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Department of English



Rethinking the Politics of Heroism: The Masculinization of the Black Heroine in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)

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Anglophone Literatures and Civilizations**

Submitted by

Chahinez Dounia MECID

Yasmine SELFI

Panel of Examiners

Dr. Amel KHIREDINE, MCB, University of M'Hamed Bougara, Chair;

Mr. Hamza RAHIL, MAA, University of M'Hamed Bougara, Supervisor;

Miss Kahina ENTIGHAR, MAA, University of M'Hamed Bougara, Examiner.

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Declaration

We hereby declare that this thesis is entirely the result of our investigation and that due references or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

June 2022

Chahinez Dounia MECID Yasmine Selfi

Signature

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to our beloved parents and family for their support not only for this study but also throughout all our educational career. To our friends for their constant support and motivation.

Dounia and Yasmine

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Abstract

To bring Black women to the center, a number of female Afro-American writers and feminists have sought to change the stereotypical dogmas that govern the concept of heroism. The Afro-American writer, activist and feminist Alice Walker calls upon this change in her novel *The Color Purple* (1982). Thus, this thesis is concerned with revisiting the politics of heroism in the selected text, it also studies the masculine traits as being adopted by the novel's Black female heroines. The first part of this study deals with the devaluation of Black femininity relying on Patricia H. Collins' 'the controlling images' and C.H. Cooley's concept of 'gender socialization'. The second part delves into the literary mechanisms that Walker has adopted in order to empower her main female characters drawing upon Maureen Murdock's theory of the 'heroines' journey' and Judith Butler's 'gender performativity' theory. This thesis showcases the way Walker has successfully altered the Black females' position through collective heroism and masculinization. The findings of this study betoken that in her search for her identity, Walker's Black heroine has rejected the derogatory images assigned to her Black femininity. Thus, she has regained her power through her physical and spiritual awakening as a leading figure of her heroic journey.

Key Words: Alice Walker, Black Femininity, Black Women's Journey, Gender Socialization, Heroism, Masculinization, Revision, Stereotypes, *The Color Purple*, The Center.

Table of Content

Declaration.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgment.....	iii
Abstract.....	vi
Table of Content.....	v
Introduction.....	6
Chapter One: Decentring Black Femininity.....	16
1.1. Femininity vs. Masculinity within the Black Community.....	17
1.2. Black womanhood’ Subjugation.....	21
1.3. “The Strong Black Woman” Stereotype	26
Chapter Two: Rewriting Heroism and the Masculinization of the Black Female	
Character.....	33
2.1. Rewriting the Margin within the ‘Center’.....	34
2.2. Women’s Quest: A Community Quest.....	38
2.3. Gender as a ‘Doing’.....	42
General Conclusion.....	50
Bibliography.....	52
Abstract (French).....	61
Abstract (Arabic).....	62

General Introduction

“True heroism consist in being superior to the ill of life, in whatever shape they may challenge us to combat.”

--- Napoleon Bonaparte.

According to scholars, gender inequality is still a significant concern among different societies. Men have been positioned on the top of the social hierarchy for centuries, therefore, they are the leading figures of every domain. Literature is not an exception; for many years, literary works have been written solely by men and about men. Men are the centre of concern in novels, poems and critical discourses. Thus, heroism have been an exclusive treat for male characters. Rachael S. Poe proves the previous statement in her article “Engendering Epic: Heroism as Constructed Masculinity in the Gilgamesh and Beowulf”, she clearly states that “masculinity is an inherent consideration when defining heroism” (1). While men are always portrayed as leaders and kings, women- if ever mentioned- are portrayed as “wicked, heartless, prostitute, mother, wife, sister, deceit, and confidants” (Singh 40). Consequently, heroism is considered as an elevated status in literature that women do not deserve.

For the sake of going against the already mentioned stereotypical idea, many women have decided to write about themselves and reprobate the biased image given to them by male-authored narratives. This literary revolution is accompanied with the three waves of feminism (late 19th century to mid-1990s) in the Western world. To name a few, writers like Virginia Woolf, Sarah Fielding and Mary Scott have encouraged feminist literature that aim to deconstruct the idea of patriarchy that is inculcated in women’s mind as well. “I detest the masculine point of view. I am bored by his heroism, virtue and honour, I think the best these men can do is not talk about themselves anymore” states Woolf in this matter (164). In the

course of time, and after perplexing obstacles, women indeed have acquired an important role in literature. Accordingly, the literary writing norms have shifted from being male governed to non-gendered. The female writers finally have gained the right to express themselves and be the heroines of their own literary pieces.

Nevertheless, the appearance of feminist literature is not the end of women's marginalization issue, in fact, it has called the attention to another overshadowed matter. As previously said, women have become functioning members in literature, to be more specific, white women started to write about white protagonists, neglecting the whole presence of Black females. This latter have not only been marginalized because of their gender, but also due to their skin colour. In her article entitled "Struggling to Connect: White and Black Feminism in the Movement Years", Winifred Breines declares that "[...] most early feminists, [...] created a feminism in which black women- and black and white women are the primary focus here- were unwelcome and uncomfortable. As a result, feminism remind predominantly white for many years" (18). Even with the emergence of feminist movements, women of colour are still double oppressed. Accordingly, literary heroism is attributed by a male protagonist or a white female one.

It is not until the appearance of Black Power movements and Black Power Arts during the 1960s that Black writings are appreciated, and the dark-skinned female heroism is brought into light. It is important to state that Black women have been always represented as ugly creatures or villains, as well as, their bodies are used as a weapon to ruin the Black female image in reality. The Black feminist critics has formed their own feminist theories where they give the chance to Black women's works, as well as, their history to stand out and be examined (Ambedkar 29). Therefore, Black female authors have started producing books with Black ladies as protagonists, in an effort to depict their reality and describe the spiritual journey of finding themselves and speak up within the patriarchal white society.

As far as contemporary literature is concerned, the Afro-American female writers have taken huge responsibility to be the defending voice of their gender. Their writings are considered as a bridge to call the attention of the world to their struggles. Noticeably, heroism as an exclusive term to describe men's journey, in this era, is revised. Moreover, the Black fictional female protagonists are a life-like-image that depict what Black ladies are actually dealing with in real life. Sudorsan Saho in his "African American Literary Tradition: A Study" claims that "[i]n their works, African- American writers of recent periods revisit the historical past and African- American tradition and experiment with postmodern techniques in an attempt to express their attitude to intersection of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation" (33). For instance, Tony Morrison's *Sula* (1973), Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) and Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984) are a few captivating novels that illustrate, genuinely, the real life of Black women through their Black female protagonists.

In addition to the previously mentioned authors, Alice Walker is an outstanding figure in Afro-American contemporary literature. She is among the few Black authors who have dedicated their lives to fight for the rights of non-white women. Through her writings, Walker has succeeded to give a voice to the voiceless, mainly, the swarthy disenfranchised women. Although she is accused of giving a negative representation to Black men, Walker continues to explore Black ladies' lives from all their aspects without taking a step back (Tally 212). Justine Tally mentions in her book *Why 'Womanism'?: The Genesis of A New Word and What It Means* that Walker has claimed in an interview "[f]or me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world" (213). Walker has reshaped the heroic agendas and has adopted Masculinization of the female characters as modes of revolt against literary writing traditions. These mechanisms are observable in several of her literary pieces, by way of illustration, *Meridian* (1976), and *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1971).

The following study is concerned with revisiting the politics of heroism in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. By the same token, it studies the masculine traits -which are attitudes that only men are supposed to acquire- as being adopted to the novel's Black female heroines, in which Walker draws the latter with masculine features as a mode of revolt against the common trait of femininity imposed on them in an attempt to empower them.

Known as the most functioning Black female activist, Alice Walker is an Afro-American novelist who was born on February 9th, 1944 and raised within a poor family. Walker had a tough childhood and teenage-hood due to being Black, thus she decided to become an advocate for all the Black women through her words. The term 'womanism' was first introduced to the world by her, which refers to Black Feminism. She was awarded the Pulitzer Price and Mahmoud Darwich Literary Price of fiction, 1983 and 2016 respectively, for her works. *The Color Purple* (1982), Walker's most renowned novel, is an epistolary that tells the story of Celie, an African American woman, who deals with unbearable traumas resultantly to the appalling abuse from both her so-called father and husband. At the beginning, Celie is passive, she shows no objection and is fully accepting to her fate. However, at some point the protagonist gets burned-out from the aggression she faces, that is when she receives help from strong Black female characters, such as Shug Avery and Sofia. Celie - influenced by these characters- decides to go on a spiritual journey to discover herself and rebel against the Black patriarchal community she lives in.

The selection of this topic as a research subject is inspired by the fact that the Black American women's history and identity have been ignored for many years. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is the primary source of this research because it gives a very accurate representation of the Black female heroine. The author have successfully revised the traditions of Heroism by bringing the Black female to the center. Through Celie's story, Walker has depicted in a powerful way the amount of unrevealed pain and misery that the Black women

have endured for decades. Furthermore, the adaptation of Masculinization as a literary device to empower the Black female characters is a reflection of Black women's attitude in reality. Black female Heroism is considered a broad field with an everlasting importance.

