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# Feminism in the Twentieth Century Afro-American Novel: A Special Reference to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)

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## **Dedication (I)**

For the pure spirit of my father.

To the reason behind my success, to the dearest person who works hard and sacrifices in order to see me in this place, to the lovely person ever, my mother.

To my sisters and brother.

To my second family.

**Zineb**

## **Didication (II)**

It is my genuine gratefulness and warmest regard that I dedicate this work to my family.

To my fiance who was the encouragement for me.

To my colleagues.

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## Abstract

*The Color Purple* is written by one of the most prominent figure of Afro-American women's writers, "Alice Walker", the novel pursues the life of a colored woman in the ordinarily dominant society of the early twentieth century. The main character of the novel tries to challenge the circumstances of her society by the support of other female characters that help her to resist the oppression and dominance that she experienced in her life in order to discover herself and find her own voice to control her life by her own. The study aims to investigate the reasons behind the emergence of the Feminist Movement as well as examining black feminist goal behind their writings. Thus, the study is conducted to spot the light on black women writers and how they apply their creativeness through novels which they used to find their own voice and to represent themselves in their society through presenting the different situations of oppression they experienced with their society through their fictional characters. Hence, the feminist theory is used to explore the major themes of the novel. Eventually, the study reveals that the author of the novel "Alice Walker" uses the epistolary form to involve the reader within her characters to allow him to understand well how black women are oppressed in their society during that time.

**Key words:** Dominance, Epistolary Form, Feminist Movement, Oppression.

## Table of Content

Dedication (I).....	I
Didication (II).....	I
Acknowledgments .....	II
Abstract.....	III
Table of Content .....	IV
General Introduction.....	1
Background of the Study .....	1
Statement of the problem.....	1
Aim of the Study.....	1
Research Questions.....	2
Research Hypothesis.....	2
Research Methodology .....	3
Significance of the Study.....	3
Structure of the Dissertation .....	4

### Chapter One : Theoretical Foundations

Introduction .....	8
1. Feminism and the Feminist Theory .....	8
1.1.Gender and Feminism.....	10
2. Twentieth Century Characteristics .....	12
2.1.Critical History of Feminism.....	12
2.1.1.First Wave Feminism.....	13
2.1.2.Second Wave Feminism.....	14
2.1.3.Third Wave Feminism.....	15
3. The Features of the Twentieth Century Literature .....	17
3.1.Finding a Female Literary Tradition.....	18
3.2.African American Women Writing.....	20
3.2.1.Features of African American Women's Writings.....	22
3.2.2.Representative of African American Women Writing.....	23
Conclusion.....	24

### Chapter Two: The Feminist Movement in US

Introduction .....	28
1. Black Feminism and Racism .....	28

1.1.Beginnings and the Black Representations.....	28
1.2.Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience.....	31
1.3.Feminism and Racism.....	33
1.4.Black Women and Feminism.....	34
2. Oppression of Black Women and Black Feminism in the Twentieth Century .....	36
2.1.Controlling Images of Black Womanhood.....	36
2.2Culture of Dissemblance.....	39
Conclusion.....	40

### **Chapter Three: Black Feminism in Alice Walker's The Color Purple**

Introduction .....	43
1. Alice Walker and The Color Purple .....	43
1.1.Alice Walker's Biography.....	43
1.2.Male Domination in The Color Purple.....	46
1.3.Gender and Sexuality in The Color Purple.....	48
2. The Color Purple and Black Feminism .....	51
2.1.Heterosexism and Controlling Images.....	51
2.2.Sexism in The Color Purple.....	52
2.3.Culture of Dissemblance.....	53
Conclusion.....	55
General conclusion .....	57
Works cited.....	60
ملخص.....	64
Résumé .....	65

## **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

### Background of the Study

The feminist movement has emerged first in Europe, then it has moved to the United States (Cavedon). The movement which is known for sharing the same idea between women is looking for equal rights between males and females. First, the concern was on the political issues. Later on, it has spread to look for racial, gender, and hierarchical rights (Beasley, Gender 18). Then the issue moved to literature which is the topic that this dissertation will tackle.

Women literature can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, women were not allowed to write. For this reason they used to write under the name of male writers. During the second phase as they gained the right to vote, they got the chance to write under their real names with their own perspectives to address their problems within their society and try to solve them (Desta). Yet, it is the case for the selected author, Alice Walker and her novel *The Color Purple*.

### Statement of the problem

Our research problem is related to the issue of racism and oppression of black American females in the American society, in addition to their feminist struggle for freedom and equality against a patriarchal community. We attempt to discover how feminism is represented in the Black American society in the twentieth century through analyzing Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*.

### Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to show how the selected novelist Alice Walker has written her novel *The Color Purple* from black feminist point of view. In other words, how she



represents the suffering of black females in the American society during the twentieth century and the impact of gender, class, race oppressions on their lives through her characters.

## Research Questions

This research attempts to ask the following questions:

- How was Feminism represented in the African American society during the twentieth century in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*?
- What is feminism and how it has helped in shaping the black female writers thought?
- How did African American females shape a Feminist Movement and how they resisted the oppression imposed upon them during the twentieth century?
- To what extent has Alice Walker succeeded in portraying her main character, Celie, as a black feminist woman in US society?

## Research Hypothesis

These questions in return, led us to formulate the following hypotheses:

- The black female writers resist to the American society's oppression by establishing a Feminist Movement and finding a female literary tradition.
- *The Color Purple* is written to represent the status of women in the twentieth century, and to show how black females corporate together to resist male domination and the oppression they faced within their society.
- Alice Walker has succeeded in portraying her characters as a black female in US society during the twentieth century.

## Research Methodology

The Triangle Methodology is used to conduct the present research. Each has its advantages and drawbacks. The thematic based approach is used to give a clear overview about the issue of slavery in Alice Walker's novel. Also, the historical approach will be used to examine the social and political issues during the twentieth century. Also, one of the most well-known approaches for carrying out is data collection, which goes through the following trends to the data analysis, starting by: Reading Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, many times and watching the movie, in addition to that browsing the World Wide Web to find various information and articles concerned with the object of the present research, using the descriptive technique in data analysis.

## Significance of the Study

The present study attempts to discuss the different themes of the novel, which are derived from the lives of Black females and how Alice Walker relates her experience as a black female in the American society to her novel, and how she uses the epistolary form to involve the reader of the story within her characters in order to understand more how the black females are abused and oppressed in the American society during the twentieth century. Hence, this research attempts to spot the light on the problem of gender, sexuality, racism, and oppression that has been imposed on the Black females and its effect on the African American literature.

The selected novel has been analyzed by many researchers. The First one was Denik Fajar Darmawanti (2012) from Muhamadiyah University titled *African American women's suffering in Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982) novel: A Feminist Approach*. In this study, the researcher analyzed the novel to express how the Black women suffered from the American society because of White and Black men. The second researcher was

Rita F. Abu Farda (2014) from Middle East University, who conducted the study with the title *From Feminism to Womanism: The Image of Black Woman in The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. This second researcher analyzed the images of the black woman from a Womanist Perspective. The third researcher was Bc. Mariana Karpetová (2017) from Palackého V Olomouci who studied about *The Concept of Black Womanhood in Alice Walker's Fiction*. This researcher has tackled two novels of Alice Walker *The Color Purple* and *Meridian*. However, the analysis of *The Color Purple* focuses on the structure of the novel as well as analyzing the female characters, in particular, Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug. Based on the previous researchers, we think that this study is different from others. Therefore, we attempt to analyze Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* from a Feminist perspective. The analysis tackles the main themes of the novel that are a part of the Black females' lives, as well as examining the main female characters of the novel and the importance of the use of the epistolary form, in addition to investigating the relationship between the author and her novel.

A primary concern of this research is to discuss racism, sexism, and different oppression issues toward black female Americans and their effect on the African American literature. Yet, it examines the way feminism is represented in the black American society during the twentieth century in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into three chapters: two theoretical chapters whereas the third one is practical. The first chapter is about the Feminist theory and its impact on female writers who based their works on investigating women issues, starting by analyzing the possible definitions to the word Feminism and how the feminist theory coexisted as well as how Feminism is related to gender. It is an overview of what it is going to be discussed in

the following chapters by giving the different stages that Feminism goes on and how it has helped in shaping the African American females literary tradition.

The second chapter is theoretical too, but it examines more social issues of Black females in the American society, pointing out the struggles of the black females, who had to engage themselves with feminist ideology, as well as their fighting to get rid of patriarchy. Also, representing the importance of the Seneca Falls Declaration in shaping a Black Feminist movement. Then the concern lies on what African Americans experienced within their society from slavery, sexism, racism which led them to resist and tried to find their own movement which fights against the oppression imposed upon them.

The third chapter which is the practical part is going to analyze the life of the selected author and her novel. Therefore, the analysis of the author is based on the suffering she experienced in her life, which she portrays in her novel, that it is analyzed through different steps. Starting by the reason why Alice Walker uses the epistolary form in the novel, then, it moves to the different themes that are present in the novel which is derived from the lives of the black females, as well as the analysis of the protagonist and some of other characters. Hence, the feminist theory is applied in the analysis in order to analyze the role of female characters in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* in portraying the African American women status in the American society.

