# Racism in Alice Walker's "The Color Purple"

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## العنصرية في رواية "اللون الأرجواني" لأليس ووكر

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Abstract

African-American writer Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel Purple Colour includes black women's issues in racist societies. Where oppression and racial discrimination against women. And also the lack of black woman's freedom of identity and choice. Inhumanism pushes women in African society to violate the rules and exit the circle of family and community laws because of psychological and physical violence. In the novel, Afro-American women portrayed in Celie's life must stand against white and black discrimination. Whites rejected the existence of blacks and treated them violently and cruelly, and even rape and murder. Black women were under the protection of men, as African-American girls and women were forced to live under cruel and brutal circumstances, all this led to psychological factors that affected the existence of the black woman because of the black skin colour and the issue of identity, where they fought to be recognised as members of society and we see this especially through the personality of Sophie and Shug Avery in purple.Blacks are considered slaves and they are inferior to whites despite obtaining their right to equality in the law, as this did not reduce their struggle and their struggle against racism in the American society dealt with in the novel. As a result of all this, the black woman has to fight and take caution outside and even inside their homes.

**Key Words**: Racism, Black Women, Identity, Psychological and Physical Violence, Feminist Resistance

الملخص

تتناول رواية "اللون الأرجواني" للكاتبة الأمريكية من أصل أفريقي أليس ووكر، الحائزة على جائزة بوليتزر، قضايا المرأة السوداء في المجتمعات العنصرية، حيث الاضطهاد والتمييز العنصري ضدها، بالإضافة إلى حرمانها من حرية الهوية والاختيار. تدفع اللاإنسانية النساء في المجتمع الأفريقي إلى انتهاك القواعد والخروج من دائرة قوانين الأسرة والمجتمع بسبب العنف النفسي والجسدي. في الرواية، يجب على المرأة الأمريكية من أصل أفريقي، التي تُصوَّر في حياة سيلي، الوقوف في وجه التمييز بين البيض والسود. رفض البيض وجود السود وعاملوهم بعنف وقسوة، بل وصل الأمر إلى الاغتصاب والقتل.كانت النساء السود تحت حماية الرجال، حيث أُجبرت الفتيات والنساء الأمريكيات من أصل أفريقي على العيش في ظروف قاسية ووحشية، كل هذا أدى إلى عوامل نفسية أثرت على وجود المرأة السوداء بسبب لون بشرتها ومسألة الهوية، حيث ناضلت من أجل الاعتراف بها كعضوات في المجتمع، ونرى ذلك بشكل خاص من خلال شخصية صوفي وشوغ أفيري في الرواية. يُعتبر السود عبيدًا، وهم أقل شأنًا من البيض رغم حصولهم على حقهم في المساواة أمام القانون، إلا أن ذلك لم يُضعف نضالهم ونضالهم ضد العنصرية في المجتمع الأمريكي الذي تتناوله الرواية. ونتيجةً لذلك، تضطر المرأة السوداء إلى النضال والحذر خارج منازلها، بل وحتى داخلها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنصرية، النساء السود، الهوية، العنف النفسي والجسدي، المقاومة النسوية

