

**Black Woman: Strategies at Resisting Devaluation in Alice Walker's
*The Color Purple and Meridian***

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Abstract

This article explores and exposes the various ways by which the black woman is recouped from varied domineering structures that have continued to limit her progress and contribution to development in the USA. Black women have greatly progressed, but still, some instances continue to resurge and delimit black female contributions that have already been impacted. In response to the following questions, this article reverberates two basic strategies and concerns that are intricate in rebuilding and unravelling the black woman's distinctiveness in the USA centuries gone. Are there edifices that continue to impound black women in the US? How does she resist them in the communities in which she finds herself? How successful does she emerge at the end of Alice Walker's narratives under study? Based on created and achieved consciousness, to resist such devaluing structures for black women, the heroines and black female characters primly engage individual determination/motivation, and bonding as agencies that are cogently provocative of substantial change. Black feminist standpoints of Barbara Smith and Bell Hooks have been adopted to guide the articulations of this paper highlighting the intertwining and influence of racial, gender, sexual, and classist structures to formulate an accurate identity for the black woman. Nonetheless, resistance is tantamount to revolutionary change and development of the black woman from the margins to the centre.

Keywords: *black woman, devaluation, resistance, strategies.*

Introduction

Many black women in the United States of America including Harriet Tubman, Ida Wells, Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou and Walker among others pioneered black and civil rights activism through physical resistance and writing for change and progress. Rosa Parks (1913-2005) for instance refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus and was acclaimed defiant which led to her arrest in December 1955. This however invigorated a revolutionary change for blacks and women in particular as it launched the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott, by

seventeen thousand black citizens. The United States Congress has since honored her as the “first lady of civil rights” and “the mother of the freedom movement.” Walker, Angelou, Morisson and others on their path provided avenues for resistance and opposition through their writing, in line with the premises of this paper. The article unravels the various strategies employed by Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* and *Meridian* to overcome capitalistic and patriarchal propensities which have for a long time limited the effort of black women in the United States of America. To properly situate this paper, devaluation, resistance and the Black Woman are defined and contextualised.

To begin, devaluation has to do with the reduction of something or someone's value or worth. Thus, the black woman's value and worth are greatly reduced or minimized concerning her heritage. Concerning the term devaluation, Bell Hooks (1981) traces the roots of black women's devaluation to the slave period and sexual exploitation when she notes that:

A devaluation of black womanhood occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery that has not altered in the course of hundreds of years. I have previously mentioned that while many concerned citizens sympathized with the sexual exploitation of black women both during and afterwards, like all rape victims in a patriarchal society they were seen as having lost value and worth as a result of the humiliation they endured. (p. 53)

The sexual exploitation of black women during slavery has affected them and their representations in literature. Uttering the above statement when Hooks wrote *Ain't I A Woman* in 1981, has inspired the experiences of the black woman till present as there has been much debate and discourse on the issues of slavery, female subjugation and other injustices. There has been a life of long suffering which gave black women a debased and worthless identity. This is in line with their representation as victims of patriarchal and colonialist structures. The economics of slavery, which commodified human lives and the breeding of more

enslaved people, encouraged the systematic practice of rape against black women, and this system established an enduring “social hierarchy based on race and sex”. However, one cannot underestimate the progress that has been recorded over the past years in terms of restoring the worth of the woman. However, degrading experiences still plague her in this setting, even in Africa and other Diasporas where police brutality and sexual violence are on the rise. Walker’s two narratives under study are good examples of the portrayal of black women with a heritage and history of worthlessness that are challenged through resistance.