# **Chapter One**

## Chapter One : Theoretical Foundations

Introduction .....	8
1. Feminism and the Feminist Theory .....	8
1.1. Gender and Feminism.....	10
2. Twentieth Century Characteristics .....	12
2.1. Critical History of Feminism.....	12
2.1.1. First Wave Feminism.....	13
2.1.2. Second Wave Feminism.....	14
2.1.3. Third Wave Feminism.....	15
3. The Features of the Twentieth Century Literature .....	17
3.1. Finding a Female Literary Tradition.....	18
3.2. African American Women Writing.....	20
3.2.1. Features of African American Women's Writings.....	22
3.2.2. Representative of African American Women Writing.....	23
Conclusion .....	24

## **Introduction**

This present chapter would tackle the major features that characterized the feminist theory and how it affected the literary outputting of the women who wrote about women's experiences, starting by the different definitions of the word 'Feminism' and then come out with one single definition from which the 'Feminist Theory' coexisted.. Furthermore, this chapter would shed light on the history of feminism and its waves. Finally, it would focus on the female literary tradition and how women created a new way of expression that made their voices heard as women and as artists, especially African American women writers. This would be done by discussing the main representatives of the Black American females writing and their notable features. This first theoretical part of the dissertation provides a general overview of the coming chapters that will be built since the feminist perspectives will be the focus of the study

### **1. Feminism and the Feminist Theory**

The term feminism had been defined by numerous writers, thinkers and scholars all over the last century. When the term Feminism emerged, it attracted not only the elites but also all the categories of society. Therefore, it was defined and seen differently according to each one's background and experience, yet all those definitions can be accepted with regard to the circumstances and the conditions in which they were produced.

Eagleton points that Feminist writers described 'traditional' or 'mainstream' Western thought as 'male stream' thinking and thus it needed to be questioned and put into dispute. Therefore, Feminism is becoming an increasingly accepted part of ordinary social and political discourse. Feminist thinkers regarded feminism as somehow different from the mainstream. They perceived it as innovative, inventive, and rebellious. In particular, they

viewed their works as attending to the significance of sexual perspectives in modes of thought and offering a challenge to masculine bias (3). Therefore, there are multiple definitions of Feminism:

- Feminism appears to offer ethical/moral 'norms' in terms of a critical stance regarding the position of women and envisioning a more desirable state of affairs (Beasley, Feminism 26).
- Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women (qtd. in Beasley, Feminism 27).
- Feminism, essentially, " seeks equal political and social rights for women as compared to men....women have had a **rough deal** because of their sex" (Beasley, Feminism 27).
- Eagleton clarifies that feminist social and political thought is a proposal to include women and the relation of the sexes within the existing theory (11).
- Delmar asserts that the early women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s largely lacked a developed theoretical approach. Hence the movement could assert without much detailed an analysis of the notion of unity among women and regard 'feminism' as a framework which reflected that unity. She argues that feminist thought developed and displayed this notion of unity and attempted to find causes or even a single cause of women's oppression (Beasley, Feminism 20). Thus:

feminist theory is a broad, generalized system of ideas about society; social life, and humanity that was developed from the standpoint of women. It focus on the social, emotional, biological, and psychological experiences of women and society and is female-centered in three primary ways: its investigation starts with the experiences of women in society, women are the central focus of the theory, and it is critical to producing a better world for women (qtd. in Gundy 1).

- Women's Rights Advocacy based on a belief in the equality of the sexes, and its wider use the word refers to everyone who is aware of and striving to bound women's subordination in any way and for any reason (qtd. in Beasley, Feminism 27).

- Feminism is a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex" (Beasley, Feminism 27).

It can be deduced that feminism could be best defined as the theory which seeks equality between men and women in all domains of life and tries to give women voice in patriarchal societies as well as eradicates the thoughts and beliefs that marginalize women.

### 1.1. Gender and Feminism

Generally speaking, people often use the words ' gender' and ' sex' interchangeably. When babies are born, people around them identify their sexes as males or females according to their biographical traits. As soon as their sexes are assigned, their genders are known. Feminism and gender are closely related as feminism discussed and be discussed in relation to gender.

Generally, numerous previous studies defined 'Feminism' as one of the two subfields (gender/sexuality) which can be situated beneath the term gender. It is placed as a subfield of the overall gender/sexuality field within the sections of masculinity and sexuality studies. Beasley argues that gender commonly refers to the social process of dividing up people and social practices along the lines of sexed identities (Beasley, Gender 11).

However, the meaning of gender deferred from one era to another and from one culture to another . According to Beasley, gender ,in the modern west, usually refers to two distinct and separate categories of human beings (the division into men and women) as well as to the division of social practices into two fields while gender in contemporary

western societies, is a strong association between men and public life, between women and domestic life (11).

Yet, the division of male and female can be used in a hierarchical order. The male category is regarded as positive and the female one is regarded as negative. Therefore, Beasley assumes that Gender refers to a binary division (into two categories) of human beings and social practices to the point of division even being construed as oppositional. This can be seen at work in the phrase 'the opposite sex'; the two categories are not merely regarded as distinct and opposed, they are also put into a hierarchy in which one is typically cast as positive and the other is negative (11). Granny Francis et al "note in this setting that a 'buddy' (a word that derived from a brother) is a good thing to have, but no one wants to be a 'sissy' ( derived from sister)" (qtd. In Beasley 11). The binary nature of gender in western society means that the features of one category exist in relation to its supposed opposite. To be a man is to be not a woman and vice versa (Beasley, Gender 12).

Genders are different. However, after the 1960s, gender had become the predominant tendency in western Feminism (Beasley, Feminism 20-21). Beasley explains that such a focus identifies the difference between genders as the starting point for social analysis. Gender distinctions in this setting mean that women have or are identified with particular experiences at some distance from mainstream, supposedly universal presumptions about the world and matters in it (Beasley, Gender 21).

To sum up, feminism and gender are related to each other. Feminism seeks equality between men and woman and thus between the two genders. Preferences between males and females raised gender issues in society and urged those who had feminist views to stand up to the thought which claims that men should have dominance over women.

## 2. Twentieth Century Characteristics

Historically, the term 'the twentieth century' had been used to describe the period between 1901 to 2000. This period witnessed substantial changes in the lives of people in terms of politics, economics, technology, society, etc. The twentieth century was rich of events and numerous important ones had happened.

During that period, society was characterized by the hierarchical order, in which it was divided into upper, middle, and lower class. Also, studies show that in this period women sought the right to vote, which was referred to us as the suffrage movement (1903), after that women started looking for emancipation, because they felt that they were qualified in all aspects of life, and that had happened during the absence of males who were at war (20<sup>th</sup> Century Historical Background and Social Situation).

Thus, the twentieth century was a century of emancipation for women. it brought them freedom and numerous rights like the right to work. In other words, in the nineteenth century, women were no more restricted to domestic spheres rather they went out to the places that were meant for men and occupied them asking for their own rights.

### 2.1. Critical History of Feminism

Feminism can be loosely described as a critical stance which is considered with the critique of misogyny and the superiority and centrality of men. Yet, it has a critical history that started by the critique of the convention of the 'norms'. Beasley, however, asserts that feminism operates not as a mere description or analysis of "what is given, but from the point of view skepticism" (16). As Bev Thiele says, "feminists consider that social and political theory was, and for the most part still is, written by men, for men, and about men" (qtd. in Beasley, Gender 16).

Therefore, feminism considered to be a critical stance that focuses on the notion of a woman to replace it as a centre of the stage. Beasley says that "Feminism not only decanters the usual assumptions about what is central and what is at the margins, but also shifts the subject of that analysis, in that the action of a woman is placed centre stage" (Beasley, Gender 16). However, The history of Feminism is divided into three diacritical periods:

### **2.1.1. First Wave Feminism**

The first wave feminism asked for equality and social changes of women. "It was the first recognized movement of women for equal treatment and for a society that must become aware of the special needs and desire of women which are not limited to the important question of suffrage" (Kahle 3).

Many people supported the idea that feminism came with. Emma Willard (1787-1870) was the first woman to say of the social change of the role of women with her book *Plan for Improving Female Education*. Willard wanted to ensure that women in society were treated equally with men (Kahle 4).

Women before the first wave feminism had no rights as Kahle pointed that the situation of women before the Women's Rights Movement was different from the current situation:

They weren't even allowed to sign a will or a contract and they had no control over their wages. It is said that there was no need for them to control their wages because they were supported to leave their jobs early in order to marry men who could provide economic security (4).

Earlier, women had no civil status under the law; they were pronounced civilly dead upon marriage or remained legal minors if they did not marry; they were not even allowed to sign a will or a contract; they had no control over their wages, in fact, they were supposed to leave their jobs in order to marry a man who could provide economic security. Women at that period were less educated "It is claimed that women were by nature physically frail and mentally limited" (qtd. in Kahle 4).

Showalter asserts that their appropriate place was at home and their role was defined as "instruments of spiritual and moral refinement", they existed to ennoble and spiritualize men. Therefore, "The first wave of Feminism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was marked by its critique of dominant Western thinking of the time, that is, its critique of Liberalism" (Kahle 4). Kahle also clarifies that First wave feminists remarked that women were regarded as 'irrational creatures', were not allowed to vote, own property once married, and had little legal control over their children or their bodies (4).