Various critics, allegedly, have indicated that Walker's hatred directed towards Black men stems from the huge influence of white feminists on her, "[she] seems to have written herself out of the so-called black family embrace, even out of the black community as a whole" (970) states C.M Jenkins in "Queering Black Patriarchy: The Salvific Whish and Masculine Possibility in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*", he further elaborates on the matter that Walker aims "in a project of 'queering' the black family" by stripping the Black men from their deserved power over their women, therefore "reconfiguring the very meaning of kinship for black sons, brothers and especially fathers" (970). *The Color Purple's* female characters continue to reshape and reorder the heteronormative, men-led family and the author, herself, precede to refashion the family dynamics. To further notice, Walker has received continuous hate for the allegedly deformation of Black men within the Black community as it appears, is uncalled for. Women in general, and their role and position in particular, within their community is highly overshadowed. However, this dissertation aims to reclaim women's integrity and their position as females and protagonists of such narratives. It also showcases how Walker uses her platform as a means to claim her female Black character as a protagonist by masculinising her.

In the novel's prologue, Alice Walker has unveiled that the sole motivation for *The Color Purple* is religion. She also believes that religion and spirituality are the major themes of this novel; "[...] I would have thought that a book that begin 'Dear God' would immediately have been identified as a book about desire to encounter, to hear from, the Ultimate Ancestor" states Walker in her *Preface to the Tenth Anniversary Edition*. As the novel reveals, it is unfortunate to be both Black and a woman. Therefore, the women who are exposed to the physical and

psychological abuse from the white masters, as well as their own people, lead them to seek God. Nevertheless, the God-image was forced into the Blacks (God, Sexuality and Gender 1). Indeed, the Bible known to the dark skinned community has spoken of a “bearded white God with blue eyes who created the Black men only to serve and obey the white men” (1). Since the Black’s culture and roots have been overthrown for centuries, it seems like Blacks have lost the true image of their own God. For this reason, African-American writers have encouraged individuals to reshape their own image of God. In their article “The Shadowed Identity”, Shukla and Banerji states that case Celie’s re-imagination of God gives her “the courage to stand up for herself and become more confident about who she is” (727). Aside from religious empowerment, the following thesis will look up another element of empowerment established in the Black women which include her own heroism, as well as her masculinisation to fit in and rise upon the oppression.

“Gender, Race and Violence: A Critical Examination of Trauma in *The Color Purple*”, is a research article by Jessica Lewis where she focuses on the trauma infused in individuals because of their gender, race and inflicted violence. The article demonstrates an accuracy between “one’s gender and race and the susceptibility to trauma” (1). As the natives who are oppressed copy their owners or oppressors, similarly, coloured men’s behaviour in *The Color Purple* is aimed towards the Black women (Batoool et al 172). Moreover, the fact that one’s race and gender could be the cause for their agony is traumatizing in itself (Lewis 28). Admittedly, the aggression Black women face in the novel banishes their trust in both men and the world producing their traumatized state (27). The physical, psychological and sexual abuse Celie and Sofia, for example, endure, contributes in their future trauma. Although, Walker investigates the double discrimination of Black women in her Pulitzer Prize for Fiction winner, and many theorists adhere to the idea, it is still lacking in terms of woman’s function

in her community. The following study will shed light on the revision of heroism by following the pattern of women's journey.

Walker has first introduced the term 'womanism' in her 1979 short story *Coming Apart*. She has coined the term to declare that "feminism movement is insufficient to deliver her message as a black woman" as she is a Black, female author (Abu Farda 39). "From Feminism to Womanism: The Image of Black Women in '*The Color Purple*'" is a thesis by Rita F. Abu Farda where she has looked at how Celie, and the other Black female body are represented in the novel. She also discusses the difference between feminism and womanism. The thesis explains how the novel's women are silenced and abused in different ways, by mostly the men in their life. Abu Farda showcases the women's, especially Celie's, journey and how they break from their oppression. Albeit that, the previously mentioned thesis does not deal with the novel from a critical point of view, nor discusses the mechanism that has been used by Walker to bring her female Black protagonist to the surface. In contradiction, the following study will view the novel from an analytical angle, showing the mode of heroism's revision that the author has adapted.

Furthermore, Musir and Kadhim point out that women in early to mid- 1900s were supposed to do all the chores and obey the men whether they were right or wrong, to not seem as bad women (27). Thus, Celie accepts her fate and her given gender role to not look like a 'bad girl'. However, Shug Avery refuses to go by the rules as she even works as a singer, therefore "she fits the role of the 'bad girl' in her community" (27). Ironically, Celie and Shug Avery, Mister's mistress, form a friendship. Besides Avery, Nettie, is the one who teaches Celie how to read and write and to "fight back against her abusive husband" (28). Moreover, Sofia is probably the one female that Celie admires the most. Sofia fights against both her husband Harpo, and his father, Albert (29). The friendship that grows between these women, later on, is considered as a saving friendship for it helps cure their life's misfortune (29). The

women friends in *The Color Purple* prove their freedom through the advice and aid they provide for each other (37). This essay has dealt with the women's friendship as the only source of empowerment for Black women, thus it does not include other sources. This thesis looks up other forms of empowerment that is the centering of Black females and rethinking gender roles.

The previously mentioned critics and studies have reflected on numerous issues such as religion, trauma, womanism and the representation of Black men in *The Color Purple*. However, the following study examines the revision of heroism by the rewriting of femininity in order to revolt against the devaluation of the non-white women. It explores the degradation of Black femininity and womanhood within the Black community. It also attempts to identify Walker's mechanisms in altering her Black female characters' position. Its core target is to study Black women's journey as leading figures of literary pieces to free them from the moulded images they have been trapped in.

This study is built upon a number of theories and books, basically, Afro-American ones to examine Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. It will mainly utilise Maureen Murdock's *The Heroin's Journey: Women's Quest for Wholeness* (1990). This book came as reaction to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*, where he explores the journey of men to reach their self-development, but, he left out women from this journey. Murdock as a response, has provided a deep understanding of women's pilgrimage. Murdock states that "[w]omen do have a quest at this time in our culture" it's the quest to fully embrace their feminine nature learning how to value themselves as women to heal the deep wound of the feminine (3). She believes that women's spiritual process is as essential as the male's one. It is noticeable that some stages mentioned in Murdock's book can be applied on Celie's journey. Her definition of the feminine journey is about finding one's soul and spirituality. This theory is applied to analyse the spiritual journey of *The Color purple*'s women to reach their "wholeness."

In addition, the following research is based on Patricia Hill Collins' book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). Within her book, Collins has promoted the 'controlling images' which devalue the Black female body. She describes these images as "images [that] are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable of everyday life" (69). This theory is applied to explain the Black femininity and womanhood's degradation by society. Similarly, this dissertation uses Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* in which she brings the marginalized Black women out of the ground. "To be in the margin is to be a part of the whole but outside the main body" (Hooks ix). This theory is used to describe how Walker has reversed the literal meaning of the margin; it is the spot where Black women can define themselves as true females.

Furthermore, Judith Butler's the 'performative gender' theory is a theoretical tool that is devoted to explore the use of masculinization in the novel. In her book *Gender Trouble* Butler argues that one cannot be defined as a man or a woman according to their body, but rather according to the way they act, she writes "if sex and gender are radically distinct, than it does not follow that to be a given sex is to be a given gender" (142). On the light of this concept, this study highlights the way Walker has masculinized some of her female characters. Despite being females, Sofia, Shug Avery and even Celie cannot be identified as actual women in view of their application of the opposite gender behaviour.

This thesis consists of two fundamental chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is titled "Decentring Black Femininity." It focuses on Black women's degraded position in the black community, and how Black womanhood is devaluated and diminished. This chapter draws on concepts such as gender socialization and the controlling images to show that both the physical and mental abuse are the reasons for these women's damaged souls and spirits.

It specifically explores the way Black female characters' role and position are relegated in Walker's novel.

The second chapter is titled "Rewriting Heroism and the Masculinization of the Black Females". It examines the way Walker has adopted revisionary techniques with regards to 'gendered heroism' relying on Murdock's paradigm of the female heroism developed in her book *The Heroine's Journey*. It also explores the way Walker has provided her female characters with masculine traits to deconstruct the concept of gender; in which community defines a person's gender in accordance with his/ her body and biological nature. Through allowing some of the novel's female characters to act in a masculine behaviour, *The Color Purple's* writer proves that gender is obviously related to the way someone preforms. This analytical section utilizes Butler's performative gender theory to highlight the Black women embodiment of masculinization in the novel to stand against all forms of gender, social, and racial discriminations.

The conclusion sums up the findings of this study. It predominantly reveals the method Walker has followed to revise the traditions of heroism. It simply showcases the approach persuaded by the writer to bring her Black female protagonist to the surface. In a similar way, the conclusion highlights the technique embraced by the writer to segregate the novel's female characters-the heroine in particular- from their given gender role.

Chapter One

Decentring Black Femininity

“As far back as slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men who ranked third, and black women last.”

Hooks Bell, *Ain't I a Woman* 53.

This chapter discusses the devaluation of Black femininity by the white ‘patriarchy’ and within the Black community. Black folks have abused their women in an attempt to prove their alleged ‘masculinity’, while the white community have created certain negative models to resonate oppression towards Black women. It also investigates the way Black women’s internal and external beings have been subjugated by patriarchal society.

The following study is conducted based on Patricia Hill Collins’ concept of ‘controlling images’, Cooley’s concept of ‘Gender Socialization’ and the strong Black woman concept. The first sub-section of this chapter is titled ‘Femininity vs. Masculinity within the Black Community.’ It explains the way masculinity is seen as superior to femininity within the Black community. Gender socialization and the whites’ supremacy are considered the main factors of Black men’s abusive behaviour towards their women. The second sub-section is titled “Black Womanhood’s Degradation”, it views the reasons behind creating divers stereotypes that aim to devalue Black femininity. The ‘Jezebel’, and the ‘Matriarch’ images are a few examples that resonate within the novel’s female characters. Lastly, the third sub-section, “‘Strong Black Woman’ Stereotype” sheds light on Black women stereotype that have had damaging effects on Black females’ position.

