

**T.C.  
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**SEX, RACE, AND CLASS: REPRESENTATION OF BLACK WOMEN IN  
ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOUR PURPLE* AND *THE TEMPLE OF MY  
FAMILIAR***

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Magdalene Mbotiji TITAMOH**

**Department of English Language and Literature  
English Language and Literature Program**

**MARCH 2023**



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**MARCH, 2023**

**APPROVAL PAGE**



## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the study titled “Sex, Race, and Class: Representation of Black Women in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*”, which I submitted as a Master thesis, is written without any assistance in violation of scientific ethics and traditions throughout all the processes from the project phase to the completion and that the sources I benefited are shown in the Works Cited. (.../.../20...)

Magdalene Mbotiji TITAMOH

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*THE TEMPLE OF MY FAMILIAR***

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines how black women are portrayed in *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*, two works by Alice Walker, under lens of her womanism theory. Walker is considered a leading figure in African-American writing, as a black feminist novelist and cultural theoretician. Her novels focus on the hardships and problems that African-American women face, racism, gender violence, marginalisation, and class conflict. This study examines the issues of male dominance and gender representation in Walker's two novels and explores the debates and feminist literary criticism surrounding her writings. It delves into the concept of womanism and its ability to spark change and empowerment among black women. The findings reveal that womanism provides a unique approach to addressing the challenges faced by black women, who often find themselves unable to identify with mainstream feminism. The novels depict the disjunction in African-American families which indirectly gives rise to impoverishment brought by a sexist and bigoted individual ecosystem compounded by institutionalized white oppression. The novels also contain strong female characters who inspire and help the subjugated protagonists to achieve a transformation in consciousness and liberation. The thesis demonstrates that womanism is a viable conceptual framework for comprehending the events, conditions, and concerns of women of colour, and can be used to inspire and empower them to achieve greater social and economic status in society.

**Keywords:** Sex, Race, Class, Alice Walker, Womanism, Black Women, *The Colour Purple*, *The Temple of My Familiar*

**CİNSİYET, İRK VE SINIF: ALICE WALKER'IN *THE COLOUR  
PURPLE* VE *THE TEMPLE OF MY FAMILIAR*  
ROMANLARINDA SİYAHİ KADINLARIN TEMSİLİ**

**ÖZET**

Bu tez, Alice Walker'ın iki romanı *The Colour Purple* ve *The Temple of My Familiar*'da siyahi kadınların temsilini, yazarın “kadıncılık” kuramının merceği altında incelemektedir. Walker, Afro-Amerikan kültür ve edebiyatı ve siyahi feminist düşüncenin önde gelen figürlerinden biri olarak kabul edilir. Romanları, ırkçılığa, cinsiyet şiddetine, marjinalleştirmeye ve sınıf çatışmasına maruz kalan Afrikalı-Amerikalı kadınların mücadelelerine ve kötü şartlarına odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma Walker'ın Afro-Amerikan romanlarındaki erkek egemenliği ve toplumsal cinsiyet temsili konularını incelemekte ve yazarın eserlerinin çevresinde dönen tartışmaları ve feminist eleştirileri araştırmaktadır. Aynı zamanda kadıncılık kavramını ve onun değişimi ateşleme ve siyah kadınları güçlendirme becerisini de araştırmaktadır. Bu çalışmada elde edilen bulgular, kadıncılığın, genellikle kendilerini ana akım feminizmle özdeşleştirmekte zorlanan siyahi kadınların karşılaştığı güçlüklerle yönelik benzersiz bir yaklaşım sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Tezde incelenen her iki roman da beyaz sistematik baskıyla birleşen ırkçı ve cinsiyetçi bir ekosistemin getirdiği yoksullaşmaya dolaylı olarak yol açan Afro-Amerikan ailelerdeki ayrışmayı tasvir etmektedir. Romanlar ayrıca, boyun eğdirilen kahramana bilinç ve özgürleştirici bir dönüşüm elde etmesi için ilham veren ve ona yardım eden güçlü kadın karakterler içermektedir. Tez, kadıncılığın siyah kadınların deneyimlerini, koşullarını ve endişelerini anlamak için uygun bir çerçeve oluşturduğunu ve toplumda daha büyük sosyal ve ekonomik statü elde etmeleri için onlara ilham vermek ve onları güçlendirmek için kullanılabileceğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Cinsiyet, Irk ve Sınıf, Alice Walker, Kadıncılık, Siyahi Kadınlar, *The Colour Purple*, *The Temple of My Familiar*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will examine Alice Walker's womanism theory to analyse how black women are portrayed in *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*, two of her novels. Alice Walker can be regarded as the doyenne of African American literature, culture, and black feminist thought. In terms of black feminist consciousness, Walker's prolific works opened out a space for coloured women and provided them with platforms to be heard. The literary works of Alice Walker, who has received numerous prizes throughout the years, focus on the struggles and woes of African American women who are caught in traumatic web of gender violence, racism, class conflict along with marginalization. She depicts the challenges that black women face in her two novels, *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*, by describing the lives of several fictional characters. Additionally, she draws attention to the hardships and marginalization that black women face in comparison to black men.

There are a good number of literatures that have emphasised the issue of male dominance over the female in civic society. Moreover, an avalanche of literature exists on gender representation in African American novels. Alice Walker has been a huge name in the black feminist movement, as her writings has been subject to a whole lot of debates and different feminist literary criticisms (Abbandonato et al., 1991: 1106-1115). (Udoette, 2014), studied Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* from the perspective of the female consciousness and discovered how the aesthetic impacts transform the demeaning portrayal of black women as victims of a gendered society into a successful woman (Udoette, 2014: 70-80). (Hasanthi, 2019), women's issues were studied womanism for *The Temple of My Familiar*, which depicted the marginalisation experienced by the blacks in America and concluded that the theory of womanism is capable of sparking light in the black community, especially among black women (Hasanthi, 2019: 1-9). (Shi's, 2020), study on womanism in *The Colour Purple* revealed that Alice Walker's main point is to awaken the self-consciousness in a black woman to push her towards self-respect, self-liberation, and

self-support (Shi, 2020: 217- 233). Accordingly, contentious themes brought up in Alice Walker's books using a hybridized understanding of the womanist and gynocritical framework have given insights into the problems faced by black women.

The simple word that connotes the struggle for equality for women is “Feminism”. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, feminism emerged as a social movement opposed to society's demeaning duties and its uneven treatment of women. Feminism aims to reframe and rectify the unequal social position that exists between men and women because humans are products of society. Due to the various forms it has taken over the years, feminism as it relates to gender issues has proven to be trans-generational. The three feminisms that have emerged in literature serve as a testament to this. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the beginning of the first wave of feminism. The goal of equal rights to vote and be elected was the foundation of feminist activity. Mary Wollstonecraft, who is regarded as the first feminist, is credited with raising awareness of women's submissive roles in society and the need to address them through her 1792 essay “A Vindication of the Right of Women” (Malinowska, 2020: 1-7). Thus, the American women's suffrage campaign and the first wave of feminism both battled for the right to vote. The second wave of feminism, which emerged in the late 1960s, advocated for greater equality and rights for women, including their access to healthcare and education as well as their freedom in terms of their ability to choose their reproductive methods and find jobs. Following this, the 1990s saw the emergence of the third wave of feminism, which pushed for the legalisation of abortion, an end to violence against women, and intersectional feminism, which recognizes the interconnectedness of all forms of oppression experienced by women. Finally, intersectional feminism, often known as the fourth wave of feminism, is a movement that started in the early 2010s and has been gaining strength over the past few years. The greater visibility and representation of marginalized groups in feminist discourse and movement is one of the fourth wave of feminism's major accomplishments. This has included a greater focus on issues affecting transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, as well as a recognition of the unique challenges faced by women of colour and other marginalised groups. The use of social media and other digital channels to mobilize and organize around feminist issues is another significant achievement of the fourth wave of feminism. This has made it possible

for feminism to spread knowledge and create groups online as well as to lobby for change on a large scale (Malinowska, 2020: 1).

Despite the widespread oppression of women in society, certain groups within the community face additional challenges, including violations of their rights, racism, and stigmatisation. For black women and other women of colour who are oppressed not only because of their gender but also because of their race, the feminist movement and identity politics have intersected in this context. As a result, Black Feminism and African Feminism, which speak to the unique experiences and requirements of black women and African women, respectively, have emerged. These movements which have several subgroups, including motherism, stiwanism, negro-feminism, snail-sense feminism, and femalism strive for gender equality and equal opportunities for both white women and black women. The goal of black feminist consciousness is to recognize and combat these interrelated forms of oppression.

Understanding that African American women face intersectional discrimination based on both race and gender, which results in their disadvantage in the social, economic, and political framework of the United States, is known as black feminist consciousness. In addition to facing prejudice and discrimination as people of colour, African American women also face various forms of oppression as women. Since black men were disproportionately represented in leadership roles during the civil rights movement, their political contributions such as organizing, mobilizing, and fundraising went unacknowledged. (Simien, 2004: 83-84)

Black Feminism emerged from the crucible of racial and gender discrimination within and across countries and continents, given the historical antecedents of slave trade and colonialism in world history. Black feminism was born out of the second wave feminism and the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. In their works, black feminists claim that because of socioeconomic stratification and the racial divide between the white and black races, feminism is an instrument of further repression that exclusively benefits white women. Ajayi-Soyinka points out:

The history of white women's experience and gender construction served as the foundation for the feminist movement that inspired feminist critical theory. Women of colour start to question the tenets of traditional feminist theory by the middle of the 1980s, as well as the dominance of white women in the feminist movement, the exclusion of women of colour's experiences and works from feminist theories and critical analysis, and the inadequacy of narrowly focused feminist critical theories to

the diversity of factors that shape their experiences and inspire their writing. (Soyinka, 1993: 161)

As was previously stated, the claim illustrates how identity politics challenged feminism and prompted the creation of black feminism. The feminist ideology does not consider or adequately represent the concerns of black women, as well as their experiences and sensibility. Feminism is essentially the concern of white women. According to (Lola, 1998: 519–534), black feminism is at the crossroads of sexism in Black Nationalism and racism supported by a white feminist agenda. As a result, just like other contentious topics that concern our globe, experts frequently analyse the marginalization of black women.

I will use Alice Walker's womanism theory to analyse how black women are portrayed in her books. A subset of feminism known as womanism focuses exclusively on the issues, circumstances, and experiences that black women and other women of colour face. It aims to promote relationships and solidarity with black males while recognizing the natural strength and beauty of black womanhood. Womanism also criticizes the pervasiveness of racism and sexism in the feminist and black communities. It asserts that both black women's femininity and their culture have an impact on how they perceive themselves. Alice Walker popularized the term "womanist" in her 1979 short story "Coming Apart" and expanded on it in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. She describes a womanist as a "black feminist or feminist of colour" in these texts.

This study will look at how black women are portrayed in two novels by Alice Walker: *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*. In the first book Celie is depicted as a character who suffers from serious abuses of her human rights, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse at the hands of several men, leaving her traumatized and without a voice. Another character, Shug, provides Celie with a sense of belonging and support through love, guidance towards belief in God, and education about sexuality. The exploration of themes like sex, women, marriage, family, love, religion, violence, and feminism in *The Colour Purple* is what makes Alice Walker's work so important. *The Temple of My Familiar*, the second book, focuses particularly on the experiences of black women while also exploring the many realities of black people in the United States. The protagonist, Zede, is a young girl from South America who is academically gifted but comes from a poor family. She eventually receives a scholarship and becomes a successful teacher, but her

communist beliefs lead to her arrest and the birth of her daughter, Carlotta, while in prison. Carlotta enrolls in college, meets Arveyda, an Indian immigrant rock star looking to get back in touch with his roots, after fleeing to the United States and residing in San Francisco. However, though Arveyda and Carlotta live peacefully for a while and have children, tensions arise when Arveyda begins an affair with Zede, who has distanced herself from her family.

In this thesis my objective is to analyse *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar* under the theory of womanism in order to investigate how Alice Walker represents black women and their struggle in the African-American culture with respect to sexuality, race, class, and gender. I argue that in both the actual lives and literary representations of black women racial, sexual, and class discriminations overlap, and Walker suggests womanism as a solution to the challenges that her black female characters go through in the patriarchal community they live in as it leads them to self-empowerment and liberty. Black women have to struggle much more than white women, as they not only fight against patriarchy, but also against discrimination due to their skin colour and class. Because of this, black women's struggles are more complex and challenging than those of white women, and Alice Walker presents the womanism thesis as the solution to all issues in both *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. In Chapter Two that follows the Introduction I will present a literature review on black feminism, Alice Walker's biography and womanist theory, and previous scholarly discussions of the novelist's work. I will explore *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*, respectively, in Chapters Three and Four, in terms of the issues that arise in relation to sexuality, racism, classism, and gender and how womanism is proposed as a solution to these problems. Finally in the Conclusion I will sum up the points of discussion and my findings.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. Black Feminism: Background, Concepts, and Related Theories**

The inception of black feminist consciousness came in response to the challenges confronting African American women, who were deprived of status and faced discrimination due to their gender and race. The desire of black women to "improve conditions for empowerment on their own terms" (Yee, 1992: 235) to address the intersection of race and gender in the context of enslavement gave rise to black feminism. Black women activists "championed for equal rights in relation to the structured black abolitionism" in the 1800s, which is when black feminism first emerged as a movement in connection with the second wave of feminism (Yee, 1992: 151). Black feminism shows how black women who are oppressed, free work together to develop and put into effect plans to eradicate both the legalization of slavery and racially motivated sexual assault. (Taylor, 1998: 234-253).