## 1.1Introduction

The color purple (1982) Alice Walker is an African-American in the Georgian countryside. As a feminist writer, as she calls herself, Walker has long been associated with feminism, presenting Black Existence from a female perspective. Alice Walker was as interested in black nationalism and the subject of apartheid as many authors such as Richard Wright and Alex Haley, striving to change society's view of the black individual.With the emergence of the civil rights movement in the period that saw the migration of many African Americans at that time, black authors were deeply influenced and recorded the movement. They tried to create a new concept of black nationalism. Many writers have tried to achieve such things as: James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez, Lorraine Hansperry, Amiri Baraka, and Martin Luther King Jr., who was one of the leaders of the civil rights movement.( Smitherman,G. 1994)[1].Author Alice Walker offers an insight into life for a poor African-American woman through the protagonist Seelly. She is an oppressed woman who is subjected to psychological and physical violence within her family, as society has refused to see Seely as a human being. The writer recounts through an organised plot the suffering and repression of black people, where Seeley embodied the role of the victim in the novel until the two women, Shog and Sophia, entered her life, began to defend herself against male persecution. Alice Walker used Sophia to illustrate women's struggle against multiform racism. Sophia is an important figure in the novel Every event and dialogue in the novel affects the nature of the characters in the novel, whether negatively or positively. Every human being is subjected to a range of experiences involving his or her mental, bodily, emotional, and social activities during his or her existence on Earth. These experiences must be had by him at various stages of his growth, from birth to adulthood. As he matures, culture, society, values, morals, ethics, and genetics all have an impact on his behavior.(Yahya, A. A., & Dakhil, T. A. 2022).[2] On the one hand, identity has been denied to black women because of racism. Blacks in a white American society were considered as mere objects during slavery and afterwards it took a long time to consider them as equal; when the Feminist movement began, it didn't include black women because of their colour. Black women have had the feeling, then, that "white women liberation did not challenge this sexist-racist practice; they continued it" (Shukla, S., & Banerji, N. 2012).[3] The narrative portrays an African American woman Celie who suffered the tyranny of patriarchal and racial oppression, overcame the shadow of the past, and eventually enjoyed a life of freedom, independence, and respect.Celie's self-identity developed in a dynamic pattern in a long temporal process.Celie's psychological evolution of self-identity is vital to the shape of ideology and independence as well as to the world around her. It concludes that conversing with oneself entails an ongoing investigation of one's self-identity, which is embodied in one's interactions with the world and efforts to influence one's circumstances. Only by developing a positive self-identity and conversing with oneself can one find peace and reconcile with the physical world(Craddock, T. 2014).[4]In American society. Women of color, as a whole, have long been perceived as the least valuable component in our social and economic system—the group with the least economic power and the smallest political influence.(Gomez, J. 1983).[5].Alice Walker's presentation of the double victimization of black women in the culture of African-American people in her novel The Color Purple (1985). It emphasizes the significance of Walker's portrayal of this dilemma, since living in South America has a profound impact on black people in general, and on women in particular. Women in that society suffer from double-otherness, being subjugated not only by white people, but also by black men. Walker has both positive and negative feelings about the South, which greatly influences the accuracy of the events presented in the novel. Walker has an amalgamation of negative and positive feelings towards the South; which justifies her temptation to romanticize the literature about the region, and promotes her ability to present an authentic account. In The Color Purple, Walker gives an account of the experiences of African-Americans women in a society dominated by male and white people. Through sketching the characters, Walker presents various themes including black feminism (Sadeq, A. E. 2017).[6]Celie was forced into a cruel and poor marriage to Albert, a much older widower than him, he treated her badly and was hiding her sister's letters Netti for years after Celie became a victim of men and because of her failure to resist abuse, Celie could not imagine another life and see herself ugly, ugly, unimportant and unimportant until Shug Avery's beautiful, sensual, confident and independent Shug entered her life, Albert's former mistress and the mother of three of his children years ago, a flashy blues singer who left Shug Agravy became stronger after a while. Celie learned that Albert hid her sister's messages for years, so she decided to leave him and went with Shug. She discovered her creative talent when she started a trouser company in Memphis years later, after she became a self-confident and valuable

person, Celie returned to Georgia to demand a huge home. Her sister Nettie returns from Africa with Celie's children and the family celebrates the survival of the human spirit.(Walker, A. 2011).[7].

