



## Dehumanization and Healing: Female Empowerment in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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### المستخلص:

### معلومات الورقة البحثية

تستكشف هذه الورقة التعقيدات الموضوعية لكتاب أليس ووكر *اللون الأرجواني*، مع التركيز على تقاطعات التجريد العنصري من الإنسانية والقمع الجنساني والصدمة. يسلط الضوء على رحلة بطة الرواية، سيلبي، من القهر إلى التمكين وهي تنتقل في مجتمع يجرّد النساء السود من كرامتهن من خلال العنصرية النظامية والنظام الأبوي. محور هذا التحول هو علاقاتها التمكينية مع النساء السود الأخريات، ولا سيما شوك إفري وصوفيا، والتي تساعد على استعادة هويتها وقيمتها الذاتية. تتعمق الورقة في كيفية انتقاد ووكر لمعايير الجمال الداخلية التي يفرضها مجتمع يهيمن عليه البيض وكيف تنتقل الصدمة عبر الأجيال. من خلال تحليل تقدم سيلبي، يظهر تركيز الرواية على التضامن الأنثوي كمفتاح للتغلب على التجريد من الإنسانية والشفاء من الصدمات الشخصية والجماعية. تعكس الدراسة أيضا كيف يظل *اللون الأرجواني* ذا صلة في المناقشات المعاصرة حول العرق والجنس والتقاطع، لأنه يقدم تصويرا دقيقا للمرونة والتمكين الذاتي في مواجهة القمع المنهجي.

### الكلمات الرئيسية:

التجريد العنصري من  
الإنسانية، والقمع  
الجنساني، والصدمة،  
والتقاطع، وتمكين المرأة

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### 1.1 Introduction

First published in 1982, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a story set in early 20th-century America, with its entrapment of African American life by racial segregation and gender-based oppression. In the novel, identified by Celie's letters, the intersection with Jim Crow laws and the struggles for civil rights (Giddings, 1984; Collins, 2000) are many real historical facts. Walker's work, then, encompasses the themes of racial dehumanization, female empowerment, and the long-term effects of trauma. More subtly, it sings of Celie's journey from oppression to empowerment and how black women resist inhumanity at systemic levels (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000), especially through solidarity with women.

The theme of racial dehumanization through Celie's ordeals with men who oppress her under the weight of both patriarchal structures and systemic racism (Harris, 1986). Walker uses the experiences of Celie to show how institutional racism works in dehumanizing black women by emphasizing the physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of the oppression—echoing Crenshaw's intersectionality theory about unique layers of discrimination black women are facing as a result of both race and gender (Collins, 2000; 1991).

One other central theme is women's support of female empowerment, specifically solidarity personified by Celie and Shug Avery. Women's relationships in their novel extend emotional support channels for one to discover themselves and heal (Smith, 1993; Collins, 2000). The influence of Shug Avery on Celie is a symbol of how women find their power and voice back through support, questioning male-dominated systems of silencing them (Harris, 1986).

Trauma is at the heart of the story, as Walker illustrates individual trauma and generational trauma. Celie's trauma is not only individual but also collective for African Americans, resulting from the experience of slavery, racism, and sexual violence (Herman, 1997; van der Kolk, 2015). Walker questions forms of inheritance regarding trauma and healing. The letters God's Way and Celie have the female community turn out the modern theories of trauma that highlight the centrality of narration to recovering from psychological trauma (van der Kolk, 2015; Herman, 1997).

The following questions are what this research seeks to address: How does Walker portray racial dehumanization in *The Color Purple*? In what ways do female relationships thwart exploitation and restore wholeness? By what means is trauma transmitted over generations, and what healing modes does Walker proffer?

## 1.2 Historical and cultural context of Jim Crow in *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is not only a story of personal and familial struggle but is deeply embedded within the historical context of the Jim Crow era. During the early 20th century, African Americans, particularly in the southern United States, were subjected to a legal and social system of racial segregation that was designed to maintain white supremacy and ensure black subjugation. This system of laws, known as Jim Crow, institutionalized racial discrimination and denied African

Americans access to basic human rights, such as voting, education, and equal employment opportunities.

Jim Crow laws were in full effect from the late 19th century up through the 1960s. They worked to deeply influence the daily lives of African Americans, who faced public segregation and economic disenfranchisement as well as violent suppression of their civil rights. Walker undertakes to show all these effects through the lives of her characters- Celie and Sofia, thus making the experiences of the latter two a microcosm of larger African American struggles against racial and gender-based oppression.