Mary Church Terrell, Frances E. W. Harper, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Sojourner Truth were a few of the pioneering black feminists. (Collins et al., 1991: 367 -381). These supporters represented black feminism from the 1830s through the early 1990s, even before the rhetorical development of Black Feminist Theory. Black feminist theory/philosophy was first discussed in earnest during the progressive Civil Rights Movement and Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s, when black women had to choose between enduring racism or chauvinism. (Taylor, 1998: 234-253). Black women were excluded from all broad progressive movements because no attention was paid to the mutuality of these two distinct oppressions race and gender. Additionally, although though the feminist movement in the United States was founded out of a desire to combat the oppression that all women faced, its goals and strategies soon limited itself to addressing the needs of white women. (Collins et al., 1990: 221-238).

Absence of representation and focusing on the specific concerns among black women in mainstream feminist and anti-racist movements has fuelled the need for

black women to develop and strengthen their own beliefs and practices. This has challenged and continues to challenge the preconceived notions and baggage associated in the United States with the term's "feminism" and "feminist" (Patterson et al., 2016: 58). Black feminists built institutions and produced a variety of writings, ideologies, and political viewpoints that addressed the reality and experiences of black women's struggles during a time when feminist and anti-racist movements were predominately directed at black men and white women (Taylor et al., 1998: 234-253). Black feminists used well-known organizations like the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), the influential Combahee River Collective, and Salsa Soul Sisters as platforms for theoretical investigation, political advocacy, and the creation of texts that have come to define black feminist principles from 1968 to 1987, according to the explanation. The formation of acknowledged black feminist institutions as political and emotional "homes" for black feminists during this time period was significant, even though their objectives were a continuation of black feminist political labour from earlier historical periods (Taylor, 1998: 451). For instance, the NBFO was established in 1973 with the intention of "address(ing) the specific and particular needs of the larger, yet virtually neglected Black woman race in America." (Wada, 2017: 109-126).

In its founding year of 1974, the Combahee River Collective "diligently focused on fighting against race, sexual, heterosexual, as well as class enslavement" (Combahee River Collective, 2017: 164-189). According to the Combahee River Collective Statement from 2017, "We remark that the improvement of integrated review and action based on the interconnectedness of the primary techniques of enslavement is our unique mission. Various circumstances in our lives are the result of the combination of various exploitations. These advocacy organizations, as well as organizations very similar to them, propagated survival ideas that were based on the "collective instability" (King, 1988: 47) of black women's position in the confluence of several structures of dominance.

Black feminists have claimed that considering the confluence of class, gender, and race is vital to adequately comprehend and confront the difficulties experienced by black women. According to Collins' definition of black feminism from 1990, it is important to take action to counteract the marginalization and denigration of black women's experiences and expertise. Collins' work outlined

several crucial areas for black women to concentrate on in their activism, including self-definition, developing positive and varied representations of themselves, using cultural traditions as a source of power against discrimination, and challenging intersecting forms of control like gender, class, and race. (Collins, 1990: 221-238).

Collins' black feminist framework and Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality were both brought into the discussion of black feminist thought around the same time. The intersections between gender and race in certain situations are highlighted by Crenshaw's intersectionality paradigm. Black feminists have stated that because feminism fosters the formation of alliances within the community and confronts the dominant patriarchy and its repressive structures, it is advantageous to the black community. According to Collins, coalition building is essential for the success of black feminism as a social justice endeavour. As the conflict with gender subordination, economic exploitation, hetero-sexism, and racial discrimination are all entangled, instead of causing rifts within the community, black feminism is seen as advancing the cause of black emancipation. (Collins, 2000: 41-53).

Black feminism is seen as supporting the struggle for black liberation rather than causing divisions within the community because the fight against racial discrimination, economic exploitation, hetero-sexism, and gender subordination are all significant to the collective pursuit of social justice (Ransby, 2000: 1215-1221). In addition, black feminism promotes a sense of community and camaraderie among black women who deal with the same issues as racism, classism, and gender stereotyping. Black feminists have persisted in making the case that, in order to solve the difficulties encountered by black women, it is critical to take the confluence of class, gender, and race into account (Ransby, 2019: 1).

## **B. Brief Overview of Alice Walker's Life and Novels**

The eighth child of Willie and Minnie Tallulah Walker was born on February 9th, 1944, and was named Alice Malsenior Walker. She was exposed to the milieu of the South while growing up as a sharecropper in Eatonton, Georgia, where black vernacular was common, and the stench of tyranny and slavery was quite strong. Her right eye was accidentally blinded when she was eight years old by her brother, who had damaged her with a BB gun while playing the game "cowboys and Indians." Her

mother, being aware of her struggles, gave her a typewriter, allowing her to express herself through writing instead of carrying out chores in the house. All these factors were responsible for shaping many of her future works, as she was exposed to immense challenges while growing up. Her higher education commenced in Spelman College in Atlanta where she received a scholarship. During the duration of her studies from 1961 to 1963, she got increasingly involved in the civil rights movement, most of what she was exposed to represent the awakening of social and intellectual issues. It was while collecting all such experiences and after having an abortion that she wrote the poems which later became published in 1968 under the title of *Once: Poems*.

Alice Walker's work as a writer and teacher truly started to gain significant recognition throughout the 1970s. Overtime, she proved to be a talented author, being skilled in writing poetry, novels, essays, and short stories. Yet, her work gained homogeneity despite its intricate versatility. Themes like the relationship between life and art, racism, sexism, the artist's function, how characters develop their "self-definition and spiritual health," and environmental issues all played key roles in her work. Her resolve is to battle for the spiritual survival of herself and her people, the oppression of black women, and their victories. Moreover, she incorporates autobiographical elements within her work as she illustrates moral, social, and political conditions of the South of the United States.

Alice Walker first proposed the womanism theory in 1982. Womanism is a sociological theory was founded on both commonplace experiences and the struggles of black women throughout history. Its objective is to "restore the balance between people and the environment/nature and reconcile human life with the spiritual dimension" (Maparyan, 2011: 5). It was when writing a short story titled "Coming Apart" in 1979 that Walker used the term "womanism" for the first time. Following this initial use, "womanist" became a term to accommodate opposing and varied interpretations of concepts such as blackness, men, and feminism (Philips, 2006: 751–772). In addition, Alice Walker used the phrase in a 1983 collection of essays titled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Some of her main works which evince the ideals of black feminism and womanism, which especially stand out to be the voice of womanism are *Meridian* (1976), *The Colour Purple* (1982), *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989),

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). These works particularly stand out as being the voice of womanism. The literary works of Alice Walker, who has received numerous prizes throughout the years, focus on the struggles and woes of African American women who are entangled in the traumatic web of racism, gender violence, marginalization, and class warfare.

### **C. Alice Walker's theory of womanism**

An important component of black feminism that has received notice recently is Alice Walker's theory of womanism. The Combahee River Collective, established by Barbara Smith, and its "Black Feminist Statement," which strives to address the experiences and requirements of black women who have been underrepresented in mainstream feminist and civil rights groups, are two well-known examples of womanism. The Combahee River Collective takes an intersectional approach, believing that by acknowledging and tackling the various forms of oppression faced by black women, they can eventually achieve freedom from all forms of oppression. Womanism, which has roots in literary criticism by mainstream feminists, has also been applied in various associative forms (Phillips et al., 2006: 192-219).

In the 1980s, writer and activist Alice Walker coined the term "womanish" to describe the stereotypically feminine or maternal traits or behaviours of black women. "Womanish" can be used to honour and acknowledge the distinctive qualities and abilities of black women, such as resiliency, determination, and the capacity to care for and support. Walker sees this as the basis of womanism because black girls are sometimes labelled as "womanish" when they act like grown women and exhibit mature behaviour (Walker, 1983: 22). Walker is not the only originator of the theory of womanism. In the following section I will try to explore also the other contributors to this theory.

According to the womanist theory, black women have managed to thrive within a parallel history of racial and gender inequality. Womanist concepts: (1) basically acknowledge that race is relevant for black women; (2) suggest that race and gender evaluations must be conducted concurrently in studies of black women; and (3) acknowledge that the demands and experiences of black women are different from those of white middle-class feminists. This is partly because the mainstream feminism and civil rights movements have frequently excluded or marginalized black

women.

*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, a collection of essays by Alice Walker, is where the idea of womanism was first established. Womanism is a multi-dimensional, feminist worldview that includes aspects of spirituality, healing, and one's peace with their body. Womanism, according to Walker, is "a perspective available to Black women that is rooted in their motherhood experiences." Womanism is gender-progressive, encompassing a multi-ethnic feminist perspective. The terms "womanist" and "womanish" have three related meanings. First, they reflect "bold, resolute, or wilful behaviour" (Walker, 1983: 22). All these adjectives refer to doing or saying something that is not clear or simple but is done so with a lot of imagination and tenacity. The focus on "wilful" behaviour, as Saunders notes, is important because for a very long time, many black women were not thought to have their own free will, and a substantial portion of this problem was assigned to the behaviour of black men (Saunders, 1988: 90–133).

Secondly, both phrases refer to a mindset that is characterized by "aiming to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one" (Walker, 1983: 22). This once more emphasizes the subtle nature of womanism. Thirdly, the terms convey a responsible, adult attitude. "Womanish" is the antithesis of "girlish," which Walker defines as "impractical, reckless, not serious" previously in the essay (Walker, 1983: 22). In contrast, being "womanish" involves acting maturely and responsibly rather than acting alone (just like the terms themselves). It has to do with being responsible, in charge, and serious.

Walker describes "womanist" in the opening story of the book in terms of the numerous kinds of connections that might exist between women. Specifically, she states that womanists love other women primarily because they share common female attributes, such as their emotional lives, their strength, and their shared female culture. In addition to loving these female attributes, Walker also suggests that womanists are free to choose other women as sexual partners, but this is not to say that womanists are against heterosexual relationships. Instead, womanists encourage their audience to love one another primarily because they are female, while also expressing love towards the opposite sex. Collins states that "womanism appears to offer a means by which Black women can handle gender exploitation without condemning Black men" (Collins, 1996: 11).

According to Walker's philosophy, individuals of different races and genders can coexist peacefully in a harmonious environment, preserving their cultural and personal identities. This benevolent attitude is essential to prevent conflict and encourage collaboration. Walker defines womanism in terms of its progression in the manifestations of black (female) people as well as its more encompassing aspect, the imaginative, all-encompassing vision of the garden. According to this metaphor, people are not independent from the earth's ability to survive, but rather they are a part of it.

Later in the essay, Walker discusses the relationship between mothers and children, suggesting that she values motherhood as an important aspect of womanhood. Razak notes that, Walker emphasizes the mentoring and sharing that characterize a typical black mother-daughter interactions (Razak, 2006: 99).

Walker provides a more thorough definition of "womanist" in the third essay, outlining the features that womanists appreciate, including the irrational characteristics that are frequently associated with women (represented by the moon). She refers to the moon and spirit as symbols of the spiritual parts of existence, while love, dance, music, food, and roundness are references to the physical and earthly pleasures of life. Additionally, she claims that womanists like struggle, maybe implying that they are persistent and do not easily give up on their goals. In addition, womanists love not only others, but also themselves (Walker, 1983:15).

In the fourth and final essay, Walker claims that "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (Walker, 1984: 12). This expression is now well-known. Walker implies in this comment that the two ideas are both separate and share some similarities. By concluding in this way, she completes the definition she started with in the first essay, where she said that a womanist is a black feminist. It is unclear why she chose purple and lavender as reference colours, though one may suspect that it might have something to do with her book *The Colour Purple*. Most significantly, she presents a universalist viewpoint that strengthens her as a woman by depicting black women as attractive and strong individuals without condemning men or white people, she actively and simply shows what each feminist aims for.

#### **D. Research on the Representation of Black Women in Alice Walker**

The representation of black women in Alice Walker has been the subject of numerous studies. According to Harris Abrams' essay, "The Gift of Loneliness: Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*," Walker believes that women should be independent and capable of taking charge of their own lives, as Celie did after being persuaded by Shug. From the author's perspective, Celie's redemption story took thirty years to actualise (Abrams, 1985: 8). Abrams further discusses the themes of independence and self-determination in Alice Walker's novel. He states that Walker believes in the necessity of women being strong and capable of taking charge of their own life, as shown by the character of Celie. Throughout the story, Celie's path of self-discovery and growth leads her to recover her agency and express her independence, finally become a more self-assured and confident woman. Finally, in his paper, Abrams examines the numerous reasons and forces that contributed to Celie's change and the transformation of the other characters highlighted in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*. This includes: (1) Relationships, such as Celie's relationships with other characters, particularly Shug Avery and her sister Nettie, play a key role in her transformation for her to assert her independence and stand up for herself. Nettie's letters, which Celie reads later in the novel, also help her to understand her own worth and the power of self-determination; (2) oppression and violence Celie is exposed to. For example, her experiences with her husband and stepfather who sexually abuse and oppress her; (3) Personal growth such as Celie's own personal growth and development also played a role in her transformation; and finally, (4) Societal change, meaning the broader societal context in which Celie lived played a role in her transformation.

