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Womanism and the Reconstruction of the Self in Alice
Walker's *The Color Purple*

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Members of Jury:

Chairwoman : Ms. Soumia MOUMENE

Examiner: Ms. Khaoula BENDJMIL

Supervisor: Ms. Soraya CHIHI

Submitted by:

Safia OUARTI

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Abstract

This Thesis discusses the status of the black female in her community and investigates how black females resist hardships that they face in *The Color Purple*, through confronting many difficulties such as domestic violence, sexism and racism. In addition this study traces the effect of female bondage on Celie, the protagonist's process of emancipation. The study attempts to explore the miserable circumstances that the color purple's females lived-in such as psychological and physical violence and the main empowering factors that helped in reconstructing the identity, in addition to breaking away and challenging the patriarchal social structure of the black community. To realise the objectives of the thesis two main approaches have been used; the psychoanalysis and the feminist approach.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Women Presence in Afro-American Literature.....	4
I. African-American literature.....	5
II. Feminism and the Feminist Theories.....	15
A. Feminism.....	15
A 1.First-Wave Feminism.....	16
A.2 .Second-Wave Feminism.....	17
A.3.Third Wave Feminism.....	17
B.Black-Feminism.....	18
III. Alice Walker’s Womanism.....	21
Chapter Two: Physical and Psychological Violence	
I. Physical and Sexual Violence in <i>The Color Purple</i>	25
II.Verbal and Psychological Violence in <i>The Color Purple</i>	35
Chapter Three:Journey of Self-Reconstruction in <i>The Color Purple</i>	39

I. Female Bondage in <i>The Color Purple</i>	40
II. Self –Reconstruction in <i>The Color Purple</i>	49
Conclusion.....	53
Works Cited.....	55
Résumé.....	56
ملخص.....	57

Introduction

The social reconstruction of gender and discrimination has been always a source of troubles to many women. Despite the fact that women have effective roles concerning society building as active members, women all along human history have been victims of subjugation and patriarchal communities which do not admit the roles women are playing in different life's domains and fields. Women oppression is not a recent case. Rather, it is an old dilemma that affected many female victims. Most women throughout the history were dominated by men; females could not own or inherit lands or wealth. Moreover, they were frequently treated as properties themselves. Until recent times, women, in many places all around the world are unable to have any influence on the political, religious or cultural lives of their own societies. This issue has been tackled repeatedly in the Afro-American literature, and the master piece of the feminist novelist, Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* is a good example for study. The novel discusses the issue of an oppressed woman who faces many difficulties throughout her life. The events continue till the protagonist, Celie, succeeds in getting out of the shell in a heroic transformation toward a self-determined female with ambitions and good expectations for a better life after a long life in the shadow of male dominance.

Afro-American women share common experiences of being doubly oppressed in a society that most its members exercise discrimination against women. This category was obliged to live as an unequal social member, and to bear white men's patriarchy, white women's racism and black men sexism. Alice Walker in her novel, *The Color Purple*, tackles such issue when she narrates a story of an Afro-American girl who lives in rural Georgia in the early 20th century. Walker accompanies her protagonist, Celie, from childhood till maturity in a journey that lasts for thirty or forty years. This journey depicts how Celie as any other Afro-American woman takes her full cup of bitter, and how she is treated violently by her father and her husband, who never sees her as a life partner, but rather, as a mere servant or as a body that

satisfies his sexual desires. This study investigates basically how Celie as an Afro-American female is doubly oppressed through exploring the circumstances that led to such subjugation.

This research applies two main approaches; the feminist approach which is a theory that seeks to depict and analyze the female status and portrait in literature and aims at understanding the nature of gender inequality, by examining the female's social roles; experiences; interests and so on. Feminism is used in this study to explore the female protagonist, who experiences discrimination and oppression within her patriarchal society. The other approach to be used is psychoanalysis, which is a literary theory that attempts to study the character's attitude and analyses his/her personality. This approach is applied to the protagonist, Celie, by explaining her behavior in relation to past and present experiences, and the effect of the psychological problems on the construction of her personality.

This study is arranged in three chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Women Presence in Afro-American Literature." It provides an overview on women appearance in literature as a character or as an author. The second chapter, Physical and Psychological Violence in *The Color Purple*, explores the consequences of the horrible circumstances that Celie has gone through and depicts the bad condition that she has lived. The last chapter, "Journey of Self-Reconstruction in *The Color Purple*," analyses the influence of other female characters on the protagonist and her process of transformation.

The importance of this research chiefly lies on analyzing the hardships of Afro-American females face within their lives, by shedding the light on the miserable life that the protagonist of *The Color Purple* has. It also focuses on the psychological transformation of Celie that enables her to shift from her passive role to a new and stronger one. Therefore, this study aims at depicting the harmful oppression that Celie suffers from in a brutal patriarchal society and

attempts to examine the success of the protagonist in defeating the subjugation and challenging the circumstances.

Chapter One: Women Presence in Afro-American Literature

This chapter studies the African-American literature as a vital entity that demonstrates how African-Americans have affected and effected American political and historical contexts, and how they have started to create an African-American voice which expresses the ideas of a whole community. Indeed, African-American literature does not only mean works that enjoy aesthetic touches; rather it investigates issues such as race, sexuality, class, and specifically the social reconstruction of gender. The way the African-American female protests literature differs from that of the African-American male. African-American women authors have used the written word as an expressive instrument to depict their divided and shattered souls and their abused bodies.

The other issue to be tackled is Feminism and Black-feminism specifically that have encouraged many African-American females to celebrate their blackness and their femininity, in addition to breaking the shell that imprisoned them enough but no more. The color black is no more a color of an inferior race, rather it symbolizes purity. Also, being female does not necessarily mean to be abused or silenced. The Black-feminist movement has broken the old concepts and has created new ones that suit the black female. In fact, it shed the light entirely on her.

Since this work essentially takes Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as a case study, the novelist will be introduced as a significant figure influenced by the movement of the Black feminism and as an introducer of 'womanism,' where she establishes new perceptions to identifying colored women's experiences. Walker in her works removes the barriers associated with gender by presenting characters that encourage women to change and reconstruct their distorted and disfigured selves.

I. African-American literature

African-American literature is a body of literature produced by Americans of African descent, and the commencement of this literature was in the pre-revolutionary war period. African-American literature is a rich literature in terms of sensibility and reality; it is socially oriented. It tends to set forth issues related to the African-American community which consequently has made it gained widespread critical acclaim, especially in the 1970's when African-American literature has become an evitable and inseparable part of American literature and culture. (William1)

African-American literature dates back to African slaves' earliest departure to the New World in 1639. In fact, African-American literature can be divided into three distinctive categories; the first category is the pre-colonial literature, the second is the colonial one, and the third is postcolonial literature. Pre-colonial literature usually takes the form of oral narratives that sometimes goes along with music. Indeed, the oral forms of African-American literature takes split into two main spheres; the sacred one, such as, spirituals, gospel, and sermons, and the secular sphere which includes Jazz, Blues and others. Colonial literature depicts the horror of slavery and slave trade rebelling against colonialism and the awful reality with the help of their inspiring past and memories in the homeland, Africa. Postcolonial literature focuses on the clash between the aboriginal and colonial cultures. (Encyclopedia.com1)

The foundation of African-American literatures evolved due to many historical circumstances and the prevailing literary interrogations of freedom and liberty during the 17th, the 18th and even the 19th centuries. First, it was published by people of African descent. This latter was characterized by the revivalism and the personal deliverance and salvation of

the great awakening(Jarret5). The first published text by an African was *Autobiography* by James Ukawsaw Gronniosaw in 1772. The autobiography tells a very dramatic story that starts from West African royalty to Dutch captivity and the Christian education in the colonial New York. As the first slave narrative, it launched the spiritual awakening as a major theme of the new world African literature of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.(Jarret5)

Due to the prevailing consideration that slaves are not humans. The first works of Afro-Americans and their detailed journeys tried in a way to stress that they did worth to have the natural rights of mankind. Indeed, the aim of authors, such as, Oluadah Equino, Briton Hammon and John Mirrant was to share the suffering, racial inferiority and both the psychological and physical tortures which accompanied their journeys. (Jarett5)

In *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African-American Literature (1746-1920)*, it is said that slavery and freedom as themes in Afro-American literature aim at challenging the difficult circumstances that the colored community was living;

For certain African-American writers, slavery and freedom were not merely sentimental literary tropes.....their literature sought to challenge both southern slavery and its institutional perpetuation of white supremacist ideology.... Unlike their early nineteenth century forbears who described personal journeys of deliverance through spiritual autobiographies, slave narrative depict behalf of the abolitionist cause African American journeys from slavery to freedom. From 1825 to 1865 over 80 slave narratives were published, most in antislavery newspapers or in pamphlets sold on the antislavery speakers' circuit. Some helped popularize sentimental novels

by white authors. Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), for instance, is believed to be the true story of Stowe's Uncle Tom. (Jarret 141)

Afro-American literature aimed from the very beginning – even in an implicit way – at highlighting the discrimination and the neglectfulness of the blacks' humanity. Philip Gould claims that: “Slaves were nothing more or less than their properties” (M. Graham, J R 41). The vintage of such brutal treatment for some slaves was to betake writing as a means to express their hurt souls, and to find the self that was lost during the long harmful journeys of exploitation and torture. Kenneth W. Warren assumes that African-American literary works are marked by a lengthy engagement with the phenomena of slavery, and the system of labor and exploitation which were very substantial to the progress of both the new world and the whole western world. (2)