### **2.1.2. Second Wave Feminism**

This wave was strongly criticized by several universal ideologies like the Liberal, the Marxist, and the Socialist Feminists, in addition to the Radical Feminists. It began in the 1960s and 1970s. Beasley, Tong, Bryson et al clarify that there are many accounts of these several types of feminism, which clarifies how they have been characterized. these standards 'had' an emancipatory orientation, Ferguson said that these standards of feminism focused on a compensatory reversal in which masculine bias was exposed and women's theorizing and activities were reduced from obscurity (Beasley, Gender 19).

This wave sought to change the social traditions that neglected and led to marginalize women. In this sense, it aimed to provide them with a part in society. However, the second wave commentators criticized the universal standards of liberalism more than their sisters

of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but it did not disclaim all its notions (Beasley, Gender 19).

Thus, the feminists of the second wave according to Beasley may be seen as linked to a modernist frame of reference on a number of grounds (19). First, they all share the same mode of analysis which was related to power and oppression of societies that discovered the key mechanism and truth about power. In general, their aim was to throw the macro (large scale) structures of power that oppress women and other subordinate groups (Beasley, Gender 19). Second, Beasley asserts that the power here can be understood in case if it applied by second-wave feminism such as 'patriarchy' and 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Second wave feminism from the 1960s and 1970s till this day, offered a theory about the truth of power, in particular men's systematic power as a group over women as group. That is more precise words, 'men have power' (19). Third, this wave, also, sought to overthrow power, and to overthrow men's authority.... Instead of accepting the mainstream Liberal universals of the 'individual', 'the human' and 'the reason', second wave feminists expanded and altered them to accept the reason and individual specificity of women as declared by Beasley (19).

Second wave feminism was a period in which many women started to ask for their rights for equal life among the members of the society. It addressed serious issues including sexuality, family and work. Second-wave feminism also gave much emphasis to certain issues related to violence and rape, and caused a remarkable changes in custody laws and divorce law.

### **2.1.3. Third Wave Feminism**

The third Wave Feminism emerged in the mid-1990s and lasted until the present day. It strived to give women respect and recognition in society more precisely, it tended to

fight sexual harassment in work places. third-wave feminists tackled topics related to individualism and diversity and aimed to reformulate the concept of feminism. Astrid Henry states that the term 'third wave' has frequently been used to point out a generational differences among feminists (3). Henry in her book *Not My Mother's Sister* represents that for the new generation of feminists who have been given the title 'third-wave', feminism appeared like "a universe of same-age peers". Henry also sheds the light on Naomi Wolf, a key spokesperson for this new generation, words who said in 1991 of the third wave "It would need to be, as all feminist waves are, peer-driven: no matter how wise a mother's advice is, we listen to our peers" (9). Also, she points out that Wolf suggests that there is power to be in a peer-driven movement (9). Moreover, it is possible to say that the 'third wave' feminism emerged as a reaction to the failure of the second wave feminism as Beasley clarifies:

These 'third-wave' Liberal Feminists (sometimes called 'post-feminists') argue that the 1960s and the 1970s women's movement and those which continue to adhere to its agenda are inclined to overestimate social obstacles and are disinclined to admit women's own responsibility for their lives and status (32). Thus Beasley asserts that Third-wave Liberal feminists, some of whom are sometimes described it as 'anti-feminists' instead, argued that women must take individual responsibility and not hide behind a group status as 'victims'. Therefore Beasley adds that "this amounts to a strong return to the individualism of mainstream Liberalism" (32). The writers of this mainstream may be seen in a feminist position in so far as they still claim the equality of men and women, but their conceptualization for women's inequality emphasizes more on individuals, more particularly "in individual women than social discrimination" (32). To sum up, third wave feminism had an entirely different way of dealing with women issues than the second wave did, it addressed deep matters that surrounded women's life.

### 3. The Features of the Twentieth Century Literature

Like any other century, the twentieth century had some features and characteristics that distinguished it from others. Especially in novels which discussed serious events related to the most notable events during that time.

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by the twentieth century literature, in which it is a term that can be traced back to "different genres *poetry, drama, fiction, and criticism* reveals unmistakably a convergence of concerns and a choice of not - too- divergent artistic strategies" (Bhatanagar 2). However, the twentieth century English literature can be described as one unit of writing that consisted of different parts which were quest for seeking self-realization, more overt presentation of the outside world, themes and preoccupations, Alienation, lack of belonging, in which many research articles clarified that literature consisted of the before mentioned parts (Bhatanagar 2).

People in the twentieth century, the Edwardian period, were seeking for mend and health treatment. Consequently, some have focused on these social issues and discussed it in creative works, which is novels such as H.G.Wells, Galsworth, Arnold Bennet. The novels at that time was characterized by realism which discussed realistic facts of the society, in addition to love and romance which came as a reaction to realism, it concentrated on the material values of life, adventure, and romance. Moreover, the use of stream of consciousness technique, that was first used by William James, as it is argued "human consciousness is something fluid; it is an unbroken current of feelings, impressions, fantasies, half-formed thoughts and awareness in general.... He may be living through an experience of the past or fantasies about the future" (20th Century Novel Characteristics).

The aforementioned characteristics led the writers of that period to establish new literary tradition, especially the case of the twentieth century women.

### 3.1. Finding a Female Literary Tradition

The feminist writers during the history challenged many social and political standards regarding women's issues women's suffrage in patriarchal society, women's call for her rights etc. In this regard, Virginia Woolf during the 1930s declares upon the challenges that she faced with her fellows female at the beginning of the century where she commented on how the society's convictions and restrictions were behind the boundaries the female writers like her and many of her contemporaries suffered from in which she notes:

although women had been writing for centuries the subjects they had written about and even the style in which they wrote was often dictated not by their own creative vision, but by standards imposed upon women by society in general (Bomarito and Hunter 4: 445).

Despite the challenges that happened in the first half of the twentieth century such as the right to vote, the fight for reproductive rights and the opportunities women gained during this period, women writers found themselves restricted to express their own opinions on matters related to women's rights , like what have been pointed in many of Elaine Showalter essays detailing the history of women's writing in the twentieth century, "several decades before women would completely break the mold of respectability under which they felt compelled to write" (Bomarito and Hunter 4: 445).

Many female writers raised by the emergence of the feminist movement in the early twentieth century, according to Bomarito and Hunter those female writers, "began to explore new modes of expression, focusing increasingly on issues that were central to their existence as women and as artists" (4: 445). Additionally, by the beginning of the second wave feminist movement, women artists started to create new expressions to openly

include, as well as solemnize the power and experiences they gained as women. Some distinctive works that helped women to awake their feminine consciousness were:

works such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1971), and others by authors like Germaine Greer, Gloria Steinem, and Marilyn French . . . , paving the way for later writers to explore the reality of women's experience in their writings openly and freely (Bomarito and Hunter 4: 445)

However, during the 1960s, female's literary works started by focusing on involving the female writers' viewpoints, concentrating on issues such as race and gender, sexuality and personal freedom taking centre stage (Bomarito and Hunter 4: 445). Bomarito and Hunter say that these years also witnessed the emergence of feminist literary theorists, many of whom set about redefining the canon, arguing for the inclusion of women writers who had been marginalized by mainstream academia in the past (4: 445).

Recently, women writers began writing about other gender issues like the skin Color differences. Women writers who established new feminine stereotypes were pointing out as dropouts and called 'vulgar' or even 'frigid' in the case of Simon de Beauvoir. Though, many of them came out with new ways of expression, as Bomarito and Hunter mentions that many of them persisted in exploring new ways and expression, and poets such as, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and others continued to write works using their experience of the struggle they faced as authors who could choose, according to Showalter " to write badly and be patronized or to write well and be attacked " (qtd. in Bomarito and Hunter 4: 446).

Ultimately, the female writers created new ways of expressing thoughts. To put it differently, They broke the norms and standards of the female authorship. In which they started to deal with issues related to women, issues such as sexuality when "by the 1990s, critical and academic opinion had shifted and works such as Eve Ensler's *The Vagina*

*Monologues*, which deals directly with women's physical and emotional experiences, were hailed as both innovative and literary" (Bomarito and hunter 4:446).

Female Afro-American writers also faced the same restrictions from patriarchal system. Although they had positive critics about their works because of their good presentation of their case of gender, culture, and race. Many of them accused to threaten the political social and economic standards even though there were female African-American writers in the beginnings of the twentieth century were outside the American feminist discussions because of both black and white male dominance (Bomarito and hunter 4:446).

Over time women explore a new way of expression and genre. Bomarito and Hunter declare that women writers today participate fully in both the creative and scholarly process. Feminist literary theory, women's mode of writing and expressing, and women's studies are now established areas of academic environments, and women are exacting continued and growing control over their own literary and social spheres (4: 446). Although many of female writers work of art had been welcomed by many members of the society specially the female members, many critics outraged against many female writers for their challenge to discuss such topics in their writings.

### **3.2. African American Women Writing**

After the civil war that happened in America that called for the equal rights for both the white and the black citizens, the black American Literature came to life.