Walker's central character, Celie, thus typifies the psychological toll exacted by life in such a segregated and patriarchal society, where black women are doubly marginalized because of both race and gender. Celie's early years epitomize the general message that African Americans, especially women, received from society; they were considered inferior and not worthy of respect or self-determination. She is sexually and physically abused by her stepfather and then by her husband, Albert, in a way that seems to combine personal violence with social violence: that is, the institution of segregated society dehumanizes black women.

This novel reflects, through Celie's eyes, the internalization of racial inferiority, resulting from systemic segregation that treats black bodies as lesser. Scholars like Harris (1986) argue that the experiences of African American women during this era reflect the compounding effects of racism and sexism, a concept that would be further explored by Crenshaw with her theory of intersectionality in 1991. Celie can be seen to lack self-worth about the patriarchal dominance of men, and also from racialized structures that define her as less than human.

Sofia, a powerful symbol of resistance in *The Color Purple*, offers a stark contrast to Celie's early passivity. Her refusal to submit to the racist authority of the mayor's wife, Miss Millie, illustrates the high cost of defying the racial order of Jim Crow. When Sofia refuses to become Miss Millie's maid—"Hell no" (Walker, 1982, p. 92)—she is violently beaten and imprisoned, a reflection of the broader societal repression that black Americans faced when resisting white supremacy.

The brutal response to Sofia's defiance is emblematic of the racial violence that enforced Jim Crow laws. According to Feagin (2013), Jim Crow was maintained through violence and fear, ensuring that black individuals remained submissive to white authority. Sofia's experience exemplifies this violent control, reflecting the broader historical realities of black resistance and the high price African Americans paid for asserting their dignity.

The Jim Crow era limited economic opportunities for African Americans and caged them in cycles of poverty and dependence. In *The Color Purple*, the economic dependency of Celie on her husband Albert reflects the same kind of economic powerlessness most black women underwent during that period. African American women were forced to work as domestic servants because of widespread exclusion from the better-paid jobs and education to limited available to options, a view that is supported by the action in which Miss Millie demanded a defiant Sofia to be her maid. The racial classifications during this period did not only confine African Americans socially but also acted as economic instruments that Farmer (1996) notes deprived them of mobility and agency.

The economic independence Celie achieves through seamstress success shadows the African American struggle to smash out of the systemic racist constraints. Allowing herself to create valuable items with her hands becomes a symbolic act of resistance against the racial and gender dehumanization meted out to her. In repossessing her economic power, Celie defies the socio-economic structures of Jim Crow that were meant to keep black women in positions of being subdued.

The novel bears ample evidence of the legacy expounded by Jim Crow segregation on both an individual and collective basis. Representing characters such as Celie and Sofia manifests the mental and physical trauma that institutionalized racism had imparted upon the black feminine while delivering the vision of resilience and empowerment, as Walker tried to propound. The way Walker sees it, the hurt of segregation will not heal very quickly. However, black women can find some ways out of their many strands of oppression through solidarity, self-reliance, and reclamation of identity.

What Walker had reminded **the reader** of, in terms of what Jim Crow perpetrated against African American women, is a discussion of today regarding systemic racism and its legacy. The **novel's** exposure of racism lodged in the institution keeps striking chords with a current verbal exchange on racial inequality. It is gaining special weight in the present drive, which began for civil rights and has now taken up the case of female rights.

Only through incorporating Jim Crow's historical context into a literary analysis of *The Color Purple* can a real vision of how social and political forces have made and **married** these characters' lives come to light. **The** novel gave a fiercely unignorable commentary on the long-lasting legacies of racial segregation in America and its resultant impact on African American communities. The issues of race, gender, and power that permeate *The Color Purple* are what make it so pertinent to the conversation surrounding Jim Crow's legacy and the fight for social justice.

## 2.1 Literature Review

Dehumanization, a central concept to discourse on systemic racism and oppression, is the perception of individuals or groups as not human at all. De Ruiter (2021) asserts that dehumanization "seems to require that perpetrators both deny and acknowledge the humanity of their victims in certain ways" (p. 1). According to Markowitz and Slovic (2020), dehumanization is "a cognitive perspective related to treating people as less than human" (p. 9262). This will provide the framework for the analysis of racial and gender-based oppression in *The Color Purple*; Celie and other African American women undergo in cumulative ways the racial violence and patriarchal controls that deprive them of basic human dignity.

