furthermore, within <i>The Color Purple</i>, Walker employs the very modern African American literary feature which is "Neo-Slave Narrative". Through Neo-Slave Narrative, she displays her black female characters' still-enslaved status in the modern era to form a juxtaposition between narrations of her fellow oppressed black women and Slave-Narrations of enslaved African Americans like Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner truth.</p>
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الحدائثة والتجربة الشخصية في رواية أليس ووكر: اللون الأرجواني

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	<p>الكلمات الدالة:-</p> <p>- النسوية - التحرر - الاضطهاد - الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي - الهوية الذاتية - التجربة الشخصية</p>
<p>الخلاصة: يتم تعريف النساء في العصر الحديث على أنهن ثوريات ومعارضات للتمثيل التقليدي لحياتهن. أليس ووكر (فبراير ١٩٤٤-) الحائزة على جائزة بوليتزر، روائية وناقدة وشاعرة أمريكية من أصل أفريقي دافعت بقوة عن الجهود الحدائثة للمرأة والحقوق المدنية للأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي في أعمالها. تستكشف روايتها "اللون الأرجواني" (١٩٨٢) تجربة الإناث الأمريكيات من أصل أفريقي من خلال حياة الراوي في الرواية ونضالاته. يميز ان "اللون الأرجواني" هو سمة الحالة النفسية للبطلة بينما تكافح من أجل الحد الأدنى من حقوقها في أن تكون امرأة، وأن تكون سوداء. بطلة رواية "سيلي" هي ثورية ومعادية للتقاليد. عكست الرواية ووكر تجربتها الشخصية في "اللون الأرجواني" من خلال المعاناة والحياة المؤلمة للشخصيات النسائية في الرواية نفسها.</p> <p>تجمع ووكر من خلال مصطلح "النسوية"، وهو مصطلح صاغته بنفسها يمثل النسوية السوداء، بين العناصر الهامة في الرواية "اللون الأرجواني" وهي أهمية التاريخ والتراث الأسود ومركزية الإبداع والكفاءة الأنثوية في ذلك التراث، والتي غالبًا ما يرمز إليها باللحف، والتأخي</p>	<p>معلومات البحث</p> <p>تاريخ البحث:</p> <p>الاستلام: ٢٠٢١-٩-٢</p> <p>القبول: ٢٠٢١-١٠-١</p> <p>التوفر على النت</p>

<p>والتحرر والهوية الذاتية والوعي المزدوج والرموز الأخرى. علاوة على ذلك من خلال عرض حالة المرأة الأمريكية من أصل أفريقي المضطهدة مرتين، لأنها تعرضت للتمييز العنصري والجنسي المزدوج من قبل الأمريكيين ، من ناحية من قبل الأمريكيين البيض ، ومن ناحية أخرى ، من قبل نظرائهم الذكور السود.</p> <p>يعد أسلوب الرسائل لـ "اللون الأرجواني" سمة أساسية في أعمال الأدب الحديث. تُستخدم الرسائل لإظهار حياة بطلة الرواية "سيلي" وشخصيات أخرى للقراء. علاوة على ذلك في رواية "اللون الأرجواني" تستخدم الكاتبة ووكر الميزة الأدبية الأفريقية الأمريكية الحديثة جدًا وهي "قصة العبيد الجدد". من خلال هذه الميزة ، تعرض مكانة شخصياتها النسائية السوداء التي لا تزال مستعبدة في العصر الحديث لخلق التقابل بين روايات زميلاتهن من النساء السود المضطهدات وروايات العبيد للأمريكيين الأفارقة المستعبدين مثل هاربيت جاكوبس وسوجورنر تروث.</p>	<p>23-1-2022</p>
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1. *The Color Purple* (1982), The Utmost Womanist Phenomenon.

The Color Purple was published in 1982 by Alice Walker, the figure who is being described by many critics as being one of the most familiar African American writer, critic, and poet within the second hand of the twentieth century. This phenomenal female figure is depicting black women's struggles and obstacles towards emancipation and freedom. *The Color Purple* is enjoyed, analyzed, criticized and read by multi-raced people, classes, genders, and cultures. It had, after all, been intended to criticize the unfair practices of racial and sexual domination. Anjali Abraham regards *The Color Purple* to be "a landmark in African American women's fiction and a turning point in Walker's career as a writer" (275). Through that black feminist masterpiece, as Tanritanir and Boynukara in their 2011 article comment that readers frequently "encounter women characters that increase their power or sense of self through the opportunity to write their own truths" (280).

Women's Liberation side by side with Black Cultural Nationalism movements were two quietly different movements within the 1970s and 1980s of America. Women's Liberation banner "All the women are white, and all the blacks are men" ironically portrays this double exclusion. In his work, Dubey explains "Black women's novel, in the 1970s do not simply oppose contemporary nationalist discourse on black identity. They imagine black femininity as an absence, and draw attention to the textual effects of this absence." (30). Walker's response to such disregard for black women's rights was to publish *The Color Purple*, which renowned black critics regard as Walker's innovation against the forementioned movements. Bell Hooks in her 1993 book *Reading and Resistance: The Color Purple* maintains that the novel:

parodies those primary texts of autobiographical writing which have shaped and influenced the direction of Afro-American fiction ... one that changed the African-American history; that led the groundwork for the development of a distinct African-American literary tradition. (291)