The term "black American Literature" can be traced back to the works that have been written by black people of African descent in the United States (Andrews 1). First, the oral tradition was used by African American writers. Later, the written forms were explored; forms such as novels, poems, and plays. Furthermore, themes of racism,

oppression, abuse, were explored in African American literature which illustrate the difficult position of black people in the American society (Andrews 2-7).

In the case of African American women writing, Mitchell and Taylor points out that, the tradition of black women literature was first used by Lucy Terry who "inaugurated a vital and vibrant literary tradition" (1). In her earliest poem Bars Fight which is a narrative that recite the attack of Native Americans in 1746, Deerfield, Massachusetts. Terry helped "establish the known beginnings of African American literature both as a poet and as historian" (Mitchell and Taylor 15-16).

The history of African American women writers shows that early African American women writers used various genres such as poetry, autobiography, journalism, fiction, non-fiction (Mitchell and Taylor 7). Also, as it is explained by Foster and Davis in *Early African American women's Literature* :

were it not for the scraps of manu-script, brief mentions in histories and diaries, a few books and pamphlets saved and later revealed the absence of texts by African American women could lead the unimaginative and ungenerous to believe that before the Civil War, African American culture was oral only (qtd. in Mitchell and Taylor 7).

According to Mitchell and Taylor, the Harlem Renaissance was the turning point for African American literature (7). It is known as the New Negro Renaissance, the Negro renaissance or the New Negro movement, as Gates and Mackay (929) agree with Wintz and other scholars that this movement begins in New York's district Harlem, where a group of African Americans moved to the north and settled there (qtd. in Kirshke 5).

"The Harlem Renaissance, characterized by the growing diversity of African Americans and their interests, is considered one of the most vibrant of artistic movements in American history" (Mitchell and Taylor 7). Yet, many themes have emerged. Writers focused on some of those themes such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston and many others, where they focused on the theme of the attempt to reclaim the African American past, and African heritage (Wintz 14-18).

Taylor points out that during the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, African American writers have been strongly affected by the Great Migration which can broadly be defined as "the relocation of more than 6 million African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the north" (Great Migration). And the American Civil Rights movement that can be loosely described as "a mass popular movement to secure for African American equal access and opportunities for the basic privileges and rights of US" (Davis). In an effort to abolish segregation, racism, and black American writers used these previous issues in their literary works (qtd. in Mitchell and Taylor 71). As any piece of art, the African American literature sought to address serious issues related to black Americans. In an attempt to help them in their way for freedom and equality the African American literature was a great message not only to the American citizens but rather, to the world's citizens as a whole.

### **3.2.1. Features of African American Women's Writings**

Many black Women Writers have included the experiences and ways of life within their works, as Smith Foster argues "African American Women Writers have used the word as both a tool and a weapon to correct, to create, and to confirm their visions of life as it was and as it could become" (qtd. in Mitchell and Taylor 1). Therefore, their works are generally stereotypical, but discussing the same issues of gender, sisterhood and other issues of African American society. Yet, "spirituality, religion, and morality are recurring themes in.... African American Women's literature" (Mitchell and Taylor 25). Another

significant characteristic of African American female writing is the importance of communication as well as the theme of freedom (Mitchell and Tylor 25-26).

### 3.2.2. Representative of African American Women Writing

The early African American Literary period outputted some important black American female writers. As it has been mentioned before, the first African American women who wrote and published their creative works was Lucy Terry and Phillis Wheatley. Another significant Black female writer is Harriet Wilson, who wrote *Our Nig* (1859), which was the first novel published in the United States. The novel portrays the difficult life of free black in the North (African American Literature).

It has been argued that Harriet Jacobs who wrote *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), can be considered as a notable female writer. It is an autobiography by an absconder young mother slave illustrates her slavery life as well as the way she became free with her children (Brent 6-183).

Many other writers who had been introduced in the civil Rights period. For instance, Gwendolyn Brooks, who is considered the first black to win the Pulitzer Prize for her work *Amnie Allen*. In addition to Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni who contributed to the same era for poetry too (African American Literature).

It has commonly been assumed that Alice Walker and Toni Morrison became the most prominent black female writers from 1970s to today. They influenced American as well as World's literature. Both of them won the Pulitzer Prize, and their works turned into movies. Also, Morrison took the Nobel Prize in literature, she was the first black American Woman author to get that honour (Surber).

## Conclusion

This theoretical background worked as a preface for the coming sections of this thesis. It contains some aspects that will help in displaying the feminist movement of the twentieth-century literature. This chapter introduced the meaning of the feminist theory and Feminism, as well as examining the reason behind its emergence. In addition, it included the conceptualization of Gender and feminism and a brief overview of the history of feminism. Moreover, in this section, the three waves of feminism are presented in order to show the aim of the feminist activists in each period. In the end, the highlight was on the female literary tradition in which the new way of expression used by women to impose their voices in society is illustrated.

In the coming chapter, the focus will be on the American Feminist movement especially the Black Feminism and the representation of black women in the American society.

## **Chapter Two**

## Chapter Two: The Feminist Movement in US

Introduction .....	28
1. Black Feminism and Racism .....	28
1.1.Beginnings and the Black Representations.....	28
1.2.Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience.....	31
1.3.Feminism and Racism.....	33
1.4.Black Women and Feminism.....	34
2. Oppression of Black Women and Black Feminism in the Twentieth Century .....	36
2.1.Controlling Images of Black Womanhood.....	36
2.2Culture of Dissemblance.....	39
Conclusion .....	40

## Introduction

The second theoretical chapter of this dissertation will deal with the struggle of Black women to engage themselves with the feminist ideology that has been developed by both upper and middle-class white women, as well as fighting to eradicate the patriarchal system. Mentioning the turning point in the lives of Black women, which is the Seneca Falls Declaration, and the persons who stand for Black women rights in it including Fredrick Douglass and Sojourner Truth.

Therefore the chapter will tackle the status that Black female experienced as sexism, slavery, racism, and how those factors led them to engage in feminist struggles against the oppression imposed upon them by the American society, through different controlling images, and how they react to it.

## 1. Black Feminism and Racism

### 1.1. Beginnings and the Black Representations

**The Seneca Falls Declaration** came as a result of the American women's movement. It is considered the single most important document that "was adopted at a meeting called to consider the **social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman**, which assembled at the Wesleyan Chapel at Seneca Falls, New York, on July 19, 1948" (Schneir 76). About three hundred black men and women were present at the meeting, thus, twelve resolutions were adopted. However, the most notably the one which confirms that:

all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority (Schneir 81).

That is, **The Seneca Falls Declaration** gave the American woman the right to be equal in position with man.

Fredrick Douglass (1817-1895) was a frequent member of The Seneca Falls Declaration. He was born as a slave and had been free for ten years to the Seneca Falls meeting. Douglass wrote in his autobiography "when the true history of the antislavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages, for the cause of the slave, has been peculiarly woman's cause" (Schneir 83). He adapts himself to the cause of woman's oppression, by observing their agency, devotion, and efficiency in pleading the cause of slave, he says "gratitude for this high service early moved me to give favorable attention to the subject of what is called 'woman right' and caused me to be dominated a woman's –rights man" (Schneir 83).

Schneir states that in The Seneca Falls Declaration Fredrick Douglass argued effectively in favor of full political rights for women, and during the following decades, he was a frequent participant in many other woman's rights conventions. Most American organs of opinions reacted to the founding of a woman's movement with a storm of ridicule and abuse (83). This result may be explained by the fact that Douglass was born as slave and witnessed the slave experience which created a sense of sympathy to black women issues.

The second struggle against racism and sexism was launched by Sojourner Truth. It was believed that she is the mother of black feminism and the one who inspired all black women to launch a second struggle. Sojourner Truth (1795-1883) was born as a slave in New York and get her freedom when she was thirty-two years old. In 1841, after she works in New York as a local for few years, she begins

traveling up and down the land certifying to the guilt that imposed on her people. Her name was Isabella, and after her freedom, she took the symbolic name Sojourner Truth (Schneir 93).

Schneir claims that Sojourner Truth consistently and actively identified herself with the feminist case from the early years of the American woman's movement. She took part in the first National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850- the only black women present. Massachusetts was the center of abolitionist affection and the million and a half black women of the South still in slavery were not overlooked by the convention representatives. A resolution was assumed to refer to these women \_ "the most grossly wronged and foully outraged of all women" (93). A year after Sojourner was called to participate in a women's convention in Akron, Ohio, in which Frances D. cage was the president, who said later that some women of the convention were not happy with the presence of Truth and try to prevent her from delivering a speech, for fear that "every newspaper in the land will have our cause mixed with abolition" (ibid). As Schneir represents how cage described the scene "slowly from her seat in the corner rose Sojourner....'Don't let her speak!' gasped half a dozen in my ear. She moved slowly and solemnly to the front.... I rose and announced 'Sojourner Truth' "(94), and after delivering her speech, Cage was surprised by her magical words and recorded it:

....Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or ever mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! Ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm.... I could work as much and eat as a man.... and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? (Schneir 94-95).

Sojourner speech was influential to the American Women's movement at that time it arose the awareness of the women to have the spirit to fight over themselves.

## 1.2. Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience

The concept of sexism persisted even after the Civil Rights Movement. Although the goal of the Civil Rights Movement was to secure legal rights for African Americans which resulted in the biggest effect, sexism continues to appear in the American society as oppressive and threatening as racism, patriarchy, or institutionalized sexism (Hooks 214).