Walker, in this novel, continues to demonstrate the systemic violence to which black women are exposed, echoing the history of U.S. racial dehumanization. Indeed, Celie is considered a piece of property, first owned by his father and then, by Alphonso, borrowed by Mr., which further reinstates the notion of black women as a commodity that runs throughout the novel inside a patriarchal, racially oppressive society. According to Fanon (2008), under racism, blacks are deprived of cultural identity and often their very existence when white society denies the validity of any other standard of beauty or humanity. It reduces everything different to something less than human.

Celie also suffers from this kind of alienation as she internalizes the norms of society considering herself inferior and unworthy.

Such racial and gendered dehumanization damage is traumatizing and has a long-lasting effect, not only on the victims but also on the perpetrators themselves. According to Grosfoguel (2016), both the oppressor and the oppressed are traumatized. The trauma for people in the "zones of being" is underdeveloped due to racial privilege, whereas it increases the trauma of non-whites in the "zones of not being" due to systemic racial oppression and social discrimination. It provides a useful framework through which to understand how *The Color Purple* presents not only the suffering of African American women but also the moral and psychological degeneration of those who perpetrate or are complicit in the oppression.

However, racism is also an affront to human dignity, as Farmer (1996) has contended. In his scrutiny of the racial dynamics in South Africa, Farmer demonstrates how racial classification denied black South Africans access to basic human rights, which created enormous disparities in health and quality of life. Just as in *The Color Purple*, these same racial classifications wield affection in present-day U.S. society, where African American women lose their rights and their humanness.

The argument that systemic racism ties back historically to the roots of colonial practices and the emergence of the United States is developed by Perry (2007) through the notion of biological racial differences. As Perry volunteers, no evidence supports genetic racial categorization, but socially, races were earmarked, which left disastrous consequences on color communities. Developmentally, this leads to the systemic dehumanization of black females in *The Color Purple* because they are perceived from an entailing position of racial inferiority. As Feagin (2013) reiterates, this new black-on-white racism was a central organizing feature of life in America; its legacy remains on the faces of African Americans in the brutalizing impacts of institutionalized racism. Celie, Sofia, and others in *The Color Purple* reflect these persisting legacies of systemic racism.

Another element of the psychological process, dehumanization, is critical for understanding the dynamics of power and violence in *The Color Purple*. As pointed out by Mekawi et al. (2019), dehumanization acts as a device that enables people to justify

taking very strong harmful actions against out-groups. In Walker's novel, the dehumanization of Celie and other black women is depicted not only as the result of individual racial prejudice but also as a deeply seated social practice underlining their interlocking subjugations. According to Sullivan (2014), challenging the intricate relationships between race and class contends that the legacy of white supremacy stamps societal norms, even of liberal-minded white folks. It is epitomized by Miss Millie, the mayor's wife, who thinks she is helping Sofia but is further enslaving and dehumanizing her.

In her paper, Love (2017) takes a further look at the other implications of this dehumanization on society, noting that Islamophobia in the United States catalyzes racial violence and discrimination against Middle Eastern people. According to Love, what is currently happening to Muslims post 9/11 is also identical to processes experienced by African Americans during their struggle for civil rights. The racialization of Muslims post 9/11 reproduces historical patterns of dehumanization from the African American case. This situates the broader story of racial violence in America as the receptor culture, and its effects are long felt even years after the decline of dehumanization. This broader context of racialized dehumanization helps to bring out the systemic nature of oppression illustrated in *The Color Purple*.

Tate's work (2017) speaks volumes on issues of black identity because it shapes black women's everyday talk with members of their families and even work colleagues. For the characters' experiences to be understood in *The Color Purple*, this challenged sense of identity must be grounded in the lived experience of negotiating an identity within a racist and patriarchal society. Tate's work calls for further investigation into identity construction using skin politics as the framework, which first humiliates Celie enough to take the white perspective on beauty and later frees her from these norms due to the self-empowerment she achieves through the same-sex relationships she builds with other black women, especially Shug Avery.

Moreover, *The Color Purple* deals with two psychological effects of internalized racism, as argued by Bouson (2000) and Mbalia (2004). They argue that internalized racism smashes up one's self-image for African American women, such as little girls like Celie. According to Mbalia (2004), *The Color Purple* shows how racism at an early age deforms the identity of African American women and makes them hate



themselves and want to be like white women in terms of standards of beauty and worth. Czajkowska (2015) also added that the oppression and cruelty toward African Americans could result in a self-destructive manner since they are made to feel ashamed of their identity and existence. This very dynamic has been analyzed in Morrison's Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, but it can very well relate to Celie's journey in *The Color Purple* when she had to live in a world that denied her humanness and dignity.