Literature of African Aptitude, according to Yollanda Williams in his book *Icons of African American literature*, is a genre of literature that shows the intellectual capacity of Africans through the use of the English language as means of expression. Authors of such sort gave a great importance to the language craft perfection and to the use of metrics. Their literary works were means to corroborate that they deserve full rights as men and women. The fact that during the 1600's and the 1700's, slaves were perpetuated by the belief that they were not fully humans; proving that their humanity was in need and out of necessity. (Williams 104)

Many early Afro-American authors had a profound effect on the public attitude towards African-Americans, and they helped to a considerable extent in reshaping the American mentality concerning slaves and slavery. One of the African aptitude literature's figures is Phillis Wheatly (1753-1784). Though there were many predecessors of an African descent,

Wheathly's talent gained her an international acclaim especially with the publication of her book, *Poems on Various Subjects*. (Beaulieu 899)

Phillis Weathly, the young enslaved girl, received a white elite education which nurtured both her language and her talent. Actually, her writings are more concerned with religious and moral themes. Therefore, she is querulous for not being feminist enough. Though the authors of the 18th century did not tackle explicitly "race" the way it is tackled nowadays, there were implicit discussions about it. Phillis addressed issues of slavery in several of her poems and letters, most famously, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773). (Beaulieu 899)

Wheathly's acceptance of the ideas that claim that blacks in Africa are uncivilized did not deprecate for her their worthiness of Christianity as the same as the whites did. Despite that Phillis was a domestic slave female, she could rise her voice up in public discussions of various political and religious topics. This fact steered new critics to reconsider her works from a new perspective in an attempt to catch a glimpse of what might be considered as concealed feminism in her poetry since at that time writing the experience as a black woman was not an offered choice. (Beaulieu 899)

Yollanda William in his book, *Icons of African American literature*, defines Literature for freedom or as it is known the slave narrative as the represented literature in abolitionist novels, essays, and speeches against slavery. In this literature, authors report their terrific experiences within the institution of slavery. They told and unveiled all the massacres or sins they encountered in slavery trades, plantations or with their white masters. This type of tales and narratives echoes how Afro-Americans moved from a collective bondage to a collective freedom. (Williams 105)

Slave narrative is one of the main factors of African-American literature's success. It does not only represent aesthetic form of language, but also it portrays an indomitable will

to freedom, equality and recognition. In *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* it is said that in 1986, William L. Andrews states that the “free” story of African American authors portrays both; the journey running from slavery to chase freedom and the desire to write and express freely the horrific realities of their daily lives in America (Graham, J R 39)

Yollanda Williams in his book, *Icons of African American literature*, asserts that slave narrative is the most unique genre in American literature since it affords the reader an intimate view onto the life of the slave in the history of US. Autobiographies or memoirs do capture that part of the authors’ lives as slaves facing numerous brutalities and severity from the white supremacists (390)

Olaudah Equiano (1745, 1797) is a former slave who was freed later. His autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), with its strong abolitionist attitude and detailed description of life in Nigeria, was so popular that in his lifetime it ran through nine English editions and one U.S. printing. It was translated into Dutch, German, and Russian. Indeed, some scholars consider it as the prototypical slave narrative. Equiano was not the first to recount his experiences in slavery. Rather, he was the first to write the story himself. His narrative details both the atrocities of the Middle Passage from Africa to America, and his conversion to Christianity, on which basis he condemns slavery. (Encyclopedia Britannica 1)

According to Elizabeth Beaulieu in her book entitled *Writing African American women*, Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was born into slavery in Maryland. Douglass eventually escaped and worked for numerous abolitionist causes, while still in slavery he suffered a lot from his sadistic pitiless master. No greater example of the power and influence of slave narratives can be found than the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

(1845) published by the anti-slavery society, Douglass's narrative presented an undeniable condemnation of the dehumanizing impact of slavery on slave and slaveholder. First came to public attention as an orator and as the author of his autobiographical slave narrative, he ultimately became the most prominent African-American of his time and one of the most persuasive orators and authors in American history. He published a newspaper called *North Star*, the manifesto of the paper was "Right is of no sex--Truth is no Color--God is the father of us all, and we are all brethren" and as Frederick was determined activist for equal rights for women, he wrote several editorials and articles sympathetic and supportive of women rights (Beaulieu 273-6)

Another figure of literature for freedom is the essayist and abolitionist, David Walker, who was born to an enslaved father and a freeborn mother. Philip Bader in his book *African American Writers 2004* asserts that David Walker was engaged in the abolitionist movement as an agent for *Freedom's* newspaper, the first Afro-American newspaper in the United States. Walker stunned the northern abolitionists and terrified the southern slaveholders with the publication of his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* in 1829. He believed that violence for slaves to regain their humanity and freedom was not out of greed but out of necessity. Walker's actions of changing the tone and aims of the abolitionist movement cost him his life whereby he died in mysterious circumstance on June 28, 1830 apparently victim of poison (Bader 233)

Yoland Williams in his book, *Icons of African American literature: the Black Literary World*, says identifying Literature of Self-Identity and Individual Freedom that:

Where the canonical works of the 18th and 19th centuries spoke of Progress, the third chapter of African American literature—the literature of self-identity and individual freedom—is best characterized by the newly found freedom that African American

authors explore in their literature. The turn of the century brought the last great slave narrative, Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901) and W.E.B. (Willaims105)

Harlem renaissance is also known as The New Negro Movement marked a turning point for African American literature and different artistic movements. During this period artistic works are characterized by determined souls and spirits of people who no more see themselves as victims of an awful fate colored their life by their skins' color. Harlem renaissance was a transformational path to Afro-American; it did establish new concepts and perceptions by permitting the Afro-American society of exercising self-discovery which is clearly and widely manifested in arts generally and literary output specifically. (Willaims106)

Among the most outstanding writers, civil rights activist and Afro-American cultural leader of this period is W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), Philip Bader in his book *African American Writers 2004* proclaims that Du Bois is one of the original founders of the NAACP and that At the turn of the century he published a highly influential collection of essays titled “The Souls of Black Folk.” The book's essays on race were depiction from DuBois' personal experiences to describe how African Americans lived in American society and described the complexity of African American self-perception as a double consciousness, in which they struggle to blend their self-perceptions with the white majority's opinions of them. The book contains Du Bois' famous quote: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.” Du Bois believed that African Americans should, because of their common interests, work together to confront bias and discrimination. (Bader 71-3)

The noticeable author of this time period is Booker T. Washington (1856–1915). He was born into slavery in the plantation of Virginia and became an influential voice among the late 19th and early 20th century. Washington in many ways represented opposite views from

Du Bois. Washington was an educator and the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, a Black college in Alabama, as an educator his focal point was to create an economic independent and progressive Afro-American citizen., Washington believed that Blacks should first prove and lift themselves up as equals of whites before asking for an end to racism. Among his published works are *Up From Slavery* (1901), *The Future of the American Negro* (1899), *Tuskegee and Its People*(1905), and *My Larger Education*(1911). (Bader 239)

By the end of WW II, civil rights reforms reached its climax of progress. Harry Truman, in his 1948 presidential campaign placed the Democratic Party in the frontline of reform when his civil rights committee wrote the 1947 report to secure these rights, and it was a precedent that a major political party candidate validated extensive guarantees of racial equality. Moreover many acts that outlawed segregation and discrimination had passed which empowered and produced a new sense of independence in the black community. This period knew a new genre of literature which is Literature of Modernism, Modernity and Civil rights

(Jarret389)

The great novelist, literary critic, and educator of this period, is Ralph Ellison (1911-1994). The range of his writing includes short stories, essays, reviews and numerous pieces of jazz. Best known for his novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), which won the National Book Award in 1953. Even though Ellison did not complete another novel during his lifetime, *Invisible Man*, was so influential that it earned him a distinctive place in literary history and established a serious and important literary figure. Ellison lone work depicts the personal struggles of her unnamed narrator, an Afro-American male who is struggling against the racial prejudice and oppression. In the prologue of the novel Ralf says “I am an invisible man,” which portrays how much his existence is unvalued and worthless for him and for his racist society. Ellison

was described by many of having complex artistry of his writing and the depth of his literary vision (Bader 79)

During the 60's many civil rights acts had passed many legislations granted, many rights among them equal access to all public accommodation strengthened federal power to combat discrimination in job hiring and promotion and with James Meredith enrollment as first African student in Mississippi university in 1966. A spirit of optimism flowed the Afro-American community enhanced their desire to eradicate fully and completely segregation and inequality. In addition, Afro-American societies were living in a tendency of massy pride, self-determination and racial nationalism. This era was a fruitful one for authors seeking to reveal yet overcome experiences related to race, ethnicity gender. Fragmented narratives, unreliable narrator were characteristics of literature during that period which was named Literature of National Militancy and the Black Aesthetic (1965-1975). (Jarret 609-12)