Hooks furthermore asserts the power and essentiality of the novel *The Color Purple*'s modern narrative, in which the dark forces of hatred, racism, and dominance are confronted by liberation, heroism, and free will. She goes on to say:

the magic of *The Color Purple* that it is so much a book of our time, imaginatively evoking the promise of a world in which one can have it all; a world in which sexual exploitation can be easily overcome; a world of unlimited access to material wellbeing. A world where evils of racism are tempered by the positive gestures of concerned and caring white folks, a world where sexual boundaries can be transgressed at will without negative consequences, a world where spiritual salvation is the lot of the elect. (291)

Ravindra Hajare views that within the novel, Walker erupts: "themes like estrangement and reconciliation, redemption through love, sisterhood, racism and sexism, oppression and suppression, political and economical [sic] emancipation of women, relation between men and women, gender discrimination, lesbianism" (14). Alice Walker enters the feminist realm of free conception with her own brand, she invented the word "womanism" to describe the black feminist movement. The main themes of the novel are parallel with the very ideology of womanism which are liberation, elimination of prejudice running around racial, gender-based and class. To validate the abovementioned statement, Shahida in her 2005 study on Walker's *The Color Purple* concludes that "same as Black Feminist initiatives, *The Color Purple* strives for productive rights, sterilization abuse, equal access to abortion, health care, child care, violence against women, rape, beating, sexual harassment, welfare rights, lesbian and homosexual rights, police brutality, and anti-racism" (26-27).

As a womanist, Alice Walker is interested in discovering life's essence and purpose via independent choice and free will. *The Color Purple* thought to represent woman's growth when she begins to look at the foundations of patriarchal conceptions of womanhood and black feminism through a womanist magnifier. Walker was well aware that black women had no voice at the time she wrote that novel. She attempted to express their thoughts via that novel. She had to deal with a lot of backlashes from the black community for portraying black men as rapists, weak, and repressive. Walker took her ground by defending herself against every reaction from *The Color Purple*. In her 2010 article *The World Has Changed* she states:

I came through understanding that I am an expression of the divine, just like a peach is, just like a fish is. I have a right to be this way...I can't apologize for that, nor can I change it, nor do I want to... We will never have to be other than who we are in order to be successful... we realize that we are as ourselves unlimited and our experiences valid. It is for the rest of the world to recognize this, if they choose. (22).

Walker writes on black women's battle for change and a respectable role as a womanist. According to Boutheina, Black women hold within their soul the anguish

they experience when fighting back and transform it into a powerful force that allows them to break free from the shackles of gender and racism (77-78). Carmen Gillespie on the other hand writes that *The Color Purple*'s characters exhibit womanist tendencies. She further states that "Walker implies that women can gain the upper hand at some time by opposing the authority of their spouses and oppressors, and daring to overcome their odds, through the characters Celie, Shug Avery, Sofia, and Nettie" (20). Walker focuses on women's maltreatment by their husbands and partners while also addressing the womanist aspect of these female characters. Celie, the main character of *The Color Purple*, is a strange, brave, and daring woman. One can safely state that Sofia and Shug Avery together are absolute female-driven protagonists.

Gillespie further studies about Shug, and discusses that she holds herself to be a womanist representative not by opposing, but altering the trajectory of the story by developing a good connection with Celie, as well as supporting her family and maintaining sexual interactions with Celie. She sets the way for Celie's upliftment as a blues vocalist. She gives Celie the tools, language, and methods she needs to discover her truth, self-worth, and desires (22). Alice Walker a supporter of Black feminism suggests that Black women should oppose the system of racial, sexual, gendered, and class discrimination and redefine themselves to resist critical ideas about Black womanhood in a white and male-dominated society in order to achieve the survival of the population in *The Color Purple*. Moreover, Wang suggests that Alice Walker utilizes Shug's image to reflect herself in the womanism movement (Wang 48).

Another pure symbol to represent Black sisterhood and Womanism is the use of African heritage. Walker's introducing of art of quilting aside from expressing the African ancestral culture and Womanism is that quilting gives self-financial independence and helps to overcome racial despair to show the opposite race their heritage and roots. The quilt Celie, Sofia and Shug work on is called "the sister's choice" (TCP 41) as patterns with little star-like yellow pieces stand for love, prosperity and beauty, as mentioned henceforth:

Shug Avery donate her old yellow dress for scrap, and I work in a piece every chance I get. It a nice pattern call Sister's Choice. If the quilt turn out perfect, maybe I give it to her, if it not perfect, maybe I keep. I want it for myself, just for the little yellow pieces, look like stars.

Celie is freed from oppression as a result of her transition, which results in feminist consciousness. Corrine sees folks in Olinka sewing lovely quilts with animals and birds. She, too "began to make a quilt that alternated one square of appliqued figures with one nine-patch block, using the clothes the children had outgrown, and some of her old dresses" (66). Again, quilting is used as a symbol of Africanization of black Americans, which is also one of the bases of Womanism:

Then I remember her quilts. The Olinka men make beautiful quilts which are full of animals and birds and people. And as soon as Corrine saw them, she began to make a quilt that alternated one square of appliqued figures with one nine-patch block, using the clothes the children had outgrown. (95)

An additional feature of Womanism, as alternate of Black Feminism is the sense of sisterhood between black women, the feature which merely conquers a wide area of *The Color Purple*. Generally, the word "sisterhood" is used by feminists to describe the relationship that exists between women who are not related by blood but are linked in unity and solidarity. Women's sisterhood, according to Abraham, "is a widely used word to refer to women feminism, engagement in the women's movement, support for other women, or knowledge of feminine traits unique to women's nature" (275). The foremost image of sisterhood is portrayed between Celie and Shug Avery in *The Color Purple*. Sisterhood is pivotal to Celie's self-realization, as she receives spiritual support from her sister Nettie, her husband's lover, and her stepson's wife Sofia:

Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier then me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like somethin tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motocar. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some. I ast her to give me the picture. An all night long I stare at it. An now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress to kill, whirling and laughing. (TCP 13).