**2.1 Racism**It is social, not" natural," it is general, not" personal"; and it is tragically effective. In a remarkable meditation on a subject at the troubled center of American life, Albert Memmi investigates racism as social pathology--a cultural disease that prevails because it allows one segment of society to empower itself at the expense of another.(Memmi, A. 2000). [8]In The Souls of Black Folk, W. E. B. Du Bois argues that, for African-Americans, white racism has produced a kind of double consciousness: "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others".It involves the feeling that one's consciousness and one's world are always spoken for, narrativized before the fact, and appropriated by the surrounding white society. For African-Americans, this translates into the inability to be non-black in an America that rejects Blacks, or the refusal to be non- American in an America that refuses Black Americans. For Du Bois, the strength to withstand and survive these contradictions and their psychic violence was a true measure of heroism.(Memmi, A. 2000).[9] The disparagement of others, from the disal- lowance of identity (and autonomy) for the dominat- ed. These three aspects (institutional exclusion, per- sonal prejudice, and a sense of identity) all function together. Personal feelings of antipathy and prejudice are not the core of racism; they arise in defense of an identity and a sociality of dominance. Institutional exclusion is not its core; the institutional works only if enacted and obeyed continually and voluntarily by individuals who gain their name and identity from it (e.g., Whites). And identity is not its core, since that is dependent on the others it dominates and centered in them, though it socially excludes them in the same moment.(Memmi, A. 2000).[10]Indeed, resistance to racism, exploitation and political repression were seldom for behind the laws and actions that defined the National Party's apartheid rule.The members of the African elite in 1912, under the chairmanship of Pimely Seme, established the South African Native National Congress, soon renamed the African National Congress (ANC). Earlier Mahatma Gandhi first employed the technique of passive resistance against discriminatory legislative affecting South African Indians. Winning  limited concessions he bequeathed the models of passive resistance to future protest-movements against racism in South Africa. The ANC together with coloured, Indian white and communist allies, become increasingly militant in the 1950's, as the Congress and its allies started to use techniques like civil disobedience to resist white rule. The Sharpeville incident of 1960, in which police shot dead 69 people who were protesting against the Pass laws, in a protest organized by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), a resistance organization that had split from the ANC.(Anand, M. 2004). [11]The beginning of the 1980's South Africa was widely predicted to be an route to a bloodbath, whose apartheid legacy would be a black versus white civil war. Blacks were removed from many jobs to be replaced by whites. The government has also begun to allocate jobs on an ethnic basis. The segregation in the form of apartheid had consisted two main elements of negative and positive nature. The former drew the fear of the whites of being outvoted by the numerically superior Black population. This fear was assuaged by legislative terminating any possible extension of the long standing non-racial franchise in the cape to the rest of the union. The Black in the cape, which was only province in which they enjoyed the franchise, were taken off the common electoral roll and transferred to a separate roll to elect three white representations to the house of Assembly.(Anand, M. 2004). [12] Speaking of racism, Nelson Mandela,we must mention his struggle against racism and segregation in South Africa to defend black people and their political, social and economic rights. In September 1998, Mandela was appointed Secretary-General of the Non-Aligned Movement, who held their annual conference in Durban.In 1994 Nelson Mandela says "A friend once asked me how I could reconcile my creed of African nationalism with a belief in dialectical materialism. For me, there was no contradiction. I was first and foremost an African nationalist fighting for our emancipation from minority rule and the right to control our own destiny. But at the same time, South Africa and the African continent were part of the larger world. Our problems, while distinctive and special, were not unique, and a philosophy that placed those problems in an international and historical context of the greater world and the course of history was valuable. I was prepared to use whatever means necessary to speed up the erasure of human prejudice and the end of chauvinistic and violent nationalism".(Mandela, N. 1987).[13].

**2.2 Legacies of racism**

The European colonization of the Americas over 500 years ago resulted in a dramatic shift in population and the establishment of new forms of societal governance. Economic development was based on the genocide and oppression of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and the resulting economic marginalization. The enslavement of people of African descent and the subsequent forced migration of more than six million people created wealth for a privileged class in the American colonies and laid the foundation for the modern United

States. Although legal slavery ended with the American Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, widespread inequality and lack of economic opportunity persist today in American society, defined by social class as well as race and ethnicityDiscrimination against individuals on the basis of demographic characteristics is common and has been a pervasive element of human society. Discrimination is almost always part of the power structure that governs how one group maintains dominance over other social groups. Racism refers to discriminatory practices toward members of socially defined racial groups, often characterized by differences in skin color and other physical characteristics, but also by descent, such as the "one-drop rule." White or light skin was associated with being "superior," privileged, and powerfulDark skin was relegated to a lower class of servants and, in the extreme American example, to slavery. Skin color is not the only factor driving racism and discrimination, as evidenced by the genocidal approach of European colonial powers toward Native Americans and discrimination based on documentation status within wealthy countries.Racism took many forms in Walker's novel The Color Purple, culminating in the heroine Celie.Racism and discrimination in societal structures are inherently linked to power disparitiesRacism and discrimination constitute social, institutional, organizational, and governmental structures, processes, procedures, and practices that limit opportunities and resources available to segments of the population on the basis of phenotypic characteristics.

## 2.3 Black Feminism

Black feminist thought demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge. By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant in- dividuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people. One distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of po- litical and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change New knowledge is important for both dimensions of change. Knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance. By objectifying African-American women and recasting our experiences to serve the interests of elite white men, much of the Eurocentric masculinist world- view fosters Black women's subordination. But placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques Viewing the world through a both/and conceptual lens of the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression and of the need for a humanist vision of community creates new possibilities for an empowering Afrocentric feminist knowledge. Many Black feminist intellectuals have long thought about the world in this way because this is the way we experience the world. Afrocentric feminist thought offers two significant contributions toward further- ing our understanding of the important connections among knowledge, conscious- ness, and the politics of empowerment.First, Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance. Second, Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates in femi- nist theory and in the sociology of knowledge concerning ways of assessing "truth." Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering.But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications(Collins, Patricia Hill).Black feminist ideology assumes the image of Black women as powerful and autonomous entities. By focusing on the multiple forms of oppression they face, scholarly descriptions have obscured their ability to discover and appreciate the ways in which Black women are not victims. Ideological and political choices cannot be assumed to be determined solely by the historical dynamics of racism, sexism, and classism in society. While the complexities and ambiguities that combine awareness of racial, class, and gender oppression make the emergence and practice of a multivalent ideology problematic, they also make this task all the more necessary for working toward their liberation as Black people, and as women.