With the onset of globalization and the upsurge immigration, the American society became more multiculturalist and diverse than ever. The novelist and critic Charles R. Johnson, in his book, *being and race* (1988), presents a new definition of African-American literature. He asserts that the cultural intellectual and political rhetoric of racial in previous eras of US history contemporary Afro-American literature represents a fiction that enables people as a culture to move from narrow complaints to broad celebration. African-American literature published after 1975 reflects the increasing cultural, racial, ethical and sexual of its writers' diversity. Indeed, the gay and lesbian authors were defined by their 'otherness,' and thanks to the black power and the feminists' movements, Afro-American female gained a remarkable status of 1970's in literature. By 1990's Afro-American female writers were able to produce a diverse literature of genre and subject which earned many such as, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Rita Dove critical, Academic and popular acclaim. Pluralism in the American society came to include even sexual preferences and gender definition. By 2004

Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay marriage. Contemporary African American literature is hiding to serious fiction.(Jarret 751)

II. Feminism and the Feminist Theories

A. Feminism

Feminism is theory that advocates political, economic and social equality of sexes. It resists for guaranteeing female's rights that the society either ignore or rejects them. The findings of anthropology, history, theology, psychology, political science, physiology and sociology contributed in determining a feminist vision on crucial issues such as: patriarchy, religious nurture of girls, limited physical and educational preparation, and self-regard. The movement of feminism played a major role in the process of human liberation; however, women in their majority are not informed about the feminist writings and achievements of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In fact for a long time, women have been ignorant of their importance and group identity. The feminist vision affected the ways in which contemporary thinkers and writers, such as, Beasley perceive, the dynamics of society and power. If the term "sex" is taken closely, a dualistic reference to classified classes is found, such as, "male and female", which is also called "sexed regimes". The term 'sex' is still used in the daily language as a reference to one's sex or sexuality. However, the term is increasingly becoming exclusive for the physical body. The "sexed" and "sexual" have been replaced, in scholarly use, by gender and sexuality respectively (Beasley2)

Beasley elucidates that feminism is placed as a subfield of the inclusive field of gender/sexuality. First gender is the process of grouping on the basis of "sexed identities". It is not necessarily the common division of male/female, which we observe in modern western societies. This categorization varies in other eras, areas and cultures. Gender classifies the members of the society in terms of the two biologically distinct human categories

of male/female, as well as a social and professional division, which is the association of men with the public affairs and women with the domestic ones. But in reality men and women in contemporary western societies are both present in all the fields of life. The history of feminism is usually surveyed through three main distinctive periods.

A. 1. Feminism First-Wave

The principal concern of this feminism wave in the late 18th and 19th centuries was the critique of liberalism, which was the predominant thinking of the time. Liberalism at that time reinforced the liberty of the individual to choose and decide. The individuals' social and political rights were theoretically free from any gender distinction and only what makes them unique as human beings is their ability to think rationally. Thus, the ability to reason and rationalize meant that individuals do not need the paternal assistance represented by the state. However, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Liberalism, despite its claims of gender neutrality, was in practice aligned to men. First-wave feminism argued that: "women were regarded as irrational creatures and they were not permitted to vote, own property once married and had little legal control over their children or their bodies." (Beasley 18)

This early form of feminism criticized the universal approach of liberalism which excluded women from its agenda. Conversely, first-wave feminists did not disagree with the principal notion of a universal standard for social and political rights and selfhood but disagreed that the liberal standard was chiefly dominant by male. While a group of first-wave feminists supported the Marxist/socialist rejection of the liberal thinking, a larger group promoted the extension of the liberal universal notion to include women in order to allow them more rights and complete mature citizenship in the Liberal capitalist society.

A. 2. Feminism Second-Wave

Feminism second wave has begun in the 1960's and 1970's and criticized strongly the universal standard proposed by Liberalism. This type of feminism presented a new form of feminism. These forms of feminism had been characterized by sharing an emancipatory perspective. Beasley Chris in his book *Gender and Sexuality* asserts that those new feminists called for a compensatory reversal in which masculine bias was exposed. Second-wave feminists called for social change which would arise from women's deliverance from the disregard and marginalization of the past, and insisted on the assimilation and integration of women in the social scene. Critics of the second wave took a more critical position towards the universal thinking of Liberalism than their predecessors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but did not cut all connections with its philosophies. Therefore second-wave feminists were still presenting a form of emancipatory Modernist approach. (Beasley 20)

A. 3. Feminism Third Wave

While second wave feminists embraced a liberal emancipator position to reinforce women's social and political status, third wave liberal feminists also called. Post-feminists argue that the 1960's and 1970 women's attempts were still adamant to what the society had determined for them. Third wave feminists considered seriously the ability of women to be in charge for their choices, views and status. Postfeminists could also be characterized as anti-feminist because they believe in the woman's individual responsibility and refuse women burial in a group identified as a victimized portion. This indicates a strong return to the individual approach of Liberalism. However, these writers still occupy a feminist position because they still calling for equality of men and women, and their emphasis lies on individual women rather than social discrimination. Some third wave writers such as Katie Roiphe and Rene Denfeld are convinced that women should stop

blaming the society and became responsible for their own fate as mature, reasoning individuals(Beasley 24)

B. Black-Feminism

Feminism claims that it is an umbrella that hugs all females with their different needs, but Afro-American women felt that it could not respond or comprehend colored women's situation. It is contradictory but it is a fact that belonging to the same category (all females) but still oppressed because of color. Mereille Hutchison in her article, "Black and White Feminism, a Post-colonial vision," suggests that females from different areas with dissimilar cultural and historical backgrounds should necessarily have unlike needs, representations and sources of oppression and domination. Black feminism for Stasuilis is growing literature that aims to convey and portray the historical circumstances of black women and other colored women. (Stasuilis282)

Bell Hooksemphasizes in her book entitled *Ain't I Woman* the fact that colored women were not well expressed and felt by the white feminists she claims:

Initially, black feminist approached the women's movement white women had organized eager to join the struggle to end sexist oppression. We were disappointed and disillusioned when we discovered that white women in the movement had little knowledge of or concern for the problems of lower class and poor women or the particular problems of nonwhite women from all classes. (Hooks 188)

Similarities between the experiences of black and white women were hardly seen. It is undeniable that both black and white women were victims of sexist discrimination, but black women, who were also victims of racism, endured hardships that no white woman had to face. For the pre-mentioned purposes and due to the fact that each female group has a non-similar

deconstructing and reconstructing processes of personality, and different status in their groups led to the impossibility of being under one global theory, therefore and since feminism has been inadequate to embrace the black female; black feminism is taking responsibility to defend black women as a female whose existence is hardly valued.

Black feminist authors start their resistance by celebrating their black heritage and overruling racism and disgrace the unequal treatment that they ever encounter in their community. Patricia Hill in her book, *Black Feminist Thoughts*, assures that the fact that oppression is complex and it is rooted everywhere. However, females must resist and foster empowerment with the same complexity (289)

Afro-American women were taught to accept racism as a form of whitesupremacy and sexism as a form of male supremacy consequently; the cessation of this legend was a necessity. Moreover; women rights activists did not advocate equality for all women and excluded the black women from their emancipatory freedom seeking demands, which necessitate black women standing for their own struggle. “Black women must fight the world because they struggle daily against the racist, sexist, classist power of white men, and against the sexist power of powerless black men” (Simms 117). Patricia Hill Collins defends the African American woman saying that:

African-American women have been victimized by interesting oppression. But portraying US Black women solely as passive, unfortunate recipients of abuse stifles notions that black women can actively work to change circumstances and bring about changes in our lives. Similarly, presenting African-American women solely as heroic figures who easily engage in resisting oppression on all fronts minimizes the very real costs of oppression and can foster the

perception that black women need no help because we can ‘take it.’

(Collins287)

Being white, yellow or black any woman whatever the circumstances she is going through, she definitely needs to feel that she is beautiful. African-American authors know and aware that black women’s society reinforce the Caucasian beauty standards (fair hair, blue eyed and rosy checked) by classic fairy tales, literature and media. The Afro-American female in such society learns that she will never be beautiful, never be worthy or loved because she does not fit the white beauty myth. Toni Morison’s *The Blue Eyed* novel explores the harmful effects of those created standards on the black child and his/her personality building. Writing about the African-American women, black feminist authors reconstruct new norms and standards of beauty that suit a black female and by presenting a confident image of herself and her body celebrating its femininity.

African-American authors have taken a responsibility to introduce the black female in a very positive image. Anderson Mingnon throughout her writings depicts Afro-American women as females who construct and build men and provide support in their struggle; females are the healing forces, tender chests and substratum of the house (Beaulieu 50-2)

III. Alice Walker’s Womanism

Alice Walker, an American novelist, a short stories writer and poet, was born in February 9, 1944, Eatonton Georgia US. Walker’s works are marked with her sensitivity towards the African American culture and the African American female in particular who has a major focus in her most notable novel, *The Color Purple* (1982). The eighth and the final child of Afro-American sharecroppers, Alice, received a scholarship to attend Spelman College. Graduated from Sarah Howrence College in 1965 and became an active member in the civil rights movement in Mississippi.