Dehumanization in *The Color Purple* is not only a personal experience for the characters but also a reflection of broader societal forces. As McKittrick (2000) notes, Walker's novel reveals the interrelated categories of race, racism, and gender, highlighting how these factors work together to deny the lived experiences of African American women. Walker's portrayal of dehumanization in *The Color Purple* serves as a powerful critique of systemic racism and sexism, offering a poignant exploration of the devastating legacies of racial oppression in America.

## 2.2 Thematic Analysis

The novel *The Color Purple* is meticulously written by Alice Walker in such a way that the themes of racial dehumanization, internalized self-hatred, and the final reclamation of self-worth are interwoven through the life of the protagonist, Celie. **Celie's letters to God**, telling about the abuse, show her isolation and powerlessness:

He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man (Walker, 1982, p. 22).

how Celie is dehumanized not only later contains the seeds of healing but also harbors potential for empowerment. Celie's mental strategy, with which she psychologically detaches herself from her body at the outset as part of a coping mechanism, indicates some form of psychological hardiness. She just imagines herself as something else "I make myself wood" at the beginning of making Celie take charge of her inner world while her outer world is completely tyrannical (Walker, 1982, p. 22). This is important because later in the novel, Celie's journey to empowerment specifically means claiming her autonomy and identity: changing from passive survival to active resistance and cure.



Walker's portrayal of Celie's detachment in this scene underscores how deeply trauma and oppression impact Black women's psyches, but it also emphasizes their resilience. Throughout the novel, Celie's relationships with other women—especially Shug Avery and Sofia—become central to her healing process. These relationships offer her support, love, and examples of how to resist and redefine the oppressive structures that surround her. The solidarity she builds with these women provides her the tools to recover from the dehumanization she experiences, both at the hands of individuals and society:

Shug say, Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did, she say. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God. (Walker, 1982, p. 195)

Ultimately, Celie's transformation from someone who mentally detaches herself to survive violence into someone who claims ownership over her life and body is emblematic of the broader themes of female empowerment in *The Color Purple*. Her journey illustrates how women, particularly Black women, can overcome systemic and personal oppression through solidarity, self-love, and the reclamation of their identities. Female characters stand by each other and empower each other to face male dominance. The character who most successfully challenges male dominance is Shug, who maintains her independence by living on her terms. Given this dynamic, it is unsurprising that Celie and Shug develop a romantic relationship. Shug, a resilient figure who refuses to be controlled by men, contrasts with Celie, who, as a victim of male abuse, has closed herself off from trusting men. When Celie comforts Harpo as he cries on the porch, she feels nothing more than she would for an animal. Together, these women help liberate one another: Shug teaches Mary Agnes to sing. Albert's sister takes Celie shopping when others neglect her. Sofia's sisters care for her children while she is imprisoned. Nettie cares for Celie's children and writes to her for thirty years. Doris Baines arranges for her "wives" to be educated in England. Eleanor Jane cooks nourishing meals for Henrietta, and Celie nurses Shug back to health and inspires her songwriting. Beyond these acts of support, Shug and Celie share a profound love that arises from their isolation, mutual desire for a better life, and acceptance of each

other. By the conclusion of the novel, these women are no longer powerless; they have united and are shaping their futures.

Celie's self-worth is further eroded by societal standards of beauty. She internalizes messages that her blackness makes her inferior, expressing in her letters: "I think I'm ugly. My skin dark. My hair nappy. My lips thick. All my life I had to fight" (Walker, 1982, p. 87). These lines illustrate how deeply rooted racism and misogyny affect her self-perception. Celie's fixation on her appearance shows the far-reaching effects of white supremacist beauty standards that deem her "less than" because she does not conform to them.

The novel shifts as Celie begins to reclaim her sense of self, largely through her relationships with other black women, such as Shug Avery and Sofia. Shug's relationship with Celie is transformative, providing her with an alternative model of strength and love. Shug encourages Celie to recognize her intrinsic value, telling her, "I think it pisses God off if you walk by *the color purple* in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker, 1982, p. 197). This statement becomes a metaphor for Celie's journey toward self-acceptance and appreciation of the beauty in the world—and in herself. Shug's role as Celie's confidante allows her to break away from the dehumanizing grip of patriarchy and realize that she is worthy of love and respect.

