

## Post-colonial identity in Alice Walker's The Color Purple

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### Abstract

When discussing significant African-American authors, Alice Walker is often mentioned because she is a feminist and vocal advocate for human rights. This paper deals with " Post-colonial identity in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*", a novel about the oppression of black women. The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction was awarded to this work. The novel centered on the position of black women in American society. The purpose of this paper is to talk about Celie's loss of identity due to her encounters with oppression and racism. An examination of women's struggles for self-determination in the face of patriarchal tyranny is presented here. The novel, *The Color Purple*, which used its heroine, Celie, to illustrate issues related to women's identity and abuse. Celie is a female character, who is oppressed by the male characters. Celie was subjected to both physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her stepfather, society and spouse. Celie wrote letters to "God" about her experiences with abuse. After years of abuse and bitterness, she finally began to rebel against her oppressors. She announced to the world that she is a strong, independent woman.

**Keywords:** identity, racism, oppression, abuse ,and slavery

### ملخص البحث:

تتناول هذه الورقة رواية اللون الأرجواني ل أليس ووكر حيث تصور المجتمع الأسود الذي نشأت فيه الكاتبة ، حيث تناضل النساء من أجل حقهن في الوجود والحفاظ على هوياتهن الثقافية.

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توضح ووكر كيف يتم تدمير السلطة عندما يجد الأفراد أصواتهم وهوياتهم. سيلبي ، البطلة الرئيسية في الرواية ، تتعرض للاغتصاب المستمر من قبل زوج أمها ، وكذلك من قبل زوجها ، السيد ، الذي يضربها ويغتصبها بقسوة. نتيجة لذلك ، فقدت هويتها كامرأة سوداء وتم استغلالها كسلعة. لقد فقدت إحساسها بذاتها. تتحول سيلبي من طفلة تعرضت لسوء المعاملة إلى امرأة بالغة أثناء سير الرواية. إنها تهرب من تأثير زوجها المقيد. تنمو سيلبي من خلال علاقاتها مع النساء الأخريات ، وخاصة عشيقته ألبرت (شوغ أفيري). يتم الكشف عن هويتها الحقيقية وجنسها. هؤلاء السيدات يغيرن حياة سيلبي. يصور اللون الأرجواني السلطة الذكورية ، وإساءة معاملة النساء السود ، وكفاحهن من أجل الهوية والحرية والاستقلال.

One of Walker's most well-known books, *The Color Purple*, has become a cultural icon in its own right. From the beginning of 1900 through the middle of the 1940s, the book is written in epistolary style. Celie, a 14-year-old girl from the South, is the protagonist of *The Color Purple*, a story about the oppression she experiences from males in her life. Celie spends the most of the novel writing letters to God because she is desolate and has no one else to turn to. As a young black woman, she experiences a great deal of discrimination and injustice. She loses whatever privacy she had over her body at a very early age. When she initially meets her stepfather, whom she thinks to be her father, he repeatedly rapes her. He abducts both of her children when she becomes pregnant from him twice. To make matters worse, her stepfather abuses her and pressures her into marriage with Albert , a widower who is secretly in love with blues artist Shug Avery .Albert is referred in the novel as Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. (Isik ,2017,p.24) Walker refers to Albert as Mr." \_\_\_\_" in order to emphasis Celie's alienation from him though she is his wife , so their married relation ship not natural as well as not healthy as it should be ,but rather it give the sense of oppressed-oppressor relation.