Alice Walker's commitment towards the African American female is clearly characterizing her works. *In the Temple of My Familiar*, Walker examines the racial and sexual tensions. The narrative of *Possessing the Secret 05 Joy* (1992) is centered on female genital mutilation in addition to other works, such as, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling poem* (1991). Walker also wrote critical essays on female writers, such as, Flannery O'Connor and Zora Neale Hurston (Britannica Encyclopedia 1)

According to Yollanda William, Walker is a novelist who is trying to heal personal and collective wounds through her writing, she digs the relationship between psychological and physical trauma, victimization, oppression, and self-loathing and its effects on individuals and communities what usually ensue a rupture and detachment between the mind and the body (448)

Alice Walker as an intellectual African-American author is attempting to create a positive model for her reader and her society. Yolland Williams praising Walker he states in his book *Icons of African American literature*:

For Walker, being a doer of the living word entails experiencing transformation and sharing it through the creative, expressive acts and her social activism. She does not merely tell us that we need to change; she inspires and empowers us to change because in her non-fiction, she shows us how she has done it herself. And in her fiction Walker shows her characters living through their painful pasts rather than only showing dealing with their painful pasts. (Williams 451)

Aiming at constructing a strong reader, Walker insists on loving the entire self as essential to a healthy self-image and healthy behavior. Through her novels, she repeats the theme of

self-loathing as the source of oppression, racism and violence which disfigure the individual and create a psychological problematic that hardly can be cured. (Williams465)

Patricia in her essay “*What’s in Name Womanism Black Feminism and Beyond*,” declares that Alice Walker in her volume essays, *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens* introduces the meaning of the term ‘womanist.’ She sees Womanism rooted in the black women’s concrete history in racial and gender oppression. The term actually is taken from the southern black folk expression of mothers to daughters: “you acting womanish” Walker believes that the black female history shows precisely how womanish girls acted in courageous ways that freed them from the long trip of slavery, racism and discrimination. Walker’s famous expression, “womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender,” explains how black women are “womanist” while white women remain merely “feminist”. A womanist stands for the wholeness of both male and female groups because the womanist is a universalist (Collins216)

The novelist introduced the term “womanist” to define someone who is to a big extent appreciates the female’s culture, emotion and character. In fact, she is eager to build, reconstruct and hopefully unite the Afro-American women and other women of other marginalized groups. Therefore, womanism is not only concerned with the issues of black women but with the collective good of all people. Walker states in her first collection of essays, ‘In Search of her mother’s Garden:

“I don’t choose womanism because it is better than feminism...I choose it because I prefer the sound, the feel, the fit of it, because I cherish the spirit of the women (the Sojourner) the word calls to mind, and because I share the old ethnic American habit of offering society a new word when the old word it is using fails to describe behaviour and change that only a new word can help it.”(94)

To conclude, the theoretical background in this chapter aims at clarifying the evolution and progression of African-American literature in terms of themes and authors' contributions all through different epochs and eras; starting from literature of aptitude that encompasses the very first literary attempts till the literature of the contemporary period and pointing out prominent authors who had undeniable effect on introducing African-American literature and gaining it an international acclaim. This chapter discusses the history of feminism and summarizes it in three major waves; the division of waves is in terms of interests, goals and ends. Additionally, black feminism is introduced as a new theory, that embraces all black women with their grief and complications which encounter them throughout their life phases. Moreover, the chapter introduces the novelist, Alice Walker, as an Afro-American author who earned a distinctive place in literary history. Besides, it presents and defines the term, Womanism, which is introduced by the author, Alice Walker, in her volume essays, *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*.

Chapter Two: Physical and Psychological Violence in *The Color Purple*

Male violence against African American females is a theme that is repeatedly discussed in African American literature. Alice Walker as an Afro-American writer holds a responsibility to successfully portray the suffering that her community's females are encountering and receiving while living in a patriarch society that does not appreciate their existence.

In her Pulitzer winning novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), Alice Walker portrays the racial and gender discrimination that Afro-American females encounter all along their lives especially while living in a society that believes in men superiority. Throughout the novel, Walker presents multiple scenes in which her female characters and specifically the protagonist, Celie, who suffers from violence from all the surrounding males in her life. Male's domination coupled by racial discrimination crushes down the female and obliges her endures the suffering silently.

This chapter investigates the physical and the psychological violence that the female characters receive in different events in the novel besides analyzing the effects of the violent incidents over them. The chapter aims specifically at exploring the causes and consequences of violence and digging how the writer is expressing her vision about the female in her colored community.

I. Physical and Sexual Violence in *The Color Purple*

According to the World Health Organization physical violence refers to bodily harm or injures someone's by using physical force or power intentionally. Physical abuse includes many types and among them sexual harassment or sexual violence. The novel of *The Color Purple* consists of many violent scenes where characters and especially the protagonist who receives a violent and unacceptable behavior.(4)

Alice Walker presents physical violence in the very first scene. Celie narrates in her letter to god how she was raped by her step-father only because her mother was sick and could not handle a sexual

relationship: “can’t you see I’m already half dead.” The raged step-father profiteers the absence of the mother and commits his crime against his child, he says to her “you gonna do what you mammy wouldn’t” (*The Color Purple* 6). Alice describes the amount of pain that heroine felt during that terrifying moment and how Pa is careless towards Celie’s tears and suffering “when that hurt, I cry. He starts to choke me saying you better shut up and get used to it.” (*The Color Purple* 6)

Poor Celie is sexually abused by her father without any resistance. She deals with her pain in a silenced way. Suffering alone while her mother enjoys the good change in Pa treatment with her: “she happy, cause he good to her now.”

Pa aggression doesn’t stop, but now another type of violence which is beating. The step- father claims that Celie winked to a boy in the church, but the protagonist says in her letter that she did not wink. Pa’s violence emerges suddenly and brutally while he could discuss the issue he chooses the violent way: “I don’t even look at mens, I look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them” this passage declares clearly how Pa oppression and violence transforms to an oedipus toward the other sex.

Celie’s powerlessness and male domination and abuse to the black woman harmed the protagonist and fostered her silence and acceptance to the violence she was receiving, especially when she is living in a society that practices the patriarchal system and dehumanizes the female gender. In her essay, “*The Daughter’s Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History*” Christine Flaura states that: “The abusive or seductive father does serious harm to the daughter’s mind as well as to her body. Damaging her sense of her own identity and depriving her voice of authority and strength.” (635)

The only way Celie uses to comfort her self or maybe to resist in a way her reality is by writing letters first to god and then to her sister, Nettie. The letter actually was the only solution by which she could express her hopelessness and disappointment. Celie could not even pray fearing somebody

hearing her objection. The epistolary novel presents a passive subjugated character which is being harassed and violated physically, sexually and psychologically by all men around her.

Alice Walker continues telling the story of her protagonist and portrays the physical violence by the step-father again when Celie offers him herself to protect her sister, Nettie, since she observes how he is looking at her while his new wife is sick. Celie sacrifices herself in an attempt to secure her young sister from living the same trauma she lived before. She says in her letter: "I ask him to take me instead of Nettie while our new mama was sick.he beat me for dressing trappy but he do it to me anyway" (*The Color Purple* 12). This passage shows how Celie accepts to be sexually used for the sake of not repeating the same scenario with Nettie.

Violence in *The Color Purple* is not limited to one character. Celie receives physical maltreatment in her very first day of marriage. She recounts how she spent her day of wedding running from the oldest boy, Harpo, who suffers from a shock because he witnessed his mother's death. Harpo's rejection to the new mammy is for the reason that he could not accept her instead of his real mother. Actually, he resents a new voice of authority in household and being ordered by a stepmother. He punishes poor Celie for taking his mother's place so he beat her with a rock: "He picked up a rock and laid my head open. The blood run all down tween my breast." The choking response is Mr _____'s one (the husband), he said nothing but: "don't do that!" (*The Color Purple* 14). It is clear that the husband is not even trying to make his children respect or obey their stepmother which frankly expresses his carelessness towards her.

In addition to his carelessness concerning the maltreatment that Celie receives from his own children, Mr _____ violates Celie and treats her like she is without feeling. Actually, the violence that she encounters from her husband is not always with a reason. Celie explains to Harpo how his violent dad beats even if she does nothing. He uses her body to let out his pain and his anger. Celie says: "Sometimes he beat ma anyhow, I say, whether I do what he say or not." (*The Color Purple* 41).

Besides, Celie relates Mr _____'s violence to the fact that she cannot be like Shug. In a moment of confession, Celie tells Shug, Mr _____'s mistress, that he beats her for not being Shug.

In point of fact, the naughtiness of M _____'s children toward the new mama did not prevent Celie from being a good step-mother and caretaker. Everybody is compliment on the way she treats the children but no appreciation or gratitude she gets back. She says, "I be good to them. But I don't feel anything from them. patting Harpo back not even like patting a dog. Its more like patting a piece of wood. Not a living tree, but a table, a chifferobe." (*The Color Purple* 24)

The protagonist was raped by her patriarchal tyrant step-father and sexually abused by her husband who does not really care about how she feels in their sexual relationship: "I lay there thinking about Nettie while he on top of me,"(14). She confesses how he cares only with his own pleasure saying, "Mr _____ clam on the top of me, do his business, in ten minutes us both sleep", she describes "sex" with no feeling or passion as if it is an action that has no sense. Gholap and Chouthwale in their article, *Alice Walker's The Color Purple: Emerging Voice of Voiceless* 2015, argue that the major concern in Walker's novel is the black woman and how she is exploited sexually and considered as "mere object" intended only for male satisfaction. (4)

Tudier Harris in her 1984 essay discusses how black males ignore their female partners' sexual desire on the account of their own sexual pleasure. She states:

The book simply add[s] freshness to many of the ideas circulating in the popular culture and captured in racist literature that suggested that black people have no morality when it comes to sexuality, that the black family structure is weak if existent at all. [. . .] The novel gives validity to all the white racist's notions of pathology in black communities.(157)

The patriarch husband does not only oppress Celie sexually but also physically. Mr _____ treats her as if she is a child, he hardly and brutally beat her. When Harpo asks him why he beats Celie, he just said “cause she my wife” as of being his wife gives him full right to beat her the way he does. Celie describes his mistreatment saying: “he beat like he beat the children. cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celiegt the belt” (*The Color Purple* 20). The protagonist believes that the only way to survive the rude husband is by obeying him, tolerating his violence and keeps her mouth shut. While Mr _____ beats her, she does not even cry digesting his ruthlessness in silence. Celie says that she imagines herself a tree that does not feel : “I say, Celie, you a tree” (20) in an attempt to kill any sort of pain or feeling she May feel while being beaten by her rude husband.