Sofia, on the other hand, represents a more direct form of resistance to the dehumanizing forces of racism and sexism. Her defiance of the mayor's wife—"Hell no, I'm not gonna clean for you" (Walker, 1982, p. 92)—is a powerful assertion of her dignity, despite the harsh consequences she faces. Sofia's strength and refusal to submit highlight the intersection of race and gender in the oppression of black women. Sofia's physical punishment after standing up to white authority mirrors the brutal historical realities that black women endured under a racist and patriarchal system. Sofia's experiences show Celie, and the reader, that resisting oppression is possible, even if the price is high.

As Celie grows, her transformation is symbolized through her development as a seamstress, a profession that becomes both a metaphor for her creativity and a tool for her independence. When Celie proclaims, "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook...But I'm here" (Walker, 1982, p. 197), she declares her survival in a society

that has repeatedly attempted to strip her of her humanity. Her success as a seamstress signifies her newfound ability to shape her future and her identity, no longer defined by the oppressive systems that once held her down.

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I ain't never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. (Walker, 1982, p. 45)

But, heed Sofia's words as they speak of her resilience and strength. "I had to fight," repeats Sofia as if to show herself never bowed to her situation. She keeps asserting herself by not giving in to the role that men from her family—and thus the entire society—try to impose upon her. Hers is both a fight of the letter and of the spirit: a commitment to say no to oppression, a refusal to renounce her value, a vow not to give up on herself or on her independence. In the novel, Sofia contrasts greatly with Celie since while initially, she does not resist passively. Defiance for her is not only a matter of making it through the ordeals but also of coming back to the right to exist on one's own terms. This is brought out in other instances in the novel when she bravely declines to bow down to the mayor's wife by saying "Hell no" articulating more to the fact that she is refusing to be subjugated under white supremacy and gender-based oppression.

Another way is how societal beauty standards have made self-consideration opaque, especially looking at it from the facets of race and gender. Celie initially wrapping her head around that she is ugly results directly from the internalized racism and misogyny she has absorbed from her immediate company. White people's beauty standards contrast with their experiences of worth. This paper doll, despite the outright initial description of her as confident and beautiful, goes through the same kind of standards Shug portrays, echoing vast culturally based expectations that reign on black women to at least inch somewhat towards whiteness. It is through her that Celie learns to turn a deaf ear to such dangerous ideals and begins to regard herself as worthy and beautiful (on her terms and not according to external measurements).

This distorted self-perception is also dehumanization in the sense that it makes black women like Celie internalize the view of themselves through the oppressive

othering of a society that devalues their bodies and identities. As Hooks (1992) explains about the work of feminist scholarship, it is the white supremacist beauty standards that further push black women aside into marginality, hence reconsolidating their already well-entrenched status of being subjected. Using Walker as a critique of these standards is rather a representation of how Celie's empowerment comes in rejecting them and embracing her true self. She is her own woman and free. She ultimately does rise until she touches down wholly on earth.

The empowerment Celie achieves is not only personal; it is based on solidarity with other women. The relationship between Shug and Sofia underlines the value of female bonding in the war against repression. It is Shug's backing that helps Celie find her lost voice, and it is Sofia's open defiance of the white rule that shows what black women can bear against a system of oppression. The same relationships are the means for Celie to come to terms with the injuries of the past and find herself concerning autonomy in a world that had denied her humanity.

Trauma, both personal and generational, is central to *The Color Purple*, with Walker exploring how it affects individuals and communities. Celie's trauma is not only the result of the abuse she endures but also a reflection of the broader historical trauma experienced by African Americans due to slavery and systemic racism. Walker portrays trauma as something passed down through generations, affecting not just the individuals who experience it but also their descendants. Celie's letters to God, and later to her sister Nettie, serve as a means of coping with this trauma and reclaiming her narrative. In telling her story, Celie can begin the process of healing, aligning with trauma theories that emphasize the importance of narrative in recovery (Herman, 1997).

The novel also touches on the generational aspects of trauma through Nettie's experiences in Africa. Nettie's letters reveal the legacy of colonialism and how it parallels the oppression faced by African Americans. The trauma of slavery and colonization is shown to have lasting effects on both African and African American communities, reinforcing the novel's themes of historical and systemic violence.