Resistance on its part determines the various ways that are put in place to redeem the black woman’s condition. That is, the various methods which the heroines under study use to overcome subjugation, to resist the said structures that pin black women not to be able to influence societal emancipation. In this paper, individual determination/motivation and bonding through sisterhood are primordial to an agency of change. Black women in the different spheres of existence have experienced varied kinds of subjugation and either consciously or unconsciously retaliate in the quest for liberty and livelihood. Individual motivations and self-assertiveness contribute to the effort to overthrow sexist, classist and racial patterns that have shaped the servile life led by black women. This thus permeates the two novels under consideration to salvage the black woman’s predicament. Andree Nicola McLaughlin (1990,) inspires the articulations herein when she posits that:

Black feminine consciousness, having its counterpart among women from every region of the world over, is the basis of an expanding challenge to the postulates of domination in all forms. It protests and takes to task the economic and cultural superstructures that exploit earth’s life by pollution, militarism, human oppression and other means. This awareness, at its root, is anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal.
(p. xiv)

This black feminine consciousness takes the initiative in addressing many forms of domination amongst others, like broad Feminism, Marxism and Postcolonialism. This position by McLaughlin also attends to economic, cultural and why not political, racial, classist and sexist superstructures that delimit the existence and contribution of the black woman.

Generally, the black woman is a reference to women who are of Sub-Saharan African and Afro-diasporic descent. The term “black women,” is both a multi-faceted cultural identity and a social construct with different meanings in different contexts, especially in Black feminist thought where individual women have specific concerns which triply and further marginalize them. A black woman is considered any female (child, adolescent or adult) who is racialised, sexualized and classified in terms of culture, lived experiences, politics and skin colour based on a mid to dark brown complexion.

In Black feminist thought, Black women are described as a unique group that exists in social relations where the intersectional processes of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation shape their individual and collective consciousness, self-definitions and actions. This is in accordance with Patricia Collins Hill (2000) and in the same way most black feminists provide a standpoint for the black woman through the following tenets of this theoretical framework.

Hooks (1981) claims that we cannot form an accurate picture of black women's status by simply drawing attention to the role assigned to females under patriarchy. More specifically, we cannot form an accurate picture of the status of black women by simply focusing on racial hierarchies (p. 12). Both factors mentioned herein are inseparable.

Black feminist thought is grounded in black women's historical experiences with enslavement, anti-lynching movements, segregation,

Civil Rights and Black Power movements, sexual politics, capitalism, and patriarchy. Black Feminists, Womanists and black women in general have had a traditional and historical position and location of marginality in society as well as in academia.

Black feminists' belief in self-authorship and the legitimization of partial, subjugated knowledge represents a unique and diverse standpoint of and by black women. This is important because when a black woman writes, she can bring such experiences which are peculiar to her and she also brings out related perspectives of others from her likes.

Furthermore, black women's experiences capture multiple oppressions and so result in needs, expectations, ideologies and problems that are different from those of white and black men, and white women. As a stance, black feminism conceptualizes identities as organic, fluid, interdependent, multiple, dynamic and socially constructed "locations" within historical contexts per the thoughts of Bell Hooks (1984) and Patricia Hill Collins (1998).

Black women also insist on self-definition, self-revaluation, and the necessity for a black female-centred analysis. This is significant because defining and revaluing one's consciousness in the face of images foster an accurate self-definition as the objectified "other", is an important way of resisting dehumanization that is essential to systems of domination. If women, most especially black women, do not come out to demonstrate their assertion and influence in their societies they will hardly be considered significant or recognized by the same structures that they stand to defend, foster and uphold. Glenda Simms in her article "Beyond the White Veil" supplements this view by postulating that "Black women must fight the world because they struggle daily against the racist, sexist, classist power of white men, and the sexist power of powerless Black men" (177).

In line with the representations of the heroines under study, we probe into examining the strategies used by heroines for self-actualisation and reevaluation. Beginning with 'Individualism,' the black woman is presented with laudable self-determination and motivation which helps to empower and aid in her resistance to male dominance and racial frontiers.

Individualism as Strategy for Resistance

This section probes into the determination, motivations and acts perpetrated by black women which interrogate systems and structures that have for a very long time enslaved and devalued them such as male domination, segregation and other injustices against the black women folk. Individualism can be defined as a social theory advocating the liberty, rights, or independent action of an individual. As a social theory, individualism procures human liberty, freedom and the right to take initiative. Thus, every action is fostered by a peculiar motive behind it, and as well, an action needs a generator, who here is the black woman as the focus of the study.