Sexism was brought from Europe by the early white American fathers. Black American society used to have the ideology that women are the ones who must work not men "the acknowledgment of females as the transmitters of slavery creates a difference. This difference, though, is not a gender difference, but a sex difference based on the female's ability to give birth" (Patton 9).

Early on, black slave traders centered their focus on importing workers because of the lack of labor force. The need for black workers led white female immigrants to engage in sexual relationships with black male slaves to produce new workers. By the year 1664, in Maryland, the first anti-amalgamation law was passed to curtail sexual relationships between white women and enslaved black men (Hooks 15). The law declared that the offspring of relationships between white women and black men are free, however, any child a black slave woman procreates is legally slave regardless of the race of her mate, eventually, they are the property of the black female slave's owner. Planters became aware of the value of the female slaves, they could increase their economic gain by breeding black slave women (Hooks 16).

Amanda Berry Smith, a nineteenth century black missionary, reports after her visit to the African communities that black women are whom to do all the hard work unlike the men and boys who participate only in easy work, Amanda describes a scene were 'a great, big man' is walking having nothing in hands but a 'cutlass' and his wife behind him with

her 'great big child' in her back and carrying a load on the head, her husband would never think of helping her because for him it is her duty to do all that (Hooks 16-17).

Black women were as a target for white male slavers because they were adapted to perform multiple field works besides their work as householders. Women slaves could not actually resist the capture at the hands of thieves and kidnappers as a consequence the ships' load was almost women, "female slaves made up one-third of the human cargo abroad most ships" (Hooks 17). Female slaves were not considered a threat for white slavers as much as male slaves whom slavers feared being alongside with them, for that they were placed in chains to avoid any unexpected reaction. Therefore, white slavers were only in relationships to the female slaves whom they could freely abuse and exercise all kinds of brutalization. Slaves aboard ships experienced almost all kinds of torture: stripped of their clothing, beaten, branded, lashed, raped, and endured a barbaric nature of childbearing concerning female slaves. Tribes were as hell for Africans who were transported to be enslaved in the new world (Hooks 18). The various tortures the slaves endured on board the ships fulfilled the goal of white slavers to repress African people's freedom and force them to adopt the slave identity among them (Hooks 19). As happiness was shown on African faces, white people assumed that slaves were pleased of their arrival at the American land, however, African slaves were only feeling relief that the slave ship experience they have endured has ended (Hooks 20).

Sexist historians and sociologists argue that the most vicious and de-humanizing impact of slavery on black people was that black men were bared of their male identity. As Hooks states in her book: "white men effectively emasculated them, reducing them to an effeminate state.... that the worse that can happen to a man is that he be made to assume the social status of woman"(20) which led to the dissolution of the black family structure. The subjugation of women though reinforced the development of black male's self-

concept. Therefore, the subjugation of women appears when they are forced to do the work of men in addition to their feminine role, unlike men who have only one role to play (Hooks 21).

### 1.3. Feminism and Racism

American people at public schools were taught a falsified history. They were given unauthentic information about the historical events and replaced them by romantic images of 'the new world', 'the American dream', America was pictured as the place where all people black and white live peacefully together "... America as the great melting pot where all races come together as one" as Bell Hooks states in her book *Ain't I A Woman* (119).

American women were brainwashed to accept racial imperialism formed as white supremacy and sexual imperialism formed as patriarchy, "teaching us to accept racial polarity in the form of white supremacy and sexual polarity in the form of male dominance" (Hooks 120). Thus, women were treated as inferiors in all domains.

Hooks argues that There is one procedure that helped in the success of such inculcation. When we repetitively deal with the wickedness that oppresses us both consciously and unconsciously way (120). In which they teach black children to be characterized with the American government that according to them it loves the students who recite the vow of devotedness to the American flag; in other words, they are forced to love the government which alienated them, as Hooks gives an example of how her white teacher was teaching them:

unknowingly she implanted in our psyches a seed of the racial imperialism that would keep us forever in bondage.... she was teaching black children to embrace the very system that oppressed us, that she encouraged us to support it, to stand in awe of it, to die for it (120-121).

The previous notion affected American women, regardless of their knowledge, race, class, to form a movement. These women have groveled to "sexist and racist socialization" which they had learned to trust the history that shaped by an oppressed system which was more obvious anywhere than it was in the later feminist movement. From which an American movement has established to fight for women's rights, the movement yet formed from both middle and upper class, but they were not looking for the equal rights with men, "they were not merely advocating social equality with men. They demanded a transformation of society, a revolution, a change in the American social structure" (Hooks 121).

#### **1.4. Black Women and Feminism**

The black female women, during the nineteenth century, were considered by the white society to be marginalized (Hooks 159). Hooks, yet, points out that in 1852, when Sojourner Truth attended the second annual convention of the women's rights movement in Akron, Ohio, when white women consider that black speaking in public is unfitting and yelled, "Don't let her speak! Don't let her speak! Don't let her speak!". But, Sojourner Truth ignored them and proved later on that woman can work alongside with men (159-160). Once, after a white man came against the idea that spoke about the equal rights for women stating that women are too weak to take place in male's labor, yet, Sojourner Truth was allowed to stage to respond to him, telling her audience:

....Dat man ober dar say dat women need to be helped into carriages....and ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm!... I could work as much as any man...., and bear de lash as well\_ and ain't I a woman? (Hooks 160).

Hooks argues that not only the black woman Sojourner Truth who advocated social equality for women. Her way of speaking publicly in favor of women's rights despite public disapproval and resistance paved the way for other well-thought black women to express their views. Also, Hooks mentions that the American historiographers have

informed by sexism and racism, they have tended to overlook and exclude the effort of black women for the cause of women's rights (160). "White female scholars who support feminist ideology have also ignored the contribution of black women. In contemporary works, like (*The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism*) by Barbara Berg, (*Herstory*) by June Sochenect" (Hooks 160). Also, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no work mentions the black women advocates who fought for women's rights, "Eleanor Flexner's *Century of Struggle*.... remains one of the very few book\_length historical works on the women's rights movement that documents the participation of black women" (Hooks 161). That is, women works were not mentioned in the history of American literature.

Black women were interested in the cause of slavery whereas white women were interested in women's liberation. Therefore, Hooks states that the majority of women who are involved in the contemporary movement toward feminist revolution assume that the white women launched the women's revolution against men's chauvinism and that black women were interested in the cause of slavery and not in women's liberation. They also argue that white women are interested in presiding all the movement that is concerned with women's liberation and this is totally true, yet, their dominance is less a sign of black female disinterest in the feminist struggle than an indication that the public of colonization and racial imperialism have made it historically impossible for black women in the United States to lead a women's movement (161). Hooks argues that Josephine ST. Pierre Ruffin, who is a Black activist engaged herself with white women's organization, but later she calls for making organization that deal with their own issues because she figured out that "black women could not depend on racist white women to encourage them to fully participate in the women's reform movement" (163). These words support the idea that racist white women are not as dependable as black women thought they are.

## 2. Oppression of Black Women and Black Feminism in the Twentieth Century

### 2.1. Controlling Images of Black Womanhood

The black women were depicted to stereotypes of controlling images which are associated to be a part of a generalized ideology of domination. Therefore, Collin asserts that "... Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images" (69). Stereotypes that existed of black women justifying the US Black women's oppression (Collins 69). These dominant ideologies have social controlling images of black womanhood, that reflect the interest of the dominant group in preserving the subordination of black women. Furthermore, as both the black and white women were important to the continuation of slavery, controlling images of black womanhood as well functioned to cover social relations that affected all women (Collins 72).

The first stereotype that is applied to the black women is that of "mammy" \_ the faithful, which is an obedient servant who works in the houses of white people, "created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black Women's long-standing restriction to domestic service". Hence , this image "represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women's behavior.... the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power" (Collins 72). This indicates that black females are a symbol of vileness.

The image of African American women has been aggressively criticized by the Black women intellectuals. Literary critic Trudier Harris's (1982) in her work "*From Mammies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature*" examines notable literary differences in how Black women have been portrayed by others and how they portray themselves, Rhetaugh Dumas (1980) in her work on the difficulties that faced Black

women leaders shows how this stereotype of "mammies" hampered and penalized women executives if they do not appear warm and nurturing (Collins 73).

The big problem is the fact that the black-American women begin to accede to the "mammy" image; in which controlling it influence Black maternal behavior, where the families who are acquainted with the skills needed for black citizens, thus, black mothers who are forced to exhibit a certain behavior in their mummified jobs, tried to transmit it to their children by teaching them the racial hierarchy, in which the black people are beneath white power structures (Collins 73). Yet, Collins clarifies that "by teaching black children their assigned place in white power structures, black women who internalize the mammy image potentially become effective conduits for perpetuating racial oppression" (Collins 73). Thus, the mummies were such a negative effect to the American society.

Another controlling image is created, as Collins argues that the image of the Black "matriarch" created as a second controlling image (74). He adds, "while the mammy typifies the Black mother figure in White homes, the matriarch symbolizes the mother figure in Black houses. Just as the mammy represents the "good" Black mother, the matriarch symbolizes the "bad" Black mother" (75). Hereafter is well represented in the failure of Black children at school because of their mothers' preoccupation in works which is considered the major contributing factor of the failure (Collins 75).