*The Color Purple* presents a narrative of healing, resistance, and empowerment. Celie's journey from voicelessness to self-realization illustrates the power of reclaiming one's identity in the face of oppression:

I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here. Amen, say Shug. Amen, amen. She say, Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did, she say. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. (Walker, 1982, p. 197)

In this passage from *The Color Purple*, Celie's journey toward self-realization is highlighted as she asserts her worth despite a lifetime of marginalization. Her statement, "But I'm here," signifies a critical moment of healing and self-acceptance. Initially, Celie internalizes society's harsh labels about her race, gender, and appearance, which contributes to her sense of invisibility and worthlessness. However, this declaration reveals a profound shift toward reclaiming her identity and recognizing her inherent value. As Hill (2019) points out, female solidarity plays a crucial role in empowering characters like Celie, a helping her resist social oppression. This moment also represents resistance, as Celie refuses to let societal oppression define or erase her. Her affirmation is reinforced by Shug's response, symbolizing the role of female solidarity in Celie's empowerment. It is only through her relationship with other women, more particularly Shug, that Celie gains enough strength to break the silencers of patriarchy and racism. The discussion on God that transpires between Celie and Shug helps to take the theme of personal empowerment a little deeper. For Celie to realize that spirituality, as well as self-worth, comes from within and not from any external institutions is to say that she has started a broader journey of identity reclamation. As such, Gibbons (2020) continues, this developing spiritual understanding brought Celie to the redefinition of relationship with divine, in turn freeing herself from societal constraints.

Walker's depiction of how Celie transforms herself underscores that community, solidarity, and self-love are keys to getting out from under dehumanization impinged by racism and sexism. Through her relationships with other women, Celie learns to resist the forces seeking to diminish her and embrace her value. The novel closes on an optimistic note: Celie's life reclamation and identity reclamation act a very powerful testimony to black women's resilience against systemic oppression.

*The Color Purple* remains fundamental in discussions of race and gender within both literary discourses and realms of social justice. The thematics within the text that articulate racial dehumanization, female empowerment, and the cycle of trauma and healing resonate through the current discourse of intersectionality and systemic

oppression. These findings relate to the current state of discussions on race and gender today, which makes the work of Walker quite relevant to modern readers trying to understand their context as remnants from past centuries. The effort is highly relevant because these issues still exist in modern society, although not in the same way.

### 3.1 Comparing Findings with Current Discourse on Race and Gender

This connection between race and gender oppression is also reflected in modern movements like “Black Lives Matter”, emblemizing in recentering the presumably sidelined experiences of black women and LGBTQ+ individuals in the broader struggle for racial justice. Scholars, for example, Bell Hooks (1992), have argued that one has to keep in mind the combination of race, gender, and class while speaking about oppression to truly understand the range of obstacles that marginalized groups face. All these interlocking forms of oppression are epitomized by Walker in *The Color Purple*, which makes this novel a key text in thinking through how these forces intersect.

Further, the novel's consideration of deformed perceptions resulting from society's perception of beauty engages the modern-day discourse on an individual's body image vis-a-vis representation in the media. Walker's depiction of how black ladies internalize standards of white beauty eminence to later come up with self-hatred finds parallelism in contemporary discourses on colorism and the elevation of Eurocentric ideals of beauty. Contemporary movements of #BlackGirlMagic and campaigns to change media representation question these standards by which black beauty and identity are to be loved. In turn, *The Color Purple* acts as a sharp social critique regarding issues prejudicing contemporary cultural and political spheres. The novel's consideration for character development is powerful by giving an explanatory basis to actions experienced within the novel. Walker builds characters using personal experiences that are a result of traumatizing experiences faced for belonging to the female gender. She conveys the experiences faced by black women in America during the 1930s. Walker portrays Olinka as a community where the women are undergoing circumcision. One of them is Tashi, a beautiful, intelligent girl who wins a scholarship to study in America. Walker uses the story "Everyday Use" in the novel "*The Color Purple*." She provided a conceptual framework to describe the cross-pressures that black women and many other women feel concerning 'traditional' and 'modern' or 'black' and 'female' ways of life, thinking, and being. Walker also uses this story in the