## 2.4 Gender Oppression

During apartheid in South Africa, the country was a collaboration between racism and sexism. Gender discrimination in South Africa is deeply rooted in the racial traditions of multicultural societies, as well as in the conformity of women themselves. The values of each culture view women as inferior to men and because of these cultural traditions, conformity and government, gender equality in South Africa has been an ongoing battle, and will continue throughout the 21st century. From a Western perspective, Africa has always been poor and plagued by conflicts whether between tribes, between husband and wife, or between citizens and

government.In Africa, women had status and power because they were the main agricultural producers, however, once agriculture became less important in the colonial era, women lost their status. The establishment of commercial agriculture left women with no real power. The colonists changed the known laws and wrote new laws. The new laws gave women fewer rights than men; such as the fact that a woman's access to land depended solely on her relationship with the man. It is the woman who bears the responsibility for the continuity of the family.This is well known in South African society, and it is something that women grow up to expect. Boys and girls grew up knowing what was expected of them in society. Boys grew up knowing that they had to be strong and wise in order to care for and provide for their wives. Likewise, girls grew up knowing that they had to be hardworking and submissive in order to attract a man as a wife. Women were victims of injustice not because of what society did to them, but because of what society did not do for them. This meant that if society did not change, it was up to women to change society.Because women continued to conform to the social and societal norms they were raised with, society had no reason to change. Society would ultimately change only when culture gave "society" a reason to change. Because of society's norms, it was not up to women to make their own lives successful; it was up to their future husbands.

## 2.5 Trauma in Relation to Violence

Although violence does not always lead to trauma, this critical examination investigates trauma that is derived from violence. Celie, Sofia, and Squeak are subject to oppression and violence that results from their gender and race, a traumatizing realization in itself. The identity-specific suffering speaks to the connection between violence and trauma throughout Walker's novel. Given the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse Celie, Sofia, and Squeak collectively endure, it is not far-fetched that their violent experiences have led to their traumatization.It is extremely unlikely that the women are not traumatized from their experiences with violence, given the nature of the abuse is not only identity-based, but both physical and sexual as well. Celie, for example, actively demonstrates the link between violence and trauma in her experiences stating, "I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them"The violence Celie endures does not fit into her ""inner schemata' of self in relation to the world". Celie, in a rightfully traumatized state, no longer trusts men. The identity-based violence she experiences destroys her assumptions of safety in men and in the world, resulting in her traumatized state(Lewis, Jessica).The result shows that Afro-American women, as pictured in Celie's experience, are treated badly physically, sexually, and mentally by black men who are introduced as her stepfather and her husband. These bad treatments are caused by an internal factor that comes from Celie's plain character: a fear of fighting. Besides that, the external factor, which comes from social conditions at that time, also gives influence toward men's point of view about black women, in which for them, women are inferior socially so that they are usually the object of cruel treatment from white, even black men.Women and children invite society attention around the world. It happens because of their lack of position among the patriarchy world. This patriarchal system, which gives more power to men, makes the existence of women and children weak in the social organization. It stimulates the occurrence of domestic violence in society. The Color Purple describes a great story of child sexual abuse and women violence around black society that is dominated by the patriarch system. Celie's struggle as the main character is revealed through her experience in her life She observes, reads and writes; such education becomes the main things to guide someone gaining knowledge. Beside, woman solidarity spread out to her environment, that supports her to fight and struggle against subordination both child sexual abuse and domestic violence.This relation of solidarity among women and children grows out of their needs and affection.

## 2.6 Twofold Nature of Gender and Racial Trauma

The psychological impact of an individual's gender or race being the source of suffering can be traumatizing in itself, but adversity resulting from one's gender and race can be doubly painful. Oftentimes the psychological effect of gender and race result from the responses members of the minority receives from majority groups about their abilities, skin color, or other physical features.The groups are marginalized for a genetic makeup over which they have no control; it is specifically that genetic makeup that supports the continuation of oppression, discrimination, and ultimately the infliction of trauma. African American women are subject to rejection for no other reason than their identity in itself. Oppression and discrimination that stems from one's identity acts as a form of self-betrayal. Ruglass and Kendall Tackett state, "certain discriminatory practices (e.g. hate crimes) may be traumatic events in and of themselves, which increases exposure to trauma among racial and ethnic minorities"While recognizing that adversity develops because of one's identity is both disheartening and traumatizing, at the same time the suffering that derives from an individual's "master status" is also traumatic. The recursive cycle demonstrates the way in which gender and race create trauma; it speaks of the

twofold nature of the situation(Lewis, Jessica).it was found that there are four types of violence found in the novel, such as physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence, verbal violence. And there are three effects of violence on Women, they are psychological effect, and long-term effect as it occurs