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On the other hand, Mr. — has a thing going on with the blues artist Shug Avery. Another character with a lot of strength, Sofia, is married to Mr. —'s son, who then tries to destroy her willpower much as Mr. — did to Celie. As a direct result of this, Sofia breaks up with him and later winds up in jail for attacking a white guy. Celie comes into contact with Shug, who eventually wins her heart and teaches her the meaning of true love via the closeness relation they share. In the meanwhile, Nettie, Celie's sister, tracks down the missionaries who have taken custody of her two children and travels to Africa with them. Nettie is a part of the adoption process. Despite Mr. —'s pledge to keep them forever separated, Nettie continues to send Celie Christmas and Easter cards and letters over the years. Celie eventually locates the letters that her sister Nettie had sent to Mr. —, with the assistance of Shug. She then quits Mr. —, launches her own pants company, and is reunited with her sister. The book *The Color Purple* is often referred to be a feminist work since it focuses on an oppressed and ignorant black woman's fight for her independence and post-colonial identity. (Ann Beaulieu, 2006, p.205)

Because of racism, black women have had their identities stolen from them. During that time, slavery was legal in the United States of America, black people were seen as nothing more than objects. Even after slavery was abolished, it took a long time for black people to be seen as equals. When the feminist movement first got started, black women weren't included because of their skin color. Throughout the whole of the history of the United States, the practice of academics using the word "women" even when they are only talking to the experiences of white women has been backed by the racial imperialism of white people. However, such a tradition, regardless of whether it is performed

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intentionally or subconsciously, contributes to the continuation of racism in the United States because it ignores the presence of women who are not white. In addition to this, it contributes to the continuation of sexism by denying the racial identity of white women and assuming that white women can only be defined by their sexuality. The white feminists who identified as liberationists did not oppose this sexist and racist behavior; rather, they supported it .(Hooks,2015,pp.22-23)

On the other hand, due of sexism, black women's identities have also been questioned and dismissed. Slavery has been described as "a Black male phenomenon, considering Black women as biological functionaries whose fates are made ephemeral— to lay their eggs and die." (Stetson as cited in Shukla, 2012,p.2) As a result, the yearnings of Afro-American women have been frustrated by the double stigma of "non-white, non-man," and their primary struggle has been to seek for a definition of themselves based on positive characteristics rather than according to what they lack. Consequently, the yearnings of Afro-American women have been frustrated by the double stigma of "non-white, non-man" (either blackness or masculinity). This sense of helplessness is something that has always been associated with the Afro-American female heritage. (Shukla ,2012,p.2)

Walker not only depicts the degrading atmosphere in which women live and how they domestic colonized by men and their society, but she also demonstrates her determination to improve their social rank and position by instilling in them a strong awareness of their own rights and their place in society. It is not only a story about the plight of black women; the book goes much beyond that. As a result of publishing the

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book, it wants to offer black women a voice and shows them the way to freedom and self-discovery, so proving their post-colonial identities. An African-American lady suffers under the oppression of her patriarchal family. In this tale Celie's family feel like a burden to Celie and her family members as a whole. Celie struggles to make sense of her surroundings. "But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive". (Walker, 1985, p. 26) "I do not say anything. I stay where I'm told. But I am alive". (Walker, 1985, p. 29) Despite the weight of her laments and worries, Celie is able to maintain her sense of self-awareness and self-preservation. Before leaving her husband's house, she tells Nettie, "it is worse than that, I think. If I was buried, I wouldn't have to work. But I just say, never mine, never mine, long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along". (Walker, 1985, p. 26) At the same time, addressing God shows Celie's deep estrangement, loneliness, marginality and domestic colonized. (AL-Qaisyi, 2011, pp. 27-28)

In their letters, Celie and Nettie share their thoughts, feelings, and wishes. They achieve their freedom via the use of words. Celie confides in God and approaches him in the novel's opening pages. As Celie's father-in-law tries to intimidate her, "you better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy". (Walker, 1985, p. 11) Rather of praying, Celie begins writing letters to God. His wife is unwell, so his need for sexual pleasure is not fulfilled by his wife, so Celie's stepfather rapes her. She can't understand why her father advises her to "You better shut up and git used to it, but I don't never git used to it". (Walker, 1985, p. 11) However Celie, who is fourteen, has never gotten accustomed to being raped. When a man she looks up to as a father abuses her, it's very painful for her. Celie's