The goal of Alice Walker's novel *The Colour Purple*, according to Maria B. Jørgensen's analysis in "Women, Letters and the Empire: The Role of the Epistolary Narrative in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*" is to give voice to the voiceless (Jørgensen, 2011: 109). She claims that Celie only recovers when she receives care. Additionally, Celie can endure the agony since her words are rendered in letters and are audibly heard when she violates her father's taboo. She overcomes fear by telling Shug about her experience of her being raped by her own father. And so, the author states that the novel is more of a political movement which is a faction of feminism. *The Colour Purple* is also described by the author as a woman expressing her own

odd story in her own voice. Celie tells her own story and it makes the content of the story more realistic and credible. Furthermore, she is tasked with narrating other characters' voices and stories. Yet in the end, she discovers her own distinctive voice through relationships with other women, particularly her sister Nettie and her companion Shug Avery. Celie learns to appreciate and to stand up for herself through these interactions even in the face of abuse and persecution. Celie also learns to express herself by writing letters to God, in addition to gaining strength and support from her interactions with other women. She pours out her ideas, feelings, and experiences in these letters; and through this process, she finds the means to describe her challenges and understand her identity and the meaning of her existence. Celie changes throughout the narrative, becoming more confident and self-assured. According to Jørgensen the letters that Celie writes to God serve as a means of self-expression and personal liberation, allowing her to confront and challenge the oppressive forces that have shaped her life (Jørgensen 2011: 109). The letters function as a form of resistance against the patriarchal, racist, and imperialist systems that have oppressed Celie and other black women. Through the letters, Celie can express her thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a way that allows her to reclaim her identity and autonomy. Jørgensen also thinks that Celie's interactions with other women are significantly influenced by the letters. They allow her to form bonds with other women and to find support and strength in sisterhood, which helps her to challenge and resist the oppressive forces that have held her down. Overall, Jørgensen's research contends that the epistolary narrative in *The Colour Purple* is essential to Celie's development and freedom and that it can be an effective weapon in the fight against oppressive regimes.

Another study titled "Gendered Selves Reconstruction in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*" was conducted by Otto-Agede in 2013. The author notes that many of the critics of Alice Walker's book took a feminist stance while discussing it. Walker, as the author notes, refused to be labelled a feminist because the concept of feminism exclusively addresses the problems of white women. The approach chosen by Walker enables the readers to observe the novel from a different and wider perspective. So, the author states that the perception that Walker attempts to give to the readers is that they observe the story from a universal standpoint, requiring greater attention to details.

Celie's problems are not limited to black American community but relatable to varying communities (Ottoh-Agede, 2013: 95-99).

Another study that examined *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker from a womanist perspective was conducted by (Musanga, 1982:388; Mukhuba, 1982:400). The primary focus of this study is on Alice Walker's predefined concept of sisterhood and family. From the authors' standpoint, family is of great importance and is emphasised by Walker in her novel, showing great commitment to wholeness and survival of the African American people. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the novel concludes with Celie being liberated and brought into unison and oneness with the African American community. When Nettie and Celie reconcile at the book's conclusion, this oneness is lauded. The authors claim that this statement is metaphorical and refers to the healing of the African American community from the challenges and horrors it had to face. The sisterhood between Celie and Nettie, which permits Celie's freedom from Mr- to become independent, strong, aggressive, and confident, is a major relationship that emphasizes the novel's other significant theme of sisterhood. In the struggle against oppression, Celie and Nettie's relationship proved to be a special and robust link that could not be broken by Mr-. The partnership is a crucial foundational step that teaches Celie to reconsider her body. Celie's technique of self-evaluation was crucial to her self-identification and self-knowledge. The third relationship, between Sofia and Celie, was crucial in seeing how effective communication can be in resolving conflicts and fostering understanding.

The image of black women by Alice Walker in *The Temple of My Familiar* has been the subject of numerous studies. The main objective of Braendlin's research was to offer a critical critique of the book that looked at its themes, characters, and overall significance. The novel is a sweeping and ambitious work that tells the interconnected stories of a diverse cast of characters, including a white woman named Suwelo, a black woman named Fanny, and a group of spirits who have lived and loved throughout human history. According to Braendlin (1996: 34), the novel is a multi-layered work that examines issues of identity, history, and spirituality through the intertwined lives of a various cast of characters. In a world formed by historical, cultural, and political forces, the novel's protagonists fight to comprehend and claim their own identities. He goes ahead to say that the characters' search for

identity is inextricably linked to their feeling of belonging and connection to others, and the novel eventually concludes that genuine identity can only be established via connection with others and with the greater world. Finally, also, he argues that the novel is intensely concerned with the role of history in defining identity and experience (Braendlin, 1996: 45). The novel's protagonists are all linked to one another by a complicated web of historical events and relationships that have impacted their lives, and the narrative explores these ties to investigate how history can both empower and enslave individuals.

In another study titled "Womanism and Women in Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*," author Ratna Hasanthi offers an analysis of womanism and femininity in Alice Walker's book. According to Hasanthi (2019: 1081), the novel is profoundly concerned with the experiences and struggles of women, and it explores the ways in which womanism can empower and liberate women. She believes that the novel uses the characters of Suwelo and Fanny to explore the complexities of womanism and femininity, and to suggest that true empowerment and liberation can only be achieved through a recognition of the interconnectedness of all people and the importance of collective action (Hasanthi, 2019: 1081-1089).

### **III. DISCUSSION ON *THE COLOUR PURPLE***

#### **A. General Overview: Introduction, Concepts and Background**

*The Colour Purple* was the third novel written by Alice Walker. The book was published in 1982, and ever since its publication, it has been subject to a vast array of controversy due to the issues discussed in it. The central and major theme of *The Colour Purple* is anchored around black women's oppression and womanism. Moreover, Alice Walker sets the scene for most of the characters in a rural farm community, with little to no visitors; thus, focuses on the portraits of each character. In *The Colour Purple*, the protagonist and other characters live on a farm that may be taken as the representation of the entire globe, and there is essentially no outside intervention in the plot's development. Because of the world's simplicity, the characters' actions may be highlighted. We can understand Mr- 's tyranny, Shug's intricacy, and the entire process by which Celie is able to liberate herself from her subjugated position more clearly. According to Christophe, in an essay titled, "*The Colour Purple: An Existential Novel*", the book is a song of joy and success that celebrates one woman's victory over racism, sexism, and social determinism and her eventual blossoming into her full potential (Christophe, 1993: 5).

Walker's main character is an example of an African American society that is both racially and sexually repressed. The author does not minimize the struggles that black people face daily. Celie portrays the feelings of victimization that black women experience because of male prejudice and their skin colour. When it comes to complexion, the enslavement as well as systematic oppression of dark-skinned individuals during the colonial period was responsible for perpetuating the preference of white skin over dark skin, giving rise to the stigma that women with darker complexions are less attractive, whereas women with light skin are regarded as wonderful. This ideology is flawed and is thoroughly dealt with in Alice Walker's novel, as she celebrates black women beauty through the character Shug. I therefore contend that womanism is the answer to the difficulties that black women are challenged with under the patriarchal system by analysing the evidence provided by

Alice Walker's work, *The Colour Purple*.

## 1. Sexuality and Gender

Sexuality can be studied as a type of oppression on its own, without relating it to, for example, the oppressions of gender, class, and race. Black women's bodies were exploited, objectified and, for white men, they were like products that were made to give them pleasure (Collins, 1986: 222). In *The Colour Purple*, we can see how Alice Walker gives Celie the opportunity of having a voice to talk about her childhood and the problems she had with sexuality. In this way, she articulates the abuses that she was subjected to, and, at the same time, she expresses herself on the issues of women's sexuality, which at the time was a grossly overlooked problem.

With respect to gender assignment, it can be understood that children come up with ideas and concepts in line with the meaning of being masculine or feminine from early years and apply these concepts to classify information, come to conclusions as well as control actions (Butler, 1998: 2). In other words, gender roles are labels or constructs of the society which are given to individuals based on their cultural and societal norms, expectations, and behaviours. In the novel, black male dominance and superiority over black women was highlighted in almost all scenes. Usually, a patriarchal community defines women to be subservient, modest, humble, and submissive. A good woman is expected to be meant to be passive, silent, obedient, and subservient. Patriarchal society demands women to act in the manner that the society has constructed for their gender.

Moreover, gender is something learned and not something innate. According to Simon de Beauvoir, despite the biological differences that define an individual sex, the idea of a woman being a woman only materialises because of the circumstances that the society exposes her to, and so, biology takes on the value of social norms (Beauvoir, 1949: 267). Therefore, de Beauvoir reveals that gender is something constructed, learned, and performed. On the other hand, since society is mainly patriarchal, there are specific gender roles that are expected to be associated with females such as being familiar with housekeeping, cooking, babysitting, being someone's sex object etc.

The oppression of black women is also significantly influenced by gender. In her ground-breaking speech "Ain't I a Woman?" Bell Hooks argues that the

intersectionality of gender and race creates a unique form of oppression for black women (Hooks, 1981: 3). Similarly, this situation is also relevant to Simone de Beauvoir's argument in *The Second Sex* that women are oppressed by males because of their perceived inferiority and the societal power dynamics that come from it. (Beauvoir, 1989: 17).

Celie experiences all kinds of discrimination cited above in her personal relationships. Her father and her spouse are only two examples of the guys in her life that mistreat her on a regular basis and treat her like a slave. She is not allowed to have any control over her own life or make decisions for herself. "I'm black, I'm poor, I'm ugly, I'm a girl, and I'm not clean enough, says Celie, expressing her annoyance. Not smart enough is me. I am not attractive enough. Not decent enough, I guess. I'm not up to par. I'm not good enough" (Walker, 1983: 22). This quote shows how Celie internalises the negative messages about her sexuality and gender that she has heard throughout her life, and how these messages aggravate her low self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness.

Because patriarchy is a "universal feature of human society," according to Mitchell, "women are being marginalized, oppressed in their very psychologies of femininity" in such societies." (Michell, 2005: 9-11). By looking at Celie's connection with her stepfather, who deprived her of the fundamental human right to education and gets her pregnant, this idea is made apparent. Therefore, Celie's life is shaped by patriarchal notions, according to which women are inferior and have minor economic duties. Pa is the main cause of gender-based violence, just like the patriarchs in the novel. His stance on the rights of African American women serves as the impetus for the harsh measures taken against Celie. When Pa is talking about Celie's school teacher, he claims that her schoolteacher runs her mouth so much (meaning she talks too much) that no man would want to marry her. In making such statements, Pa paints the picture of the expectation men have of women. In other words, women are to be complacent, obedient, and uneducated, so it is far easier for them to be controlled and dominated. Moreover, Pa is representative of a patriarchal system where in some instances, women are objectified, being offered to any man who comes asking for their hand in marriage. Such is the case with Celie, where she is offered to Mr\_ as his wife, being written off as an ugly person who no one will want to look at. And so, she will be a man's property for the rest of her life and is

nothing more than an object.

At the end of the day, a woman's self-worth is determined by physical appearance and by her capacity to care for the needs of the home. This demonstrates how social conceptions are fundamental to the oppression and misery experienced by women. Abusing one's body repeatedly results in the loss of one's sense of self because it is an integral aspect of one's identity. Additionally, Celie, like some female characters in the novel such as Squeak and Sofia, belongs to a specific societal category that is deemed insignificant and inferior, especially coupled with the fact that they are black. This means they will inevitably be victims of brutal and sexual abuse, as observed by the lead protagonist, Celie, who suffered throughout her life. Mitchell, offers an explanation to this cyclical oppressive situation that women are subjected to stating that “the ideological construction of gendered subjectivity can be regarded as ensuring the ongoing reproduction of dominated femininity and dominating masculinity” (Mitchell 1993: 9-11). As a result, the female characters in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* are forced to endure repeated abuse throughout their lives.

Another important reason to point out about the lead protagonist Celie is that her repeated abuse stems from her subordinate identity. This can be seen in how she has been conditioned to calling her husband, Mr\_, where the omission of her husband's name is because of her being conditioned to fear men. Growing up, she was conditioned not to speak against abusive practices carried out on her, and this behaviour, as can be seen, transitioned into adulthood. Her years of abuse forces her to be mute in precarious situations, she does not fight back, and she is now in a life-or-death predicament because of her identity. Celie's repeated abuses highlight two different viewpoints i.e., white supremacy's hold over black people and man's dominance over women. This can be seen in the statement made by Celie, after Mr.\_ repeatedly violated her.