novel. She provided a conceptual framework to describe the cross-pressures that Black women and many other women face concerning 'traditional' and 'modern' or 'Black' and 'female' ways of life, thinking, and being. Walker draws a juxtaposition between Olinka's life and her community, highlighting a white American mentality of beauty that has removed noses and straightened light hair; this illustrates how the reader's perspective can be shaped by community and values. Walker draws juxtaposition with Olinka's life and her community, with a white American mentality of beauty that has removed noses and has straight light hair; this shows how the reader's perspective can be set toward community and values. Walker clarifies that Dee wanted to hang them on her walls as decorations and make some modifications that would present an exotic nature. Such understanding affirms that many women across the globe experience struggles in attempts to reconcile relationships with interracial love affairs, which are common between white men and native women. Such understanding affirms that many women across the globe experience struggles in attempts to reconcile relationships with interracial love affairs, which are common between white men and native women. Walker reveals how easily such values can be lost during her childhood on Big Dee, who reshapes herself in many different quilt mannerisms when suddenly inspired by the magazine's desire for roots material culture she found in recent black Muslim movement literature. Walker reveals how easily such values can be lost during her childhood on Big Dee, who reshapes herself in many different quilt mannerisms when suddenly inspired by the magazine's desire for roots material culture she found in recent black Muslim movement literature.

### 3.2 The Relevance of Walker's Work in Contemporary Society

Indeed, such feminist themes of empowerment and solidarity in *The Color Purple* have a strong bearing on the current discourse on gender equality and women's rights. Walker's valorization of female solidarity and mutual support as locus points for empowerment strongly anticipates contemporary instantiations of feminist solidarity. In particular, this takes into account those reincarnations of the feminist movement that are fiercely critical through the lens of intersectionality and are embedded within women of color. It is the #MeToo kind of movement, aimed at unveiling and contesting sexual violence, that resonates with characters like Celie, who have experienced sexual abuse but then find some strength out of their relationships with other women. That is



why Shug Avery's mentoring of Celie in the process is quite prescriptive of the kind of female solidarity that even contemporary feminist activists are potentially looking after. The collective agency-bringing back of these women in the novel makes it clear to understand how collective empowerment can be an effective tool against patriarchal oppression.

Moreover, trauma and healing are universal issues that Walker writes about in her fiction. In *The Color Purple*, Walker unveils how trauma is how events cross individuals to make something more meaningful. It shapes a way of thinking that brings out the sense in which people understand themselves with their past, present, and future family relationships. Modern psychological and sociological studies have focused on generational trauma, often specifically related to racial trauma. Van der Kolk and Herman have put forward that healing from trauma is founded on the personal and shared story of experience. This goes back to what Walker said regarding Celie's letters being a form of reclaiming her voice to heal from the violation she had undergone.

Society nowadays is so very focused on the potential long-term effects of trauma, especially in any way marginalized communities that historically have had continuous systemic violence and oppression perpetrated on them. It is seriously suggested that historical trauma explains how aspects concerning identity, legacy, and even more at personal and population levels have contributed to the difficulties of each new generation related to Indigenous and African American peoples. What Walker does in *The Color Purple* is approach that kind of trauma from a very contemporary place and understanding, which means that Celie, Nettie, and all these characters have to deal with personal traumas as well as much larger, historical traumas that have gone into shaping their identities.

Walker's view of economic empowerment as liberation is a theme that can still be taken up in discussions on independence vis-à-vis current dimensions of freedom and gender equality. Celie's metamorphosis from a powerless and subdued lady to an independent entrepreneur brings out the significance of personal liberty that comes along with financial independence. This is representative of what is currently happening globally, including economic empowerment initiatives aimed at women, specifically those belonging to marginalized groups where inequality deprives them of financial resources. The presence of women-owned businesses and microfinance initiatives in

developing countries is a testament to the lasting relevance of economic empowerment themes found in *The Color Purple*.

More importantly, the stress of the novel lies on the community as a source of strength and healing is still valid in contemporary activism. In *The Color Purple*, characters lean on one another for emotional and spiritual support, hence underlining the role of collective action in beating down oppression. This is, in turn, reflective of contemporary social movements that lay their key concern on the essence of community organizing and solidarity in the struggle against systemic injustices. For instance, grassroots organizations that work towards racial and gender justice generally come up with community-based solutions in reaction to system problems, the way the women in *The Color Purple* find healing and sources of strength from their relationships with each other.

In conclusion, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker must be treated as a key text that explicates in the intersections between race and gender identities with trauma, both in historical and contemporary contexts. The novel delivers a strong message of racial dehumanization, empowerment of females, and perpetuation of abuse that corresponds to the current discourse on intersectionality, body image, feminist solidarity, and historical trauma. Walker's work can never be irrelevant, taking into account such themes of systemic oppression and racial violence that are going on, along with gender inequality. It has a powerful comment on resilience within marginalized communities and transformational power entailed by the act of storytelling, solidarity, and self-empowerment in light of fast-paced issues regarding systemic oppression, racial violence, and gender inequality.