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father is verbally abusive, and it's hard for her to see him do it. (Sedehi & Talif, 2013, p. 426)

After a childhood of loss, hardship, and cruelty, Celie is on the verge of adolescence. At the tender age of fourteen, Celie has been repeatedly raped and impregnated by the man (Alphonso) she believes to be her biological father. In her first anguished letter to God, Walker gives the reader a glimpse into the private thoughts and emotional state of her traumatized, guilty and shame-ridden, and depressed protagonist, "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". (Walker, 1985, p. 11) It is common for a rape and incest victim to blame themselves for their trauma, or worse, feel that this horrible thing has occurred to them because they are bad and thus deserve it. Celie puts a line over "I am" and adds "I have always been a decent girl." When Celie feels embarrassed of what is happening to her, she writes to God. (Proudfit, 1991, p. 93)

Not only was Celie raped by her stepfather, but also by her husband. "Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ come git me to take care his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me, I say" (Walker, 1985, p. 109). The fact that Celie's husband beats her is another example of the harmful influence that sexism has on society. This lends credence to the notion that women have no rights and that men had the authority to mistreat their spouses this means that women domestic colonized by men, specially their husbands, as seen by the following statement: "Dear God, Harpo asked his daddy why he hit me." (Walker, 1985, p. 30) Because she is

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Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s wife, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ said. She was also quite obstinate "all that women are good for is that he doesn't complete". (Simparinka,2022,p.280)

After following in his father's footsteps, Harpo tries to do the same thing with his new bride Sophia. The novel's two battered women create a close bond because of their shared misery, their pain binds them together. Celie didn't initially provide any assistance to Sophia, but with time, she developed into a more fully realized version of herself. As a result of the subjugation of the black man in a society dominated by whites, black men in turn dominates and oppresses black women. (Radharani & Davidson, 2018, p. 84)

In *The Color Purple*, there are some examples of women losing their identities and suppressing their freedom to choose and determine their fate, so that the female characters were not given the ability to choose their own romantic interests. According to what is said in a letter that Celie sent to God, Nettie was denied the opportunity to wed Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. The letter begins, In spite of the fact that Mr. \_\_\_\_ desired Nettie's hand in marriage " Dear God, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ finally come right out an ast for Nettie hand in marriage. But He won't let her go." (Walker, 1985, p. 16), her father argued that she was not old enough to marry and that he would give Celie to Mr. \_\_\_\_ instead. Celie had been the victim of Alfonso's sexual assaults several times, and he was responsible for both of the pregnancies that resulted in the birth of her children, a boy and a girl. After that, he wanted Mr. \_\_\_\_ to marry her since he was aware that she was spoilt and that he no longer need her assistance. Therefore, he said to Mr. \_\_\_\_: "She the oldest anyway. She ought to marry first. She ain't fresh tho, but

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I spect you know that. She spoiled. Twice. But you don't need a fresh woman no how." (Walker, 1985, p. 17) It was also taken away from Shug Avery the ability to marry the guy of her choosing. Celie was informed as follows by her:

His daddy told him I'm trash, my mama trash before me.

His brother say the same. Albert try to stand up for us,git knock down. One reason the give him for not marrying me is cause I have they children . But they his I told old Mr. \_\_\_\_.(Walker, 1985, p.116)

Because of this, these sorts of marital arrangements that restricted women from selecting their mates had a negative severe impact on both women and families (Simparinka,2022,p.281).