Alice Walker shows the next female character who has a relation with the physical violence in the novel, but not like Celie’s relation. Sofia is a strong girl in personality and in body who does not accept to be violated and dominated by men. Celie describes her as following: “arms got muscles, legs too.....solid, like if she sit down on something, it be mached.”(*The Color Purple* 26) Sofia builds up her character all along her life to face men. She says: “all my life I had to fight, I had to fight my daddy, I had to fight my brothers, I had to fight my cousins and uncles. A girl child ain’t safe in a family of men.” (29) Sofia’s stubborn character prevents her husband Harpo from controlling and dominating her. Sofia’s strength is shown when Harpo admits to Celie that he could not beat Sofia. He says, “....but not Sofia. She do what she want, don’t pay me no mindat all. I try to beat her, she black my eyes...” (*The color purple* 41)

Harpo fascination by his daddy’s power of control leads him to ask for an advice from his father who Jenkins Candice Marie in her 1974 essay, *The queering Black Patriarchy: The Salvific Wish and Masculine Possibility in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple*, describes as a traditional patriarch who dominates both his grown children and Celie(984). Harpo as a member of patriarchal society that practices discrimination and as a son who inherits Mr _____’s adoration of control and power, he

strongly shows his desire to have the same control that his “pa” enjoys, Harpo argues, “I want her to do what I say, like you do for pa...when pa tell you to do something, you do it, whe he say not to, you don’t, you don’t do what he say, he beat you.” Harpo explicitly expresses his thirstiness to oppress and subjugate his wife Sofia.

Harpo becomes obsessed with the idea of controlling Sofia who has a strong body unlike Harpo’s body. His obsession leads to think how to have similar strong and giant body so he started eating all what he finds: “ he eating more and more everyday...harpo eat even whe he ain’t hungry” (*The Color Purple* 39). Celie discovers the reason behind this behavior and she tells Sofia, “he trying to git as big as you, I say.” (42)

The son goes to the one who seeds in him the longing of supremacy and control seeking an advice that enables him to be a man who enjoys power. Mr _____ advices his son, Harpo, to physically violate his wife in order to be the man of the house with a complete voice of authority, Mr _____ says: “You ever hit her? Mr. _____.ast.Harpo look down at his hands. Nawsuh, he say low, embarrass.Well how you spect to make her mind? Wives is like children.You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothingcan do that better than a good sound beating.”(*The Color Purple*26)This passage directly reflects Mr _____’s notion about men-women relationship, and that man should always reminds his woman violently that he has the “upper hand”.

Jenkins Candice Marie in her 1974 essay,*The queering Black Patriarchy: The Salvific Wish and Masculine Possibility in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple*, states that the fact that Harpo is ashamed to confess to Mr. _____ that he doesn't hit Sofia points outhow he hates his lack of control over hiswife, and indicates his shame as an inadequate patriarch. Hrapo could not interact with his father as an equivalent, who has his own household to dominate, Mr _____ sees him as unqualified to be the voice of authority in his own house. The inadequate patriarch responds his father with a low-voiced, eyes-averted which shows the extent of embarrassment that he feels.Mr _____’s statement

that “wives is like children” uncovers the feminized subjugation that Harpo has endured as Mr. _____'s child, Mr _____'s patriarchal control does not only disciplines wives but also children.(980)

Harpo's rejection to his situation with Sofia leads him to consult Celie about what he can do to make Sofia's mind, Celie answers “beat her”. The answer may be not only due to a feminine jealousy but also because Celie's life has been always related to violence. Though she suffers from male's oppression, she consults to use it for the reason that she does not know another solution or other manner that men may use to deal with their female partners.

As previously mentioned Sofia's character is strong and does not accept any male subjugation. Harpo attempt to violate his wife as Celie and Mr_____ consult makes him encounter a fight with her which ends with Harpo injured: “Next time us see Harpo his face a mess of bruise. His lip cut. One of his eyes shut like a fist. Hewalk stiff and say his teef ache.” *The color purple* (27). Harpo denies that he is beaten by his wife because he does not want to be described as the man who is violated by a female and incapable to control. Harpo denying that he was beaten by his wife shows again that he does not want to be seen as a weak man with no ultimate control over his wife. He says to Celie:

I say, what happen to you, Harpo?He say, oh, me and the mule. She fractious, you now, she went crazy in the field the other day. By time I got her to head for home I was all banged up. T hen when I got home, I walked smack dab into the crib door. Hit my eye my eye and scratch my chin. Then when that strom come up last night I shet the window on my hand. Well, I say, After all that, I don't spect you had chance to see if you could make Sofia's mind.

Naw, he say”(*The Color Purple* 27)

After Sofia moves away, Harpo chooses a girlfriend that suits his obsession of control. This girl, Sequeak, is a passive subjugated female. Celie says about her “she like me, she do whatever Harpo say”(50), which finally achieves Harpo's goal of being the voice of authority and ends his search for

domination as a male.

Harpo's attempts to gain power and oppress his wife bother Sofia and annoy her. She complains to Celie the fact that the husband that she loves is trying to make her slave who follows each and every word he says. Sofia says, "all he think about since us married is how to make me mind. He don't want a wife he want a dog" (*The Color Purple* 42). The situation that Harpo puts Sofia in makes her less interested about him, she feels that the huge love they once had is diminishing day after the other. She even loses her sexual desire towards him: "now when he touche me I just don't want to be bothered" (42).

Sex to Sofia transforms from something to enjoy to something that shows masculinity and the eagerness of control and oppression of the female partner. Sofia clarifies her point to Celie saying, "once he git on top of me I think about how that's where he always want to be." (*The Color Purple* 42) In fact what makes Sofia even more nervous is that Harpo cannot see her change towards him she continues:

You know the worst part? She say. The worst part is I don't think he notice. He git up there and enjoy himself just the same. Naw matter what I'm thinking. Naw matter what I feel. It just him. Heartfeeling don't even seem to enter in it. She snort. The fact he can do it like that make me want to kill him. (*The Color Purple* 42)

This passage shows again the males' carefulness only about their own sexual satisfaction, and totally ignoring the other part's feelings and desires.

Indeed, physical violence in *The Color Purple* that females are encountering is not only because of masculinity and patriarchy of the society, but it is also due to racism. *The Color Purple*'s females are suffering a double discrimination. The first one is within their black community as being females

which is a fact that is emphasized by Sofia's statement: "a girl child ain't safe in family of men" (*The Color Purple* 29). The second one is as being colored in a society that celebrates the white race supremacy, and appoints them as the suitable leaders of nation ignoring the fact that Afro-American are also a part that cannot be separated from the population.

LesiaRuglass and Kendall-Tackett their book *Psychological of Trauma* proclaim:

The psychological impact of an individual's gender or race being the source of suffering is traumatizing oftentimes the psychological of gender and race result from the responses members of the minority receives from the majority groups about their abilities, skin color, or other physical features. (83)

This resembles the case of Celie who is subjugated due to her belonging to both black community and to the females' sphere.

Lewis Jissica in her essay, "Double discrimination: an Analysis of Gender and Race's Role in Trauma" (2016), points out that Walker declares race as an equivalent component of discrimination and which goes side by side with gender in oppressing the Afro-American females. Lewis continues that this double discrimination is doubtlessly makes the colored female encounters numerous forms of physical and sexual traumatic accidents. Walker according to Lewis Jessica portrays the double oppression's suffering and the rejection that African American females bear for nothing but their identity itself by presenting three characters of the novel: Celie, Sofia and Squeak. (1)

Sofia, the stubborn character, faces a racial discrimination when the mayor's wife asks her to be her maid, Sofia gets nervous and strongly refuses, "all your children so clean, she say, would you like work for me, be my maid? Sofia say, hell no. She say, what you say? Sofia say, hell no." (*The Color Purple* 52)

After such rejection, the mayor and his wife felt humiliated. In order get back his prestige, the racist patriarch mayor slaps Sofia who could not endure that she is being violated and she beats him

back which consequently leads her to be prisoned and harshly treated. Celie says describing that, “when I see Sofia I don’t know why she still alive...they tear her nose on one side. They blind her in one eye....she can’t talk.”(53) Poor Sofia endures a very harsh and humiliating treatment. She works in the prison laundry all along the day; the jail is a dirty place with numerous flies and rats and about food, she says, “bad enough to kill you with it.”(54). This inhuman treatment broke the stubborn Sofia, she answers when Celie asks her how she handles it saying, “every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I’m you. I jump right up and do just what they say.”(54)

When Sofia gets out of the jail she serves as maid in the mayors’ house, and she endures terrible condition as well. She is not permitted to see her own children only a once per year and she is also maltreated by the mayor’s son. Walker captures how racial and sexual discrimination can inverse one’s life totally. Sofia is not only racially discriminated, but also she is physically violated by the mayor in addition to losing her freedom while in jail and when she is in the Millie’s house. The character of Sofia changes throughout the novel’s events from a self-determined strong female to a submissive oppressed woman that silently endures violence, oppression and harassment.