The same as the "mammy" image, the "matriarch" image is a centripetal subject of different ways of oppression. Therefore, the importance of this image lies in explaining the persistence of Black social class outcomes, as Black women follow the matriarchy system in teaching their children the values, the Black children then, do not receive the same nurturing as the white middle-class children, which cause their failure in school (Collins 76).

A third controlling image of Black womanhood which is "the Welfare mother". That is a controlling image elaborated for poor working-class Black females who make use of social welfare benefits to which they are entitled by law" (Collins 78). This image fulfills controlling Black women's fertility in the political and economic context that is an important function to elite groups by describing it to be unnecessary, dangerous and can harm the values of the country the fertility of Black women (Collins 79).

Therefore, the welfare mother image shares some features with the two previous ones. Collins clarifies that, despite the fact that the Welfare mother is characterized as a seamy mother the same as the matriarch, but she is not too bellicose (79). Yet, he says "While the matriarch's unavailability contributed to her children's poor socialization, the welfare mother accessibility is deemed the problem.... The image of the welfare mother represents another failed mammy, one who is unwilling to become 'de mule uh de world' " (79).

The welfare mother image of African American mothers has no male authority upon her. It is racially characterized to be a lazy stereotype as it fails to pass on the work ethic (Collins 79). However, Collins argues that the welfare mother "is typically portrayed as an unwed mother, she violates one cardinal tenet of White, male-dominated ideology: She is a woman alone" (79).

The most significant controlling image in oppressing Black women is "the Jezebel, whore, or hoochie". It is considered to be the central image of Black women's images. This image symbolizes Black female sexuality deviation, that is considered to be aggressive. "Thus, providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women" (Collins 81). This quote clarifies the way White Americans view the Jezebel image of black women.

The previous images have existed among black women in the nineteenth and twentieth century as a form of oppression. It is seen also in the slave narratives and it did not either eradicate the assembly with the sexuality that has been forbidden nor they believe the traditional interpretations of black female sexuality (Carby 38-39), "rather, the cult of true womanhood drew its ideological boundaries to exclude another definition of black women from 'woman' " (Carby 39). Yet, these images show how white male is interesting in defining Black women's sexuality and fertility, going through intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Collins 84).

## 2.2. Culture of Dissemblance

The Black female has reacted to the previous controlling images that has been mentioned before about their sexuality with secrecy and silence. In the history of analyzing the Black female sexuality:

First, the construction of the black female as the embodiment of sex and the attendant invisibility of black women as the unvoiced.... second, the resistance of black women both to negative stereotypes of their sexuality and to the material effects of those stereotypes on their lives; and, finally, the evolution of a "culture of dissemblance" and a "politics of silence" by black women on the issue of their sexuality (Hammond 131-132).

In which the later, the politics of silence, is found to eliminate the previous negative black women's stereotypes of sexuality. In this context, Hine suggests that "rape and the threat of rape influenced the development of a culture of dissemblance among black women." (912). He adds that "by dissemblance I mean the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors" (912).

White people used the aforementioned controlling images to be excusable for the sexual offense. Therefore, Darlene Clark Hine argues that the black women revolt as a reaction to aggressions upon their sexuality by arising a "politic of silence", and a "culture

of dissemblance", in order to "protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives" (Higginbotham 266). As well as rape, economic discrimination that Black women faced also affected the " culture of dissemblance" where they had less hiring prospect than did Black male. For instance, in late 1930, about fifty percent of Black female labor were unskilled and forced to work in factories in Chicago (Hine 913). Hine mentions that Alan H. Spear pointed out that "Negro women were particularly limited in their search for their desired positions. Clerical work was practically closed to them and only a few could qualify as school teachers" (913). Thus, Black female emigrates from the south "out of a desire to achieve personal autonomy and to escape both from sexual exploitation from inside and outside of their families and from the rape and the threat of rape by white as well as black males" (Hine 914). Consequently, it is deduced that black women could not occupy high positions.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter above is more concerned with what it will be discussed in the next practical chapter. Therefore, it tackles the American Feminist movement, in particular, the Black Feminism, and how women are represented in the American society, in addition to the different stereotypes that their society characterized them by it as a form of oppression. Yet, the next chapter will be an analysis of what has been mentioned before in a particular novel. In which the novel is written by Black female writer Alice Walker. The different titles of the chapter will be an analysis of the different themes that have been encountered while reading Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*.

## **Chapter Three**

## Chapter Three: Black Feminism in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Introduction .....	43
1. Alice Walker and <i>The Color Purple</i> .....	43
1.1. Alice Walker's Biography.....	43
1.2. Male Domination in <i>The Color Purple</i> .....	46
1.3. Gender and Sexuality in <i>The Color Purple</i> .....	48
2. <i>The Color Purple</i> and Black Feminism .....	51
2.1. Heterosexism and Controlling Images.....	51
2.2. Sexism in <i>The Color Purple</i> .....	52
2.3. Culture of Dissemblance.....	53
Conclusion .....	55

## Introduction

This practical part of the thesis will analyze the novel of *The Color Purple*. Starting by giving an overview about Alice Walker as an author and how she involves herself within her characters. Then, the analysis will be on the different themes that the novel discusses. Themes that derived from the lives of Black Female which has been discussed in the previous chapter including male dominance, and how is it strongly present in the novel, in addition to heterosexism as a system of oppression which is strongly present regardless the controlling images which are notable, and how the female characters of the novel supported each other to discover oneself and to resist the oppression of the society during that time.

### 1. Alice Walker and *The Color Purple*

#### 1.1. Alice Walker's Biography

In 1944, a girl from sharecroppers' family was born, whose name was Alice Walker. She was the youngest of eight children. When she reached eight she had an accident, when she was playing with her brother, shot her in her right eye, this accident affected Alice walker's psychology and turned her from a social girl into an introvert.

The incident that she had encountered helped her to develop her writing. Yet, she started writing at an early age beginning with memoir 'childhood'. Other stories which she wrote deals with the melancholy that her mother passed, from which she took the idea of the short story *The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff*. In her early writings she always uses first-person narrator "in her little-known children's writing, Walker in many ways takes on her mother's role as a storyteller and preserver of the cultural heritage of the Black South"

(Lauret 6). Regardless the close relationship with her mother, she had a bad experience with her father and brothers which deals with sexism and violence.

Yet her essays and fictions always related to what she had experienced, as Lauret mentions "in the early essays it appears that the domestic abuse she exposes in her fiction had its parallels at home, but the negative portrayal of male family members shifts to more conciliatory tone in the later essays" (6).

As it has mentioned before, the accident that Walker had experienced affected her, and she reported in different essays, until she gets birth to her daughter Rebecca, because she helped her to change that perspective, as Lauret describes "only when her daughter Rebecca years later sees the scar tissue as a 'world' in her mother's eye is the victim redefined as a survivor, and blindness turned into vision" (6-7). The latter helps Walker in passing the bad experience that she faced "it enables Walker to interpret the trauma of being blinded by her brother's as a 'patriarchal wound' like that of women who undergone genital mutilation (Lauret 7). Henceforth, as Walker herself clarifies, "the blinding makes her feel like an outcast, but it also causes her to grow up fast and to study the relationships she sees around her, through observation and reading, but also through writing poems" (qtd. in Lauret 7). Walker used her personal experience as a background for her career.

In 1964, when she traveled to Africa she started to experience the literary and intellectual life. As she studied at Sarah Lawrence, she published her first collection poems '*Once*' which was as a result of another afflictive event, where it became pregnant, then miscarriage her child, therefore, the emotional scar raises her creativeness in writing, as Lauret mentions when Walker tells John O'Brien that: "that week I wrote without stopping....almost all of the poems in *Once*" (7).

During that time, she was already engaged in the Civil Rights Movement which was a turning point in her life as a writer. From 1965 until 1968 she was committed in civil

rights campaigns, and she is hired in Mississippi to teach black history to adults for SNCC, the student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee, which she considered it as a form of activism (Lauret 7-8).

Moreover, Alice Walker moved from the South to North and starts teaching and writing there instead of campaigning in the South. She starts designing courses like the one she designed in White Wellesley College in New England, in which the course was talking about black women's writing including authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Paule Marshall, where "she finds that in this privileged environment the consciousness-raising of students, but primarily of faculty, is badly needed" (Lauret 9). Walker desires to make all black women of their rights by her writings.

In addition to teaching black women's writing, she involved in a Black women writer's group called the Sisterhood. This group is formed to help black women writers to share their ideas, works, discuss political events, etc. Nevertheless, disappointment changes Walker's attention from academic teaching to spending all time in writing (Lauret 9-10).

Alice Walker began getting awards and fellowships from the mid-1960s. The Radcliffe Institute Fellowship which opens her creativeness to write *In Love and Trouble* and *Meridian*. In 1979, she gained Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships from which she works on *The Color Purple* that in 1983 gets Pulitzer Prize and The National Book Award, which later on turned into a movie (Lauret 10).