Sofia is regarded as the symbol of repression against male domination, violence and abuse, and modern slavery in a way that she is portrayed as a human version of the very idea of Womanism. The characters in *The Color Purple*, according to Fiske, "are connected by a similar experience of pain and a common fight to survive in the face of oppression, brutality, and abuse" (151). Celie and Sofia develop personal completion relationship. Martin acclaims that Sofia is Celie's polar opposite, being assertive and talkative. She has a realistic vision of the world and isn't scared to stand up to repressive patriarchy in order to attain her own objectives (30). Even in their first meeting, Sofia is clearly a forceful and courageous individual; as Harpo brings her home to meet and greet his father, she is not terrified and is not hesitant to express her opinion:

Mr. ___ say, No need to think I'm gon let my boy marry you just cause you in the family way ... Sofia face git more ruddy. The skin move back on her forehead. Her ears raise. But she laugh. She glance at Harpo sitting there with his head down and his hands tween his knees. She say, What I need to marry Harpo for? He still living here with you. What food and clothes he git, you buy. (TCP 27)

Sofia is not a tragic figure; she is a symbol of resistance to injustice in whatever form, says Celie. Sofia is the embodiment of sisterhood, embracing every aspect of Womanism in its purest form, writes Celie about her friend Sofia.

2. Race and Gender, Double Oppression and Liberation in *The Color Purple*.

According to Gates and Appiah the topic of violence against African Americans did not receive much attention until beginning of the 1960s (17). They further acclaim that "In *The Color Purple* the role of male domination in the frustration of black women's struggle for independence is clearly the focus" (17). "To be black and to be a woman, to be a double outsider, to be a woman, twice oppressed, to be more than invisible. That

is a triple vision” (Harley 80). Celie is treated like a slave in a slave sale when she is pushed into marriage with Albert. Dilara Isik follows the story and writes that Celie’s stepfather first “persuades Albert to marry her” by claiming that “she works hard and would obey him”. Within the eyes of the Patriarchal point of view a woman is whether bad or good. Good when she meets his expectations, and bad when she disobeys him and refuse to address him, on that matter, she is seen as a terrible wife, or a witch. (25). Dona Haisty Winchell studies the events thoroughly and claims that Albert “inspects her as if she were a piece of livestock and marries her out of desperation since he requires someone to cook and clean for him as well as care for his four children. Celie is regarded as property and a servant in this place, being passed from one dominating black guy to the next. She is not a slave in the traditional sense” (86), but she is by all matters, being mastered by the males in her life and unable to make her own decisions.

In this work, there is oppression of sexuality and gender. *The Color Purple*, according to scholar Bernard Bell is “more concerned with the politics of sex and self than with the politics of class and race... its unrelenting, severe attacks on male hegemony, especially the violent abuse of black women by black men, is offered as a revolutionary leap forward into a new social order based on sexual egalitarianism” (263). To understand how Celie is governed by the current patriarchal order, we must first consider the history of slavery and black women’s double oppression. As Nederveen Pieterse correctly points out that human equality did not evolve organically once slavery was abolished (8). Whilst Mosse believes that Racism, on the other hand, became a line of demarcation between the black and white populations. As a result, black people have remained one of the most prominent countertypes to white supremacy (68). As a matter of fact, these systems of distinction persisted throughout twentieth-century America. Celie accepts these disparities quietly in *The Color Purple*. Other female characters, such as Nettie, are far more active in their resistance to male dominance. Nettie advises Celie to fight such imposed identities:

Don’t let them run over you, Nettie say. You got to let them know who got the upper hand. They got it, I say. But she keep on, You got to fight. You got to fight. But I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive. (TCP 19)

Celie’s oppression is seen in her fragility, which has developed as a result of her being a female character and being oppressed by her stepfather (Gates and Appiah 215). Jennifer Martin indicates, that the story “puts an end to the conventional picture of the male-dominated southern community with the complete transformation of the main character Celie, “one of the most fragmented and oppressed women in literature” (27). Tanritanir and Boynukara further detail that as she “grows from a shy young woman to one who has the confidence to stand up for herself, eventually becoming one of those women whose tongue will defend her whenever she opens her mouth” (289) because she is unable to grasp what is happening to her or the reason why, she starts to send God letters, seeking for a call or a sign (Gregory 364): “Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.” (TCP 8).