This section projects the various means by which black women through the heroines and other black females in the novels under study, become motivated and self-determined to move beyond sexist, racial, cultural, political barriers and otherwise. Mary M. Kolawole (1997) has rightly pointed out that "change cannot take place in vacuo but within a dynamic cultural crucible. Consequently, many have recreated women in their literature as agencies not only of culture but also of active socio-political change" (p. 153). It is against the backdrop of black female marginalization and devaluation that Walker recreates her heroines who quest for an autonomy of theirs, as they seek freedom and liberation to reform the black female. To this effect, their motivations and growth play a central role as subsequent analyses illustrate.

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In line with L. Susan Brown (1993), individualism makes the individual its focus and so starts “with the fundamental premise that the human individual is of primary importance in the struggle for liberation” (p. 23). In this light, she contends that liberalism, existentialism and anarchism are also examples of movements that take the human individual as a central unit of analysis (p. 23). Individualism as Ellen M. Wood (1997) puts it, involves “the right of the individual to freedom and self-realization” (p. 6). On these premises, the black woman therefore seeks freedom and takes initiative on her way to self-realization and actualization.

To begin, Celie, the heroine in *The Color Purple* is a black woman who has gone through a series of hurdles in life, which we seek to analyse through her evolution in the narrative. At the age of 14, she started writing, which seems to be the only way that she can express herself thoroughly. This skill comes as a result of her first rape by her stepfather, with the introductory words “You better not tell anybody but God. It’d kill your mammy” (p. 1). It should be noted that although she is pushed by her stepfather into writing, it is championed by the pain and sorrow that he causes her which also inspires her writing. This writing is a strategy used by Celie to protect her mother from sudden death if she learns about her rape and other negative things that Pa has done to Celie.

We also look at the power to write and exist as a means of strife, struggle and resistance. Through writing, Celie expresses her inner thoughts, fears and motivations. She, as an individual and the narrator in the novel, narrates most of the story through her letters in the first person point of view. In an instance where we find Celie able to write, she also encourages her sister, Nettie, to write in her 11th letter when she says:

...If I was buried, I wouldn't have to work. But I just say, Never mine, never mine, long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody But I only got one things to give her [Nettie], the name of Reverend Mr. ____. I tell her to ast for his wife. That maybe she would help. She the only woman I even seen with money.

I say, Write. She say, What? I say, Write. She say, Nothing but death can keep me from it. She never write. (p. 18-19)

In response to Nettie's worry about Celie's welfare around Albert and "rotten children", they indulge in the above conversation. If she is buried, she will also not be able to write. The story thus develops as she continues to write, with the hope and inspiration from G-o-d. Apart from this, Celie also instills in her sister, Nettie the urge and power behind writing, as later in the novel she is the author of several letters herself. The power to write keeps Celie and Nettie in touch and able to reach out to each other, which enhances their motivations and manifestations, in line with Barbara Smith who argues that black feminists and critics should have a good knowledge of the identifiable tradition of black women's writing. She should have a good eye and ear for black women's language and should think and write out of her own identity. In all the letters Celie writes, she voices out her peculiar experiences in the way she thinks best: to God, her sister and the reader.

In line with Henry L. Gates Jr (1988), Celie shoots her abusive husband, Albert's words back at him, taking hold of the language and making sure that "Albert no longer has the power of the word over Celie" (p. 252). Celie's self-realization is clear in her assertion that "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. **But I'm here**" (p. 214). Celie's statement herein transgresses such issues of class/status, race, sex, beauty, and silence which are covertly articulated in the statement and propels the thesis of this section. Albert's debile attempt to hurt Celie sums up the male view in the novel, which schemes the superior outlook on life by a mediocre man in line with Sveinsdóttir (2012). Unfortunately for him, Albert is abandoned by Celie at the end of the novel as she slithers through his molestation and dictatorship.

A first example of Meridian's individuality in *Meridian* is when she rejects religion at a very young age despite her mother's devout Christian beliefs.