*The Color Purple* novel is a kind of letters that black abused girl used to send to God. The novel written by using Black southern African American colloquial language, that is the only language that the main character (Celie) knows. Walker used Celie's speech to give her a voice "in Walker's hands, that speech, long regarded as backward and

degraded, becomes a vibrant literary language that gives voice to a girl.... This voice did not come out of nowhere" (Lauret 90). The novel was in epistolary form in which Walker gives the main character the power to express the feelings and thoughts in her own way.

## 1.2. Male Domination in *The Color Purple*

The novel is written in an epistolary form which is used first time in *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson, in which epistolary means that the plot of the novel abloom through reciprocating letters between its main characters. Despite the fact that this technique is the earliest of novel writing but honor goes to Alice Walker who uses it in a special way and technique to debate the delicate issues of that time (Zafar 3).

As her most works, Alice Walker uses the first-person narrator in *The Color Purple*, but it appears through letters alone. The novel was about a fourteen years old girl whose name is Celie. The main character Celie who was raped by her stepfather who she thought that he was her biological father. Yet Celie starts writing letters to God "Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I-aa I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me" (*The Color Purple* 4).

The novel is characterized by male domination and control which is presented through Celie's fear of speaking, instead, she used letters to express her feelings, and emotions toward the other sex, yet the letters were directed to God. The few words at the beginning of the novel reveal Celie's fear and why she favored to write those letters to God "You better not never tell anybody but God. It'd kill your. Mammy" (*The Color Purple* 4).

The main character Celie was abused by her stepfather through rape and violence. He raped her when her mother went to the doctor telling her "You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't.... I cry, He start to choke me, saying you better shut up" (*The Color*

Purple 5). Also, after she get birth to her first baby, he took him while she was sleeping, after that he took her second baby:

He took it. He took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods. Kill this one too, if he can.... He took my other little baby, a boy this time. But I don't think he kilt it. I think he sold it to a man an his wife over Monticello (The Color Purple 6).

Celie was forced to marry Albert who known in the novel by Mr. \_\_\_\_\_? which reveal that she is a slave in a way or another. First, when her stepfather forced her to that marriage by convincing Albert to marry her, by telling him that she can take care of his children and works hard, in addition to obeying him "...She not much of a chook.... She ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean....You can do everything just like you want to ...." (The Color Purple 8-9).

The Black male thought that black women should be beaten in order to obey them. Yet, Celie fears males because they used to deal with her in a violent way. For instance, her stepfather once beats her claiming that she winked at a boy in church, although she tells God in her letters that she fears men and she can't even look at them " I don't even look at men. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them" (The Color Purple 7). Also, Albert incites Harpo to beat his wife Sofia in order to obey him when he complains to him about her attitudes telling him:

You ever hit her? Mr. ??? ast. Harpo look down at his hands. Naw sub, 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. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating (The Color Purple 36-37).

Male dominance can be seen in the role of man in marriage. When Albert had a sexual relationship with Celie, it was characterized by violence and it was not romantic as it should be, as in the following scene:

He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, like? He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep (The Color Purple 78-79).

Nevertheless, there is an acceptance to male domination in the novel. It is foiling to Celie when Albert dominate her, although she accepts that because she believes that her society is used to be as it is in that time, where men used to dominate their wives. For instance, she says about that:

After all the evil he done, I know you wonder why I don't hate him. I don't hate him for two reasons. One, he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him. Plus, look like he trying to make something out of himself (The Color Purple 312).

In spite of the physical abuse she had from him, she is glad to Albert's change that has been marked throughout the novel in which he tries to better himself.

### **1.3. Gender and Sexuality in The Color Purple**

The oppression of Gender sexuality is obvious in the novel as Bernard Bell argues that the novel of The Color Purple "is more concerned with the politics of sex and self than with the politics of class and race" (23-63). The novel is characterized by the sexual violence by the Black male, as Bernard Bell argues to that "its unrelenting, severe attack on male hegemony, especially the violent abuse of black women by black men is offered as a revolutionary leap forward into a new social order based on sexual egalitarianism" (263).

In her novel, Alice Walker plays with her characters by using both male and female gender roles. For example, when Harpo tries to beat Sofia, she does not let him dominate her, and it gets apparent to the reader that Sofia is stronger than Harpo, because when he

tries to beat her she fought with him and beat him too which conveys that she is stronger than him, as shown in the scene:

Next time us see Harpo his face a mess of bruises. His lip cut. One of his eyes shut like a fist. He walk stiff and say his teef ache. I say, What happen to you, Harpo? He say, Oh, me and that mule. She fractious, you know. She went crazy in the field the other day. By time I got her to head for home, I was all banged up. Then when I got home, I walked smack dab into the crib door. Hit my eye and scratch my chin (The Color Purple 37).

In Harpo and Sofia marriage, Alice Walker played with male and female stereotype; in other words, she uses inverted gender roles in which Harpo is characterized by female properties and Sofia is characterized by masculine properties. The notable thing is that both of them are fistful with these stereotypical gender roles in their marriage, but Harpo's father and Celie incite him to dominate her by beating her, and he starts beating her as they insist on him. The pressure makes both Harpo and Sofia look for someone with opposite role who they will be comfortable with. Also, Celie and Albert had opposite gender roles at the end of the novel, and Shug Avery is presented to be more masculine in spite of her feminine body, as Albert describes her "Shug act more manly than most men. I mean she upright, honest. Speak her mind and the devil take the hindmost". But Celie didn't like his idea and complain by mentioning that the properties that he tells are feminine more than to be masculine "Mr.??? think all this is stuff men do. But Harpo not like this, I tell him. You not like this. What Shug got is womanly it seem like to me. Especially since she and Sofia, the ones got it" (The Color Purple 326).

As well as the weak character Celie, Alice Walker presented strong characters in her novel like Shug Avery, Sofia who are Backlashers, independent female, who helped Celie to build a strong personality. Women relationships are distinctively presented theme that Black women writers used to present in their novels, as Collins argues "US Black women writers and filmmakers have explored many themes affecting Black women's

relationships.... Another theme concern's how Black women's relationships can support and renew. Relationships such as those between Celie and Shug in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" (104). Celie discovers her own sexuality by Shug's help:

God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoys 'em a lot more. You can just relax, go with everything that's going, and praise God by liking what you like (*The Color Purple* 223).

Celie, later on, starts to understand herself throughout the novel when Albert tells Celie "Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (*The Color Purple* 238-239), in which she responds to him "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (*The Color Purple* 240). Using Albert comment on Celie shows how the American Society has a patriarchal culture in which Black women withstand as Celie does in the novel.

Walker's used good examples which portraits the presence of stereotypical gender roles within the American society. For instance, when Nettie was in Africa the Olinka tells her that women should not be educated, and they just should be the mothers of their husbands' children:

The Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. When I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something. What can she become? I asked. Why, she said, the mother of his children (*The Color Purple* 171).

Nettie tells Olivia who discovered to be Celie's daughter later, therefore, she makes a comparison between African and American society telling Nettie "When I told her the Olinka don't believe in educating girls she said, quick as a flash, They're like white people at home who don't want colored people to learn" (*The Color Purple* 172). Walker here asserts that black girls were not allowed to be educated they were taught how to serve their masters.

## 2. The Color Purple and Black Feminism

### 2.1. Heterosexism and Controlling Images

Black women's sexualities studies show how sexuality compose one major system of oppression which is heterosexism. In which is considered as a freestanding system of oppression like other oppressions, which can be seen in black feminism. Yet, heterosexism can be found in *The Color Purple*, the same way oppressions of race, gender, class existed (Collins 128).

The oppression of race or gender mark bodies with social meanings while heterosexism marks bodies with sexual meanings. Collins defines heterosexism as: "the belief in the inherent superiority of one form of sexual expression over another and thereby the right to dominate" (128), means that heterosexism is a form of oppression that can dominate anyone who has only one idea about sexual expression. Like in the *Color Purple* heterosexism is involved through Shug and Celie homosexual relationship which is not the standard, Shug did not cease her relationship with Albert in spite of the fact that she and Celie become close.

As Black women's controlling images were formed by a male-dominated culture, heterosexism can be related to these images. The controlling image of the "hoochie" is used by men to sexually assault African-American women putting them in the portrayal of sexually aggressive women. From this perspective, men allow themselves to impose their dominance and subdue these women mainly by forming such images as a pretense for their oppression. This appears in the *Color Purple* when Mr. Albert uses his position as the Man of the house as an excuse to abuse Celie. Which black feminism works on fighting these patterns.

While slavery is the source of these sexual ideologies the "mammy" image portrays a stereotype of submissive women who work for richer white people. In which the men

that are existed in their lives are anticipated that black women should show submissive attitudes. For instance, in the novel when Celie's stepfather threatened her, he expected that Celie will act submissively, eventually, after he takes her children she becomes always acting in a submissive way. However, the novel portraits how female characters fight to get rid of the stereotypes that coexisted in their society to oppress them.

Some of the images are present in the novel while others are not. The "mommy" and "hoochie" images are not very presented, while the welfare mother and the matriarch are not present at all as heterosexism which is presented strongly as it has been mentioned above. The ideology of the submissive woman is not applied to all the women in the story. In fact, some female characters refused to be as their society expected them to be, they were strong enough to refuse such ideologies in a way that Walker expresses her thoughts in the novel of how unworthy those stereotypes were.