I. Verbal and Psychological Violence in *The Color Purple*

Violence is not necessarily related only to physical maltreatment. It could be when a person or a group uses hostile behavior (gesture, word, writing...etc.) to emotionally harming the victim. According to the National Coalition against Domestic Violence (NCADV), psychological abuse creates trauma to the victim caused by verbal abuse, acts, threats acts...etc. It aims at controlling, terrifying and even humiliating denigrating the abused. (1)In fact such type of violence may be more damaging to the person than the physical violence because it causes long-term damaging to the person. The verbal and psychological violence are largely presented in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982).

Alice walker presents the verbal behavior in the very first page of *The Color Purple* when Pa says: “you better not ever tell anyone but God. It’d kill your mammy”(1). This expression which appears

as an innocent advice in fact carries a hidden threat to Celie. Kouadio Germain N'Guessan in his paper, "you better not ever tell anyone but God. It'd kill your mammy": The Violence of Language in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, argues that Pa uses what he terms "the violence of language" to warn Celie that if she says anything about the rape accident it will cause her mother's death, Celie bears her trauma silently fearing losing her mammy. (74)

Celie's rape by her step father, Alphonso, caused her a psychological breakdown. Walker describes how Pa does not only sexually abuse her but also how he emotionally violates her when he says: "you gonna do what your mammy wouldn't." (1) He forces her to bear the consequences of a mistake she is not responsible of. He continues his shameful action saying to the crying child: "you better shut up and get used to it" (1) Pa's words show how he obliges her to handle the assault and the pain silently which causes to Celie more psychological destruction.

In her book, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy refers to the psychiatrist, Alice Miller, who states that victims who suffer from trauma and are most damaged are the same ones who are unable or prevented from voicing and expressing out their anger and pain (6). Celie indeed suffers from being sexually abused and even more traumatic obliging her to be voiceless and tolerate the massacres that the step father is committing. Kouadio Germain N'Guessan asserts that Pa decreases Celie's state to "Nothingness" in an attempt to reformulate and reconstruct her personality according to his patriarchal standards, the same way the capitalist and patriarchal slavery degraded and dehumanized slaves. These facts explain Celie's subordinate character and her inability to construct an independent self-determined identity; instead she is being constructed by males surrounding her, a passive humiliated character who is subjugated and dominated by the other sex. (75)

Alice Walker captures the psychological violence Celie encounters when the step father takes away her children preventing her from enjoying and exercising her motherhood though she was too young for being a mother. Alphonso never tells her where he took the babies because he considers Celie as a mere object that sexually satisfies him. Celie as a passive character does not voice her desire

to hold her baby or even ask where Pa took her. She only presumes that he killed her in the woods: “He took it. He took while I was sleeping. Kill it out there in the woods.” (*The Color Purple* 7). When she gave birth with a boy, he took him too while her breasts still full of milk. This time she assumes he sold the baby to a couple over Monticello.

Alice Walker captures Alphonso’s inequity when he drops Celie out of the school when she gets pregnant. He accuses her of stupidity and that her schooling is in vain. Nettie tries to convince him to let Celie study, but he refuses strongly: “you too dumb to keep going to school, Pa say. Nettie the clever one in this bunch” (*The Color Purple* 13). Educational oppression affects Celie’s personality since she could not get the chance to shape it the right way using education.

Pa keeps on humiliating Celie whenever he gets the chance to. When Mr’s comes proposing to Nettie, Alphonso refuses and proposes Celie instead. Walker shows his audacity when he describes Celie to Mr’s he says: “She ugly....fact is, he say, I got to git rid of her....and She a bad influence on my other girl.... Don’t even look like she kin to Nettie...she ain’t smart either...and another thing she tell lies” (*The Color Purple* 12). Alphonso’s brutality and cruelty towards Celie are clearly portrayed when he in his unblemished statement invites Mr _____ frankly to abuse and exploit her: “she ugly. He say. But she ain’t no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And god done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want and she ain’t gonna make you to feed it or clothe it....but she can work like a man.” (12)

Male’s domination over the female characters is denounced in Pa’s attitude while arranging the unblest marriage of Celie and Mr _____, which again and again stresses his patriarch nature of Alphonso who tolerates explicitly any violent behavior towards the poor Celie. Mr _____ knowing Pa’s opinion about Celie and that he is going to hinder him from violating Celie, instead he encourages him to do so, showing no hesitation to physically, sexually, verbally and psychologically violating his wife. Mr _____ rapes Celie repeatedly continuing what Alphonso used to harm her and damage her notion about sex. Celie’s sexual desire is damaged first by Pa than by a husband the

barely feels her existence, which affects her innerself and makes her desires sex with the same sex and not with men.

Celie after finding out that her husband was hiding her sister Nettie's letters from her, she informs him that she is leaving him and going to the North with Shug, the outrageous husband tries to prevent but when he finds out that this time Celie is not going to silently obey his orders he uses his Sharpe tongue to hurt her feelings he says, "you'll be back, he say. Nothing up North for nobody like you.....but what you got?you ugly. You skinny .you shape funny. You too scared to open your mouth to people. All you fit to do in Memphis is to be Shug's maid."(109)

To conclude, walker highlights with her work,*The Color Purple*, the suffering that the African American females encounter due to their gender and race. Walker calls the attention that violence with all its type damages the females' characters and crushes down their identities. Using a non-traditional style and telling Celie story, Walkerdenounces the scenes of violence that the colored woman encounters in her real life.

Chapter Three: Journey of Self-Reconstruction in *The Color Purple*

African-American female authors use their literature as healing and empowering productions to their society females, and Alice Walker is not an exception. Alice in her novel, *The Color Purple*, aims specifically at pushing her female readers towards self-realization throughout a process of transformation that they live with her protagonist, Celie. Emphasizing female solidarity and bonding in addition to highlighting the intensive effect the surrounding females have on the protagonist mainly aim at encouraging women to support each other and challenge the patriarch social structure which is forced on them by men. Walker believes that the self-determination process can be more facilitated by females' friendship and solidarity. Actually, in *The Color Purple*, friendship plays an important role in ameliorating and fostering the self-esteem of the female as an individual that has valuable status in her community.

Alice Walker seeks predominantly to push women to challenge their fears and the oppressive communities to gain self-determinant women with ambitions and a valuable existence. Celie, the major character, is a vivid model that Alice suggests. She captures a silly immature girl that gradually shifts her position as a passive subordinate character to a voiced independent member. Celie's final transformation expresses Walker's longing to see all the oppressed females breaking away from their old submissive characters to possess a respectable status.

I. Female Bondage in *The Color Purple*

Contemporary African-American authors present their literary creations that suggest black females' bonding as a significant theme. The relationship of females is unique and specific because they share the same suffering and multiple oppressions in their patriarchal communities. Women find a release only when they bond together and comfort each other. In fact, female bonding is an empowering relationship that has always a positive effect on the process of breaking the shell of male-domination and widening women's horizons.

Alice Walker in her novel, *The Color Purple*, presents females' friendship as a sacred relationship that guides the female throughout her tough path towards safety, independence and self-reliance. Walker applies to the protagonist, Celie, her vision and theoretical assumption about the positive influence of females' solidarity and bonding on the individual. Female characters of *The Color Purple* help Celie to create the sense of selfhood and own a voice of authority and strength.

Digging in this theme, the reader notices three main females who have a remarkable effect on Celie's personality creation. Alice Walker presents the three characters, Nettie, Sofia and Shugas focal points in Celie's life without whom she would never succeed in breaking the silence and widening her horizons. In a sequence of incidents structured properly by the novelist, the reader notices the development of the passive mute Celie to a thoughtful mature woman thanks to her surrounding females.

Female bondage and friendship have been portrayed as a significant relationship that appears from the very beginning of the novel. Walker celebrates this relationship when she emphasizes Nettie's tight attachment with her sister, Celie. Nettie, the loving sister, defends Celie's right of education and stands in confrontation with her stepfather. She says: "But pa, Nettie say crying, Celie smart too. Even Miss Beasley say so." (*The Color Purple*

13). Nettie knows what her sister is going through and she believes that the two of them should be educated in order to get rid of their stepfather's oppression. Nettie does not submit and she decides to teach Celie what she has been taught at school. Celie states:

She be sitting there with me shelling peas or helping the children with they spelling. Helping me with spelling and everything else she think I need to know. No matter what happen, Nettie steady try to teach me what go on in the world. And she a good teacher. (*The Color Purple* 17)

Nettie notices the misbehavior of Mr _____'s children, and she does not like the fact that her sister is abused, and the husband is in a total silence and carelessness towards his children behavior. Nettie urges Celie to fight back and to not permit to a bunch of kids to ruin and control her life. Nettie asserts: "don't let them run over you, Nettie say. You got to let them know who got the upper hand. They got it I say. But she keep on, you got to fight. You got to fight." (*The Color Purple* 17) Nettie knows already Celie's character. She is kind and sure that Celie needs a strong push in order to fight for her rights to be a respectable woman with a voice of authority in the house. Consequently, she desperately tries to encourage her to have a strong position confronting the naughtiness of the children.