In *The Color Purple*, Sofia represents another character who lived a loss of identity and self only because she was a woman and black, though she has a strong body and character ,but because she was black woman , she was unable to wield the center of power because she was so far from the mainstream, i.e., Whites, that she had lost her identity as a woman and a human being. Before them, she was completely paralyzed, and they bullied her into shaping her identity in accordance with their desires. Because she saw nothing but darkness before her eyes, she had no choice but to adopt their ideals or submit to them. To learn her actual identity, she had to endure a horrendous ordeal of torture and physical abuse. Her skull and ribs were broken, and one of her eyes was completely blinded by the impact. The violent hit and damage to her body had left her with large bruises that had turned her purple in color. In the end, Celie and the black attendant were there to tend to her and treat her wounds. However, she became a calm and gentle creature like the sheep after she

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was shown as an angry and aggressive lady. In the throes of power, she lost sight of her actual self as an unwavering individual, and as a result, she was eventually labeled a mentally ill prisoner. (Sattar, 2014, p. 525) "Every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you. I jump right up and do just what they say." (Walker, 1985, P. 93)

Among the most important scenes in the novel is the one in the mirror. Celie's life is permanently changed in this moment as she finally accepts her physique. Modern feminism's fundamental goal has been to reclaim women's bodies from a patriarchal civilization that stole them long ago. A dread or even a hatred of their own bodies has been instilled in women since they are the most common target of male hostility. (Ross, 1988, p. 70) Until Shug Avery, the lover of Celie's husband, shows up, Celie has little desire to learn about her own body. The secrets of the body and sexual experience are unlocked for Celie thanks to Shug, who enables her discovery of words as well as her liberation from the oppression of men. Celie's quest for selfhood is sparked when she discovers and accepts with pride her own body, saying, "It mine, I say". (Walker, 1985, p. 80) When Shug, Nettie, Sofia, and Mary Agnes's letters are discovered by her, she starts to create an identity via a network of female friendships. Celie's newfound identity enables her to break away from the masculine ban against speaking and join a society of women, thereby liberating herself from reliance on and submission to male aggression. (Ross, 1988, p. 71)

Sofia, Harpo's wife, is the first woman to oppose sexism. In order to teach Sofia to respect males like Celie did, Celie tells Harpo to beat Sofia. At one point however, Harpo attempted to take her down, but Sofia stood

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her own and defeated Harpo like a small child. Nettie, too, was a defender of the oppressed. Unlike her sister, Celie, she was unable to act in a similar manner. She'd refused Mr. \_\_\_\_'s insistence on having sex with her. Nettie departed when he ordered her out of his house. When she ran away from him, he attempted to rape her. As a result, Nettie battled and vanquished the intruder. Nettie revealed this to Cellie in a letter she sent. (Simparinka, 2022, p. 283) "Well, I started to fight him, and with God's help, I hurt him bad enough to make him let me alone. But he was some mad". (Walker, 1985, p. 119)

Celie finally had a change of heart and chose to join the rest in the struggle for independence and get rid of mental and physical colonialism. Because she discovered the secret letters from Nettie, she altered her mind. Despite the fact that she had contemplated murdering him, Shug resisted the notion. It was still their decision to leave him and go to Memphis. Mr. \_\_\_\_ was baffled as to why Celie had made the decision to leave and why she had reversed her decision so abruptly. Celie in any case, Celie wasn't going down without a fight. In her opinion, he was nothing more than a lowdown dog. (Simparinka, 2022, p. 283) "You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need". (Walker, 1985, p. 181)

When Celie receives emotional support and encouragement from Shug to accompany Celie to Memphis, she is better able to ignore Mr.'s complaints. Celie's ability to protect herself when she is confronted with a violent guy like Mr. is aided by the fact that she has found models of resistance in the form of Shug and Sofia. In addition to this, she screams at Harpo, "oh, hang on hell, I say!" If you hadn't sought to exert your

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authority on Sofia, the white people would have never been able to find her... I think you're all depraved children. You have made living on earth a living misery for me. "And your papa over there ain't no dead horse's crap!" (Walker,1985, p.181) Not only does she speak for herself, but she also speaks for Sofia. Everyone, and particularly Sofia, is stunned by Celie's daring statement, but she has finally reached a point in her life when she has had enough. (Sedehi & Talif ,2013, p 428)