The Color Purple’s historical relevance stems from Walker’s depiction of black women in America facing double oppression. Walker argues that whites discriminate against black women, as well as black males who apply a double standard. Shnawa writes that:

Black men suffer from racial segregation, humiliation and exploitation. On the other side the black women face double marginalization due to racial segregation and sexual oppression. Black women and their own children may be considered as assets belonging to the white masters. The black women suffer from rape and abuse at the hands of men who treat them as sexual objects necessary for sustenance of the planting system in the Southern region before the Civil War. (1)

A historical examination of African American male authors before Harlem Renaissance to the period of post-Harlem Renaissance era in the 1920s shows that they depict black women as second-class citizens, even to the lesser-known black male characters. In his work *Banjo A Story Without a Plot* (1927), Claude McKay depicts black women as prostitutes or being sex objects to be used by males for pleasure. In his renowned article "How Thomas Bigger was Born" (1940), Richard Wright, the founder of contemporary African American literature, expressed his clear belief in phallic power. His best-known works, like *Native Son* (1940), and *Black Boy* (1945) depict disenfranchised black women who are linking themselves in reference to their counterparts. African American Women were being exploited and marginalized twice, once by whites, and then by black males as well, at times almost eradicating their existence. As Calvin Hernton (1990) writes:

As white people have created and maintained a racist culture, so have (black) men created and maintained a sexist culture. Racist culture teaches all whites to be racist in some manner or the other. In and through an elaborate system of masculine versus feminine gender Imperatives sexist culture socializes all men to be sexist. (10)

Walker has examined black women from the inside out, the story in *The Color Purple* depicts sexism and racism in great detail, providing key imagery for gender and class scuffle. Walker's choice of epistolary style narrates the story of the heroine, Celie's, acute visions of injustices and unfortunate events in her life. Her letters to God disclose her father's transgressions. For that matter, Vineberg writes:

All the virtues of the book its gumptions and directness and the potency of its private, vernacular vision of anguish are evident in the first half of this section. Walker hauls you in by serving up rape, incest and infanticide on the first two pages reported by a fourteen-year-old girl who doesn't know what's happening to her. It's a shock the reader doesn't recover from until, sixty or seventy pages later, the bells of sisterhood begin to peal so loudly that they drown out everything else in the book. (95)

Celie's original paternity is depicted in the narrative, and racial behaviors come dangerously close to pursuing her. Men in her life have physically assaulted her, dehumanized her, and brutalized her, and she has been compelled to remain silent in a brutal, nasty, and patriarchal society. Alfonso, her stepfather, has sexually and physically abused her. Celie's life has been ruined by her stepfather's repeated rapes. Celie writes: "He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't." (TCP 8).

Dilara Isik believes that sexual oppression ties oppressions of race, gender, and class together since they all revolve around the control of black women's sexuality. In terms of images of black females, such as the "mammy," race governs sexuality (32). *The Color Purple* is a work of fiction, but it serves as a powerful representation of what happens in the black community. Walker, according to Collins, gives a voice to women who have had similar experiences to Celie's in order to spark conversations about the politics of black femininity. Collins further elaborates:

By creating Celie and giving her the language to tell of her sexual abuse, Walker adds Celie's voice to muted yet growing discussions of the sexual politics of Black womanhood. But when it comes to other important issues concerning Black women's sexuality, US Black women have found it almost impossible to say what has happened. (123)

Racism is characterized in *The Color Purple* as a means of oppression; a white antagonist assaulting a vulnerable black victim. It's worthy to note that none of the novel's villains is completely wicked being and those who perpetrate the violence are frequently victims of abuse themselves. Mr. ___ treats his family and others around him similar to his oppressor-being father. As Abdulimam comments, "in the story, racism is portrayed as a cage through which whites oppress black people. Sofia's confinement is a metaphor for black people who are enslaved by racism and forced to live in slavery and domesticity in their own houses" (4). Because of this prejudice, there is a perception that white skin is more beautiful throughout the story. *The Color Purple* "depicts the emancipation of African American women" from patriarchal oppression "at the turn of the twentieth century" (Alcoff and Mendieta 5). Her statement is true, as race, class, gender and sexuality, are all intertwined. Celie, the heroine, fights for self-expression in a world that has already defined her (5).

He laugh. Who you think you is? he say. You can't curse nobody. Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all. Until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. (TCP 102)

Walker develops a variety of powerful female characters in *The Color Purple*. Celie looks up to Shug Avery, Kate, and Sofia because they are all rebellious, powerful and independent females. Collins explores women's relationships in depth in the novel. Black women's sisterhood is a recurring topic among African-American female authors. Black women may assist one another to grow and encourage each other (104). Sedehi et al exhibit that Nettie and Celie have a great friendship and are always there for one another. Shug and Celie also share an emotional connection that Celie has never had with any other man in her life. They have a sexual connection, and Celie develops confidence as a result of it (430).

Alice Walker is a pioneer in the fight against gender inequality, and her revolution is a one-of-a-kind decolonization of conventional love. She created 'homosexuality' to counter heterosexuality, where a female becomes a commodity of commerce and a patriarchal world thrives. According to a *Newsweek* review by Peter S Prescott back in 1983, "*The Color Purple* is ... an American story of lasting value, that unique kind of literature in which love redeems and meanness kills" (12). The practice of radical black subjectivity is what Floyd-Thomas and Gillman call "Celie's liberation in *The Color*

Purple” (550). Her existence no longer remains private, but rather becomes a public testament to the possibilities of oppression’s subversion. The protagonist of *The Color Purple* sets an example for her peers by having the bravery to speak the truth, even if it is unpleasant. However, by doing so, she transforms the African American woman’s double burden into a bounty of fresh chances. Celie confronts not just her particular dominator, Albert, but also the entire patriarchal system with this single act. What’s crucial to note at this stage is that Celie is also not doing this by herself. The liberation fight is assisted by the assistance of a large number of other black women, demonstrating the importance of the women’s community in gaining independence from any man-driven society (551).