In the section entitled “The Attainment of Good”, Meridian’s mother, Mrs Hill’s beliefs about church are showcased in contradiction to politics which is Meridian’s stronghold from childhood:

She did not complain against the church because she believed the church building – to be holy... She thought the church was literally God’s house, and believed she felt his presence there when she entered the door; when she stepped back outside there was a different feeling, she believed... Mrs Hill did not complain about anything political because she had no desire to understand politics. She had never voted in her life. Meridian grew up thinking about voting days... (p. 74 – 75)

The life and experiences of Mrs Hill are contrasted to that of her daughter, Meridian in line with the above quotation. Meridian on her path becomes a political activist advocating the rights and freedom of black people in the US south where she instead encourages all Blacks to take part in voting. Throughout the novel, she has hardly demonstrated any belief in God or the spirituality of the church.

In school, she is unable to finish a speech because she knows that there is no truth in the speech given her to present. Because of this notion, Meridian

... in the middle of her speech, Meridian had seemed to forget. She stumbled and then was silent on the stage. The audience (who cared little for what she was saying, and of course didn’t believe any of it) urged her on but she would not continue. Instead, she covered her face with her hands and had to be led away... Meridian was trying to explain to her mother that for the first time, she really listened to what she was saying, knew she didn’t believe it, and was so distracted by this revelation that she could not make the rest of her speech. (p. 126)

This passage reveals that Meridian’s intellectual assertiveness overpowers her emotions. This is because she does not believe in her recitation about the virtues and superiority of the American Constitution and way of life, during an oratorical competition at her old high school. According to the narrative voice, even the audience neither cares nor believes in her recitation given the sad valour in her eyes. In effect, she

stumbles and goes dumb on stage to reiterate her non-conformist attitude and non-belief in the false virtues and racist superiority of the American experience and way of life.

Another example of how Meridian shows she is a nonconformist is when she gives up family life and motherhood when she has the opportunity to attend college. Her feelings are well explained in the following extract. "You will no longer be called Eddie Jr," she said. "I'll ask them to call you Rundi, after no person, I hope, who has ever lived." When she gave him away she did so with a light heart. She did not look back, believing she had saved a small person's life. (p. 89)

Meridian rejects being a wife and companion to Eddie and in later attempts made by Truman Held. As the novel's plot progresses, Meridian aborts Truman's child without his knowledge.

On her way to have an abortion, she saw them riding across campus in his father's new red car. From a distance, they both looked white to her, that day. Later, as the doctor tore into her body without giving her anaesthesia and she saw stars because of the pain, she was still seeing them laughing, carefree, together. It was not that she wants him anymore, she did not. It enraged her that she could be made to endure such pain and that he was oblivious to it. She was also disgusted with the fecundity of her body that got her pregnant on less screwing than anybody she had ever heard of. It seemed doubly unfair that after all her sexual "experience" and after one baby and one abortion she has not once been completely fulfilled by sex. (p. 118 – 119)

Meridian's actions are justified through the fact that she refuses to trust any man in her life due to patriarchal tendencies which leave her in pain, similar to her mother's. Even though she develops love for Truman in the course of the narrative, due to his support and activism in the Black Movement, she remains and dies a determined single woman at the end of the novel.

Mrs Hill had spent the early part of her life scurrying out of her father's way. Later, when she was in her teens, she also learned to scurry out of the way of white men – because she

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was good-looking, defenceless and black. Her life, she told Meridian, was one of scurrying and only one thing kept her going: her determination to be a schoolteacher. (p. 129)

Meridian's determination is somewhat inherited from her mother as seen in the preceding excerpt. Mrs Hill's experience in scurrying makes her a strong and determined black woman from such racial and sexist structures.

Mrs Hill also uses acceptance as a means of battling white subjugation and securing her freedom amid whites, in public places. The quote below demonstrates how she transgresses white domination and prejudice by accepting her blackness which is a state of dignity to her, refuses to mingle with white people in a bus and stays aloof by sitting at the back of the bus.