## 2.7 Afro-American Women

In the Nineteenth Century Afro American people had much suffering, and thus they have to struggle to get their independence today. They were considered slaves in America and were treated inhumanely by white people slavery is inherently a system of brutality and coercion in which beatings and the breakup of families through the sale of individuals were commonplace. The racist system also very discriminated against blacks in the last quarter of the nineteenth century by applying a regulation called Jim Crow Law that "segregated public schools, forbade or limited black access to many public facilities, such as parks, restaurants, and hotels, and denied most blacks the right to vote by imposing poll taxes and arbitrary literary tests.". Afro American women had the worst. They were also subjected to violence for being slaves; women were seen as inferior to men. They did not have many rights to be granted, and they have no equal rights as men.from colonial times, unmarried women had enjoyed many of the same legal rights as men, although custom required that they marry early. With matrimony, women virtually lost their separate identities in the eyes of the law. Women were not permitted to vote, and their education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was limited largely to reading, writing, music, dancing, and needlework. In addition, Afro-American women or black women, in the eyes of white and black society, are considered inferior socially and legally (Mogea, Tini).[14].

## 2.8 Language and Educational Oppression

The novel's epistolary format calls attention to the educational oppression the female characters are subject to in The Color Purple. Walker's use of dialect, most obviously her incorporation of broken English, illustrates the inferior status of the female characters. Celie's letters are not written in Standard English; the women's broken dialect sounds choppy and is challenging to read, forming a sense of fragmentation. From a young age Celie faces horrific physical and sexual abuse; her stepfather began beating and raping her at fourteen years old, ultimately forcing her to carry his two children just to have them taken away from her at birth. When Celie recounts her difficult experiences, her language mimics the sense of fragmentation and isolation trauma victims often feel. Celie remembers the first time the abuse occurred: "When that hurt, I cry. He started to choke me, saying You better shut up and get used to it. But I don't ever git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook. My mama fusses at me and looks at me. She is happy, cause he good to her now" (Walker ). The spelling and grammar Celie uses plays against a smooth read, recreating the sense of confusion, turmoil, and fragmentation she experiences following the start of the abuse as well as while dealing with the aftermath of the trauma. The language also simultaneously recreates the feelings of isolation, confusion, and helplessness that many trauma victims experience. The sense of confusion positions the reader to ask why the characters are victims of such violent abuse. The language speaks of the educational oppression Celie, Sofia, and Squeak suffer because of their gender and race, which directly contributes to their trauma(Lewis, Jessica).Educational oppression is a means by which men maintain complete control over women's abilities, deny them opportunities for success, and impose complete subordination on them.

## 3. Conclusion

Only women and African Americans are able to understand the oppression, abuse, and trauma caused by gender and race. The epistolary form of the novel engages directly with the reader, inviting the audience to acknowledge the African American woman's call for change. Celie's letters represent a marginalized group, demanding a resolution to the trauma they endure. The abuse and suffering endured by Celie, Sophia, and Squeak are a result of their identities, and while women cannot change their status as masters, the novel serves as a platform for changing the stigmas that taint them. The issues raised by Walker, The Color Purple, are timeless. Given the recent categorical divisions in so-called "progressive" America, gender and race seem to remain central issues that require a great deal of focus. All this mistreatment is due to several factors including men's view of women, especially black women, who are considered socially inferior and sexual objects. Women cannot get an education, cannot work in an office, cannot interrupt men, and are forbidden from laughing at men while they are talking. They are also seen as the property of whites and therefore whites and even black men can do whatever they want to them according to their pleasure. Whatever the reason, violence against children and women is inhuman treatment. A father should give his children love, education and a decent life. As a husband, he should also give his wife love, care and protection. Differences in social status and race should not make people underestimate each other. People should value each other.I recommend to the reader or the researcher

that, racism is the garbage of thought, the residue of backwardness, and in the view of scholars and philosophers, it is the division between people. The world needs to be cleansed of racism, and people are repelled by racist people and feel ridiculous about them; only those with shortcomings make fun of people. Do not humiliate people, and do not divide them into caravans, tribes, and alliances. Neither religion nor humanity accepts racism; it is a thorn in the neck of humanity.. So be refined, lofty, great, and far from harming others

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