Nettie can not continue her role as a supportive character because she is forced to run away and save herself. Before leaving, Nettie promises Celie that she would never forget her and she will always write to ask about her and to tell her about how she is. Nettie's going away nut her sense of sisterhood and responsibility towards her sister leads her to write letters to Celie whenever she gets the chance. Though Celie could not reply her because she did not receive the sent letters, Nettie keeps writing for long years. Nettie's letters are not just communicative means, but in fact they are symbol of carefulness and healing words of a loving sister.

Bonnie Thornton Bill's essay, "Race, Class and Gender," as cited in Lynda Stone's book, *The Education Feminism Reader*, suggests that the notion of sisterhood is a significant bonding force in the contemporary women's movement and it is a pushing force in the confrontation of male chauvinism and patriarchy (42). Bonnie's point of view comes as an assertion and affirmation of the power that sisterly attachment has when it comes to standing against oppression, and helping the other part to get rid of the marginal positions and create a strong independent identity. In other words sisterhood is a main factor of destroying the subordinate character and reconstructs a new free individual.

Nettie in her letters describes to Celie everything. She even tries to teach her using letters, Nettie's aim as usual is to widen her sister's horizons and gets her out of the prison that both her stepfather and her husband created for. Indeed it is through Nettie's letters that Celie discovers that Alphonso is just their stepfather and not their biological father which creates relief somehow for Celie who thought that her babies are children of incest. Celie says: "my daddy lynch, my mama crazy. All my little half-brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children are not my sister and brother. Pa not Pa" *The Color Purple* (94). In addition to writing to Celie, Nettie takes care of her sister's children tenderly as a loving sister of their mother and as a warm aunt. Clenora Hudson in her book, *African Womanist Literary Theory*, cites Reny Thomas's article, "Sisterhood in Alice Malsenior Walker's *The Color Purple*." She states:

Given that we know all too well how comforting sisterhood is, we must welcome it and its rewards for others as well as for ourselves. Thus, for the moment, let us reflect on how much more beautiful our world would be if all sisters simply loved each other, our children would be more secure, for there would have not just one female guardian, but many needs. (284)

Clenora Hudson describes how sisterhood is a comforting relationship that surrounds us with love. Sisterhood is a relation that brings security and safety to the world.

The other influential character in Celie's life is Sofia, a strong solid woman who enjoys self-esteem. Sofia has shown to Harpo, Mr _____ and the passive Celie that she is a submissive woman and she would never be. Amy Sickels in her book, *African-American Writer*, declares that Sofia is the first woman Celie encounters, and who bravely succeeds resisting men oppression. She continues that Sofia is one of the characters who contributed in the process of transformation of the protagonist through capturing her attention by her fearless resistance which influenced Celie's development. (76)

Sofia's and Celie's friendship starts when Sofia confronts Celie's recommendation to Harpo to beat Sofia; Sofia comes asking for justification and she is not leaving till she gets it. This leads Celie to break the silence for the first time and confess to Sofia that she is jealous of her ability to defend herself while the poor Celie is being oppressed, beaten for nothing and treated as a maid. Celie admits, "I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't....fight." (*The Color Purple* 29)

Sofia sympathizes with Celie and she decides to befriend to her because she feels the extent of pain she is holding inside her chest. Sofia suggests to Celie to make quilt which is an activity that *The Color Purple* female share together. In fact, quilt making is a symbol of solidarity because while working on the stitches a tough bond is being established and reinforced between the two women.

Tucker Lindsey in her essay, "Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*: Emigrant woman, Emigrant Text," comments that quilt making functions as a metaphor of the theme of female solidarity. She argues that this activity is which involves stitching different worthless pieces to create beautiful useful objects. Tucker assumes that like the quilt is

considered as attaching mismatched pieces of cloth; also the creation of a strong resistant spirit in *The Color Purple* basically depends on a mismatched lives bonded together. Though those characters share different stories, their experiences can be useful to each other when they are attached and put together. In other words, without solidarity females would be just like a worthless piece of cloth.(93)

Sofia shares with Celie the story of her abused mother who suffers just like Celie from a patriarch violent husband, who never considers her as a life partner. Rather, he considers her as a human with inferior status. Sofia says:

To tell the truth, you remind me of my mama. She under my daddy thumb. Naw, she under my daddy's foot .anything he say, goes. She never say nothing back. She never stand up for herself. Try to make a little hard stand sometime for the children but that always backfire. More she stand for us, the harder time give her.(*The Color Purple*29)

By sharing her mother's story, Sofia tries to open up to Celie and to create a close intimate relationship; she even try to incite her over Mr_____. She tells her: "you ought to bash Mr_____ 's head open,she say. Think about heaven later."(29) Breneda R. Smith in her essay, "We Need Hero: African American Female Bildungsromane and Celie's Journey to Heroic Female Selfhood in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," declares that Sofia is the first voice to pierce the shell of Celie's pressed emotions.(9)

Sofia's friendship guides Celie to the path of self-determination,while Shug Avery is the one who leads Celie's journey towards her salvation shifting from the invisible Celie to a visible character. Shug, Mr_____ 's mistress and Celie's idol, comes to the town and both Mr_____ and Celie were longing for her arrival, the queen honeybee as her fans call her is

so sick and Celie with her own desire and with Mr _____'s orders are going to nurse her. Kouadio German in his paper which is entitled "You Better Not Never Tell Nobody but God. It'D Kill Your Mammy: The Violence Language in Alice Walker *The Color Purple*," states that:

...there is also what I called "positive violence", that is to say violence which does not create physical, psychological or moral impact on the individual. In psychoanalytical terms, this type of violence helps the fragmented subject to negotiate existence and personality ... it helps the subject to transcend his/her past and present condition by realizing that he/she possess talents ... Shug notices that the heroin suffers from lack of personality...needs to be forged.... she decides to behave as a stepmother. (82)

In fact, Celie is not the only one affected by the relationship with Shug. Actually, Shug as well is touched by Celie's carefulness and tenderness though she knows that the queen honeybee is her husband's mistress. Celie describes her treatment to Shug saying, "I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia—or like she mama....first she say, hurry up and git finish. Then she melt down a little and lean back against my knees." (*The Color Purple* 36) The psychologist, Daniel W Ross, argues that the "doll" in this context is a symbol. He continues that the psychoanalytic school of object relation considers dolls as transitional devices which help girls to move on from childhood dependence to possess a maturing role. (164-5)

As a matter of fact, Celie's process of growth and maturity are hindered by both the patriarch stepfather and the oppressive husband; the continuity of this process is accomplished by Shug's guidance. Walker presenting this precious friendship, and she

properly plans many scenes that reinforce her belief on women's ability to help reconstructing each other. When Shug decides to sing in Harpo's Juke joint, Mr _____ refuses to let Celie goes there, but Shug does not give up till he gives Celie the permission to go. While in the Juke joint Shug dedicates a song to Celie and she even names it after her. This doing promotes Celie's notion of self-hood and desire to construct an independent identity that own private things. The heroine recognizes that she is valuable to someone and that she is finally loved by someone rather Nettie.

Shug's relationship with Celie exceeds to a mere friendship in which two persons share their problems. In fact, while Celie presents a warm tender mother to Shug, who represents security and safety to the oppressed Celie. When she recognizes that the heroine fears her husband's violence, Shug promises her that she is not leaving till she ensures that Albert will not mistreat or violate Celie: "I won't leave, she say, until I know Albert won't even think about beating you." (*The Color Purple* 47) Shug does not only offer her love to Celie, but she also gives her carefulness and protection.

Shug's friendship guides Celie gradually to be a full grown voiced woman. She facilitates her path towards progress and individuality. Finding out that Celie does not enjoy sex leads Shug to try to raise Celie's awareness about her own body that she never felt that, she possesses it. She determines that she will make the protagonist familiar with her own body and celebrates her femininity. In order to be able to express her desires, she has to recognize them first. Bayerman in his book, *Fingering the Jagged Grains: Tradition and Form in Recent Black Fiction*, claims that, "the evaluation of the female body as the site of self-awareness and self-esteem. Thus, in *The Color Purple*, a crucial moment in Celie's transformation comes when she perceives the beauty of her genitalia." (321)

In addition to security and sexual recognition, Shug pushes Celie to break the silence after long years of concealment about the rape she encountered in her childhood. While telling her dramatic story, the two women cried out their hearts, Shug hugs Celie in an attempt to relieve some pain. After knowing Celie's secret, Shug determines more on standing always by her friend's side and gets her out of the dramatizing world that males locked on her.

When Celie finds Nettie's letters, she becomes outrageous after a long time of pressing her feeling: "I can't remember last time I felt made... I start to feel nothing at all." (29) Celie's anger breaks the silence of years. When she insists on killing Mr ____ for hiding Nettie's letters, Shug prevents Celie and instead she takes the razor from her hand and switched with a needle. Shug again helps Celie in discovering her sewing talent which straightforward the path for her self-independence.