"As far as I'm concerned", said Mrs Hill, "you've wasted a year of your life, fooling around with those people. The papers say they're crazy. God separated the sheep from the the goats and black folks from the whites. And me from anybody that acts as foolish as they do. It never bothered me to sit in the back of the bus, you get just as good a view and you don't have all those nasty white asses passing you". (p. 83)

Voter registration is another motion for resistance in *Meridian* which Meridian Hill takes up as a challenge to create and register every black person to overthrow American racism. In the first place, she leads in the rescue of a black five-year-old child who had been bloated in the sewer for days and matches to the mayor's office. In the second place, she is appreciated by this black community and asked to use the vote as a means of resistance to the murder of Blacks as illustrated in the following passage:

It was Meridian who had led them to the mayor's office, bearing in her arms the bloated figure of a five-year-old boy who had been stuck in the sewer for two days before he was raked out with s grappling hook. The child's body was so ravaged, so grotesque, so disgusting to behold, his own mother had taken one look and refused to touch him. To the people who followed Meridian, it was as if she carried a large bouquet of long-stemmed roses... Instead, she made them

promise they would learn, as their smallest resistance to the murder of their children, to use the vote. (p. 209)

Meridian musters so much courage amidst this community to single-handedly carry the decomposing body of a dead child, all the long walk to the mayor's office. Through a metaphor, Meridian falls on the way like Jesus carrying His cross on the way to Calvary for the redemption of the souls of Christians, just like Meridian does with a tranquil countenance for the freedom of blacks in a racist America in the 60s. This Judeo-Christian analogy enhances the idea of a continual strife of Christians to attain salvation as well as Blacks to attain freedom and equality in America, which remains under reconstruction to date. Her followers honour her with the promise to name their next girl child after her in a bid to continue the pedigree of black female power and determination. She also makes them promise to resist any negative forces against them through registration to vote.

Furthermore, Walker uses silence as a sign and strategy for rebellion, and authenticity as an activity to battle racial, and sexual discrimination in her novel *Meridian*. The heroine is obliged to undergo a process of change and transformation for others to appreciate her identity. In the story, Meridian suffers from marriage and pregnancy at the early age of thirteen. She cannot endure the responsibilities of being a mother at this tender age and chooses education over husband as a means to be successful and impactful, by actively participating in the Civil Rights Movement to defend the black citizens and the women in particular.

However, in keeping with the claims of the feminist movement of the sixties, 'personal' becomes 'political' for women like Meridian, whose political activism depends on the way changes in her personal life take place. Racial discourse seems to be superseded by black feminist discourse in *Meridian*. Thus, while Walker wrote of the Civil Rights Movement with unreserved approval in 1967, she would later contend

that it continued to oppress and stifle the creativity of black women, by encouraging sexism within the movement, and therefore failed in its mission for human liberation. Activists merely turned political rhetoric to their ends while continuing to repress spontaneous individuality. To overcome this destructiveness, Walker reaches for a new definition of revolution as espoused above in the novels explored: *Meridian* and *The Color Purple*. According to Stein, her hope for a just society is not merely in political change, but in personal transformation. Only by replacing the inhumane old order with life-affirming values, can a new world be built. (p. 129)

Silence is restored as a major strength of the novel with the depiction of the interiority of Meridian herself. The internal conflict she displays throughout the text causes the reader to be emotionally invested in her. As the novel progresses, at each juncture Meridian faces a dilemma between what she wants to do and what she's forced to do. Every time this is presented, Meridian represses her desires. Thus, Meridian's rejection of 'traditional' life carries great emotional weight as it is something that she has fought for her whole life. However, what is most literarily and socially significant is the symbolic breaking down and repairing of Meridian's body. This is important because it doesn't just speak to the sacrifices that Meridian has had to make for the civil rights movement to progress, but to the sacrifices that need to be made on a larger social scale to enhance social change. Meridian Hill is a microcosm of the necessary actions society must undertake to enact social justice.

In a nutshell, individualism which is a belief in the importance of the individual and the virtue of self-reliance and personal independence is majorly evinced from afore discussion and analyses of the black women in Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Meridian*. Nonetheless, despite the slow recognition of female actions and power, their impact has nevertheless been demonstrated through the character and role projections of Celie, Nettie, Meridian and Mrs Hill, among others. Thus, confrontation,

scurrying, acceptance and silence are the strategies employed by black females to resist structures delimiting their worth and identity as women.