“Once he gets on top of me, I think about how that's where he always wants to be”  
(Walker 1983: 65).

Walker uses this statement to pass a message, by implying that a man wants to be in control of their relationship and how women see him, it is a classic power struggle. For the female characters, Squeak, Sofia, and Celie, they can never be on top in a patriarchal society and so, they fall to the very bottom of the list. According

to Crenshaw, in order to maintain black women in a position of subjugation, "many women of colour, for example, are burdened by poverty, childcare responsibilities, and the lack of job skills" (Crenshaw, 1989: 71). Here for instance, these female characters are suffering the misery of black man because they lack money, they always need to take care of children and they lack job skills. They were not thought to learn any occupation, that is why they are subjugated. In fact, all the female characters depicted in *The Colour Purple* share the characteristics of childcare responsibility, poverty, and lack of job skills, which makes it more likely for them to be confined to the roles that are subordinate to those held by men and by people of colour. On the other hand, the male characters depicted in *The Colour Purple*, pride themselves on keeping women below a certain standard, promoting oppressive and discriminatory practices amongst women. This shows how gender causes abusive situations to take place in the lives of black women.

Therefore, I would like to argue that black women are victims of sexual and gender discrimination. This is seen in the situation where black women experience this discrimination from only black men who use that same oppression which reflects the oppression of the whites in which they were subjugated to. I also would like to argue the fact that black women are more loyal to black to a substantial degree than their own selves. (Walker, 1984: 318). This is seen in the case of Celie, where she is conditioned to be faithful despite the horrible and repeated abuses she is subjected to. And so, because of the numerous abuses Celie is exposed to, she compares herself to a tree, a mute inanimate object. When her spouse mistreats her, she keeps telling herself that she should continue to be a tree. This shows the suffering and sorrow that Pa and Mr- inflict on her. Additionally, this symbolizes the closeness of black women who are sexually, and gender harassed both physically and mentally while being quiet and compliant.

Black women have been marginalised, subjugated, conditioned, and became victims of rape, finding it difficult to speak out. Such traumatic experiences similar to that experienced by the lead protagonist, Celie, leaves these women lonely, humiliated, and reluctant to speak out about their experiences as a result of this trauma. Silence can be a coping method that allows them to avoid repeating the horror of the incident while also protecting them from additional damage. It is crucial to remember that silence is not just for women. but also, for the male victims of rape;

silence seems to be a general way to avoid reliving such traumatic experiences. The relationship between rape trauma and silent women is nuanced and diverse. On the one hand, trauma can lead to silence as a coping and protective mechanism. Silence, on the other hand, can contribute to and prolong rape trauma by allowing the offender to elude prosecution and reinforcing the perception that rape is a normal and accepted part of society.

Another alarming fact that Walker draws the eyes of her reader towards is the idea that black women are wrongfully labelled as sex machines and so are considered objects to satisfy sexual desires. According to Jewell, from the early 1630s to the present day, black American women of different shades have been labelled as hypersexual i.e., “bad black girls,” a term which was synonymous to another term developed in that era, “Black jezebels” (Jewell, 1993: 186). Black women, even in the 1930s, were still believed to have an insatiable appetite for sex, which justified the rape of black women who were objectified by their male counterparts. This was the reason Celie grew up being exposed to all these unfortunate incidents, moulding her into the timid, submissive, and confused woman she eventually became.

Womanism appears to be the solution to Celie's issue of experiencing prejudice as a woman of colour and as a member of a lower social level in a patriarchal culture. Mr- 's attitude towards Celie, shows how black women were continually seen as targets of sexual brutality and constant exploitation from the patriarchal power of the white superiority. As a result, Celie is no longer interested in knowing her own body due to the numerous abuses and repeated molestations committed against her. According to Wilson (1989: 33), this can be thought of as dissociation, where a safety-oriented cognitive mechanism is developed leading to the individual having an imbalance in their psychic equilibrium. And so, in the case of Celie, she loses interest in trying to discover her sexuality due to the numerous traumatic sexual abuses she has been exposed to. For Celie to grow and appreciate her sexuality as a woman, it is vitally important that she learns about who she is both physically and emotionally. It is during this phase of enlightenment that Shug begins to show Celie how to please herself. Not surprisingly, she is appalled when Shug told her that she indeed enjoyed having sex with Mr\_. As time goes on, Shug proceeds to have sexual intercourse with Celie. And doing so enlightens her on the pleasures she has been denied when having sex with her husband. This is the very first time,

according to Celie, that she enjoyed sex.

Although this idea of Shug having sexual intercourse with Celie might seem shocking to the readers, what Shug was really showing Celie was how to love and appreciate herself. It is the first time that Celie expresses enjoyment in having sexual intercourse, and it is with another woman, Shug, rather than with her abusive husband Mr\_. This revelation may have come as a surprise to readers as it challenges societal norms and expectations surrounding sexuality and relationships. Additionally, the fact that Celie can find pleasure and self-love through this experience with Shug may have been unexpected for readers, as Celie has previously been depicted as a victim of abuse and oppression.

According to Walker (1983: 8), womanists love themselves and largely those traits that define them as women, such as their emotional lives, their tenacity, and their shared female cultures. Most significantly, they ought to value the accomplishments that are credited to them. Indeed, one can never truly love others except if that love is first expressed to oneself. For Celie to be truly free and enjoy herself, Shug lets Celie understand what it means to feel good sexually and be able to enjoy herself because according to Shug, Celie was in effect a virgin as she had never experienced pleasure with Mr\_. This appreciation for oneself, in addition to all that makes a female who she is, was demonstrated by Celie's experience with Shug. As Shug appears naked before Celie, her core values of what attraction should mean begins to change. Celie starts to learn about her body, having erotic feelings towards Shug, as it becomes easier for her to appreciate female attributes. Through Celie's transformation from being ignorant about her sexuality to now being more comfortable about her body, Alice Walker allows the reader to realise that womanists admire other women, to a great degree because of those things that identify them as females.

Thus, in *The Colour Purple* Walker prioritizes female kinship over male kinship to female relationship. According to Walker, womanists love themselves and most of the characteristics that define them as women, leading to women loving themselves both sexually and non-sexually. However, Walker does not disapprove of opposite sexual relationships, letting her readers know that a womanist occasionally has non-sexual and sexual feelings for men. The "sometimes" in this context means that womanists try to find individuality amongst other women, rather than putting all

dependence on men.

Another interesting fact that I argue is that sexuality can be perceived as a means for females to impose their influence over men. This can be seen in the character of Celie, where she has unlocked her sexuality and is through Shug that she morphs herself into a powerful, confident, and independent character, no longer slave to Mr\_. According to Bell Hooks, “an aging female seducer worries about losing her capacity to use sex to manipulate and entice men since it gives her power” (Hooks, 1989: 94). In time, Celie begins to understand this power and frees herself from Mr\_ and Pa’s control and influence. Celie observes how Shug utilises her sexuality to control men, where she has relationships with Grady and more recently with Germaine. On the other hand, Mr\_, who is occasionally hostile towards Celie, is calm, collected, and composed towards Shug, due to her sexual influence. In all, Celie was sexually assaulted by Mr\_ and Pa; and these sexual relationships were void of the possibility of enjoyment and love. And so, Celie eventually found pleasure and love through Shug, and this was because love and equality were present in this relationship. Mr\_'s treatment of Celie does change after she becomes liberated. Initially, Celie is oppressed and mistreated by Mr\_, who physically and emotionally abuses her in a pattern of patriarchal domination. However, as Celie gains independence and autonomy, she begins to assert herself and stand up to Mr\_. She begins to assert her own needs and desires, and she no longer passively accepts Mr\_'s mistreatment. This change in Celie's behaviour can be explained by the concept of "agency" as described by feminist theorist and philosopher, Michel Foucault. According to him, agency is the ability to act upon one's own desires and needs, and it is essential for individuals to assert their own power to resist oppression and domination (Foucault, 1980: 5). As Celie becomes more self-assured thanks to her relationship with Shug Avery, who helps her appreciate her own beauty and femininity, she not only becomes more courageous in exploring her own desires, but also begins to exert her sexual power over men by demanding respect from them and refusing to be treated as inferior. In all, Celie’s liberation is not only physical and material but also emotional and sexual. She no longer allows men to use and abuse her, she embraces her own sexuality, and she reclaims her agency, power, and autonomy in her relationships.

In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir makes the case that

masculinity is commonly viewed as the standard or ideal human type, while femininity is viewed as a subsidiary or inferior form of humanity. This view, according to de Beauvoir, is based on the concept of the "eternal feminine," which holds that femininity is an essential and unchangeable element of females. De Beauvoir claims that this representation of femininity as inferior and submissive to masculine is the outcome of patriarchal oppressive regimes that have systematically excluded and discriminated against women. She claims that this idea has been used to excuse women's exploitation and mistreatment (such as rape), contributing to the persistence of gender inequity (Beauvoir, 1949: 12). De Beauvoir's examination of masculinity and femininity is central to her larger claim that women are not intrinsically inferior to men but have been socially and culturally produced as such. Therefore, to attain equality with men, women must reject this false notion of femininity and fight for their own independence and strength (Beauvoir, 1949: 220).

Celie attains that independence and strength through the intervention of Shug Avery, who both in character and in deed is a non-conforming woman. As Hartmann points out wage and housework are very vital exploitation mechanisms for men to subdue and control women within a patriarchal society. This indirectly refashions the thinking processes of women, especially those who are not aware of their strengths and qualities, leading to them being exploited (Hartmann, 1981: 1-33). However, Shug's actions and character do not reflect conformity to the patriarchal framework, defying it almost entirely. Shug is feminine in her own way and so she expresses herself wholesomely without boundaries. Shug has changed the status quo and taught Celie how to stand up for herself and to redefine society's definition of conventional practices associated with women. She has taught her to be happy with her sexuality and to be daring and unperturbed. Shug comments at some point "I'm overjoyed. I have time, money, friends, job, love, and relationships" (Hartmann, 1981: 194). This shows how free-spirited Shug is and how she is not scared to express herself to the world.

Because of the sexual abuse she has been exposed to Celie has made "attempts to disregard and destroy her body" (Walker, 1982: 5). This too contrasts with Shug, who is independent, strong, and not ashamed to express her sexual tendency towards females. She is "womanish," a woman who articulates, enjoys her body and other women's bodies, while not being hostile to men (Walker, 1982: 6).

Shug assists Celie in developing a comfortable relationship through her body, and consequently Celie commences her healing process until she completely regains her freedom and confidence. Due to this self-discovery, Celie begins to form close bonds or sisterhood relationships with women like Shug and other female characters. This bond of sisterhood unites the sufferings of black women characters in *The Colour Purple* were subjected to, leading to the characters to derive strength from each other. Jing argues that the idea of sisterhood is to shake off despair, self-effacement, resignation, self-denial, and depression, imposed by men. Alice Walker's depiction of Celie figures a systematic transformation of a black female's life from the clutches of pain, misery and suffering to happiness, self-confidence and more importantly, appreciation for her sexuality.

In terms of women's empowerment and enlightenment, Alice Walker expresses transformative actions that are taken by the female characters in *The Colour Purple*. In time, Celie refuses to believe that her domestic duty is in the home any longer. Throughout the novel, Celie becomes aware that by adhering to traditional gender roles as a devoted wife, she reinforces the patriarchal foundations upon which the black community is established. As the story progresses, Mr.- tries to objectify Celie, however, she gradually overcomes the patriarchy and forges a sisterhood for herself. She is now able to feel herself differently and live her life without having to live up to patriarchal norms. Without relying on her husband's financial assistance or social standing as a provider, Celie develops the fortitude, courage, and sense of self-worth necessary to live and define her own identity.

Many feminists argue that men hold power in part due to their financial status as providers and the way in which women are frequently seen as consumers, whereas they (men) regard themselves as producers. However, Mies, argues that females were the first producers of social production, life itself, and tools of production. Nonetheless, she added that if they were responsible for initiating social production, why were they unable to prevent establishments of exploitation and hierarchy amongst the sexes? It was simply because of male dominance and supremacy, where men instigated and developed destructive tools through which they controlled women and other men (Mies, 1988: 12). However, women in *The Colour Purple* choose to refute and fight this system, working to develop their own businesses, like Celie who grows to become a self-developed woman through beginning a business in

producing pants.

Accordingly, I argue that womanism enables women to be independent, self-confident and industrious. Walker, a womanist, believes that while the world in which women live is dominated by men, they can have a positive impact on one another. Women change how they perceive males as a result of a woman. Alice Walker demonstrates this in her novel, the moment when Celie goes against Mr.- after she gets to know Shug. Shug helps her to change from a quiet ignorant young girl into a grown audacious woman. Celie's maturity is demonstrated by her capacity to go from one place to another. This teaches her how to deal with problems in life without a man's help. Evidently, the way feminism is viewed has changed as a result of all these advancements and recent modifications. Additionally, the female characters in *The Colour Purple* are not weak and deferential to men, but rather are empowered and capable of challenging traditional gender roles as perceived by feminism. Being both an outsider in the dominant white American community and an insider within the marginalized black African group, Walker as an African American writer exemplifies the complexity of American patriarchy. Her writing and depiction of the oppression endured by black women in the South, particularly through the character of Celie and other black females in the book, are significantly influenced by these two experiences.