1.1. Femininity Vs Masculinity within the Black Community

Throughout the ages and within various cultures, femininity and masculinity are seen and taught differently. This latter is predominantly perceived within the Black community. Since childhood, Black girls and boys are taught a series of codes, albeit dissimilar depending on gender. This latter, according to Black theorists, has caused problems within Black male/female relationships (Wallace 11). A number of intellectuals blame this conflict on Black women, however others blame it on Black men. Wallace Danielle believes that socialization plays an immense role on how Black men and women act (11). Moreover, she argues that biological nature along with socialization among Black males and females “shape their behaviour and interactions” with each other (11). In recent years, Black Power Movement and Women’s Movement have triggered African-Americans to call into question Black masculinity and how it impacts Black male/female relationships (12). However, what provoked the Black community even more is Michelle Wallace’s “Black Macho” which essentially means that Black women should start to “step back” in order to permit Black men to regain their stolen “masculinity” after enslavement (12). Wallace’s notion is the first one that blamed the conflictual relationships of Black women and men on the latter entirely, unlike several other authors who blamed it on the white society.

Gender socialization is a concept created by CH Cooley that refers to the learning of attitudes and behaviours that are considered appropriate for a given gender. Similarly, among the Black community, femininity and masculinity are learned through a series of rules and guidelines. As previously mentioned, after the long years of slavery, Black men started to question their masculinity because they were not allowed to be “real men” under the white’s control (Wallace 13). Therefore, in African-American societies, boys are taught from a young age how to be men. Aggressiveness, violence and domination are the main traits that must be present in a “true man” (16). In order to regain their deprived ‘manliness’, many Black males, lacking power and

control in white dominated society, project their anger and frustration on their wives, partners and female family members. The double oppression aimed towards Black women in *The Color Purple* leads to the loss of female identity in a number of characters, but most obviously, Celie. For instance, when Harpo went to his father, Albert to ask him how to deal with his wife, Sofia, Albert's replied with: "[...] You ever hit her? [...] Well how you spect (sic) to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let'em (sic) know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than good sound beating" (Walker 22). This patriarchal system of domination is passed down through the generations, Albert to Harpo, because it is regarded as a measure to manhood.

In her book *Ain't I a Woman* Bell Hooks explains how social hierarchy was intended to put Black women at the bottom of its structure, she writes "[a]s far back as slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex, that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men who ranked third, and black women last" (5). This quote shows that the social oppression against Black women by their men came as a reaction to this latter's enslavement by the whites. Anglo-Saxons have continuously distinguished between men and women with regards to strength, rationality, aggressiveness and intelligence for men, weakness, irrationality, unintelligence for women (Wallace 14). White supremacists have credited all that is good to themselves, however white women are always considered less due to their weakness. This notion is yet comparable to how Euro-Americans viewed Africans as unwise, sentimental, brainless and animal-like (14). In other words, Black people's only purpose in life is to serve the whites, obey their needs and stay at the bottom of the hierarchy. In fact when Miss Millie orders Sofia to become her maid, she assumes she is doing her a favour, as it is considered an honour in white's opinion, to be a maid for a white family (30). Although Black men and women were both persecuted by the whites, the former

felt the need to prove their manliness that was taken from them by the tyrannical whites by directing their rage towards their women.

Black Patriarchy have had a damaging impact on the Afro-American community and family. Masculinity is firmly linked to violence and brute sexuality, on the other hand, however, if a girl is raped, obviously against her will, she will be automatically accused and labelled as a “slut” (60). In Walker’s selected text, aggressive masculinity is shown through Mister. The latter feels authorized to women’s submission, hence he lowers Celie to a mere subject, abuses her as well as his failed attempt at seducing Nettie who eventually runs away from him. All of this represents patriarchy norms within Black communities, where this type of behaviour is encouraged. Celie not only suffers the physical violence submitted to her by her husband but also the verbal abuse that would eventually lead to psychological trauma. “He beat me like he beat the Children. Cept (sic) he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie git (sic) the belt. [...] It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That’s how I come I know trees fear men” (Walker 15). Here Celie takes her husband’s abuse silently, as she makes herself a static object for physical cruelty as she normalized Black men violence, and any resistance will put her under more abuse.

Another aspect in which Black men assert their masculinity is through intimacy. Within the Afro-American community, a huge emphasis is placed on sexual performances, therefore, boys and girls alike, view manhood and masculinity as sexual matters and that for “one to become fully a man, one needs only engage in sexual intercourse” (Wallace 16). Mainstream media plays a fundamental role at securing the image of sexuality within the Black community because it repeatedly hypersexualized African- American people (17). Furthermore, Black boys learn that to be a considered a “true man” one must be “aggressive, dominant and sometimes violent” (16). Yet, they should not be “too” aggressive in order not to feed into the already racist

expectations of the whites. On the other hand, women are supposed to be pursued by men, yet they are also supposed to act disinterested to men's approaches in order for the latter to convince them. Consequently, and as Black men learn that masculinity and manhood rely solely on the sexual aspect, thus they lack guidance in terms of family and partnership (17). False and double standard ideals among the Blacks have, time and again, lead to an unbalanced and broken relationship between its men and women. When men's masculinity and manhood are identified by their desire and drive, concerns like family and children matters suffer because they don't fit the "requirements of manhood in the Black Community" (18). Wallace questions how a man's masculinity is doubted if he shows any emotion like crying, but not when he neglects his family and children (18). Harpo's masculinity, for instance, is questioned because he does the house chores instead of his wife Sofia, who is usually seen fixing the roof and walls. Within patriarchal communities, house chores such as cooking and cleaning are reserved for women only. In order to reclaim his 'masculinity', Harpo turns to violence to assert his manhood over his wife.

Slavery has definitely shaped African-American's masculinity. During their enslavement, Afro-Americans were subjected to all kinds of torture, humiliation and degraded to animals. Walker in *The Color Purple* has focused on the violence submitted by Black men toward Black women as a form, if one might say, retaliation. The text represents various forms of domination and oppression and how they affected interpersonal relationships of Blacks. After the continuous abuse of Alphonso on Celie, not only does he take her innocence as a fourteen years old, but also takes away her motherhood when he lies to her about her children's death. Furthermore, he forbids her from pursuing her education stating that Celie is "too dumb to keep going to school." (Walker 8). The abusive behaviour addressed to Celie by her stepfather rendered her to fear men, and shaped her view of Black masculinity. Her belief, in fact, is proven when she is married to Mister. Mister's name is Albert, Celie is afraid of him to the point where

she can't even refer to him by his real name. When the protagonist is encouraged to defend herself she states that "[I] don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (13). Ary Sayamanad Tahir has argued that the men's treatment of their women in *The Color Purple* is similar to that of white oppressors and that within the traditional southern African-American households women are considered as objects because it allows their husband's dominance over them (11). This come from what Black men has inherited from their previous life masters.

It's important to rectify the many problems that lay within the Black Community that stem from, primarily, the blind Euro-American socialization of the Black children. Walker's novel shows clearly how important it is to break away from the patriarchal rules in order to build a well-balanced community, where men and women respect, and not fear, each other. It is also crucial to teach young Black children about their history, culture and experiences rather than teach them detailed guidelines on how one should be as a man or woman. By advancing a new notion of Black masculinity, gender and children' socialization, it is possible to build a healthier foundation for relationships and families and by extension communities to come.

1.2. Black Womanhood's Degradation

Due to being both a woman and Black, non-white females have been abused in real life and portrayed in literature as "primitive, lustful, seductive, physically strong, domineering, unwomanly and dirty" (Mgadmi 40). It is important to mention that this representation is far away from being truthful. Intending to make it seem like Black women deserves to be mistreated, certain stereotypes have dominated the existence of Black females; "the controlling images" as referred to by the feminist Patricia Hill Collins. The initial aim of these images is to justify the racist acts exercised upon the Black females along with trapping them within certain suppositions from society (Isik 14). Interestingly, not only have community members believed that these images are valid, but Black women themselves, who must stand out from these unfair

standards, have tried strongly to fit into them, because simply, the amount of oppression they have dealt with have convinced them that these images are their reality.

In her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins deals with the above mentioned concepts that appeared in the 19th century. She states that “[a]nalyzing the particular controlling images applied to African-American women reveals the specific contours of Black women’s objectification as well as the ways in which oppression of race , gender, sexuality and class intersect” (Collins 72). She also argues that white women have experienced a certain type of oppression. She explains that the male governed community has created some cardinal virtues that give a clear definition of the “true” woman. Thus, white females had to adopt these virtues for the sake of being considered as “true” and reach perfection. Black women, however, have faced a more brutal form of domination. Notably, Collins' interpretation of the controlling images did not discuss the othering of the Black women by their own men.

In this notion, Ane Caroline claims that the controlling images have “infiltrated people’s imagination (both whites and blacks), creating opportunities for continuous oppression and domination” (10). She stresses the fact that Black women have to endure the whites’ supremacy in addition to handling their castrated husbands and sons’ frustration. Apparently, Black men- who are supposedly the defenders of Black women- have made use of the erroneous stereotypes to further persecute their wives, daughters and even their mothers. Ribeiro has also clarified that these myths are created specifically to destroy the Black women’s selfhood, by aiming explicitly to enslave and control their bodies (vii), taking into consideration that the Black female body is her first source of femininity. Furthermore, Elisa Forster in her paper “Controlling Images of African Women: The Hottenot Venus, Alek Wek and the Thought of Stuart Hart” introduces a different set of images that devaluates the African women. In the same way, Collins’ concepts have referred to the decentring of the African American women’s bodies

and womanhood. She, in fact, argues that the controlling images she discusses are the basis of what Collins claims about the repressive images of Black women (1). This can be considered as an integral part of Collins researches since she has over sighted the Black African females. Both of these studies have provided a well-built explanation of the devaluating myths Black women have embraced.