Sisterhood as Strategy for Resistance

Sisterhood is the next strategy employed by Walker in confronting jingoistic irrationalities. This section explores the various dimensions through which women come together in solidarity, communion, and aid towards one another to resist and move beyond sexist, racial and classist frontiers that have preserved them in subservience. Would sisterhood be a definitive measure through which black women succeed in their revolt? And if so, how effective is sisterhood articulated in the novels under study to the realization of a struggle that emancipates the black woman? These are questions that this section hopes to address. hooks (2000) claims that it is the young black woman who among others clamoured for the feminist movement that created the context for female bonding. They however did not bond against men but bonded to protect their interests as women especially, when they challenged professors who taught no books by women. It was not because they did not like those professors (they often did), but because they wanted an end to gender biases in the classroom and in the curriculum (p. 15).

The principle of (female) bonding was not necessarily a prerequisite for bonding against men, however, black women strived to protect their interests without minimizing the influence of patriarchs, and thus a means to eliminate gender biases and why not racial and other social biases with regards to colour, status and racial politics. hooks further avers that the most effective ways through which sisterhood succeeds is through commitment, solidarity and non-indifference of women which entails the obvious separation between white and black women. Her stance or vision of sisterhood in the extract below apprises this section:

Feminist sisterhood is rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no matter the form that injustice takes. Political solidarity between women always

undermines sexism and sets the stage for the overthrow of patriarchy. Significantly, sisterhood could never have been possible across the boundaries of race and class if individual women had not been willing to divest of their power to dominate and exploit subordinated groups of women. As long as women are using class or race power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully realized. (p. 15-16)

Sisterhood here implies commitment, solidarity, and individual determination, among other ideals, against all sorts of injustices against women of colour. Sexism, race and class are considered rudimentary factors that are known to promote injustices and prejudices that devalue black women. However, these same factors are taken into consideration to determine the strategies through which black women in particular battle or resist such irrationalities.

The novel, *Meridian*, projects characters like Fast Mary, Louvinie, and Meridian, and their revolutionary spirits and thoughts which are somewhat connected to nature. The Sacred Tree itself, named "The Sojourner" for instance, is planted by the slave woman Louvinie, who is later murdered and buried under the tree (p. 31). For Fast Mary, this tree has been her only friend.

So many tales and legends had grown up around The Sojourner that students of every persuasion had a choice of which to accept. There was only one Sojourner ceremony, however, that united all the students at Saxon – the rich and the poor, the very black skinned (few thought they were) with the very fair, the stupid and bright – and that was the Commemoration of Fast Mary of the Tower. It was related that during the twenties a young girl named Mary had had a baby in the tower off one end of Tower Hall...any girl who had ever prayed for her period was welcome to the commemoration, which was held in the guise of a slow May Day dance around the foot of The Sojourner (which had been, it was said, Fast Mary's only comfort and friend on the Saxon campus). It was the only time in all the many social activities at Saxon that every girl was considered equal. On that day, they held each other's hands tightly.

The preceding quotation projects the bond between women and The Sojourner (nature) and also emphasizes the bond and resistance (bridge) against many forms of prejudices like racism and classism predominant in Saxon College. The Sojourner brings together the rich, the poor, the Black, the White, the intelligent, and the injudicious, and suggests a common identity for women as one in this socio-educational space and also proposes equality seen through the May Day dance; the girls coming together and holding one another's hands tightly in commemoration of girlhood and motherhood. The Sojourner (tree) in the novel is personified to augment the significance and role of nature as an unavoidable tool and measure of human, black and female emancipation and progress. According to Sherilyn MacGregor (2006), this view cruxes on ecofeminist thought, where the relationship between women and the earth is foundational to its analysis and practice as it draws on the concept of gender to analyse the relationships between humans and the natural world (p. 286).