Female connectedness and remedial relationships are not limited only to recovering and bonding the protagonist. In fact, there are other females who bonded together to ensure each other survival. Shug helps another female who is Squeak to achieve her dream which is singing. Shug knows that singing is an expressing means that the oppressed female needs to express herself. Patricia Hill Collins in her book, *Black Feminist Thoughts*, states, "Blues has always occupied a special place in black women's music as site of expression of black women's self-definition" (148) so the blues is a music that females use in order to break away from the oppressive system that their society applies to them.

Alice Walker captures female solidarity also when Sofia encourages Squeak to sing and promises her that she will take care of her daughter while she is away realizing her dream. Another scene celebrates the sacred female friendship is presenting the fabulous sisterhood that the Olinka's women enjoys. Though being wives of the same man, the women in the

Olinka tribe love each other and they take care and nurse each other's children in a cooperative scene that can't be seen anywhere else. They forget about jealousy and enjoy their femininity by bonding together. Though as Reny Smith mentions in her paper, "Sisterhood in Alice Malsenior Walker's *The Color Purple*," female relationships has been tested through many conflicts in the novel between the female characters. Walker affirms that female unity is built on faith, trust and sharing which are essential requirements to achieve an independent individual.(294)

II. Self –Reconstruction in *The Color Purple*

Self-reconstruction is an important theme in African American literature. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an awakening model for the reconstruction of the black female. Walker aims at pushing her female readers to a positive change by presenting a successful model that transforms from a totally passive submissive and subordinate character to a determinant financially independent female. Walker in her novel succeeds at connecting her protagonist with the outsider world after being emotionally repressed. With the help of the other female characters, Celie could break the shell and connect herself with a world she has been having an inferior and marginalized position.

Celie's transformation comes gradually in different phases. In each phase, it is noticed how the protagonist is starting to express herself and break away from the silent world. The sexually violated and barely educated Celie learns that in order to have value in home, society and in the whole world, one needs to fight. Though in the beginning, she is not convinced with the idea of fighting but with time she comes to conclude that: "girl child ain't safe in family of men" unless she fights for her own existence.

Celie's emancipation gives hope to all the oppressed women. Alice Walker makes her readers live the transformational process with details in order to encourage them taking the

first step towards their liberation from male dominance. Celie's letters to God is a means to break the silence which was imposed on her by her stepfather: "You better not never tell nobody." Though she is not able to connect with anybody and her story could not be shared, she finds a relief telling God about what is happening to her. Celie's letters give readers a close look to her miserable life. They are as testimony of unsupportable life; she describes the physical and psychological violence she is enduring, both from her stepfather and her husband while she is in a powerless position accepting all the pain silently. Celie by writing to God she is able on one hand to express and confess, on the other hand she gains a voice to share her story with.

Celie's growth and maturity are shown when she gives Harpo a mature answer about his desire controlling his wife, Sofia. She says: "some women can't be beat, I say. Sofia is one of them. Besides, Sofia loves you. She probably be happy to do most of what you say if you as her right. She not mean. She not spiteful. She don't hold a grudge." (*The Color Purple* 41) She advises Harpo in a very mature way which is constructed through her bondages with the other female characters.

Alice Walker captures the gradual change in Celie's personality and position when she narrates her attitude towards old Mr _____ who came to their home blaming Mr _____ for hosting the queen honeybee, Celie while taking to him a glass of water in which she spits as a reaction against old Mr _____'s attack on Shug she says "I drop a little spit in old Mr _____ water.....I twirl the spit round my finger" (*The Color Purple* 37). Celie's reaction is considered as a defense on her idol and future friend Shug.

Celie remains in a passive position for a long time until she finds out that Mr _____ is been hiding the letters of Nettie all over the last years. This was a transformational and breaking point in Celie's life. Her anger explodes and she tries to kill her husband,

punishing him for doing so. Shug prevents and tells her to turn her madness into a productive creation like making some pants. Here, the protagonist starts to find out her talent which will realize her financial independence.

Celie tells Mr ____ that she is going with Shug. He strongly refuses at this moment the submissive. Celie shows that she is dead, and a new character is born. She says:

You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter in the creation. And your dead body is just the welcome mat I need. You took my sister Nettie away from me. I say. And you know was the only person love me in the world....but Nettie and my children coming home soon, I say. And when she do, all us together gonwhup your ass.(The *Color Purple* 109)

Needlework becomes a source of freedom and economic independence. Besides, it releases her from the abuse and pressure of her patriarch society. She starts to write letters to Nettie and not God which is considered as a positive sign because it is a rebellion against the silence that the stepfather imposes on Celie. Finally, she resists that killing silence and shares her stories with someone else. In addition, she does not write anonymous letters anymore. She starts to sign her name on her letters to her loving sister. Celie's last letter which is addressed to everything captures her joy and self-satisfaction that she gains by the end of the trip. After a long journey, she finally finds her lost self and reconstructs identity that has been damaged by males' dominance.

Celie's feeling that she is a part of all the creation is raised when Shug clarifies the image for her which helps her to reinforce her spirituality and faith. John T. Hier in his, "Creation theology in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," states that, "Celie experiences the actual redemption when she realizes that she is a part of the creation he assumes that "to

enter into the flow of god's creativity is to know love and through love to know the meaning of selfhood, family, and community- in short to know true wisdom."(15)

To conclude, in *The Color Purple*, the theme of Self-reconstruction goes hand by hand with female bondages that push the major character towards her emancipation and opens the door for her self-expression. As walker Barnes comments, "The Color Purple is a story about group of people who learn to have identity, to love, to celebrate themselves and to resist racial and gender oppression." (2). Celie, the protagonist, succeeds in her mission of reconstructing her identity, self and individuality. She realizes herself though all the hardships she faces all along the journey of reconstruction.

Conclusion

This work tries to explore the presence of African-American female authors in literature by digging in the Afro-American literary history and by highlighting the prominent figures of each phase. Besides this thesis introduces the feminist approach and its three waves, and explains the term Black Feminism in relation to Feminism. Most importantly it stresses Womanism and its principles and perceptions according to Alice Walker as its initiator.

Alice Walker in her novel *The Color Purple* presents a real-life like story, which discusses African-American females' issues such as discrimination, violence and sexism. Those issues are successfully captured in Alice Walker novel. Alice's protagonist "Celie" bears from the same problems that her community females endure, as a result she suffers from submission and loss of selfhood. Though the novel was criticized by some scholars for its negative representation of the black males in addition to the controversy that the theme of lesbianism made; Alice succeeded in conveying her females' pain and suffering. Alice Walker deals with black women's problem through the experience of Celie, her main protagonist.

Celie grows in a patriarchal environment where silence is imposed to her and where all the rules are set to the advantage of man. She encounters physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence. Consequently she is led to the loss of identity and selfhood. In different phases of her miserable life, Celie, Walker's protagonist presses her feelings and loses her self-esteem through ill-treatment in the hands of Pa and Mr. ___ who illustrate violent dominant males. Celie both as a stepdaughter and as a wife served as either a maid or as a body satisfies sexual desires of both Alphonso and Albert.

Through a non-traditional narration style, Alice presents the efficiency of female bondage, *The Color Purple's* Women recognize that through their sisterhood and bondage they can realize their dreams, their individuality and their value as equal members in the community.

the theme of female bondage is stressed through making it an inevitable phase in the process of emancipation of the protagonist.

In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker offers an occasion for black female characters to defend themselves in patriarchal system and gain individuality and respectable social status. As a result, Celie is transformed from a passive submissive female to a self-dominant character who stands up for her rights. As a result of her rebellion against patriarchal system, she achieves her financial independence and creates her own sewing industry. She is no more a house maid but she is a business woman with wide horizons and ambitions. *The Color Purple* considers male transformation as well which is portrayed in Mr _____'s change, he becomes more respectful to females and he shows his regret about the ill-treatment that Celie suffered from because of patriarchy and violence. The transformation of men and the development in women's status in this novel predicts a better future for black society.

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Résumé

Ce travail de recherche traite la situation de « femelle noire » dans sa société, en s'appuyant sur « Le couleur pourpre », Roman de l'écrivain AllisseWoken, Dans lequel plusieurs difficultés s'exposent, telle que :

La violence, domestique, Le racisme, Le sexisme.

Ainsi, cette étude montre la solidarité et la collaboration féminine, et le rôle qu'elles jouent dans le processus de la libération de « Sily » l'héroïne de l'histoire.

Dans cette recherche, nous essayerons d'éclaircir les circonstances pénibles qui rencontrent les prunes et les efforts qu'elles déposent, pour faire d'eux mêmes des personnes fortes, nobles, et bénéfiques dans la société, entièrement comme l'homme.

ملخص

هذا البحث يناقش وضعية الانثى السوداء في مجتمعها و يتحرى مقاومة التي يقوم بها اناث رواية "اللون البنفسجي" للكاتبة اليس وكر من خلال مواجهة سلسلة من الصعاب مثل العنف المنزلي , التمييز الجنسي و العنصري. بالإضافة الى ذلك هذه الدراسة المقدمة تفتقي اثر التكتل و التعاضد النسوي على تطور و تحرر البطلنة "سيلي". هذا البحث يحاول كشف الظروف الصعبة التي تعيشها اناث " اللون البنفسجي", و ابرز العوامل المساعدة التي ضافرت اعادة بناء الذوات المحطمة , و انشفاق الاناث المضطهدات و تحديهن للبنية الاجتماعية الذكورية في المجتمع الاسود.