The Mammy, the Matriarch, the Welfare mother and the Jezebel are the main concepts that Collins have has interpreted in her chapter “Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images” (69). The mammy, who is “Aunt Jemima” according to Hooks, is defined by Collins as the voiceless, loyal, compliant maid (27). This image represents the Black woman who basically ignores her family and dedicates her life to serve and please the whites. It is created to convince Black women that working for the whites is an elevated honour that they should be seeking for. Aside from this, the mammy brutally deprives Black woman from her feminine features and sexual needs. It depicts her as ugly yet a hardworking and kind creature (Magadmi 40).

Like “The Mammy”, “The Matriarch” is s working women, yet they are looked at by the whites from different perspectives. Since “The Matriarch” works to maintain her own family, she is accused of being the bad Black lady who ignores her own kids. This stereotype is particularly created to put the blame on Black working, mainly single, mothers for their children’s scholar failure (Collins 76). Hooks asserts that the independent Black woman is impulsively seen as aggressive, manipulative and non-lady like (78). This statement indicates that the white society have tried to suppress any form of Black female’s independence, thus they convinced that they were born to just take orders, not to lead.

Furthermore, “The Welfare Mother” is another controlling image that is made to downtrodden Black womanhood. It is based on the deployed idea of Black women are able to

produce children “as easily as animals” (Collins 78), thus it is agreeable to take power over their fertility. It might be true that Black women are more fecund than the white ones, but it is discriminatory to use this fact to offend them. The White authority has created this concept to “shift the angle of visions away from structural sources of poverty and blames the victims themselves” (80). Like the Matriarch, The Welfare Mother is a bad mother. She takes responsibility of her poverty by being indolent, reliant upon government and gives birth to a huge amount of babies whom she cannot feed. This invalid representation of Black women make people believe that the misery these women are facing is strongly rightful.

Likewise, “The Jezebel, whore or “hoochie” (81) is the vilest image Black women have coped with. This stereotype jeopardizes directly the core of Black females’ femininity because it delves into their sexuality. Unlike the Mammy who is asexual, The Jezebel has outstanding sexual abilities, it describes the Black females as being made just to fulfil their sexual desires. Hooks states in her book *Ain’t I a Woman* that “black women were naturally seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust. They were labelled jezebels and sexual temptresses and accused leading white men away from spiritual purity into sin” (33). In other words, if a Black girl is raped, it is apparently her own fault because she, as a whole, is a clear invitation for misdeed. In fact, she cannot be raped because she enjoys sex under any circumstances (Windsor et al 2). Expectedly, white men have used this imagery to justify their uncontrolled sexual attraction towards Black women, much surprisingly, Black men too utilizes the stereotype of the Jezebel to rape their women, wives, and in an animalistic manner, their daughters.

The 1982 *Color Purple* have portrayed Black women’s devaluation realistically. The previously described controlling images occurs in the novel implicitly; they come into sight as impressions rather than characters. For instance, the image of “The Mammy” and “The

matriarch” are both depicted through Sofia’s character. By combining these two imageries within one character, Walker disputes the ideal representation of the mammy, Pi Li Hsiao confirms (110). Sofia is unconstrainedly independent, she is the one who brings food to the table so she is at the head of her family. Typically, she is ashamed by society for having a sense of freedom, yet she never hearken to the voices that were trying to subjugate her. Sofia resembles to the Matriarch for trying to break free from the stereotypes imposed on Black women, but she ironically turns into the woman she was fighting not to be. When Miss Millie asks Sofia to be her maid, this latter rejects the offer wildly when replying with “hell no” (46), unfortunately, this rejection costs Sofia a loss of her power, beauty and dignity. She is sent to jail where she gets beaten to the point Celie cannot recognize her, She wonders how Sofia is still alive since “[t]hey crack her skull, they crack her ribs [...] [a]nd she just about the color of an eggplant” (Walker 47). Eventually, she ends up working as a slave in a white household, she becomes the obedient, hardworking servant who takes care of the whites’ kids. She raises Eleonore Jane, the mayor’s daughter, while neglecting her own children, and this is exactly what the mammy is made for. Similarly, the spirit of the mammy can be found within Mary Agnes, Harpo’s second wife, and Celie. These characters have not worked as actual maids but the pair are submissive to their men. Celie acts like a slave to her stepfather and her so called husband, she does not make the slightest effort to stand for herself. She replies to Mister’ sister when she encourages her to fight that she is incapable of fighting, she will accept her fate as long as she is alive (Walker 13). Mary Agnes either is domestic, passive and resistless. Although she hates being called Squeak, she does not urge anyone to call her by her real name. In fact, she is often addressed as “little Squeak” as “she has been conditioned by society to respond affectionately and feebly to everyone, especially the men, around her” (Tierney 1). Both of Celie and Squeak resembles the mammy in their biddable behaviour.

Additionally, Shug Avery is considered as the archetype of the Jezebel. She is a pretty woman who feels no shame in exploring her sexual abilities. Since she is married to Grady, loves Albert and have an affection towards a nineteen years old Germain, she is seen as the Jezebel who leads men to sin. Brown Zakiya A. asserts that she is characterized as a filthy women by the men and women, in her village, who are afraid of her independence and self-confidence (14). However, Honeybee (Shug) does not allow this stereotype to overcome her by any means. The character of Celie, again, can fit into the Jezebel image. The poor girl is constantly raped by her stepfather and her husband, yet the two men never got punished for sexually assaulting her, as she is a Jezebel, what they did to her is not even considered a misdeed. Alfonso, the stepfather, used her body for a year without having any mercy on her, when she first refuses, he threatens her and says “you better shut up and git used to it. But I (Celie) don’t never git (sic) used to it” (Walker 1), this demonstrates that Celie’s body was not hers anymore, she is treated as the Black female slaves who had their sexuality and reproduction controlled by the white masters (Brown 3). Celie, as the majority of Black women, has no power over her feminine physic, she believes in the jezebel image and allows it to dominate her. Therefore, she proves to society that it is normal to rape a lady and use her body against her will as long as she is Black.

1.3. “The Strong Black Woman” Stereotype

The Black women’ subjugation is an exceptional one as it is not based on one factor but a set of two. It is a blend of “sexism experienced by (white) women” and “the racism experienced by (Black) men” (Colfer et al 4). It is important to mention that the Black female’s situation is not shaded light on until the term intersectionality is considered as a point of discussion. This term is brought by the Professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw who notices that “black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy because both are practiced on a discrete set of experiences that does not accurately reflect the interaction

of race and gender” (140). That is to say, the combination of being Black and a female has made the Black women the most marginalized group through history. Intersectional oppressions have a fundamental role in shaping Black women’s personality, their view of life and most importantly their identity. It appears that Crenshaw’s studies are lucrative as they lead to a much more profound analysis of Black women’s issues.

Drawing on Crenshaw’s theory, the psychoanalytic Maria Root has developed her term of ‘insidious trauma’ where she clarifies that intersectional oppression has a “traumatogenic effects” that not only affects the body but also violates the spirit and the soul (107). However, her study was not conducted to Black women in a specific way, unlike Jessica Lewis who has deeply examined the way gender and race intersect to create an abnormal type of trauma within Black women, she argues that “adversity resulting from one’s gender and race can be doubly painful” (28). Judging from the fact that Black females persecution is gender-race based, the trauma they have experienced is agonizing, therefor, their inner being must be undoubtedly damaged. Lewis further explains the tribulation which originates from one’s identity and low social status can be dispiriting and traumatizing. This statement spotlights the disastrous mental state of non-white females. Owing to the fact that they were persecuted for having a ‘Black female’ identity in addition to being considered inferior than all society categories, the traumatizing results of dark skinned women are highly alarming.

Trauma is a major theme in Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Due to the violence they have experienced from the whites and the Blacks, women in this selected text have been mentally damaged. In her article entitled “Interpretation of Celie’s trauma in *The Color Purple* from the Perspective of Trauma Theory”, Zhao Qing examines the traumatic circumstances that the protagonist has undergone. Although her study is well grounded, Qing has neglected the presence of other ‘mentally oppressed’ female character.

Although Nettie is emotionally stronger than Celie, it does not prevent her from experiencing an isolating trauma. After refusing to be sexually assaulted by her sister's husband, Nettie get kicked out from the only place she ever considered a home. Yet, she is lucky enough to find her way to Africa and work with a missionary couple while living within an African tribe. Since Nettie shares with Celie a very strong bond, this separation have engendered a deep feeling of loneliness and isolation. By virtue of gender oppression mainly, Celie's sister had to endure a painfully traumatic situation, "[w]hen I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray. Locked in myself and choking on my own heart. I am so lonely, Celie" (Walker 67). Through these faithful words, Nettie confesses to her sister that the loneliness she feels is tearing her soul up. Feeling numb and empty have become ordinary emotions for her. She also admits that even when being surrounded by people, she still feels like an isolated stranger, she has "nothing of [her] own. No man, no children, no close friend" (Walker 89). In his article "Feministic Issues in *The Color Purple*" Ahmed Karyosh Jubair states that the letters Celie and Nettie were exchanging are the means that keep them sane (940). Notably, Nettie's isolation trauma is not as effective as Celie's, hence she kept writing letters and hoping to reunite with her sister for whole three decades.