## **2. Racism**

The issue of race is one of the most important and integral parts of *The Colour Purple*. The idea of the theory of womanism opens a new perspective on the relationship between Africa and Europe, issues on imperialism, black and white communities' relationship, differences between women and men, in a bid to offer a bridge between the cultures and races, as well as to unify all parties involved. Furthermore, it highlights the struggles that black women face due to their colour. In *The Colour Purple*, the racial discrimination is heavily centred on Celie who is the main character in the novel. Her stepfather is one of the most menacing characters in her life, aside from Mr., her husband, who has committed numerous acts of violence and rape towards her. These two men seek to oppress her the same way the white man oppressed the black man by crippling her emotionally and showing no respect whatsoever to her as a person. To be born poor and black, meant at the time that you are disadvantaged, while being born black and rich meant that you are born with an

advantage. So, Celie's case was that of a serious disadvantage (Hooks, 1995: 58-64). Her stepfather's actions towards her were considered normal by most of the public and so, there was no one to whom she can really voice her complaints. Alice Walker highlights the racial discrimination faced by Celie. She uses Celie's experiences to illustrate the method in which racism doubles the marginalization of black women.

Racism, sexism, and classism, as variant forms of discrimination overlap and interrelate in a complicated manner in the case of black women's position. In fact, this idea, called *intersectionality*, was first put forth by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor at Columbia University during an academic debate in 1989. In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour" Crenshaw defines intersectionality as an analytical framework to disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable. By tracing such categories to their intersections, she shows that they should be expanded by factoring in further issues such as class, sexual orientation, and age to describe how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalized in society (Crenshaw, 1991: 1246). As a poor black woman living in the patriarchal community of rural parts of Georgia in early 1900s Celie's experiences are a clear demonstration of how she is placed at the centre of several oppressions, including racial discrimination, gender oppression and economic inequalities.

Alice Walker discusses the ordeal that Celie is subjected to due to the colour of her skin, by relating it to the African Americans in the twentieth century who faced widespread discrimination and segregation in many parts of the United States. Celie is prohibited from attending the same schools as white students, because of the "separate but equal" act, a legal policy that permitted separation in public settings, including schools. In the Plessy v. Ferguson case from 1896, the Supreme Court upheld this strategy. Ferguson, holding that segregation was legal if facilities for black people were of comparable quality to those for white people (Ferguson, 1896: 537). Black people, however, were not offered the same educational possibilities as white people, and their facilities were sometimes inferior to those available to white people. Celie and other African Americans who had restricted access to education were severely affected by this school segregation and opportunities and were consequently marginalised and devalued in society. This marginalisation and devaluation of black people in society contributed to a cycle of poverty and

inequality.

Similarly, Celie battles with the limited opportunities and amount of knowledge that are accessible to her as a black woman throughout the whole novel. She is not given the opportunity to learn how to read or write. This makes her less able to stand up for herself and claim her independence, making her more open to abuse and exploitation. If Celie was given the opportunity to educate herself and attend a profession or an occupation, maybe earlier she might have said no to her father or husband and become an independent woman. But these possibilities are taken from her and for that reason, she had to endure all these injustices and oppressions she was exposed to by Mr\_ and Pa. Crenshaw's claim that there is an overlap of various ways of discrimination such as racism, sexism, and classism interrelate in complicated ways is valid in this respect. Because Celie is not given the opportunity to educate herself and have a profession, because she is a woman, and because she is black, she cannot become wealthy and successful. She can only work as a nurse but can never become a lawyer. The reason for Celie's silence is her fear of rebelling against Mr- and Pa, which at the core of her problems. If she was given education, she would not be afraid. Since she was not given the opportunity, she tends to choose rather to be a victim and believes this to be her fate and that the only way for her to live is in silence.

Another character that Walker represents in *The Colour Purple* as a racially and economically exploited black woman is Sofia. Sofia is the wife of Harpo, Mr-'s violent and sexist son and she is depicted as a rebel against the system who has learned how to be independent and defy the status quo of women's predefined roles in the public. Overall, despite her tough exterior, Sofia is continuously brought low whenever she attempts to rebel against and operate outside of the patriarchal, white racist system. Sofia's experiences show how society promotes oppression and racism through its systems and structures. For example, Sofia is initially employed as a maid for a white family and is subjected to verbal and physical abuse by her white employer. This is a clear example of how the system of racism is used to exploit and oppress black people in the novel. However, her fight through the system is short-lived when she is forced to be a maid for mayor and his spouse. Miss Millie once encounters Sofia in the town with her kids and says:

All your children are so clean, she says, would you like to work for me, be my

maid". She responds, "hell no" and "follows by pushing the mayor down for slapping her (Walker, 85).

Miss Millie and her husband, the mayor, are the representatives of the white supremacy that poses racial limitations on black women in early twentieth century America. Their treatment of Sofia shows the rigidity of the racial roles in which black women are confined. In such a system, any deviation from the anticipated or predetermined racial roles is deemed an anomaly. Even with Sofia's master status, she is denied equal opportunities in the society run by the whites. Her race confines her to a box, with minimal opportunities and yet an avalanche of abuses and oppressions. When Sofia refuses to be Miss Millie's maid, she is beaten up by the police to force compliance, reaffirming their racial dominance over her. This instance shows the unjust treatment of black women in a white supremacist system. Sofia is thrown into prison just because she is a black woman that defended herself from a white woman who attacked her unprovoked.

Eventually, she is forced to work as a maid, which at that time was considered prestigious. In such a stratified unjust social system it was thought to be an honour to be working as a maid for white people. Miss Millie clearly draws the borderlines between the whites and the blacks when she says:

"Have you ever seen a white person and a coloured sitting side by side in a car, when one of 'em wasn't showing the other one how to drive it or clean it' (Walker, 104).

In addition, while Sofia is working for Miss Millie, as her maid, she portrays group specific adversity that the African woman endures as opposed to other women who occupy other categories in the society. For five years, Sofia is not permitted to see her children straight without visitation approval. When eventually she gets the opportunity to be with her kids, she is cleaning the house and exclaims:

"I'm slaving away cleaning that big post they got down at the bottom of the stairs". However, her son replied, "Don't say slaving, Mama" (Walker, 103).

This infuriates Sofia, who angrily exposes the harsh reality of trauma, oppression, discrimination, and stigmatisation she has been subjected to, due to her race and gender. She says:

"Why not? They got me in a little storeroom up under the house, hardly bigger than Odessa's porch, and just about as warm in the wintertime. I'm at their beck and call all night and all day. They won't let me see my children. They won't let me see no mens. Well, after five years they let me see you once a year. I'm a slave, she says". (Walker, 103).

Therefore, Sofia epitomises the racial discrimination that was faced by black

women in the twentieth century. She was limited to performing parts that were exclusive to women because she was a black woman working for a white family. Her race limits her role in the white supremacist, patriarchal society, leading to a life of being oppressed and discriminated against. Moreover, Sofia is depicted as a black woman who can fight gender stigmatisation in her struggle against Harpo, her husband, yet she is unable to fight and overcome the racial discrimination that dominated American society.

Additionally, Sofia's husband, Harpo, also oppresses her by attempting to control her actions and silence her voice. This highlights how the patriarchal system reinforces gender inequality and reinforces the notion that men are superior to women. Sofia's experiences also demonstrate how society categorises people based on their class, race, and gender and how they are utilized to excuse and legitimize oppression. Sofia's experiences serve as a reminder of how systems of oppression and bigotry are ingrained in society on a deep level, and how they continue to affect marginalised communities even today.

Furthermore, by looking closely at the ordeal that Sofia faces, after spending some time in jail, she becomes conditioned to be silent, even when she is finally free to go. Her voice, so eloquent in the past, is locked in silence. She reacts in the same manner as Celie as she indicates that she has lost not just her voice but her identity due to racism. Furthermore, she becomes depressed and less willing deep inside. When Miss Millie says she is finally free at the end of the novel, she hardly laughs, she keeps silent. Her inner thoughts and dreams are not communicated by Walker after she is released from jail. This means that the racial discrimination she experienced detaches her from being completely human, where she exists solely for the purpose of serving the masters. Unfortunately, what makes her an intriguing and captivating character, is the same reason readers empathise with her and feel sorry for her misfortune. In all, Sofia becomes emboldened as the novel progresses and can stand up and say no to the white men who have been oppressing her throughout the novel. This change in her character can be linked to the concept of womanism; where womanism emphasises the need for self-empowerment and self-definition for black women, and it encourages them to reclaim their own agency and resist the oppressive systems that have been imposed on them. This is evident in Sofia's character, as she begins to reject the roles that have been assigned to her by society and starts to assert

her own autonomy.

In all, despite Sofia's harsh demeanour, every time she tries to rebel against and operate outside of the patriarchal, white racist system, she is constantly knocked to the ground. Sofia's experiences show how society promotes oppression and racism through its systems and structures. For example, Sofia is initially employed as a maid for a white family and is subjected to verbal and physical abuse by her white employer. This is a clear example of how the system of racism is used to exploit and oppress black people in the novel.

Sofia's journey can also be linked to the concept of resilience, which is the capacity of people, communities, and systems to survive, adapt, and grow in the face of stressors, shocks, and disturbances. Sofia's resilience is demonstrated by her ability to overcome the adversity she faces, both from the white men and her husband Harpo. Her strength, determination and will to resist the oppressive forces that she faces, despite being repeatedly knocked down, can be seen as an example of resilience (Wagnild et al., 1993: 165-17847.). Moreover, Kimberlé Crenshaw highlights the separate varieties of oppression, such as sexism and racism, which interrelate and divide in an intricate manner (Crenshaw, 1989: 126). Sofia's experiences as a black woman subject to both racism and sexism, and her ability to resist and overcome these forces, demonstrate the intersectionality of her identity and how it shapes her experiences.

Also, Walker presents the theme of racial discrimination within the black community, focusing particularly on the relationships between black males and females. Through these issues, the novel attempts to bridge the gaps between these cultures and between the races to unify all parties involved. One aspect of this discrimination is seen in the experiences of Corrine, Nettie, and Samuel when they arrive in Africa. The Olinka, a native African tribe, have not yet fully experienced the negative effects of racism and its associated hardships, unlike black Americans. The Olinka do not see racism as a burden and do not take the preaching of black American ministers seriously, rejecting the notion that they should align with their ideals and beliefs purely on account of their skin tone. Through these depictions, Walker is illustrating how the identity of a person is far more complex and nuanced than just their race. She is emphasising that culture, class, gender, and nationality also play a crucial role in shaping a person's identity.

Furthermore, in *The Colour Purple*, the relationships between characters such as Harpo and Sophia, Celie, and Mr., and the English settlers and the Olinkas are all based on power dynamics. This highlights that the novel's themes revolve around power, as opposed to race. Additionally, the dominant race uses its influence to determine the existential modalities of the minority races in a multiracial society like the United States, which can be seen in the way some blacks may try to adopt the physical manifestations of whiteness, such as bleaching their skin or straightening their hair, to conform to societal expectations. This idea is supported by critical race theorists such as Crenshaw, who argues that the intersectionality of gender and race results in the reinforcement of societal dynamics of influence/control/authority, and the oppression of minority groups in society. (Crenshaw, 1991: 22).

Moreover, Alice Walker illustrates the call for peace between both races (black and white) through the relationships and interactions of the characters in the novel. She depicts the struggles and hardships faced by black Americans and the ways in which they are affected by racism and discrimination. Through the portrayal of these experiences, she highlights the need for understanding and empathy between the races in order to overcome the barriers that separate them. One way she achieves this is by showing the contrast between the experiences of the black Americans and the Olinka, a native African tribe. The harmful impacts of racism have not yet been felt to the fullest extent by the Olinka, which allows for a different perspective on the issue and an opportunity for the black Americans to learn from them.

In all, she also shows how the characters work through their conflicts and misunderstandings by building relationships and connecting on a human level. For example, Shug Avery, who is both successful and influential, and Celie's relationship with Shug, helps her to learn about herself and to connect with others outside of her own race. This ultimately helps her to establish her own identity and to find her own voice. Furthermore, the novel also explores the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. Corrine's letter to Celie, in which she apologises for her past actions and seeks forgiveness, is an example of how the characters learn to accept and forgive each other. Through this, the novel demonstrates that forgiveness and understanding are essential in establishing peace between the races.

Furthermore, in *The Colour Purple*, Alice Walker tries to expose racial discrimination that is experienced by Celie in the light of domestic violence and

black women are oppressed in a patriarchal society. Specifically, black women are treated unfairly by whites in the South soon following the end of the Civil War because they are considered slaves in the patriarchal society of the United States. Here, I argue that black women were abused because of their outer appearance, and this led to the most threatening and usual type of racism that is based on persecution. They were the target of continuous racial brutality and exploitation, against them the patriarchal power of the white superiority over the black inferiority. For example, because Celie was black, she was demeaned and treated with scornful abuse. This was depicted by the character Mr\_ who exploits Celie's blackness to reinforce her feelings of weakness and inferiority by acting as if he holds the authority and superiority of a man of colour. He oppresses Celie with the racism, prejudice, and hegemony of the white man to assert his own superiority over her. As such, I concur with Alice Walker that the reason for the abusive behaviour of some black men whose domineering and violent temperament can be attributed to both their ancestry and the way patriarchal social systems have moulded it. (Walker, 1983: 128).