3. Self, Identity and Double Consciousness in Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

W.E.B. Du Bois proposed in his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk* that blacks were previewed by white Americans through a metaphorical fold. This matter had three interconnected features, first, the skin as a symbol of African Americans' being different from white fellow Americans, then white people's non-ability to view African Americans as American counterparts, and finally, African Americans' inability to call themselves outside of that fold. He noted:

Black was born with a veil, in this world endowed with insight—this is a kind of no real self-consciousness, but merely through another world scale to measure the feeling of his own soul. It is a strange feeling, this is a double consciousness, a kind of always through the view of themselves, others with another world scale to measure the feel of his soul. (12)

The Souls of Black Folk’s double-consciousness has had a significant impact on black people, which will prompt them to consider how they may better understand their own culture and exist in the white world. Jian Ting indicates that when white culture is dominant, blacks confront a significant self-identity crisis. This has caused a lot of problems and uncertainty for black people’s identities. To put it another way, black Americans live in the fissures created by the displacement of black and white cultural circumstances and attitude (2). Walker once told *Washington Post* in 1979: “we are in the same nation, a nation does not reject their spirit. If rejected, for the sake of our children, we as artists, and the future of witness’s responsibility is to pick them up” (135).

The Color Purple is an illustration of black people’s double-conscious awareness. Nettie, Celie’s sister, is one of the key characters within the novel to speak to the consciousness duality. She has been battling the strengths of destiny and escapes the house and pays a visit to her sister. She steadfastly rejects Mr. ___’s abuse and flees to the black pastor Samuel’s home, where she works as a servant before joining him as a missionary in Africa. They had numerous unique experiences in Africa, where they have a bond to her dark skin. Despite several challenges and tragic occurrences, they are finally able to overcome them because of their strong black national spirit. She has distinct thoughts about this location as a black American. She never considers it to be a genuine location. She considers herself an American figure, hence, she would not visit a location infested by “savages who do not wear clothes”, as she explains in the letter:

In the morning I started asking questions about Africa and started reading all the books Samuel and Corrine have on the subject. Did you know there were great cities in Africa, greater than Milledgeville or even Atlanta, thousands of years ago? That the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the Bible meant all of Africa? (TCP 74)

Nettie is a devout missionary in Africa, yet she also has a superior white conscience. She feels that educating Olinka women is critical for the self-realization and independence of African women. Moreover, in her letter, she writes:

The Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. When I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: A girl is nothing to herself, only to her husband can she become something. What can she become? I asked. Why, she said, the mother of his children. But I am not the mother of anybody's children, I said, and I am something. You are not much, she said. (TCP 83)

Black women who lose their dignity and respect of themselves, lose their female identity and are unable to realize their feminine beauty and value. Woodward elaborates that "Identity gives us a sense of who we are and to some extent satisfies a demand for some degree of stability and of security. Crises occur when an identity position is challenged or becomes insecure" (xi). Jian-ting narrates that the "rediscovery of black female particularity" is the focus of this novel's examination of female identity. Celie is the novel's protagonist. She lacks self-esteem, social standing, ideals, and goals. She is a good and lovely black girl. Her stepfather, however, rapes her when she is fourteen. Later, her stepfather makes a deal with Mr. ___ and orders her to marry him as a couple. In the viewpoint of men, a woman is a sexual object that may be abused and even sold for a low price (4). Walker through Nettie's letter emphasizes native African women's poor position within society, being limited to be an instrument of reproduction:

There is a way that the men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don't even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not "look in a man's face" as they say. To "look in a man's face" is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behavior around Pa. (TCP, p. 85)

Reconciling with her newfound identity, living in their new Tennessee home Celie, unlike in Mr. ___'s house, has the option of decorating her room in purple. Shug takes an old horseshoe and says, "us each other's people's now" (TCP 93), symbolizing their marriage. She is a new lady who can be proud of herself, with respect, love, and dignity, as well as her house. As she proclaims: "I'm poor, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here." (TCP 102). Celie's rebirth teaches her how to be sexually and psychologically free. Celie now writes her letters to her sister rather than God, a practice she began after discovering her inner power. This self-transformation is accomplished through discovering one's own skills. Linda Tate claims that "the main key of Celie's transformation is in the ability to take control over defining oneself, naming oneself" (131). Celie writes "I am so happy. I got love, I got

work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children.” (TCP 105) in her letter to Nettie from Memphis, and it is the first time Celie signs her letter. Later, when Shug professes her love for Germaine, a nineteen-year-old guy, Celie has no objections and lets her go; she has given up all for her love. Celie has learned to value the freedom and independence of others, including Shug, to whom she owes her transformation.

4. *The Color Purple* as a Modern Epistolary Narrative.

There are great examples of epistolary narrations that peaked in eighteenth-century Europe and created masterpieces. Many artists from diverse origins and times have utilized the letter as an artistic tool. Nonetheless, for decades, novel’s epistolary form has been considered as historically limited and antiquated. Numerous creative authors resurrected epistolary as an aesthetic genre in the 1970s (Altman 3). Despite the apparent parallels between epistolary writings and scripts of many writers, which are not easy to deny, Altman claims that the epistolary novel differs in substance and style. Altman further comments that epistolary novels:

reveal a surprising number of similar literary structures and intriguingly persistent patterns when read together with other examples of the epistolary genre. These structures, recurring thematic relations, character types, narrative events, and organization can in turn be related to properties inherent to the letter itself. In numerous instances the basic formal and functional characteristics of the letter, far from being merely ornamental, significantly influence the way meaning is consciously and unconsciously constructed by writers and readers of epistolary works.
(4)

Under the shade of the above statement, epistolary form can create meaning directly or indirectly through the artist’s use of a variety of techniques and vehicles. As a result, the letter serves as an intermediary in this situation. As a bridge between sender and receiver, it is a link between two far and separated points. Modern writers reject the conventional narrative technique. They advocate for old-fashioned experimentation. This is obvious in *The Color Purple*, when Walker deviates from the usual epistolary narrative approach. Campbell goes on to say that twentieth-century modern female novelists used epistolary form to achieve their goals. This argument clarifies modernists’ use of epistolary method for certain new innovations in this form (48).