Moreover, racial trauma is a significant theme in the novel, it appears through Celie and Nettie's mother, which is a mental illness that showcases the effects of direct or indirect encounter with racist discrimination. This concept is first introduced by Robert T. Carter in his paper titled "Racism and Psychological and Emotional Injury." Although her short appearance in the story, the protagonists' mother has an effective role. Since her beloved husband was murdered for no reason other than being Black, the poor widow have been consumed by a traumatic emotional pain. By delving into the novel's events, one can ratiocinate that the misery Celie and Nettie have endured is all due to their mothers' sickness. The race based discrimination that the mother have indirectly tolerated has made her physically weak,

emotionally drained and eventually lead to her death. Celie states in the first letter she wrote to god that her mother is always ill and unwilling (Walker 1). It is important to mention that the most serious effect that racial trauma brought to Celie's mother is disassociation. According to Alex Klein, a person who have experienced racial trauma is most likely to disassociate himself from others (2). Accordingly, Celie's mother have downright disassociated herself from her daughters' life. She could not even understand her eldest daughter's pain and kept cursing at her for being lazy and improper. She was so sunken in her pain that she did not even notice her daughter's life is being destroyed in front of her eyes. The racial trauma did not only has a damaging effect on Celie's mother, but it was a point of departure of the sorrowful and injustice journey the pair of sisters went through.

As a further matter, trauma in *The Color Purple* is not conducted to individual females only, but rather to a group of Black women, which is known as collective trauma. In "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning" the professor Gilad defines the collective trauma as "a recollection of a terrible event that happened to a group of people" (1). In *The Color Purple*, women's horrible incidents are all related to objectification. All females of the story, namely Celie, Nettie, Sofia, Shug Avery, Celie's mother, Mister's sisters, have memorized being dehumanized by Black and White society, which created the same traumatic pain within them. They are to be made small which indicates to be made to feel "humiliated and inferior" (Eduberdie 1). Domestic violence, mental abuse and rape are daily incidents that women in the novel have faced, hence, all of them have endured a painful collective trauma that lasts even when they are liberated.

In addition to the controlling images that were mentioned previously, the strong Black woman is another stereotype that aims to ruin the Black womanhood. As it was stated before, the Black female has encountered intersectional oppression which has logically caused her an unbearable amount of pain, thus community expected from her to handle all that silently and it

ashamed her if she tries to voice out her struggle. The strong Black woman is “[the] one who overcomes all obstacles, remains strong despite problems, and sacrifices herself for others” (White 1). Due to all the violence and injustice Black women have faced, their lives are strongly damaged on both levels: the external and the internal one. In an attempt to keep the Black female’s struggle in the shadows— so she can never heal herself or ask for her rights— the image of the strong Black woman is created. Ostensibly, this myth is supposed to represent Black women in a “positive” manner, since strength is a favorable characteristic that everyone wishes to have, but unobtrusively, it is self-damaging because along with making people “inattentive to black women’s pain” it “prevent them [non-white females] from speaking about their traumas” (Pétigny 37).

Both Black and white society expect from Black females to stand still and keep pleasing others despite all the mistreatment they have experienced, community has denied her the most elementary human rights, which is to feel weak, care for herself and break down whenever she needs to. The strong Black woman stereotype depicts the Black women as a tough (on herself) yet a soft creature with others. “In Speaking to the Silences: Black Women’s Mediation of Historical Trauma and Healing”, Naimah Zulmadelle Pétigny narrates:

[...] I distinctly remember looking around and seeing other Black girls on the train who looked like me. Searching to meet their eyes, my stares were eager. They looked back; hard and sort of angry. I could read the agitation all over their faces, [...] Responding to aggression through hardness seemed to be the only way these girls connected with each other. [...] As I got older and continued to ride the subway, the stares started to signal other things for me. It became clear to me that something was going on with black women- as individuals and as collective. These cold, strained interactions seemed to be proof enough

that some type of historical anger was affecting Black women and girls.

(4)

She emphasizes in this anecdote the strong effects of the strong Black woman stereotype, concluding that young and old Black females have strongly tried to fit into the strong Black woman image to the point where they are seeking help unconsciously using their facial expressions.

In *The Color Purple*, the female characters firmly embrace the image of the strong Black woman. They are all internally ruined but also still strong for their families. Roxanne Angela Donovan confirms that care-giving is one of the notions that is related to the strong Black woman stereotype. Care-giving stands for the idea that Black women must “give her time, energy and resources freely to those who need it without resentment or expectations of reciprocation” (4). This statement describes what the Black female characters of *The Color Purple* have been doing their whole life. Although being miserably treated by her husband Mister, Celie takes care of his children as if they are hers, she describes them as “bright but they mean. They say Celie, I want dis (sic), Celie I want dat (sic). Our Mama let us have it” (Walker 10); she always takes care of their needs without complains. She even have the strength to forgive him and care for his feelings. Sofia and Squeak adopt the same notion, this latter cares for Sofia’s children while she was in jail and the former raises the Mayor’s kids although being strongly suppressed by their white parents. The female characters of the story are a pure depiction of the strong Black woman stereotype.

This chapter is concerned with the devaluation of the Black females. It has examined the degradation of Black womanhood and femininity by the Black and white society. Black men have exploited their women, as a reaction to the white oppressors, in order to practice their manhood. Furthermore, it studied the fact that this behavior can be related to gender socialization. This chapter also has explored the various negative representations of Black

females that were created to justify the acts practiced upon them. Overall, this chapter has viewed how Black women are considered as inferior to men, trapping them within various ruinous controlling images that aims to devalue them internally and externally. The next chapter will discuss the literary mechanisms utilized by Walker in order to centralize her Black women's femininity.

Chapter Two

Rewriting Heroism and the Masculinization of the Black Female Characters

“A strong woman knows she has strength enough for the journey, but a woman of strength knows it is in the journey she will become strong.”

Luke Easter.

“Women were eager to liberate themselves from the feudal rites not to construct new identities but to identify with masculine ones.”

(Nhất Linh, Masculinization of Femininity 87)

This chapter is concerned with rewriting heroism in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. It shows the way Walker has attributed masculine traits to her Black women as a means of reversing gender norms. This revisionary methods as being utilized by the contemporary female writer aims to bring her Black protagonists to the center. The first sub section of this chapter is titled “Rewriting the Margin within the Center.” It studies the “margin” as coined by Hooks that has been adapted differently by this Black female writer. Her Black female characters subvert the mechanism of both “the center” and the margin by creating their own center. The second sub section is titled “Women’s Quest: A Community Quest”. It traces the journey of the protagonist to be akin to the role of heroism. Walker in the selected text has created a new type of heroism that is not based on individuality, but on collectiveness; the journey embarked on by her Black women to reach their spiritual and physical wholeness. The last sub section is titled “Gender as a Doing,” it looks into liberating the female characters, the heroine mainly, from the chains of gender roles. Through attributing her female characters with masculine traits, Walker proves that gender is a notion that consists of a set of acts, she accordingly emancipate

her female protagonists from the established gender standards that control women in terms of bodily qualifications, sexual orientations and their convictions. Thus, Bell Hooks', Maureen Murdock's and Judith Butler's literary concepts are indispensable to describe Walker's heroine who "leaves behind their previous way of seeing things and adopt new attitudes towards life" (Lopez 8).

2.1. Rewriting the Margin within the 'Centre'

Gloria Jean Watkins, best known as Bell Hooks, was an American author, activist and feminist renowned for her writings on race, gender and class. In her ground-breaking publication *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), she has condemned previous feminist discourses that, according to her, have defined feminism to only include middle class white women. Hooks argues that even though feminist movements were determined to gain the same rights as men, they seemed to overlook, purposely, other "non-white, unprivileged women" (Biana 13). Betty Friedan's definition of feminism in *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) has inspired Hooks to come with her own definition of feminist theory. Hooks' new theory not only aims to end the sexist oppression and exploitation, but also includes other forms of oppression like racism, sexism, and imperialism (Biana 13). To Hooks, Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* was written as if powerless, homeless and silenced women "did not exist" and that her book was directed to "a select group of college- educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women- housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life" (1). Friedan's theory has promoted contemporary liberal feminism movements, thus, Hooks has brought a new remedy to the latter- revolutionary feminism.

While liberal feminism focuses on gender equality, revolutionary feminism, in fact, focuses to end patriarchy and sexism, as stated in Hooks' *Feminism is for Everybody*:

Passionate Politics (4). Liberal feminists promote equality between same class men and women, it is a “romanticized version of freedom” (Biana 16). Through her new definition of feminism, Hooks offers a change that covers all oppressed groups and one that will last longer.

The foundation of a future feminist struggle must be solidly based on a recognition of the need to eradicate the underlying cultural basis and causes of sexism and other forms of group oppression. Without challenging and changing these philosophical structures, no feminist reforms will have a long-range impact. (31)

The word ‘margin’ in the title refers to Black women who exist only in the margins, isolated from the American society, i.e., the ‘center’. Thus, Hooks alters such establishments by giving a neoteric interpretation to the word. She has encouraged Black women to remodel the ‘margin’ that is always associated with them by creating their own ‘center’ within the margin. Hooks believes that to be part of the center, one must be born under certain circumstances that would allow them to do so, such as class and race. Hence, Black unprivileged women would forever be marginalized. Therefore, a ‘new’ center within the margin including various modifications in gender roles must be created.