## **2.2. Sexism in The Color Purple**

As other aspects of oppression, sexism is also present in The Color Purple. In which sexism means the distinction that based on sex. As Celie in the novel, she characterizes herself to be less than other sex, begins from the point that she is a woman in addition to the oppression and dominance that she has experienced by her stepfather.

Despite the fact of male domination, Walker's use of strong female characters that resist against sexism. Like Shug Avery and Sofia who are self-standing and Backlasher women. Those two characters perform as a model for the main oppressed Celie. In which Shug has a self-feeling that she is not defined by any man.

Gender, class, and race oppressions are all linked together by the oppression of sexuality because they all control sexuality in different ways. In which race dominate sexuality of black female through controlling images like "mammy" and "hoochie". While

gender dominates sexuality because of male dominance in US society. And class controls sexuality because White women sexuality is different from Black female one, and it is not characterized by certain controlling images like "hoochie" and "mammy".

In the novel when Celie's stepfather convinces Albert to take Celie in a way which conveys that he is selling her to Albert, which portrays how black female bodies are controlled as it happens really in the American society. Her stepfather insults her while he is speaking about her to Albert telling him:

She ugly. He says. But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean.  
And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and  
she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it (The Color Purple 9-10).

Which reveals that they negotiate with her as she is an ownership or a maid. They also mention the beauty of Nettie. In addition, her stepfather gives himself the right to rape her because he believes that she can do what her sick mother does not "You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't" (The Color Purple 5).

Collins argues that in the US "controlling Black sexuality has long been important in preserving racial boundaries" (133). Thus, it functions as a reason for creating a sexual hierarchical system within the American society. As it is portrayed in the novel in which the distinction that is based on sex is present the same as it is the American society.

### **2.3. Culture of Dissemblance**

The section that follows reviews the presence of Culture of Dissemblance in the Color Purple. The novel discusses important themes of sexism and racism. It is true that the novel is a story but it portrays what really happens in the black community which black female hide. Collins states that Alice Walker creation of Celie is to raise the voice of the sexual politics of Black womanhood:

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

It is the reason why the character Celie wrote letters to God instead of speaking to the public.

Celie threatened to do not talk to anybody about the abuse she faced "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your. Mammy" (The Color Purple 4), instead she chooses to write letters to God rather than speaking to anyone. She talks about all the oppression, abuse, and violence she experienced by her stepfather and her husband. Yet, speaking to God gives her voice and breaks her silence to speak about what has happened to her throughout the novel. For example, she did not discover herself until Shug Avery teaches her how to do so by teaching her that she has the right to have control over her body and her treat. "no matter how oppressed an individual woman may be, the power to save the self-lies within the self" (Collins 118-119).It is a technique that Alice Walker uses because it characterized most of the black women's literature. Almost they share the same notion.

Although the fact that Black women support each other, eventually, a self-standing woman is the only one who can discover herself. Alice Walker's novel portrays how women can figure out their own voices. Like Celie, she starts by writing letters to God about the different kinds of oppression she experienced. Ultimately, throughout the novel, she creates a voice and begins to talk to others.

## Conclusion

As the second chapter was primarily an examination of Alice Walker's life, then the concern lies on the analyses of *The Color Purple's* female characters, spotting the light on the main character Celie. Also, the themes of the novel take part in the analyses. The notable one is the discovery of Black female oneself. The black female solidarity is also discussed to show how women resist abuse and oppression. Also, by reading the novel we discovered that the author of the novel Alice Walker tries to close the distance between the reader and the main character Celie by using the epistolary form. In which the letters express more the character's feelings and allow the reader to get along with them.

## **General conclusion**

## General conclusion

The aim of this dissertation is to shed light on the way Alice Walker portrays the black females suffering in the American society during the twentieth century. As well as examining the impact of gender, class, race oppressions on their lives through her females characters.

The present study represents the issue of racism and oppression of black American females in the American society, in addition to their feminist struggle for freedom and equality against a patriarchal community. We attempt to discover how feminism is represented in the Black American society in the twentieth century through analyzing Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*.

As it has been mentioned before, The Triangle Methodology is used to conduct the present research. Each has its advantages and drawbacks. The thematic based approach is used to give a clear overview about the issue of slavery in Alice Walker's novel. Also, the historical approach will be used to examine the social and political issues during the twentieth century. Also, one of the most well-known approaches for carrying out is data collection, which goes through the following trends to the data analysis, starting by: Reading Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, many times and watching the movie, in addition to that browsing the World Wide Web to find various information and articles concerned with the object of the present research, using the descriptive technique in data analysis.

We have discussed in the first chapter in what way Feminism helps in shaping a feminist theory through giving an overview about feminism and as the feminist theory flourished up we examine how it helps in finding a black female literary tradition.

Then in the second chapter, we have dealt with a general background about the status of women in the American society during the twentieth century and in what way they were oppressed by both White and Black males.

In the third chapter, we have shown the form and techniques that Alice Walker used in her Novel *The Color Purple*. Besides, the different themes of the novel which is a part of Alice Walker as well as many black female writers, we had shown the aspects of female creativeness and how Alice Walker portrays women in her novel through such techniques.

Women during the twentieth Century were oppressed by their society. Yet, further analysis of *The Color Purple* showed that Alice Walker, as a black female and as a black activist, she represents, through her novel the African American women who live in a patriarchal system. Alice Walker examines the status of women during the twentieth century.

Closer inspection of the novel shows that Alice Walker uses her female characters, Celie, Nettie, Sofia, Shug Avery, to show the way African American women cooperate together to resist the different ways of oppression, in order to be free.

The most striking result to emerge from the data is that Alice Walker succeeded in portraying the black female suffering through different techniques, such as the epistolary form, the use of the first person narrator, and the use of colloquial language.

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis of the novel that the selected novelist Alice Walker involves her experience within her society through her characters, by portraying the status of women in the twentieth century American society. Other interesting finding is the use of epistolary form, as well as the colloquial language in order to involve the reader with the suffering of the black female, which it shows that there is a strong relationship between the novel and Alice Walker's real life that has reported in

the literature. The present study was designed to determine the effect of the use of the first person narrator that seeks to close the distance between ones thought and his language in order to convey his message.

In the end, we can say that Alice Walker was one of the memorable novelists of the history of African American literature during the twentieth century. Yet, the novel is still one of the well-admired by readers and it even turned into a movie and a play.

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## ملخص

"اللون الأرجواني" كتبت من طرف احدى نساء الأدب الأفرو أمريكي "أليس وولكر". تتناول رواية قصة امرأة في مجتمع يمتاز بالهيمنة في بدايات القرن العشرين, وتحاول البطلة مقاومة الظلم و الهيمنة المفروضين عليها بمساعدة شخصيات نسوية أخرى. لذلك تسعى بطلة الرواية لتحقيق المعرفة الذاتية والروحية للسيطرة على حياتها الشخصية بنفسها و عدم تدخل الآخرين بها. تهدف الدراسة للتحري عن الأسباب التي أدت الى تأسيس الحركة النسوية إضافة الى دراسة الهدف من الكتابات النسائية الأفرو أمريكية. لذلك أجريت هذه الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على الكتابات السود و دراسة كيفية قيامهم بتجسيد ابداعهم من خلال الروايات التي بدورها وجدت لتوحيد اصواتهم و فرض انفسهم في مجتمعهم عن طريق شخصيات رواياتهم الخيالية. و لهذا فإن النظرية النسوية طبقت من أجل اكتشاف مختلف المواضيع التي تناولتها الرواية. في النهاية, كشفت الدراسة بان الكاتبة 'أليس وولكر' قامت باستعمال منهجية الرسائل من أجل تضمين القارئ ضمن شخصياتها من أجل تسهيل عملية فهمه لمعاناة النساء السود وكيف يتم قمعهم و اضطهادهم في مجتمعهم في ذلك الوقت.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** قمع, هيمنة, الحركة النسوية, منهجية الرسائل.

## Résumé

Le roman étudié est écrit par une femme spécialisée dans la littérature afro-américaine. Le roman «*Le Colore Violet*» est une histoire d'une femme qui vit dans une société dominée au début de vingtième siècle, et l'héroïne essaie de résister à l'injustice et la dominance imposées avec l'aide des autres figures féministes. Par conséquent, l'héroïne cherche à atteindre la sa propre connaissance et le contrôle spirituel de sa propre vie sans l'auto-implication des autres. L'étude vise à étudier les raisons qui ont conduit à la création du mouvement féministe en plus d'étudier l'objectif des écrits féministes afro-américains, c'est ainsi cette étude a été menée pour mettre en lumière les femmes écrivains noires et pour étudier comment elles incarnent leur créativité à travers des romans qui, à leur tour, ont trouvé à unir leurs voix et s'imposer dans leur société à travers les personnages de leur fiction. Par conséquent, la théorie féministe a été appliquée afin de découvrir les différents sujets abordés dans le roman. Au final, l'étude a révélé qu'Alice Walker utilisait la méthodologie du message pour inclure le lecteur dans ses personnages afin de faciliter sa compréhension de la souffrance des femmes noires et comment elles étaient réprimées et persécutées dans leur communauté à l'époque.

**Mots-clé:** Répression, Domination, Mouvement Féministe, Méthodologie des Messages.