In addition, Walker is highlighting the systemic issues that underlie the discrimination and violence experienced by the severe social norms and masculine superiority mentality that affect African American women. What is judged acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for black women is determined by these cultural roles, further perpetuating discrimination and oppression. Overall, Walker is using the novel to challenge the stereotypes and generalisations about race and to emphasize the complexities of oppression and identity. Moreover, Alice Walker was able to show how racial stereotypes are preserved over multiple generations.

In all, Alice Walker illustrates the call for peace between races through the relationships and interactions of the characters in the novel. She depicts the struggles and hardships faced by black Americans and the ways in which they are affected by racism and discrimination. Through the portrayal of these experiences, she highlights the need for understanding and empathy between the races in order to overcome the barriers that separate them. One way she achieves this is by showing the contrast between the experiences of the black Americans and the Olinka, a native African tribe. The harmful impacts of racism have not yet been fully felt by the Olinka, which allows for a different perspective on the issue and an opportunity for the black Americans to learn from them.

### 3. Classism

During the 1930s, African Americans were segregated and relegated to societal roles that were demeaning and looked down on by the white upper class. As a matter of fact, these African Americans had to put in a lot of effort to get by. Housing, schools, and churches were all segregated and the opportunities for blacks were confined to majorly sharecropping. They were viewed as third-class citizens, and black women were further marginalized because of their gender. These black women were victimised by their very own black men and were considered lower in rank in comparison. The character Celie, as well as other females represented in the novel by Walker, help to uncover issues that surround black women who were dominated by white social class as well as black men. Moreover, the novel depicts and covers the conflicts that people from varying classes are subjected to. Furthermore, the abuse expressed in the novel takes place as part of the power struggle among the individuals. The abuses carried out by Mr.\_ as representation of an unstable father and husband, Corrine, and Samuel as representation of the colonial whites and countries. The author criticizes the current upper white class dominance through Sofia, who is apparently made to serve them as a slave.

Unfortunately, even after the abolition of slavery, black women continued to live in poverty and were mistreated by both black and white men. In *The Colour Purple*, this difference between black women and men can be observed in the characters. According to Dunston and Pickett, classism is usually directed to those individuals of low socioeconomic status and class, usually referring to the lower class or the poor (Dunston et al.,2004: 7-20). Therefore, the black women depicted in Walker's novel are relegated to lower class status, these females are depicted as poor in the society they lived in. In contrast, two black male characters in the novel are depicted as wealthy within their community going on to own property and run prosperous farms as well as dry goods stores. This includes Celie's stepfather, who runs a dry goods store which over time makes it possible for him to build a comfortable home on a large area of land. Moreover, Mr\_ also owns property and land, being able to provide employment to his son Harpo and a comfortable living space for his family as well as Nettie, Celie's younger sister. Both men exhibit successful and wealthy characteristics within the community, illustrating a class difference in comparison to black women. In this section, we will see details of

classism and how it influences how women are portrayed in Alice Walker's novel.

According to the novel, Celie's biological father was the true owner of the store, which is now being run by her stepfather. However, the stereotypical ideals of class stratification between black men and women, have led Celie to live like a pauper in her own home, with her rights being seized from her. Interestingly, the reason for her biological father's demise was because of lynching. Being a black individual that was rich and influential at the time, was considered an anomaly, and was greatly frowned upon by the white upper class. In some respects, it was a threat that could not be accommodated because it redefined the status quo closing the gap to economic empowerment. A space only reserved for white individuals to be prosperous and wealthy. In *The Colour Purple*, this idea of black male class superiority over black women, is an ideology that is interwoven into the black culture and is a consequence of class stratification between white and black people. Where the black man is apparently in a more commanding position, should be wealthier than his wife and his wife should serve him as a second-class individual. This can be seen in the perception of women depicted by Harpo and Mr\_.

"Harpo, she [Kate, Mr-'s sister] says. Harpo the oldest boy. Harpo don't let Celie be the one to bring in all the water. You are a big boy now. Time for you to help out some. Women work, he says. What? She says. Women work. I'm a man. You're a trifling n\*\*\*\*\*, she says. You got that bucket and brought it back full. He cut his eye on me. Stumble out. I hear him mutter something to me. \_Mr- sitting on the porch. Mr\_-call his sister. She stays out on the porch talking a little while, then she comes back in, shaking. Got to go, Celie, she says. She was so mad tears were flying every which way while she packed." (p. 28-35).

Their perception paints a picture of the economic stratification that has entered African American society, segregating the rich from the poor. Unfortunately, black women are victims of such crossfire.

Nonetheless, Shug breaks this stratification by rising above it. One of the attributes of womanism is the idea of black women empowerment and independence. This is how Shug, the main character, breaks through the social barriers that black women face due to their class in society. Shug is an adventurous blues singer who portrays an empowered feminist. She is seen as a huge advocate for change, renaming herself from Lillie to Shug which means sugar. As a singer, writer, and composer, she is very wealthy and successful which defies the status quo of what a black woman supposedly is to represent. According to Celie, she usually sings during the weekends at Harpo's, and she makes him a lot of money, with her also making

her fair share. She is financially stable, able to travel to different places and do as she please. She appears to have carved out her own way throughout the novel and is content with her life, her means, and herself. As Celie's states:

"She knows everybody, too. Know Sophie Tucker, know Duke Ellington, know folks I have never heard of. And money. She makes so much money she doesn't know what to do with it. She got a fine house in Memphis, another car. She got one hundred pretty dresses. A room full of shoes. She buys Grady anything he thinks he wants " (p. 101).

Crushing the stigma of impoverishment usually expected from a black woman in her days, Shug occupies that circle of wealth and influence that is reserved for black men within the black community and society at large. She holds a prosperous career, owns a home to herself, and is free to live lavishly. Due to economic independence and empowerment, Shug is not dependent on men for her upkeep. On the contrary, she has many boyfriends whom she dates. As a result of the close bond Celie and Shug share over time, Celie makes her transition from being mentally defeated and broken into a woman who rises above society's definition of who she is. She learns from Shug how to be self-sufficient and independent. Later, Shug brings Celie to Tennessee, where she launches a business producing pants. The company eventually develops, expands, and thrives. She becomes wealthy and can now take care of herself and her sister Nettie. As a bonus, she inherits the land after the death of her stepfather, making her even more polarised as a black woman. Therefore, Celie breaks from the low-class stereotypes of society and establishes herself as a wealthy independent woman, which is an unconventional characteristic of a woman in African American society.

On the other hand, Celie does not have the will to muster the courage to speak out her mind, let alone even if the infant the white woman is carrying is clearly her own, strike up a conversation with her. In the novel, classism also has an economic paradigm. As Alphoso utters:

He says, "Take me, I know how they are." Money is the answer to all of them. The issue with our people is that they refused to give the white guy anything else once they were freed from slavery. But the fact is, you got to give 'em something. Either your money, your land, your woman, or your ass. So, what I did was just offer to give 'em money. Before I planted a seed, I made sure this one and that one known one seed out of three was planted for him. Before I ground a grain of wheat, the same thing. And when I opened up your daddy's old store in town, I bought me my own white boy to run it. And what makes it so good, he says, I bought him with white folks' money (p. 155).

Alphoso compromises with the white people to reap benefits from them. He

resides in a home that appears to have belonged to a white person. He employs white people to work in his dry goods store. He wed a fifteen-year-old girl since her parents worked for him and resided on his property. He has white friends who are armed with weapons. He has a paternalistic attitude toward black people. Evidently, Sofia is instructed to work there as well when Celie opens a stationary store and keeps the white employee on staff. It has been observed that the fact that a woman is at the same time black determines her class. Celie or Sofia cannot receive good education, they cannot practice law or medicine, and they cannot become rich. But Alphoso on the other hand can. Yet, again, in the end Celie, thanks to womanism and the helping hand of Shug, becomes independent and moves up to the social ladder.

In addition, Walker is highlighting the systemic issues that underlie the discrimination and violence experienced by the severe social norms and masculine superiority mentality that affect African American women. These societal roles dictate what is deemed acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour for black women, further perpetuating discrimination and oppression. Overall, Walker is using the novel to challenge the stereotypes and generalisations about race and to bring attention to the complexity and intersectionality of identity and oppression. Moreover, Alice Walker was able to show how prejudices of race and gender are passed down through the years.

Additionally, she also shows how the characters work through their conflicts and misunderstandings by building relationships and connecting on a human level. For example, Shug Avery, who is both successful and influential, and Celie's relationship with her, helps Celie to learn about herself and to connect with others outside of her own race. This ultimately helps her to establish her own identity and to find her own voice. Furthermore, the novel also explores the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. The character Celie, as well as other females represented in the novel by Walker, help to uncover issues that surround black women who were dominated by white social class as well as black men. Moreover, the novel depicts and covers the conflicts that people from varying classes are subjected to. Furthermore, the abuse expressed in the novel takes place as part of the power struggle among the individuals. The abuses carried out by Mr. \_ as representation of an unstable father and husband, Corrine, and Samuel as representation of the colonial whites and countries. The text helps to deconstruct through Sofia, who is ostensibly

made to serve them as a slave, the author critiques the contemporary upper white class domination.



## **IV. DISCUSSION ON *THE TEMPLE OF MY FAMILIAR***

### **A. General Overview: Introduction, Concepts and Background**

Compared to *The Colour Purple's* phenomenal success, the public's reception of Alice Walker's 1989 novel *The Temple of My Familiar*, which she wrote in 1983, was unfavourable. Even though some critics sided with her creative dexterity, such as Barbara W. Bell who stated that her novel was a “multifocal experiment with postmodern romance and magical realism” (Bell, 2004: 154), some mocked her descriptive style and technique, claiming it to be “rife with clichés and sentimentality” (Sol, 2002: 393). However, from the consensus, Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*, which is sometimes referred to as "a romance of the last 500,000 years," was praised by all critics for its ambition. (Sol, 2002: 400).

The novel primarily focuses on the interwoven stories of Lissie Lyles, a matriarchal goddess who has had innumerable reincarnations over the past 500,000 years, and two married couples Carlotta and Arveyda and Fanny and Suwelo. Through the portrayal of the characters and their specific situations, Walker traces the roots of racism and differences between men and women's statuses. The most significant protagonist of the novel, however, is Lissie Lyles whose recollections of past experiences enables her to piece together numerous historical tales, whether she is black or white, man or woman, throughout generations. The memory and voice of her ever-present ancestor reaches back to a time when humans and animals coexisted peacefully as familiars. The storytelling strategy that is employed by Lissie keeps relevant the traditional harmony of native America and Africa.

The story of Zedé, a black woman from South America and Carlotta's mother, is told at the beginning of the novel. Through flashbacks we learn that Zedé was imprisoned because of her communist ideals, there she gave birth to Carlotta, and once she was released, she found refuge in San Francisco together with her daughter. Zedé continues with her traditional occupation in the 1960s, she made feathered capes that she sold to rock singers. This is how Carlotta first met Arveyda, a skilled

and well-known rock star to whom she delivered peacock capes her mother had made. The couple has a happy life until Carlotta learns the secret love affair between her husband and her mother. Heartbroken, Carlotta takes her children and returns to South America for a journey of self-discovery.

Another couple that the novel focuses on is Fanny and Suwelo. In reality, Fanny Nzingha is Celie's grandchild from the earlier novel *The Colour Purple*. Like Celie's experiences, Fanny's story is marked with intense hostility that stems from the anger she feels for the white society and her own husband's toxic masculinity. She takes a trip to Africa, where she meets her sister Anne and her father Ola and reconciles with her African background and embraces her cultural identity. Suwelo, on the other hand is a professor of history who struggles in a white academic community, and raised as a sexist stereotype, he thinks being able to sleep with several women is a symbol of power and dominance as a man. Indeed, Suwelo is a symbol of post-1960s machismo gone wrong in overcoming sexism and white supremacy. In the novel he is described as a man that belonged to a:

generation of men had failed women - and themselves, for all their activism and political development during the sixties, all their understanding of the pervasiveness of oppression, for most men, the preferred place for women had remained the home; the preferred position for women, wherever they were, supine. (p. 28-29)

Suwelo's reformation takes place as he meets Lissie in his deceased uncle's Baltimore home. The tales and experiences from earlier that Lissie tells draws him to enlightenment and eventual reconciliation with his wife.