In an article by Linda Abbandonato titled “A View from ‘Elsewhere’: Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroism’s Story in *The Color Purple*”, Celie is described as an “invisible woman” (1106), as she is a silenced, submissive and an abused character. However, Walker has formed her character to be the ‘center’ of the novel (1106). By centering her, Walker, through Celie, has challenged the known patriarchal norms which downgrade women. At the beginning, Celie and the other women’s lives are exploited and full with sorrow, but later on, the character have gained assertiveness and are able to gain selfhood (Shrivastva 1130). Owing to the Black and strong females around her, Celie eventually learns how to be different and

successful despite her patriarchal society. This newfound power enables the protagonist to leave her husband Mister. “You are a lowdown dog is what’s wrong. Its time to leave you and enter into the creation [...] But Nettie and my children coming home soon, I say. And when she do, all us together gon whop your ass” (Walker 207). Shrivastva in his article on resistance against marginalization in Walker’s text has referred to Celie’s newfound freedom as “her own world” (1130) where she now could freely make her own decisions and be her own person. Her liberty has been asserted thanks to the “community of her black sisters” (1130). In due course, this Black sister’s community with Celie has managed to create “matriarchal community” through which they can showcase their newfound freedom against the oppressive, patriarchal society they live in (1131).

Walker has successfully adopted Hooks’ framework of marginalization and how Black women should create their own ‘center’ within the ‘margin’. However, revolutionary feminism has been heavily criticised by many theorists. Hazel T. Biana, for example, questioned whether Hooks has included “all women of ‘color’” or just the Blacks (19). While she has denounced previous theorists who have not included Black women, repeatedly, Hooks seems to have also ignored the struggles of others as well. According to Biana, *Feminist Theory’s* author appears to believe that other women, oppression is less prominent than African-American’s (21).

Blacks have always been challenged in terms of identity living within white mainstream culture, thus this duality has brought upon them, if one must say, an identity crisis, a confusion even. Nettie, Celie’ sister, runs away from the house because of Albert’s harassment. She seeks shelter with Pastor Samual, who provide her a job as a servant than she would travel with him and his wife to Africa as missionaries. Although the latter has a deep connection with her skin, Nettie still finds herself unable to connect with the new place as an African-American (Lou 28).

She goes even further to question whether Africa is a real place, yet, eventually, and as she learns about African history and culture, she starts to realize the uniqueness of it (28).

In the morning I started asking questions about Africa and started reading all the books Samuel and Corrine have on the subject. Did you know there were great cities in Africa [...], thousands of years ago? That the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the Bible meant all of Africa? (Walker 136)

Nettie wrote in one letter to Celie. And as her knowledge started to grow, she begins to question some norms that are unacceptable for her as she grew up as a US citizen, heavily influenced by white society characteristics (Lou 28). She even resents her ancestors when she has read about “the Africans [who] sold us because they loved money more than their own sisters and brothers” (Walker 147). Furthermore, when Nettie meets the Olinka tribe, she suggests to educate their girls and women for the sake of their independence and enlightenment because according to them “[a] girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something” (235). Nettie’s story and development proves that Blacks must unite and support each other in order to eliminate their exploitation.

In addition, *The Color Purple*’s women used handicrafts in order to create their own center. In *Sewing, Quilting, Knitting: Handicraft and Freedom*, Catherine E. Lewis has described the act of sewing, where making pants and cloths by *The Color Purple*’s Black women represents Walker’s creation of a feminine spot. The quilt making symbolizes getting together as a unity. Furthermore, the act of sewing is considered as an unimportant labour for women, however, Celie with Shug’s help, turns this unessential work to a profitable business. In order to help,

Celie hires women who have suffered to bond and “free themselves from restrictions and take strength from female influence” through domestic labour (163).

In men’s eyes, women are considered as objects for them who can be abused and even sold for miniscule prices. Again, *The Color Purple*’s protagonist is brought to the picture as, by the end of the story, she finds her true identity as a proud Black American woman. Celie’s proudness comes from the lessons she has learned and shared with her Black sisters. Shug teaches Celie to educate and respect herself despite the patriarchal society she lives in. Walker has shaped her protagonist to go on a journey of self-discovery, she becomes a joyful and successful woman after living under daily struggles. Celie’s creativity symbolizes what women can acquire from using and “channelling their creative energy” (Amrutha 255).

2.2. Women’s Quest: “A Community Quest”

The term ‘heroism’ has always been associated with the male sphere, and literature is no different. Constantly portrayed as the knights in shining armours, men have been placed at the center most of times. As a matter of fact, Joseph Campbell’s best known work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) where he stresses on the fact that “all heroes are men” (3) and that women should only be represented as an award to the heroic man (101). This has lead women to believe in the male’s supremacy in terms of heroism and the heroic treats. Scholars like Maureen Murdock, Bell Hooks, Katherine Pope and Lesly Margret have started, gradually, changing the biased image of heroism by presenting new standards. *The Heroine’s Journey: A Woman’s Quest for Wholeness* (1990) by Murdock came as a reaction to Campbell’s theory of The Hero’s Journey. Murdock states that women, in fact, do have a quest to follow during this time and age. This quest, according to her, is for women to “fully embrace” their feminine, appreciate themselves as women and to heal the “deep wound of the feminine” (3). She later

adds that it is an “inner journey” that would eventually lead to a “balanced, whole human being” (3).

Murdock believes that this journey that women seek is to “heal the internal split between woman and her feminine nature” (2). When asked about his view on the matter, Campbell has stated that “women don’t need to make the journey” in the first place (qtd. in Murdock 2). In addition, Campbell has not only excluded women from heroism, but also has referred to women’s growth as unchallenging. In her study, Elizabeth J. Ordóñez has defined heroine studies as a way to take on a quest in order to find new meanings and perceptions (52).

As heroism has been long associated with men and told from men’s perspective, it seems that it has cancelled the real meaning of female heroism. In her article “It’s Time to Throw out The Hero with a Thousand Faces” Chris Winkle has stated that the book is based on folkloric symbols and patterns, thus it conjures up an image of men with inhuman powers defying all kinds of threats and dangers. Yet, women, when put under the same perspective, they are portrayed as “goddesses, helpers, wise women or evil temptresses” whom the hero ought to defy on his journey (Ordóñez 52). In this regard, Carol Peason and Katherine Pope called it a “dualistic assumption about appropriate male and female behaviour” (52), as it gives a double standard vision of how men and women should act and be.

Therefore, Murdock’s conceptualization of ‘heroism’ came to remodel and rewrite Campbell’s pattern of ‘gendered heroism’. By including the female, the theorist has broken the traditional mind-set that associated heroism with masculinity. In an interview with Mary Davis, and when asked about the difference between the hero’s journey and the heroine’s journey, Murdock stated that “[t]he feminine journey is about going down the deep into soul, healing and reclaiming, while the masculine journey is up and out, to spirit.” In other words, whereas the hero’s journey’s fulfilment lays by achieving a grand triumphant, the heroine’s journey is achieved by self-discovery and self-acceptance to heal the feminine wound. Therefore,

Murdock's archetype is considered as a guide for women's quest to wholeness despite the known rules set by men.

In *The Heroine's Journey*, Murdock has introduced a cyclic model that describes women's journeys to their wholeness. This pattern is derived from Campbell's pattern of the heroic quest, yet the language of the stages has emerged from Murdock herself (3). The cyclic journey starts with 'the separation from the feminine' and ends with the 'integration of the masculine'. Murdock states that the first stage starts with the heroine's search for her identity, for she receives a "call" when her "old self" is no longer accepted (5). This separation, which indicates the beginning of the journey, occurs when a woman rejects her feminine side because it is too often described as weak and unproductive (6). Similarly, Walker describes her black female characters as leading figures of their journey. Shug Avery, for instance, rejects motherhood; is open about her sexuality and is also a singer. Sofia is a strong, independent and confident woman who confronts her husband's abuse. Also, Squeak goes on to pursue her dream to become a singer despite her husband's refusal "[...] I want to sing, say Squeak. Sing! Say Harpo. [...] You ain't (sic) had to sing in public since Jolentha was born. Everything you need I done provided for" she repeated "I need to sing" (Walker 93). She implicitly claims that her dream is as essential as basic life needs. Moreover, she demands from Harpo to call her by her real name, Mary Agnes, because it identifies her real identity which is a singer (93). These women have proven that they are, indeed, not weak nor unproductive and that their dreams and goals are as valuable as men. The second stage is entitled 'Identification with the masculine and gathering the allies'. Murdock identifies this stage as choosing a different path than the social role chosen to women and to fight an organization or a group that limits her life options. In other words, that on their journey, women would face many difficulties, because their journey in the first place is against societal roles indicated for them. It would be Mister and Pa for Celie, Albert and Alphonso for Sofia and yet again for Squeak. Furthermore, women should gather

allies in order to face the previously mentioned difficulties. In the case of *The Color Purple*, the women's ensemble is, in fact, their sanctuary as they help and guide each other to reach the end of their quest, together. The forthcoming paragraphs will explain these stages.

Walker has dedicated her literary works to bring her Black female character to the forth and the selected text *The Color Purple* has proven her achievement time and again. The Afro-American writer and activist shifts the common literary canon of heroism and leadership from men to a Black female. Celie in the novel, is not only the central character, but the narrator as well. Celie is an uneducated, voiceless and young Black female, yet through Walker's narrative strategy, she has achieved a "radical rewriting of quest" (Miles 116). In other terms, the quest that is sought after in *The Color Purple* is not individual, but multiple as the growth and change of characters happens "within relationships and in terms of relationships" (117). Miles states in *The Female Quest in the Novels of Alice Walker* that Celie is not only telling her story, but the "stories of Shug, Mary Agnes, Nettie-- and to a lesser extent, Albert and Harpo" (115).