Similarly, Sojourner Truth became fascinated with the notion that blacks and whites could work together to fulfil the goals of the Declaration of Independence – the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all Americans. As such, she worked with both whites and blacks all over the country to abolish slavery. Walker who is deeply aware of the power of writing wants to preserve the nobility of women, blacks, nature and culture (past and present) without bias. The female protagonists in Walker's novels display a love for the earth and identify themselves with natural objects.

Just like Truth, Harriet Tubman encapsulated the notion of resilience and black women will always make reference to and reverence her as invoked in the following passage of the text:

On the other hand, black women were always imitating Harriet Tubman – escaping to become something unheard of. Outrageous. One of her sister's friends had become, somehow,

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a sergeant in the army and knew everything there was to know about enemy installation and radio equipment. A couple of girls her brothers, knew had gone away broke and come back, years later, as a Doctor and schoolteacher. Two other girls went away married to men and returned home. (p. 111)

Harriet Tubman (Araminta Ross, 1822 – 1913) was an American abolitionist and political activist who was born into slavery. Tubman escaped and subsequently made some thirteen missions to rescue approximately seventy enslaved people, including family and friends, using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. During the American Civil War, she served as an armed scout and spy for the Union Army and in her later years, Tubman was an activist in the movement for women's suffrage.

Finally, Meridian and Anne-Marion Coles exert a kind of bond which is infectious and affective, while exhibiting resistance against hypocritical Saxon college norms and the American capitalistic community. In the first place, Anne-Marion instigates Meridian into proactivity during a conversation inspired by a non-revolutionary black past, also prompting the conscious minds to preserve and defend their dignity and history through revolution even if it means violence:

They needed her to kill. To say she would kill. She thought perhaps she could do it. Perhaps. "I don't know if I can kill anyone..." "If I had to do it, perhaps I could. I would defend myself..." "Sure you would..." sighed Anne-Marion, reining in the hatred about to run wild against her friend. "Maybe I could sort of grow into the idea of killing other human beings..." "Enemies..." "Pigs..." "But I'm not sure..." "Oh, what a drag this girl is..." "I know I want what is best for black people..." "That's what we all want!" "I know there must be a revolution..." "Damn straight!" "I know violence is an American cherry pie!" "Rap on!" "I know nonviolence has failed..." "Then you will kill for the revolution, not just die for it!"... (p.

18 – 19)

From the author's choice of words and tone in the preceding quotation, Anne-Marion can be established as a firm revolutionist who instigates

Meridian to be the same, if they have to walk/work together against white supremacist and patriarchal rule. In the second place, both black girls skip school and frequently march to jail as they find it difficult to study while others are being beaten and thrown into jail (p. 94).

In *The Color Purple*, the various proportions which capture sisterhood or bonding range from: Celie's silence to her meeting with Shug Avery, discovery of her sexuality, finding her long confiscated letters from Nettie, to the new image of God. She is also brought closer to confrontation with Albert where she reclaims her voice and the power over her own life, and finally becomes an independent woman. Thus, the focus would be on how Celie and other black women in the novel can break away from the silence/ devaluation in their lives and how revolt embattle their lives and the lives of other people around. Abbandonato (2012) has rightly argued that "the narrative is about breaking silences" (p. 1106).

An important base to the desired goal of sisterhood is contrived when Celie meets Shug Avery who brings enlightenment to her. Before Shug arrives at Albert's home, Celie is powerless because of her devalued femalehood and marriage. Through Shug, Celie rediscovers herself. Apart from making her see how a woman can be self-conscious, she also understands her sexuality. In the 35th letter, Shug sensitises Celie about her dignity and sexuality, which gives Celie mastery and control over herself. After educating Celie about what transpires during sexual encounters (p. 82-83). This Sex education is very instrumental to Celie because it helps the heroine break away from sexual enslavement from Albert. Onwards, she can resist Albert's sexual abuses. The dialogue between both women also exhibits the cordial, sisterly and supportive relationship that exists between them.