Consequently, as the characters gradually get to know each other and the fact that their situations are very much alike in various respects, the same message is amplified. Overall, the early part of the novel portrays the spiritual fragmentation of the main characters, except for Lissie, as they each battle a core anxiety, disagreement, or irritation in their lives. As Dieke argues, achieving "oneness, wholeness, and unity" as opposed to "dialectical tension, exclusivity, and separateness" is what the characters are striving for, throughout the novel (Dieke, 1992: 507–508). In contrast to the self-destructive narcissism of thinking "man as separate from woman, humans as separate from animals, one race as separate from another, the old as separate from the young," communion is presented as the most efficient means of passing on these values and concepts (Dieke, 1992: 512). The relationships between several facets of each person's identity, such as their culture,

race, gender, and age, are explored in the book. Walker offers a hopeful vision of how people, animals, and the environment might live in harmony with one another, forming a symbiotic relationship that encompasses the entire cosmos. This focus on unity prompts readers to consider the significance of Walker's theoretical work for the community.

In the novel, there are three key elements that every character must experience in order to achieve spiritual wholeness. Firstly, being an artist is a necessary component of this process. Secondly, characters must reconnect with their past through the act of recollection, which helps them understand and their present and future are shaped. "Remembrance is the key to redemption," the novel declares. Lastly, other people's effective communication is equally essential, as it allows characters to share their inner thoughts, emotions, and memories, ultimately creating a sense of unity and empathic connection (Dieke, 1992: 512).

In this chapter, I once again argue that Alice Walkers' womanism leads to self-empowerment, and liberty for black women in a patriarchal society. The *Temple of My Familiar* presents a variety of forms of communication, including tape music, recordings, journal excerpts, dialogues, letters, artworks, stories, and more. The characters' interactions with one another happen to be at varying stages in their growth towards becoming whole as a person, assist one another in the process. They disclose their perspectives and develop new ones while communicating with one another. The end result is that "they all hazily realize they have a role in each other's life. They serve as a means for them all to develop individually. Although they don't talk about it, everyone feels strongly about it. Trust is evidently present" (Sol, 2002: 398). In each couple there happens to be one spiritually weaker person, like Carlotta or Suwelo, who has limitations as to how much they can strive for wholeness, and a spiritually stable character, Arveyda, Fanny or Lissie, who can achieve wholeness to the fullest. Notes by Sol:

Lissie, Arveyda, and Fanny realize their significance in life with a sublimity that is hardly matched in modern literature. By the book's conclusion, Lissie remembers her past lives, and Arveyda and Fanny combine as (quite different). Suwelo, Carlotta, and Hal, meantime, can only find fulfilment by comprehending the prodigies' [Lissie, Arveyda, and Fanny] abilities and accepting their own difficult pasts. (Sol, 2002: 398)

## **B. Sexuality, Racism, Classism and Gender in *The Temple of My Familiar***

### **1. Sexuality and Gender**

The issue of sexuality is thoroughly dealt with as Alice Walker develops various characters in *The Temple of My Familiar* to reflect her position on the subject. However, unlike her previous novel, *The Colour Purple*, she focuses more on male characters who constitute almost half of the characters. Even though every male character is not depicted as a saint, in comparison to *The Colour Purple*, their image is far less negative. *The Colour Purple* faced great criticism for portraying every possible bad trait of a man and stereotyping men as mindless sexual predators. However, one of the important points that Walker tried to show her readers in that novel was that even someone as terrible as Mr\_ was capable of change, a message that *The Temple of My Familiar* effectively conveys.

"Temple" is used for two meanings: (1) it connotes sexual tendencies manifested in body and behaviour. When one of the main protagonists, Lissie states she is expressing her feeling of sexual freedom as it has been expressed via her body by referring to her body as her temple. (2) Temple, according to Walker, means literally a temple referring to the one of her character, Fanny, and the massage centre she has. These two terms will be integral in understanding Walker's stance on sexuality as it relates to the concept of womanism which communicates wholeness, unity of sexes, and female bonding.

One of the noticeable points in Alice Walker's novel is the socially imposed ideal of marriage. There are a lot of heterosexual partnerships in the book, but none of them could be deemed long-lasting, as their framework is built on the notion of conventional marriage. The relationships of the couples depicted in the novel serve to communicate how institutions like marriage work as instruments of hegemony. Walker shows that conventional morality as defined by marriage, keeps women in bondage, preventing them from experiencing freedom. The novel casts the relationship between a married couple as akin to a master and slave bond, where it is hinged on the wife being submissive, obedient, and doing all that the man demands. Consequently, this gives the man right over the woman's body and validates his superiority over her through his sexuality. Therefore, he turns his wife into a sort of sexual object that satisfies his urges. Therefore, Walker's novel might be said to

point out that marriage legitimises sexual exploitation of women; and thus, it does not allow a woman to attain a state of happiness, peace, fulfilment, growth, or identity discovery.

Such characteristics of exploitation can be observed particularly in the relationship between Fanny and Suwelo. Fanny is a feminist and finds her husband Suwelo's masculinity very toxic, as he thinks he is allowed to have sex with Carlotta and several other women. Fanny feels that the primary cause for this is rooted in how her husband was raised as a sexist stereotype whose philosophy is built on male dominance and white supremacy. Along the line, Fanny goes through therapy sessions with Suwelo, and he eventually finds peace with himself, and afterwards they seem to be reconciled. However, their marriage is still in jeopardy as Suwelo creates all sorts of excuses to justify his cheating habits. Eventually, Suwelo and Fanny's relationship deteriorates. When Fanny decides to leave Suwelo as she runs out of patience with her husband, Suwelo, whose sexual tendencies are hinged on using women as sexual machine and relief for his urges is concerned only that his sexual needs will not be met.

“Does this mean we won't ever sleep together”? Then, when Suwelo lives alone, he gets “into pornography” (p. 238).

This shows how Suwelo devalues his wife and only sees her as a sexual object to meet his needs. On another occasion, Fanny has a mental breakdown upon discovering that Suwelo is having an affair with another woman, Carlotta, Arveyda's wife. Though this becomes a huge blow on their marriage, this is not the issue that bore the full load of her disgust towards him. Suwelo tells Fanny that she means nothing - of no substance to him. She tries to save the marriage by pleading Suwelo:

“Men must have mercy on women, and they must “feel women' s bodies as a masseuse feels them” not just to caress them superficially and use them as if they are calendar pin-up, centrefolds or paper dolls”(p. 321)

However, she realises that he cannot be saved and his respect for the dignity of a woman's body and mind is compromised. Therefore, she leaves him and starts a new life for herself, independent from men. The marriage between Fanny and Suwelo is one-sided and unequal. It inhibits the growth of a potentially fruitful and mutually satisfying relationship, based on the recognition and respect for each other. Therefore, Walker suggests that women can only achieve full control over their sexuality when they break the status quo and defy conventional institutions such as

marriage that confine women to a state of submission.

Yet, Suwelo's idea of sexuality is compromised because of the information he has been exposed to throughout his life and Fanny is aware of this. She thinks his mind is:

“...colonised by the movies he saw and the books he read. The magazines he thumbed through on street corners” (p. 386).

This ties into the belief that masculinity is characterised by control and domination, and women are meant to be submissive. This ideology is hardwired into the men's consciousness while growing up, making them a product of their environment. Materials such as the books and movies Suwelo has read and watched, have reinforced those learnings, slowly constructing his perception on sexuality. Therefore, Fanny knows that nothing can be done for him. Moreover, she feels degraded by his excessive sexuality in the past and that she has never truly experienced orgasm while being his wife. So, she leaves the need to discover herself and deconstruct society's definition of relationship. This eventually gives her the much-needed peace, freedom, and wholeness as denoted in womanism.

Female protagonists in *The Temple of My Familiar* all happen to be or have gone through one form of sexism. Another example is Carlotta, who behaves as a female impersonator to please men. Womanism argues that women should take every opportunity to learn about themselves for them to feel appreciated, and that includes sexual experiences. This means they have got to come to an agreement with their sexuality, appreciate and before they can engage in any sexual activity with men, women must first be comfortable with their own bodies. One of womanism's key characteristics is that it focuses on sexual freedom. For example, a woman is womanish when she expresses love to everyone regardless of their gender and it can be sexual or non-sexual. In other words, she enjoys the freedom of not being constrained to one partner, which completely alters the notion of traditional marriage and what it stands for. Lissie advocates this same ideology in the novel's gospel:

“Helped are those born from love: conceived in their father's tenderness and their mother's orgasm” (p. 281).

Freedom of sexuality as characteristics of womanism leads to self-empowerment, and liberty as seen in the character of Lissie. She has achieved wholeness and serves as a guide to other characters. Lissie has had many lives,

reincarnated repeatedly in different bodies, experiencing being both masculine and female is what it entails. First, in earlier times, it was the females who had a remarkable relationship that "deeply satisfied (her children) was (her) relationship with animals." As Lissie suggests:

"The women alone had familiars. In the men's group, or tribe, there was no such thing". (p. 361)

Having a close connection with animals and nature is a symbol of wholeness and women have been naturally close to wholeness even from the early days of history. Lissie embodies all that womanism characterizes: She acknowledges that women are sacred, they should love their essential nature, and respect their power if they want to find a healing path in a world that has gone wrong.

Actually, with her wisdom Lissie helps the most chauvinist male character of the novel, Suwelo. Suwelo travels to Baltimore to visit his recently deceased uncle's house, where he feels unexpectedly comfortable. Suwelo meets Lissie in this old house. Appearing before him as a 113-year-old woman, Lissie recounts her many lives through human history. Starting from a prehistoric time when animals and humans co-existed as equals Lissie tells him about humanity's development. She speaks fondly of when men and women lived separately but cooperatively in small African villages. As time progressed, men and women started to live together. However, this cohabitation proved disastrous for women as the men always wanted to dominate them. From this point, men began to develop warfare and the concept of private property, which led to slavery and suffering. The violent oppression has separated men from their once peaceful balance with nature, leaving women as the ones with the spiritual connection to the past.

As he begins to learn more from Lissie's stories and adventures, Suwelo is drawn to maturity. He understands that it was his insecurity and not his pride that led him to cheat his wife, Fanny. Suwelo absorbs Lissie's epic story and considers his role in the world. As a black man, he recognizes that as well as having suffered oppression, he has also inflicted it through sexism, especially the repeated infidelities in his marriage.

## **2. Racism**

Alice Walker elaborates on the subject of racism in *The Colour Purple* and

*The Temple of My Familiar*, respectively, helping us understand that racism has been there for a long time and has existed in every facet of the social group. One of the crucial ideas that is raised in the novel is the idea of victim blaming. According to Walker, during the slave trade, black women were victimised and demonised because of their natural endowment, and there were claims by the white enslavers that they were being tempted by black women and lured into having inappropriate sex. It was believed that black was associated with evil, while white was associated with good. According to Longshore, the colours of white and black have long carried varying connotations, where black was connoted to be linked to disgrace and evil, while white was depicted as pure and decent (Longshore, 1979: 7). In the United States, colours have designated racial groups and so, inevitably, it has been adopted in social norms that pertain to each group. For instance, the norms that describe black are highlighted as immoral, vile, violent, and so, this has reinforced this ideology to be a general connotation of the black colour.

Therefore, there were numerous unfavourable pictures that aggregated to generalize about black women. Walker describes in the novel how, over time, this deeply seated stereotyped belief evolved and was generalised by individuals. One of the characters named Zede recalls some terrible experiences she was subjected to during her days in the prison village of southern America. These experiences serve to provide insight on the dangers of stereotyped convictions. According to Zede, after a very difficult and hard day working in the farm, the enslaved black women were relegated to performing slave mistress roles at night, sacrificing their bodies to satisfy sexual urges of the prison guard. Zede accounts that the guards sexually abused the black women, forcing them to mate with them. In no time, every guard had a slave mistress as though these women were toys and dumping grounds to relieve themselves of their urges. According to Zede, the prison guard that chose her was an unstable individual, almost psychopathic. He did not force her to have sex but took his time in getting her to comply. He was someone notorious for killing, burning, and beating black women without remorse, yet held on to a rather uncanny belief that a black woman would want to sleep with him without using force. For him, it was a strong belief he held unto, with pride oozing in his countenance and communication. He felt that black women were inferior and should be treated as pets.

As mentioned in the discussion of Walker's earlier novel *The Colour Purple*,

the belief that black women were habitually sexual was justified by the biblical character “Jezebel” who was known for her wickedness, fostering of ritual sex and prostitution. Moreover, Jezebel was also known for fostering Baal religion and for encouraging temple prostitution and service to multiple deities. She eventually took the throne as the queen, forcing her subjects to worship Baal. This permitted the idea of engaging in sexual immorality, which was a bad omen and bad representation of what a virtuous woman should be (Satchell, 2008: 1593-1602).