Writing to God is a personal trait which is a new concept that deviates from the usual epistolary approach of humans writing letters to other human figures. *The Color Purple*’s unique method can be classified as a modernist aspect. Furthermore, *The Color Purple* belongs to a canon of outstanding epistolary fictional from a narratological viewpoint. One can sum up the novel’s narrative approach which is to be modern, as seen by the following aspect of the novel. For that, Mel Watkins comments about Alice Walker’s epistolary power of *The Color Purple* in *New York Times* as: “Alice Walker’s choice and effective handling of the epistolary style has enabled her to tell a poignant tale of women’s struggle for equality and independence” (7). When Mr.____ threatens Celie, she gets a compelling cause to choose writing rather than talking about her abuse and feelings: “You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy.” (TCP 8). She obeys Mr.____ because she is worried about her

mother. Through one of Nettie's letters, readers learn the main reason for Celie's writing:

I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart. I am so *lonely*, Celie. (74).

Celie's writing shifts from simple recounting of events to psychological analysis and even comedy as her experiences become more acute and meaningful (Schwartz 99). Boutheina indicates that her writing has changed as her character has evolved from a passive reporter to an active one who now has a self-realization and is able to look behind the pages of her life. Writing, through being a skilled writer, is transformed into a powerful tool for achieving liberty (98). Writing was a pivotal ride for her final liberation:

On this journey her written voice has been the vehicle for self-expression and self-revelation. Without the act of writing, Celie might have developed a distractive rage against her mistreatment. Or she would have been silent and invisible and probably would have died early, like her mother. The act of writing has saved her from this fate, as it has been a productive process and not a distractive one. (6)

In *The Color Purple*, the letters symbolize windows through which the reader learns about Celie and other characters' quests. Celie has a dual function in the letters, according to Schwartz, she is a means of epiphany, in which she is the author of her present, current and past narrative who has a part in the events she writes. The letters are regarded to be personal expression that allows the reader to learn as much as possible about the characters' sentiments and sensitivities. However, readers encounter not only Celie's letters in *The Color Purple*, but those of Nettie, whose voice alternates with that of her sister as well: "the letters reinvent events that happened by shuffling their chronological order and juxtaposing different conversations that seem to have happened simultaneously" (7). The letters of Nettie and Celie are so personal that we, as spectators, should connect them to one another.

Celie is the key witness and narrator of many of the events and individuals that Nettie becomes aware about through the letters of Celie. For that matter, Schwartz states: "the letters reinvent events that happened by shuffling their chronological order and juxtaposing different conversations that seem to have happened simultaneously" (7). Similarly, Gaitanidis and Curk refer to the letters as an unending after-dinner narrative in which the lives of the individuals and events are spiraled and intertwined via the exchanging of Celie and Nettie's narrations. She describes the letters as "a mosaic of colors and forms that lead the reader through the travels of the girls as they grow into ladies" (100). Celie and Nettie develop and reshape themselves, allowing the reader to experience and comprehend the pain and agony that has lasted for thirty years. They further state:

The poignancy of Celie's grief lies in her need for her sister and her inability to reach her or the children born in terror by her stepfather. Celie's recounting of her life, her controlling and shaping it, replaces sister love and mother love; paradoxically, their flight saves Nettie, Adam, and Olivia, just as Celie's struggle to communicate her feeling in their absence saves her and gives her autonomy (100).

Celie's cultural environment is difficult to navigate. Celie's writing and self-expression, on the other hand, helped her gain insight and survive her trauma. Gaitanidis and Curk explain:

Her culture, intractable to some, bears little initial resemblance to the world outside in its wisdom, morality and opportunity. But the forces that shape Celie's world, reflected in the complaints we hear ... and the pathos and hopelessness of her situation, are slowly transcended by the understanding and the distance that self-expression requires. (100)

The novel's epistolary form is arguably a prominent element of modern literary work. In two cases, Alice Walker produced a letter that was originally sarcastic, drawing the reader closer to Celie's situation. The letters serve as windows where the reader may learn more about Celie's events and the other characters. As Boutheina says, Walker's use of epistolary form is a deft storytelling style that provides the reader with a wealth of information and a profound understanding of Celie's environment as she recounts, reshapes, filters, and reconsiders her existence (104). The novel's epistolary aspect is not just an exterior trait linked to "Walker's style", but it is also a crucial part within the protagonist's psychological development and her capacity to articulate her feelings, as well as her maturation into a woman (Grebe 4). Abel further describes *The Color Purple* as: "...unquestionably a novel with a social message, but the larger issues in it concern a woman's personal struggle for freedom, and how she accomplishes this in a society where women are looked upon as inferior" (4).