Celie nonetheless deserves love and respect and not molestation as promulgated by Shug. During Shug's first music performance at Harpo's Joint, she appreciates Celie by saying "This song I'm bout to sing is call

Miss Celie's song. Cause she scratched it out my head when I was sick" (p. 77). When Shug dedicates this song to Celie, Celie mentions that "First time somebody made something and named it after me". (p. 77) It is also Shug who gives Celie her first letter from her sister Nettie, and as if not enough, it is through this letter that Celie threatens to kill Albert for confiscating her letters but Shug calms her in the 59th letter.

In this third novel of Walker, she re-evaluates the female body as a locale for self-awareness and self-respect. Instead of negation and reservation that women suffer in a patriarchal order, Walker insists that women should be considered as the authentic half of the social totality for the harmony of the whole and the survival of the human species. We find a strong bond of love and care between women as sisters, friends, mothers and daughters in her novels. Celie considers Shug Avery as her mentor and the one who moulds her into a perfect woman and helps her to come out of her shell. This is a community of women which resembles according to Gay Wilentz (1992), the "residual African model of the village compound, where all the women are in charge of all the children, and domestic as well as economic duties are often shared" (p. 69). Walker's characters extend this communion from women to men as well as to God, trees and the whole cosmos. The relationship between Meridian and the Sojourner (magnolia) tree is a point in case. The process of Celie's determination and resistance also creates a process of finding her audience, in Sofia, in Shug and Nettie, her ideal sisterly audience.

Celie's decision to move out to Memphis can be related to Hooks' position in *Yearning* which states that "For African-Americans, our postmodern condition is characterized by continued displacement, profound alienation and despair." This hopelessness creates a yearning for insight and strategies for change that can renew spirits and reconstruct grounds for our black liberation struggle." Typical of an African-American, Celie represents this ideology because she decides to displace and alienate herself from an environment that provokes or reminds her of subjection

to where she is renewed and finally emerges successful and lives peacefully as a liberated black woman. In this connection, Barbara Christian has noted that “in *The Color Purple*, the emphases are the oppression Black women experience in their relationships with Black men (fathers, brothers, husbands, lovers) and the sisterhood they must share to liberate themselves” (p. 469).

In terms of racial resistance, it is important to note that Mrs. Millie in *The Color Purple* is an epitome of such women that Hooks describes as having “turned their backs on the vision of sisterhood” (16). About this, it is observed that, as women, particularly previously disenfranchised privileged white women, began to acquire class and power without divesting their internalized sexism, divisions between women intensified. When women of colour critiqued the racism within the society as a whole and called attention to the ways that racism had shaped and informed feminist theory and practice, many white women simply turned their backs on the vision of sisterhood and closed their minds and their hearts. And that was equally true when it came to the issue of classism among women.

The togetherness that the women share while quilting in *The Color Purple* symbolizes sisterhood. They even name a pattern of quilting as “sister’s choice”, which can be comparable to the weaving done by the Spider Woman in the Native American myth. Celie expresses her anger at men by calling them Mr.—. When Mr.—’s daddy comes to visit them, she spits in his glass of water and schemes that on his next visit she will add Shug’s urine into the water. These are extreme actions, which project Celie’s suppressed hatred of men.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that it is through pain and sorrow that black women as seen in the preceding analyses, manifest their individualisms and shades of sisterhood. Not even the pain and sorrow (devaluation) can

quench their quest. Thus, black women take the initiative and bond their way through, to self-realization and actualization to progress and impact the respective communities in which they live. Therefore, one can submit that despite the odds, the black woman forges ahead exhibiting a skilful level of determination, and bravery and battles the racial, classist and sexist norms that undermine her and her effort for a harmonious life and strives towards communal development. Barbara Smith (2000) complements this outlook by stating that “Unlike any other movement, Black feminism provides the theory that clarifies the nature of Black women’s experience, makes possible positive support from other Black women, and encourages political action that will change the very system that has put us down” (p. xxxvii).

In all, black women have been proven in the preceding analyses to battle such systems in varied ways, enhancing confrontation, reconstruction, education, emancipation and development through the black female characters explored in the works of Alice Walker. Through language, Meridian uses words to empower people politically and socially, and Celie and Nettie use language to regain their identity, all to promulgate black feminine consciousness and instigate progress in the black female diaspora.

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