Walker, yet again, changes Murdock's one woman journey to a community journey where the hardships and growth affect the community within itself. Furthermore, the quest phases are divided over multiple characters accomplished with the use of quest features such as separation, identification with the masculine and gathering of allies. According to Miles, *The Color Purple* asserts kinship's values (117), and that in his book *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement of Intimacy*, Michael Cooke has interpreted it as "social bonding", sharing their worries, burdens and being present for each which has become a used and dominant mode in Black literature in the latest years (117). In *The Color Purple*, Walker manifests this celebrated kinship through bonds between women.

In other words, taking into consideration the selected text, Celie's development is at the core of her friendship and relationships with the novel's characters such as Shug Avery, Nettie, Mary Agnes and Sofia. Celie's encounter with several strong Black females will help her find

the true meaning of her existence. We take for instance, Shug Avery. Aside from being a singer, Shug is not afraid to speak her mind. When Celie is described as voiceless, Shug “has a voice and knows its power” (Miles 124). Furthermore, the theme of ‘voice’ is manifested in the novel in a different way, which is through letters. As an epistolary novel, Celie tells her story through letters to God, in a way it is considered as “listening in to someone’s prayers” (126). Yet, the way Celie copes with the abuse and violence, she bears it with a passive attitude. It is not until many years later, when she finally speaks of her pain and pent up anger to Shug Avery.

The friendships introduced in *The Color Purple* are essential for they serve as goals for the quest in lieu of a medium to the quest and that the relationships between the novel’s women involve their emotional lives instead of their lives with men.

It is in these relationships that the real intimacy occurs, intimacy arising from sharing feelings and shared experiences, from making quilts together and from supporting on another in child-care and work. It is the women in this novel who nurture each other. They do not expect, nor do they get, nurturing from men. (131)

And by following Murdock’s pattern of the heroine’s journey, it is crucial to point out that this journey, *The Color Purple*’s women journey, is a search for self, but more importantly, it’s a statement against attempted eradication of Black women’ struggles and suffering long since slavery started in America.

2.3. Gender as a “Doing”

Gender roles have been considered as an intrinsic feature within individuals since ever. Springing from the bodily qualities of a person, gender defines people’s role in life, their mentalities and their sexual orientations. Contradicting the common concept of gender roles, the philosopher Judith Butler has established her well-grounded theory “gender performativity” where she has reshaped the common gender standards. In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism*

and the Subversion of Identity Butler reinforces the notion of gender which most feminists stand for, that is gender identity is culturally built. The immortal words of the French philosopher Simon de Beauvoir “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (283) have inspired Butler to create an impactful interpretation of the substance of gender. She explicitly claims that “gender is not something one is, it is something one does” (25), shedding light on the fact that the biological sex of a person does not define their gender identity, but their actions do. Therefore, Actions are the primary source that should be taken into consideration when categorizing people into males and females, they actually should not be categorized in the first place, Neida clarifies in her article.

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, was the one who has put a foundation for gender- sex studies. In his *Complete Works* Freud states that “the position of the genitals” is the “decisive and [the] unchangeable factor” (2346) which set males apart from females. Freud has implicitly claimed that femininity and masculinity are strongly related to the physical appearance of people. This basically indicates that gender roles are not facultative, they are rather inescapable. Nevertheless, the theorist Sandra Bem’s view of gender differs from Freud’s one. In her book *The Development of Gender Schema Theory*, Bem affirms that the traditional definition of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed. She has named the process of shaping gender norms “sex typing” (598). According to her, gender is a teachable phenomenon in which society indirectly educates children on the “appropriate sex behaviour” so that he or she can spontaneously “encode and [...] organize information – including information about the self- according to the culture’s definitions of maleness and femaleness” (603). Thus, male kids are taught that violence, roughness and harshness are traits attributed to men, while females have learned that being a woman requires softness and submissiveness. It is true that Bem have provided a deep explanation of gendered identities, but her theory was not expanded enough to include new interpretations of sex and gender.

In the selected novel, some of Walker's characters are a perfect significance of the standard gender roles. Most Black men are aggressive and violent, and most importantly, Black women are voiceless and they take their stereotyped femaleness as an inevitable destiny. Celie, the protagonist of the story, firmly embraces her femininity, in fact, she can be seen as too feminine. Arthi and M. Phil asserts in their paper that she fits perfectly in the stereotypical sex framework by being extremely nice, obedient, have no self-esteem and compliant (830). Celie is admittedly spiritless, which society teaches every female to be. Moreover, The Olinka- an African tribe which Nettie visits during her missionary- have the same conventions of sex roles as the American society. Nettie, Celie's sister, is unwelcomed among the Olinka's people for being an unmarried adult women. According to the Olinkian traditions, the only goal that every female should pursue is marriage, and since Nettie fails to accomplish that, she is looked down at and seen as a "non- person". Through the Olinka tribe sub plot, Walker has successfully proven that the traditional gender norms are universally agreed on, thus females everywhere are compelled to fulfil a secondary disesteemed role.

Unlike other feminists, Butler has not only deconstructed the classic formulations of gender that has inferiorities women, but she has also enriched the gender roles studies by introducing the term "performativity" to them. As aforementioned, society has believed that gender identities are a real thing, while they are in fact misconnected (Gulickson 5). However, relying on Butler's theory, women have finally gained the right to break the chains of their femininity, they are able to perform in a "masculine" manner. With the appearance of the third wave of feminism, many women have chosen not to be oppressed relatively to their alleged femininity, but they have decided to be voiced, irresistible and independent. One of Butler's aims in writing *Gender Trouble* is to "reconsider the statues of "women" as the subject of feminism and the sex/gender distinction" (xxx). Since her studies deconstruct the cultural gender notions, the performativity gender theory can be seen as a helping hand for the oppressed Black women

who wants to escape the gender norms that placed them at the bottom of society, as well as pave the way for them to explore their real gender identities.

Moreover, sexual orientations are an essential part of Butler's gender studies. Women, notably, are allowed to be attracted to the opposite sex only. In fact, expressing their sexual thoughts is a non-discussed taboo, let alone questioning their sexual preferences. However, gender performativity theory has allowed women to explore their sexuality through wising them up on the options they have which are the ability to be sexually attracted to the same sex or both sexes at once. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler clarifies the notion of performativity that is mentioned in *Gender Trouble*. She has affirmed that since people's gender is taken as a normative notion in society, their sexual intercourses are absolutely unquestionable, "sex" acts, Butler states, as a "part of regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs"(1). The sexual process is a cyclical situation where people practice a regular task that aims to produce more people who are socially obligated to practice the same misinterpreted process. In their article titled "Language and Gender" Penelope and Mc Conrell declares that kids are learnt to crave the "perfect matched" significant other from the opposite sex (17). In due course, girls' first and only concern is to find her manly other half, it makes no difference whether she is actually attracted to him or his ability to fulfil her sexual desires, gaining a man is the greatest achievement a woman can ever attain. The heterosexual relationship is based on the fact that female's sexual preferences are out of discussion. This fact is manifested on the way Celie fears all men, she admits that she "don't even look at mens (sic)" (Walker 5) because she is afraid of them, yet she was obligated to get married, live and have a cold sexual relationship with a man she does not even love. The thought of being sexually attracted to a woman have never crossed her mind although she likes looking at them.

Black females' bodies are treated as a guaranteed property for their man. They are represented in literary works as hideous, sinful and shameful. Therefore, this has motivated

many African-American novelists to challenge the gender norms in their writings. Walker namely in her selected text has adapted Butler's performativity gender theory with regards to her Black female protagonists' gender constructivism. The masculinization of the female characters is Walker's method to empower the oppressed Black women. Masculinization is a revolutionary literary technique adopted by contemporary female writers, in which they liberate their female characters from the culturally constructed gender identity by attributing 'masculine' traits to them. This revisionary technic may seem as a strange method to free females from the male oriented society, but it is indeed the most suitable way to empower Black women. Sofia, Harpo's wife and Mister's daughter in law, has been detached from her feminine gender role physically and spirituality. Women in Afro-American community must have a small diminutive body, Sofia's physical appearance, on the other hand, is not slightly close to the socially constructed formulation of a feminine body. She is big and strong in a way that "give(s) you the feeling she all there. Solid" (Walker 21). Butler in her *Gender Trouble* states that "gender is instituted through the stylization of to the body" (519). Thus, depriving Sofia from the bodily feminine standards is freeing her from her physical weakness and giving her the chance to save herself from being domestically abused. She claims at some point that no matter how much she loves her husband, she would kill him if he tries to harm her (Walker 24). Unlike most women in her village, Sofia refuses to submit neither to the Black community nor to the white one, consequently, she loses twelve years of her life due to her refusal to work for the white mayor's wife. In spite of the fact that Sofia is an oppressed Black woman, her performance questions the whole meaning of femininity in Black society.

Shug Avery is also a non-traditional female character. Through her, The Afro-American novelist has defied all the gender norms, making a revolution in the basics of Black female's identity. In Black community, girls in their twenties should be married with several children, Shug Avery has kids yet she has never been married. Shug Avery-Mister's mistress- is a

beautiful woman, she is powerful, fearless, knows her worth and exhibits to the whole world that not a single soul can dominate her irresistible spirit or her body. She is detached from the main source of her femininity which is motherhood, she abandons her children for the sake of purchasing her dream as a blues singer. Ruth Horowitz in his essay “The Expanded family and Family Honor” defines motherhood as “the most culturally acceptable identity available to women” (71). He clarifies that the role of the mother is destined for every female before she is even born. Shug, however, declines this idea by escaping from the “mother hold” (Murdock 38) on her.

Concerning her sexual identity, Shug Avery has used her body in every way that pleases her. She is completely deprived from the heterosexual identity Black women are obligated to adopt. Janusiewicz points out that the character of Shug Avery is a response to the issue of normalized heterosexuality that Walker has openly debated (7). Shug Avery proves that being bisexual does not make a woman any womanly, if anything, women having power over their bodies is their first step towards freedom. Shug Avery is a female who has reached her full self-recognition when She “displaces and denaturalizes the hegemonic universality of Heterosexuality” (Boucher 117).