McKever-Floyd comments that the protagonist Celie gains emancipation via epistolary choice, that allows the reader to access her inner world (427). According to Tanritanir and Boynukara Celie is compelled to write in order to express herself, which is only a substitute for speaking (284). Ottoh-Agede says she: "writes letters that demonstrate her heartbreaking struggle to make sense of her oppressed life," (24). Anjali Abraham insists that the reader learns that the protagonist "is shut off from everyone and her experience is so terrifying even to herself that she can only express it in the form of letters to God" (278).

To depict the inner consciousness of characters, modern authors employ the stream of consciousness approach. Robert Adams Day in his 1966 book *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction before Richardson* goes on to say that *The Color Purple* is a good choice for Walker to depict her inner thought. He makes the following argument:

The author may let his characters think on paper, he may try to show the actual notions of the mind, its veerings and incoherences, the shape which thoughts take before they are arranged for formal presentation: inchoate ideas, when the mind is tugged this way and the form is intended course by emotions and small happenings, or is wholly carried away on a new track in spite of itself. This method now removed from

the less “realistic” convention of the letter is called interior monologue or stream of consciousness technique. (8)

It is demonstrated that Walker’s utilization of epistolary form is, in fact, a stream of consciousness technique via which she depicts her characters’ minds. Celie’s letters reveal her inner thoughts and inner truth to the readers. She writes to God on a regular basis while speaking loudly in her room. She organizes her ideas in an illogical manner that confuses the past with the present. For instance, she says:

My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing. She scream at me. She cuss at me. I’m big. I can’t move fast enough. By time I git back from the well, the water be warm. By time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By time I git all the children ready for school it be dinner time. He don’t say nothing. (TCP 9)

Celie is psychologically unstable, according to these lines. There is a conflict between her exterior and interior selves. Her response to her mother’s query regarding the paternity of her first-born kid, reveals that her mind is jumbled with ideas, leading her to believe in superstitions. Celie’s views can never be conveyed in the third person. For describing Celie’s inner thoughts, Walker’s chosen narration is distinctive and unconventional. Walker, rather than portraying social realism directly, prefers to show the psychological truth of the society and characters (Tanklet 22).

5. Neo-Slave as Personal Experimental Narrative in Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

Slavery, in whatever form, is an unquestionable crime in the eyes of the contemporary man. Although slavery has not been abolished entirely, it is no longer generally accepted on a superficial level in our culture, as it was in the first pages of America’s existence. The slave narrative was the most helpful and thought-provoking element of slavery in America, and as Mobley points out: “the genre that began the African-American literary tradition in prose” (357).

Slave tales ceased to be written after the country’s emancipation proclamation in 1863 which abolished slavery, but this did not imply that the slaves’ position in literature had ended. Ariel Moniz alleges that several contemporary black female authors continue the practice of examining slavery and ensuring that it is not forgotten (1). Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler and Alice Walker were among the women who have resurfaced the slave-narrative tradition in their effort to expose its dark underneath and black ongoing consequences on people. Their work is similar to black female slave tales like Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). All of these female writers have utilized their writing to address a variety of slavery-related concerns. *The Color Purple* is interpreted as a story of an Afro-American woman’s oppression, struggles, and eventual liberation from suffering, despite the fact that it belongs to the epistolary novel genre. As Moniz points out that it has features with slave narratives. Slaves and ex-slaves began to narrate their tales, which resulted in the development of slave narratives. Slavery, segregation, and the brutality that went along with these terrible policies were all discussed. These stories were also seen as an attempt to evoke empathy from white Americans and improve their treatment of black people (2). One of the most well-known slave narratives is the famous preacher/slave Nat Turner’s *The Confessions of Nat Turner* written in 1831. Among the works that have been published are Frederick Douglass’ *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), Sojourner Truth’s *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850), Solomon

Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1861).

The Color Purple, on the other hand, is not set during the age of slavery, and none of the novel's main characters are slaves or slave owners in the classic meaning of slavery in North America. *The Color Purple*, unlike a slave tale, was not written or authorized by a former slave. As a result, most scholars who see some very vivid shades of slave narratives in the novel coin the term "neo-slave narrative" to describe these postmodernist texts that reveal the oppression of the African-American speaker, unearthing their horrific treatment that went unchallenged even after slavery was abolished (Zafar 99).

To characterize novels that are "residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom," (Bell 289). Neo-slave narratives according to Ashraf Rushdy are "contemporary novels that assume the structure, adopt the norms, and adopt the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative," (3). Their reliance on first-person narration in neo-slave narratives puts them closer to the original slave narratives, whereas any other form of slavery fiction would be rejected. Arlene Kaizer on the other hand, refers to the genre as "contemporary slavery narratives" and adopts a broader definition (3). It is defined as a post-slavery and post-segregation writers' historical narrative of slavery and segregation. Finally, Neo-slave works, like historical slave tales, employ resistance and freedom and are portrayed through the eyes of a slave protagonist, according to Jessie Sagawa and Wendy Robbins's 2011 article "Resister and Rebel Storytellers", cyclical time and fragmented language are common postmodernist tactics used in neo-slave narratives (11).