After leaving the home of Mr. \_\_, Celie is able to use the authority that she has gained, which allows her to restore her respect and dignity. Celie launched an entrepreneurial endeavor in her brand-new home that ultimately led to her being socially and financially independent. Celie's personality was fueled with a fire of protest and revenge by Shug Avery, who also inspired Celie not to give in to the bullying of males and to respond in equal measure. Shug Avery inculcated this fire in Celie. She made her way according to the ideas and direction of these feisty women, who instilled in her mind a sense of boldness, audacity, vigor, and gallantry. She paved her way according to the principles and direction of these feisty women. She eventually parted ways with Mr.\_\_\_\_, and when she arrived at Shug's, she was an entirely different person; she exuded self-assurance in both the way she presented herself and the way she carried herself. She was given respect, dignity, and a role in that home, and the interactions she had there with people like Adam, Olivia, Nettie, Samuel, Harpo, Sofia, and Shug, among others, let her experience a sense of youth despite her advanced age. In her words:

My skin dark. My nose simply a nose. My lips simply lips. My body, as well as the body of any other woman as she goes through the stages of aging. There is nothing unique about this that anybody would find attractive. If

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you don't have honey-colored curls in your hair, you can't be cute. There is nothing new and youthful. However, despite this, my heart must be youthful and robust since it has the sense of blossoming blood.

(Walker,1985, p. 266)

As a result, it can be seen that Celie was able to obtain her family and her identity when she used the power that resulted from her courage and her character of resisting. Therefore, as she gained authority, she also gained identity, in contrast to her prior circumstance, in which she had lost her identity because she was unable to use the power she had gained (Sattar,2014, pp.527-528).

Now, Celie is aware that she has a sisterhood relationship with other women, and she is certain that her friends would support her whenever and wherever she encounters any challenges on the way to achieving her goals. While Shug and Celie are on their way to Memphis, Shug helps Celie with her sewing projects and provides financial support. Celie is now renowned, has achieved financial independence, and is adored by the woman who loved her the most. (Sedehi & Talif, 2013, p. 428)"I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time" (Walker,1985, p.193).

At the end of the novel, Celie abandons her traditional view of God in favor of a more progressive understanding of the divine, as seen by the last letter she sends to him, which begins,"Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God." (Walker,1985, p.249) Celie's transformation from a helpless, dependent person into a self-reliant, independent woman who can finally rely on herself and make her voice heard is represented by this change from one picture to another. Celie has been dealing with an inferiority complex and battles for

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many years inside the four walls of her own house. She first faces challenges posed by her father, then those posed by her husband and his offspring. She finds solace in Shug, who is able to assist Celie in reestablishing her connection with herself and determining the kind of person she aspires to be. Because many of them are oppressed first by black men and later by white men and women, it is especially difficult for Black women who are oppressed to deal with the world around them. This is simply due to the fact that many of them are oppressed by black males. When confronted with poverty, the predicament of black women is exacerbated, and as a result, the subaltern theory is brought to the forefront. The concept of the "other" or a person whose voice is not heard due to factors such as their ethnicity, gender, or social status, is what is referred to as "subaltern theory". (Altaher,2009, p.5)

### Conclision:

This paper deals, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* which depicts the black society where the writer grew up, where women battle for their right to exist and keep their cultural identities. Walker shows how authority is destroyed when individuals find their voices and identities. Celie, the novel's main heroine, is regularly raped by her stepfather, and also by her husband, Mr\_\_\_, who beat and raped her viciously. As a consequence, she has lost her identity as a black woman exploited as a commodity. She's lost her sense of self. Celie transforms from an abused child to a young adult during the course of the novel. She escapes her husband's restrictive influence. Celie grows via her relationships with other women, especially Albert's lover Shug Avery. Her actual identity and gender are revealed. These ladies change Celie's life. *The Color Purple*

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depicts male authority, black women's abuse, and their fight for identity, freedom, and independence.

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## **Note**

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