#### 4.1 Conclusion

The paper has therefore answered the research question, which sought to address the exploration of intricate themes of racial dehumanization, female empowerment, and trauma in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, concerning multifaceted struggles of black women in early 20th-century America. The novel manifests vivid portrayals of how systemic racism and misogyny intersect to oppress women like Celie, who at the initiation of her journey is entirely bereft of agency and dignity.

One of the key themes elaborated on in the paper's analysis is racial dehumanization. Celie undergoes systematic processes of having her human features peeled off in the face of other black women in the novel. In the treatment of abuse experienced by Celie, both physical and psychological, Walker captures how the denial of basic dignity and autonomy to African American women had been deeply rooted in social systems. Celie's body is thus acted upon, in a sense, showing that black women were normally subjected to further exploitation and were to use objects within both the domestic and broader societal structures. Her early submission to patriarchal norms throws light on the internalized racism and misogyny she tries to fight against: for instance, she has always believed herself to be ugly and worthless.

Nonetheless, this novel gradually veers to portray female empowerment as Celie starts to repossess her voice and her sense of self through the transformational power of woman-to-woman relationships. Walker has developed these relationships to show the redemptive power of female solidarity, especially that of Celie and Shug Avery. It is Shug's influence upon Celie that marks the most striking point of the novel. From Shug, Celie learns to question dehumanizing forces, thus beginning to realize that her value does not entirely lie in conforming to patriarchal or racist standards but because she is a human being. Shug's affirmation of Celie's beauty and worth surfaces when she tells her, "I think it pisses God off if you walk by *the color purple* in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker, 1982, p. 197). This line will get to be the symbol of awakening to dignity, beauty, and autonomy that had been so ruthlessly denied by the forces of racism and sexism, all but snuffing out her life.

Another key theme explored in this research was the significance of Sofia's resistance to dehumanization. Sofia represents a different model of empowerment in the novel, one that is more confrontational than Celie's initial passivity. Her refusal to submit to Miss Millie, the mayor's wife, illustrates her refusal to be diminished by white supremacy. When Sofia stands up and says, "Hell no, I'm not gonna clean for you" (Walker, 1982, p. 92), she becomes a symbol of defiance against the oppressive systems that seek to silence and subordinate black women. Although Sofia's resistance comes at a great personal cost, her character serves as an important foil to Celie, showing that black women can and do resist the forces of dehumanization, even in the face of violent retribution.

No Theme was kept static; in this case, the paper maintained consistency by borrowing several emanations of the academic framework. it was the intersectionality theory, as in the work of Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), who interlocked the oppressions of both race and gender as a twin angle for appraising and celebrating experiences in *The Color Purple*. Celie's oppression is not only racial or gender-based alone, but the dehumanization that she is part of comes from those two identities at the intersecting point. In turn, the intersection applies to other persons in the novels, as in Sofia, who has her other forms of oppression multiplied by both race and gender.

It's such a powerful novel that it can never leave you because it exposes all inharmonious social forces that are technically dehumanizing black female victims. In the twin contexts of racial and gender-based oppression and the transforming power entailed in feminine solidarity, Walker makes the reader feel sensitivity to how these women build their resilience. The very fact that the novel still speaks to contemporary issues of racial injustice, gender inequality, and the legacy of trauma attests to its unfading value as a strong vehicle in the social justice and human dignity cause. Through Celie's life story, Walker argues loud and clear that one can be empowered, one can heal, and one can resist even when heavily oppressed.

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### Abstract

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This paper examines the thematic complexities of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, focusing on the overlaps of racial dehumanization, gender oppression, and trauma. It emphasizes the protagonist Celie's journey from oppression to empowerment as she navigates a society that strips black women of their dignity through systemic racism and patriarchy. Central to this transformation are her empowering relationships with other black women, especially Shug Avery and Sofia, which help her reclaim her identity and self-worth. The paper explores how Walker critiques the internalized beauty standards enforced by a white-dominated society and how trauma is passed down across generations. Through analyzing Celie's development, the novel highlights that female solidarity is crucial for overcoming dehumanization and healing from both personal and collective trauma. The study demonstrates that *The Color Purple* remains relevant in today's dialogues about race, gender, and

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intersectionality. It offers a detailed portrait of resilience and self-empowerment in the face of systemic oppression.

**Keywords:** *Racial dehumanization, gender oppression, trauma, intersectionality, female empowerment.*

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