The Color Purple is considered a neo-slave tale in the same vein as the works described above. They are comparable in their first-person descriptions of tyranny, struggle, and eventual escape from it. Autobiographical literature depicting oppressed women's path from real, physical servitude to freedom were woven into slave narratives about African female slaves, narratives about and/or by women who are neo-slaves in fiction. Morgenstern goes on to say that "if neo-slave tales are fictional testimony literature recalling the terrible memory of slavery" (105), *The Color Purple* could be regarded in the same light. Celie, the heroine, is not tormented by the memories of her people's previous ordeals, but by her own slavery and traumas. Obligatory work and familial duties are the earliest signs of slavery. Angela Davis in her 1981 book *Women, Race and Class* narrates that slave women were "viewed as valuable labor-units" (5). Celie fills all of the tasks that African American female slaves were expected to fill, for instance, she works in the fields, prepared food and catering, was a cleaner, and she could work as hard as any man could do (*TCP* 9). She also looks after the children of others. Her existence as a family slave has been a series of humiliation encounters, misery, and hard labor:

He say. But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it. (*TCP* 14).

Henderson mentions that Celie's tale in *The Color Purple* is Walker's inspiration on her grandmother's experience as a twelve-year-old slave who was abused by her owner (67). Same as Walker's grandmother, Celie, a poor black woman living in the American southern frontier, suffers from paralyzing bonds imposed by black patriarchs, her stepfather, and her husband, whereas slave story heroes suffered under slavery sanctioned by white, men-mastered American society.

As Juan Al-Banna affirms, Alice Walker establishes a new voice by alluding to her grandmother. She acknowledges and embraces her literary and cultural history, as well as her people, and she has a profound understanding of her function as an artist in a socially and politically complicated world (9). Albanna further comments that “As a black writer, [Celie] is aware of her people’s folk tradition and pays homage to her forefathers by imagining a neo-slave narrative that features a twentieth-century female character who, despite living under the psychological and social slavery imposed on her by the patriarchs of her clan, is capable of reaffirming and reclaiming herself” (10). Celie’s letters are written in the style of slave narratives. The format of many slave tales is that of a notebook or diary, with each new paragraph indicating a new entry. *The Color Purple* is likewise written in the manner of a journal or diary, with each chapter acting as a fresh entry in which the reader is introduced to Celie’s and her friends’ lives (Zafar 95). Some slave tales were written like interviews, with the interviewer transcribing what the former slave stated. Celie’s voice in *The Color Purple* appears to be responding to an unknown interviewer’s questions. Walker also picked a vocabulary for Celie’s letters that is similar to that spoken by Blacks in the rural South though her capacity to be more detailed in her expressions has grown over time.

Through Celie’s experience, Walker wishes to show the reader that women are always at risk of becoming slaves, not just to white men, as in Sophia’s case with the Mayer family, but also to men of their own race, as in Celle’s case. As a result, the black woman’s race, class, and gender marginalization is complete. Celie is handled as if she were a slave, as a laborer and a breeder. Mr. is shown her as a slave for sale at a slave auction:

He say, Let me see her again... Pa call me. Celie, he say. Like it wasn’t nothing. Mr. ___ want another look at you. I go stand in the door. The sun shine in my eyes. He’s still up on his horse. He look me up and down. Pa rattle his newspaper. Move up, he won’t bite, he say. I go closer to the steps, but not too close cause I’m a little scared of his horse. Turn round, Pa say. I turn round. (*TCP*, p. 15)

The issue of female sexual exploitation and repression is present in both slave tales and *The Color Purple*. Forced sexual relations were a part of life for female African slaves. “They were considered as genderless and compelled to toil like men when it was advantageous to exploit them as if they were men,” Angela Davis writes, “but when it was profitable to exploit, punish, and oppress them in ways suited only to women, they were locked into exclusively female roles” (6) They were raped at the whims of their masters and exploited as slave-producing machines, the offspring of which were either added to the free work force they already had or sold to numerous slave masters around the region. The offspring of these parents had no idea who their dads and, in some cases, moms were. This had a catastrophic impact on the mental and physical well-being of African American families (6).

Zafar claims that the slave story came to a pleasant conclusion; after a lengthy time of servitude, Harriet Jacobs attained genuine freedom. She authored *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as part of the anti-slavery struggle. Frederick Douglas was able to liberate himself from slavery. After a lengthy time of cruel servitude, Celie, too, takes her freedom from her stepfather and husband. Celie, Shug, Sophia, and other men and women in her community provide her with support, just as they do with Jacobs. With their support, she learns how to take responsibility of her own life and finds the strength to do so (102). Toward the end of the story, she is able to abandon what she doesn’t want, humiliation, hatred, and violence, and claim what she deserves:

I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children. Jerene and Darlene come help me with the business. They twins. Never married. Love to sew. Plus, Darlene trying to teach me how to talk. What I care? I ast. I'm happy. (TCP 105).

The Color Purple is a powerful and timeless monument to the atrocities of slavery, not just in its physical form, but also in its ideas and constructions. This novel demonstrates that the problems caused by slavery do not go away just when slavery as a widespread institution has ended. Celie is still stuck in a society where she is denied self-worth due to her skin color and gender. Many of the difficulties she encountered, such as sexual assault, a lack of self-esteem, and the feeling that she was undeserving of love and respect, are still visible today. This truth may aid the reader in empathizing with her predicament and realizing that her narrative is not simply a product of her mind or a relic of the past, but might very well be current and genuine.

Conclusion

The African American writer Alice Walker, has resisted racism and called women for redefining themselves and for independence. Racial discrimination along with oppression is clearly portrayed in *The Color Purple*. Through her Neo-Slave narrative style, Walker concentrates on the Women's sufferings and also through her autobiographical writing, she confesses her agonies and is against all kinds of violence. Walker presents womanism to express the new image of an independent woman able to defend herself and have a better future. The first and main step in Walker's view is to raise female consciousness which is the powerful means for controlling different shapes of discriminations and violence.

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