Influenced by outrageous female characters such as Sofia and Shug Avery, the heroine of the story eventually finds her way to bodily freedom and self-reliance. Walker has masculinized Celie as an attempt to release her from the trapping femininity she has been embracing since the day she realizes what to be a woman supposedly means. The Black protagonist has strongly believed that it is conventional for a man to beat or sexually abuse his woman, while the wife’s role is to endure all the pain without any objections. The interaction with Sofia have thought Celie that being a woman does not necessarily means accepting violence and mistreatment. Additionally, being married to Mister, Celie have never experienced pleasure, their sexual relationship was one sided, She admits that “[m]ost of the time [she]

pretends [she] ain't there. He never know the difference. Never ast [her] how [she] feel, nothing” (Walker 49). For that specific reason, Celie has an indescribable sexual experience when she is with Shug. Detaching Celie from heterosexuality have allowed the protagonist to enjoy the sexual process and to love and appreciate her body. It is commonly known that self-love is the first step to get power.

Femininity in Black community is not only devoted to sexual orientations and bodily features, but it also means being submissive to the society generally and the husband specifically. Women, basically, are not able to choose suitable manner of living for themselves. In this regard, Rahil Hamza and Mohammed Chaaban Ali state that “[Black women] are also taught to defy the gendered self as feminine, playing the role of the subservient wife and mother, and being devoted to the domestic sphere, the social duties and the will of the husband” (216). The protagonist Celie, since she was a child, had no ability to design her life's path. She is forced into a toxic marriage, takes care of a house that is never hers and raises children she did not gave birth to just because her culturally based femininity reside in doing so. Living with Shug Avery the free spirit, the desire of not being assumed to the domestic feminine role starts to grow inside Celie. Normally, being independent and living with no man or children does “not correspond to the prescribed traits of femininity” (Rahil and Chaaban Ali 220). However, Walker challenges the standards of femininity by giving the power for her protagonist to fight against her husband. When Albert tries to prevent Celie from leaving him, she stood up for herself for the first time by stating strongly that she is poor and Black, she might be ugly and cannot cook, but she, indeed, exists (Walker 95). Eventually and only when acting in opposition to the gendered social expectations, Celie is capable to live a successful and purposeful life.

This chapter has dealt with the revision of the traditional definition of literary heroism that was related exclusively to the male sphere. It has mainly examined the methods Walker has persuaded to reshape the known concept of gender roles as a mean to bring her disempowered

Black female characters to the center. In an attempt to go against the patriarchal norms that placed women at the bottom of the social hierarchy, Walker has empowered her Black female characters through creating a 'center' for them, strengthening them by bonds of friendship and liberating these protagonists from the gender roles that they are trapped in. By applying these literary techniques with regards to her Black female characters, Walker has presented new politics with regard to both heroism and femininity.

General Conclusion

This thesis has explored the rewriting of heroism through the masculinization of the Black protagonists in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. It has mainly investigated the revisionary methods Walker has persuaded in her selected text. In doing so, she has reversed the literary canon that devaluated the Black women and has positioned them to the margins. Thus, Walker in her fictional literary piece has deconstructed both: the canon of gendered heroism by making a Black female the leading figure of her narrative, and the culturally constructed concept of femininity- which has been an effective mechanism to keep Black women in the shadows- through attributing her female characters with masculine traits. This study projects the Black female protagonists' transcendental journey to reach their spiritual and physical wholeness.

The first chapter has focused on Black women's degraded position within the Black community, and how Black femininity and womanhood are devaluated and diminished. This chapter has drawn on concepts such as gender socialization and the controlling images to show that both the physical and mental abuse are the reasons for these women's damaged souls and spirits. It has investigated the way Black feminine standards have brought about the relegation of these black female characters' roles and position in Walker's novel. Black folks have abused their women in an attempt to prove their alleged 'masculinity', while the white community have created certain negative models to resonate oppression towards Black women.

The first chapter has been conducted based on Patricia Hill Collins' concept of 'controlling images', Cooley's concept of 'Gender Socialization' and the strong Black woman concept. The first sub-section of this chapter has explained the way masculinity is seen as superior to femininity within the Black community. Gender socialization and the whites' supremacy are considered the main factors of Black men's abusive behaviour towards their women. The second sub-section has viewed the reasons behind creating divers stereotypes that aim to

devalue Black femininity. The 'Jezebel', and the 'Matriarch' are few examples that resonate within the novel's female characters. Lastly, the third sub-section has shed light on Black women stereotypes that have had damaging effects on Black females' position.

The second chapter has dealt with the author's deconstruction of the traditional male oriented heroism with regards to race and gender. It has focused on Black heroine's mechanisms of self-empowerment. Hooks' concept of 'center', in addition to Murdock's archetypal framework and Butler's gender performativity are necessary to study Walker's text. This chapter has examined the techniques conducted by Walker to alter the politics of heroism and femininity.

The first sub section of this chapter has studied the "margin" as coined by Hooks that has been adapted differently by this Black female writer. Her Black female characters subvert the mechanism of both "the center" and the margin by creating their own center. The last sub section has looked into liberating the female characters, the heroine mainly, from the chains of gender roles. Through attributing her female characters with masculine traits, Walker proves that gender is a notion that consists of a set of acts, she accordingly emancipate her female protagonists from the established gender standards that control women in terms of bodily qualifications, sexual orientations and their convictions. Depending on Butler's Gender Performativity, the novel's female protagonists are able to break from their femininity concerning their sexual orientation and bodily characteristics.

This thesis has demonstrated how Walker has created leading Black female characters who have challenged the patriarchal and societal norms in order to restore their identities as both females and Black. The Afro-American novelist has succeeded to depict Black women's negative representation, simultaneously she has effectively liberated them from the previously mentioned depiction. Ultimately, Walker has managed to reconstruct a powerful image of the

Afro-American womanhood and femininity in her selected novel through bringing her Black female protagonist to the center.

This thesis could be used for future research and studies since it has provided interesting pieces of information and data about the patriarchal system of Black communities in contemporary literature and the multiple ways authors, like Walker, have chosen to deconstruct the previously mentioned system.

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Résumé

Afin de donner aux femmes noires le statut qu'elles méritent et d'agir sur l'image stéréotype dont elles étaient l'objet, un certain nombre d'écrivain Afro-Américains ont modifié cette images à travers leurs publications littéraires. L'écrivaine, militant et féministe Afro-Américaine Alice Walker a appelé à ce changement dans son roman « La couleur pourpre » (1982). Cette note vise à mettre en évidence les techniques que l'auteur a utilisées pour modifier et examiner comment le sens de l'héroïsme a été reconstruit dans le roman sélectionné. Le premier chapitre de la thèse s'est appuyé sur la théorie du contrôle des formes de Patricia Hill Collins et sur le concept de socialisme de C.H. Cooley afin d'expliquer les types d'oppression adoptés par une société patriarcal contre les femmes noires. Quant au deuxième chapitre, il porte sur les techniques adoptées par l'écrivaine en ce qui concerne l'héroïsme féministe, basées sur le model d'héroïsme féminin de Maureen Murdock, qui a été développé dans son livre « Arc du voyage de l'héroïne », en plus, de la théorie Les confusions et profusions des identités de Judith Butler présenté dans son livre « Trouble dans le genre » afin de responsabilises les personnages dans le roman. Cette thèse vise à montrer comment l'image de la femme noire a été modifié par l'héroïsme collectif et des caractéristiques masculines lui ont été données afin de revendiquer son rôle héroïque.

Mot clés : Alice Walker, féminisme noire, le voyage de femme noir, socialisme de genre, héroïsme, masculinisation, stéréotypes, La couleur pourpre, le centre.

ملخص

من أجل إعطاء المرأة السوداء المكانة التي تستحقها ومن أجل نفض الصورة النمطية عنها، قام عدد من الكُتّاب الافروامريكيون بتغيير هذه الصورة من خلال منشوراتهم الأدبية. الكاتبة، الناشطة والنسوية أليس والكر دعت لهذا التغيير في روايتها 'اللون البنفسجي' (1982). هذه المذكرة تهدف لتسليط الضوء على التقنيات التي اتخذتها الكاتبة لتغيير ودرس كيف تمّ إعادة تشكيل معنى البطولة في الرواية المختارة. اعتمد الفصل الأول من الأطروحة على نظرية باتريشيا هيل كولنز 'التحكم في الأشكال' ومفهوم كولي للتنشئة الاجتماعية من أجل شرح أنواع الاضطهاد الذي تم اعتماده من طرف المجتمع الذكوري ضدّ المرأة السوداء. أما بالنسبة للفصل الثاني، فهو يتعلّق بالتقنيات التي اعتمدتها الكاتبة فيما يخص البطولة النسوية اعتماداً على نموذج مورين مردوك للبطولة الأنثوية والذي تمّ تطويره في كتابها «رحلة البطلة»، بالإضافة إلى نظرية جوديث بتلر "تدير الهوية" المطروحة في كتابها «مشكلة النوع» من أجل تمكين الشخصيات النسائية في الرواية. هذه الأطروحة تهدف لإظهار كيف تمّ تغيير صورة المرأة السوداء من خلال البطولة الجماعية وإعطاء مواصفات ذكورية لها (الذكورة) من أجل المطالبة بدورها البطولي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أليس والكر، الأنوثة السوداء، رحلة المرأة السوداء، التنشئة، البطولة، الذكورة، اللون البنفسجي.