Black women were linked to this biblical character and were stigmatised as being overtly sexual. Due to this stigma, guards believed that black women enjoyed being sexually abused. Thus, the attitude of the guards manifested the prevalent beliefs that has been adopted by white men that black women are nasty and so, are filled with ingenious tricks that they use to seduce white guys into their beds so they can enjoy immediate fulfilment. In fact, this ideology was so prevalent that the white abolitionists devised strategies to spiritually rescue the white guys, rather than liberating the black women. According to Bell Hooks (1981), the rationale behind the antislavery efforts were not driven by compassion for the black women’s plight and struggles but rather on how to save the soul of the white man (Hooks, 1981: 3). Louisa Barker claims that black women were believed to be extremely promiscuous, luring young slaveholders into illicit attachments and sexual practices; by doing so, the master’s constitution is compromised because of physical overindulgence and reduced the likelihood of the black woman slave being sold (Barker, 2020: 955). Walter stated that “If they continue with their vicious practices, women who have been drawn into licentiousness by wicked men almost always display their revenge for their own debasement, by entangling others into the same moral ruins and corruption” (Walter, 1973: 22). Thus, it was a means of payback for the female slaves who allegedly put much responsibility in stirring the sensuality of their masters, to degrade them as they themselves have been degraded.

Such statements being propagated about black women provoked the imagination of white readers, and the southern white males no longer looked like the sexual aggressors but victims of black women’s insatiable appetite for sex. Therefore, the antislavery movements were being stirred up not just because of concerns about interracial sex, but because of how much of an influence black women might have on their host and the level of evil corruption that can manifest

(Anderson et al., 2018; Walker, 1973: 44). Therefore, with respect to the so-called authentic representation of a black female in western epistemology is essentially a hoax. They have cultivated this mind-set and embraced this idea that black women are prostitutes and so, they are to be treated as such, with sole purpose tied to satisfying and fulfilling their sexual desires (Huff, 2020: 10) This is a mind-set that is still prevalent in our world today where black women suffer from discrimination and sexual harassment, not only because they are women but also because they are black.

### **3. Classism**

Similar to the overlap of skin colour and gender discrimination, racial difference intersects with class division. In Western culture class was historically seen as an attribute rooted in blood, or inherited, rather than an affiliation that can be acquired. For example, the lower classes and peasants were frequently thought of as biologically distinct from the higher classes. They were viewed as being more primitive or darker than their masters. When Europeans ventured in colonizing the world and the slave trade, the labels that had already been used to describe persons from poor backgrounds rude, uncultured, filthy, unrefined, and stupid were readily been used for the recently colonized people and the boundaries that discriminated them in terms of their biological features and class was furiously policed. In fact, human slavery became legal and institutionalized with the year 1776 saw the establishment of the United States of America. The enslaved people were considered as forming a racial caste associated with their African heritage. Despite the fact that slaves were finally emancipated in 1865, many of them had no other option than working as sharecroppers or indentured servants in the lands where they were born as slaves. Jim Crow laws, which were state laws promulgated to enforce racial segregation particularly in the Southern United States, black people were exposed to continuous discrimination, educational inequalities, unjust persecutions. Having very limited freedom and almost no economic opportunity resulted in continued poverty for black people. Linda Brent points out that, slavery is one of the highest forms of oppression and as it is awful for males, women experience it far worse. Along with the challenges and plights the black community faces, women suffer exploitation, mutilation, and savagery. Black women, for years, have been called the “slave for the slave” and “mule for the world”, they were wrongly labelled as worthless and disposable. And so, black women wanted to reclaim their dignity, womanhood, and

humanity.

The concept of enslavement is effectively communicated in *The Temple of My Familiar* throughout Lissie's adventures, who is a goddess and have reincarnated several times in her lifetime. In one of her escapades, Lessie tells of when she was dragged along with other black women into a ship by the white slavers. They were humiliated, stripped of their garments, and stripped of the cotton that covered their hips, forcefully dragged into the ship deck bald and naked. This was a harsh reality of life for a black woman, whose entire dignity as a woman was stripped. She remembers one of her experience and observations regarding the knowledge of the white slavers:

“Our new masters had a genius for turning us viciously in ways that shamed and degraded even themselves, if only they'd had sense enough to know it—against anything that once we loved” (p. 64).

It can be understood from the above quote that the white slavers had enough understanding of how to hurt black women who were powerless, breaking their will and programming them to be submissive. They eventually belittled the black women by making them kneel before them with little or no resistance. The way violence was propagated by the slave owners showed that they lacked feeling for helpless women whom they enjoyed torturing in every possible way.

Another important remark that was pointed out in Lissie's story was the living conditions and food scarcity of black women, which was a tool weaponized by the slave drivers to exploit them. According to Lissie, the shelter, food, and environment provided by the slave drivers to her, her sick mother, and sisters were very filthy and inadequate. She tells Suwelo that even the very air was not circulated properly and the food miserly rationed.

“They fed us a little millet gruel, which we dipped with our hands from a long wooden trough outside the pen twice a day. We could see the sky for the ten minutes it took us to eat” (p. 64).

From this statement we can understand that Lissie and her fellow women were treated like animals. As a matter of fact, even the animals had better live conditions, as the women were limited to daily sun intake of ten minutes and were packed like sardines in cottages. This example reveals the extreme level of wickedness of the system of white supremacy that shows how far they will go to maintain racial discrimination against black women. This highlights an idea that has

been embraced by the white male supremacists at the time, who have come to believe that black women are less of a human being and more of a tool that can be picked up and used just like a tool in a toolbox.

Furthermore, the novel highlights how little the black community has learned from its roots in being enslaved, where patriarchy and white male domination prevail. Take for instance, Ola's art gives some deep insight into this argument as stated by Fanny:

“into the oppression of women, black women by black men, who should have had more understanding having criticised the white man's ignorance in dealing with black people for so long” (p. 262).

Therefore, black people are also guilty of misusing power and carrying out oppressive actions. Interestingly, Fanny arrives at the same conclusion stating that:

“... I feel so frustrated, because the men can always run on and on about the white man's destructiveness and yet they cannot look into their own families and their own children's lives and see that this is just the destruction the white man has planned”. (p. 255).

It is important to remember that what Alice Walker was trying to portray through womanism is that black women need to stand up for themselves and embrace freedom. They should disrupt the traditional beliefs of male dominance and change the status quo. Moreover, they should promote gender equality and women's rights, so that women can be fully independent just like Lissie. Also, the idea the novel wants to communicate is that no culture, class or belief-based separation is healthy. Lissie, even though she herself insists to have only negative memories of the white people and has first-hand knowledge of what it would be like to be a white person and is extremely pleased to be a black woman. She has utilised her experience to find harmony within her own self and does not allow the scars of racism to devour her wholeness and inner peace.

In *The Temple of My Familiar* by telling the unique stories of the three couples, whose lifestyles and experiences reveal that they are from different ethnicities and age groups, Walker depicts the lives of marginalised black women in a white male supremacist driven class structure. Walker discusses the umpteen trails the black women are subjected to due to their gender and colour. These black women are resolute and bent on tipping the scale, proving that black women truly can be successful. Being the oldest couple in the novel, Lissie and Hal have risen above the class struggle and serve as a template for the younger black generation to push back a

bias system and embrace womanism.

There is no doubt that *The Temple of My Familiar* pays homage to the womanist movement, re-emphasizing the importance of embracing the womanist spirit and consciousness. Indeed, it honours the tenacity, fortitude, and vigour of black womanhood. Moreover, it demonstrates how black women have overcome obstacles of stigmatization placed before them by the black and white patriarchs in society (acting under the direction of the white patriarchs) and have created a stronger image for themselves and for future generations. In the novel, Shug describes how black women have been segregated, marginalised, and discriminated both economically and socially within American society. She states:

“We are considered second and third-class citizens of a country whose government never wanted us. Except as slaves. We understand by now the world will be blown to bits, doubtless by the same government, before people of colour get their fair share” (p. 59).

Yet, even though black women are less privileged and are not able to afford most of the resources as white women can, they are resolute and unperturbed, being proud of their colour. Blacks in general are incredibly obstinate, never wanting to do anything the way that white people do, should avoid being linked with them. They take pride in their skin tone, and take pride in braided cornrow hairs, which Walker feels help them with their self-identification.

Walker utilizes snakes to represent a black woman's social exclusion in the novel. Kate, one of Walker's characters, goes into the Amazon. While she is there, she notices a small serpent in the hut in which she is staying. As she contemplated on what to do about the snake, an interesting revelation came to her: black people, especially women, have been ostracised from the circle of goodwill for many years just like what was currently happening to the snake.

“Women lived in cultures that despised and wilfully obliterated the feminine, would never experience the connection to earth and to humanity that was their birth right. Pain had driven them to separate from their very selves” (p. 214).

According to Alice Walker, mythological allusions, and religious indoctrinations have made people live in fear and loathe the snake. Separation, discrimination, and class stratification were brought about by the snake's exclusion from the circle of benevolence, that we have come to know. The American society that is discussed in the novel, which is intelligently put together with narrative twists and turns, is in a bid to re-educate the black community, especially black women, on

class stratification. Both social constructs of manhood and women are intertwined with racially defined hierarchies, meanings, institutions, systems, and frameworks. Walker discusses the necessity for black women to overcome these traditional hierarchical structures in her novel as defined by white supremacists. She advocates for black women to become more aware of their potentials and rise to be successful and wealthy individuals.



## V. CONCLUSION

In contemporary society black women face several challenges. These challenges encompass political, social, and emotional turmoil, and unfortunately black women are unable to identify either mainstream feminism or Afro-Americanism. Despite being part of both minority groups, their predicament has not been fully grasped by either of the groups. Hence, black feminism emanated from what these groups lacked and gave a special platform to black women to voice their plights and establish solidarity amongst each other.

One of the prominent and highly respected black women, who is also a strong advocate for black feminism, is Alice Walker, who coined her own terminology “womanism” and created a novel approach for tackling the challenges faced by black women. As discussed earlier, a subset of feminism known as womanism is particularly concerned with the issues, circumstances, and concerns that affect women of colour. Womanism seeks relationships and solidarity with black males while acknowledging the natural strength and beauty of black womanhood. It detects and denounces racism in the feminist community as well as sexism in the black American community. It also contends that both black women's femininity and culture have an equal role in determining how they feel about themselves.

My goal in this thesis is to use the womanism theory to analyse how black women are portrayed in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*. I tried to bring insights into African American culture, centred on the problems of black women and their lives in both the black and the white communities of patriarchal society, particularly in terms of gender, race, and class. I argued that in both novels Walker suggests womanism as a panacea which enable or may enable the cure to the problems that her black female characters and black women have to overcome in their struggle to have meaningful lives in the hostile environment created by both the violent patriarchal dominance of black men and the white supremacist society who are to blame.

*The Colour Purple* is a novel that fits into black feminist ideology, where the subject of sexuality appears to be the main anchor point. Sexuality is an important framework of the novel's storyline, interconnecting racism, class, and gender marginalisation. In addition, male dominance over female sexuality, gender oppression, and the pressure to conform to the stereotyped gender roles are all evident in the protagonist Celie's story. The novel communicates the idea that the disjunction in African American families indirectly gives rise to impoverishment which brought a system of systematic white oppression, a racist and sexist ecology, is imposed upon them. These women experience not only the worst sort of segregation by white supremacists but are also abused in their own homes by their fathers and spouses. This became the premise for blacks' low socioeconomic condition, where dysfunctional families are a major issue within the black community that keeps most of them in impoverishment. Over the years, black women have been victimised and relegated to low social status. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that this thought process has consumed the black community where 21.1% of black women, representing over 3.4 million women, are still living in impoverishment, years after slavery and mistreatment by both black and white men (NWLC, 2018: 26).

However, Walker's novel also contains strong female characters like Shug. Thanks to her and the womanist bond she establishes, the subjugated Celie undergoes a transformation in consciousness and is liberated. Even though she is stereotyped, degraded, and looked down upon, Walker illustrates that it is possible for her to become a confident, independent, and strong woman. Consequently, Walker's novel seeks to inspire women and help them achieve higher social status in the conventional class structure through her womanist ideals.

The characters of the second novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*, are both black men and black women. Three of the novel's six key characters are male. Not only is the choice of using males as protagonists intriguing, but also these males are depicted as very gentle and humane, unlike the male characters in *The Colour Purple*. Thus, rather than emphasising the bond among women, the novel embodies Walker's Universalist in real life, non-separatist value system, which again underlines her womanism theory. The novel seems to convey the message that to be 'perfect' as a person, everyone should strive and make efforts to be peaceful with

each other. *The Temple of My Familiar* demonstrates by advocating for peaceful understanding between races, genders, times, and locations, as well as between species, she expands the definition of males as opposed to women and whites more explicitly than does the concept of men as opposed to white people. Although one could argue that *The Colour Purple* illustrates and elaborates on the precise, concrete definition of womanism. The more general aspect of the idea seems to be best expressed in *The Temple of My Familiar*, the novel communicates love, in all its forms and most importantly love for the self. This appreciation of oneself, helps in achieving wholeness which eventually realigns priorities, easing up the process to self-discovery and goals refinement.

In all, both novels illustrate how Alice Walker's works are mostly defined by her support of black women, their circumstances, and their interests. As a result, her theoretical and fictional work are inextricably linked, as if they were the identical coins with two sides. They seem to have an impact on and benefit from one another, and evolve in response to each other. Walker is therefore well-suited to base her theoretical framework in the real and concrete, albeit imaginary, lives of her characters, while still having them act in accordance with her ideology. This trade is most likely what gives her power as a philosopher and an exceptional writer.

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