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THE CHALLENGES OF WOMANISM IN ALICE WALKER'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT
The article describes the development of womanism as an alternative movement to feminism. It advocates inclusivity over exclusivity, whether related to race, class, or gender. Womanism created a political framework for women of color and gave them tools to challenge the patriarchy that imposes restrictive norms and negative stereotypes. She also fought against the limitations of feminism, which was especially evident in the field of literary studies. Womanism is also associated with new movements within feminism such as women's theology and eco-feminism.

Keywords: Womanism, feminism, patriarchy, class, race, gender, norms.

Alice Walker who is from Georgia is an American writer and social activist. Her novels, poems, and short stories insights into the life of African American culture and tradition. One of her notable works The Color Purple published in 1982, for which she won the National Book Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She is an ardent storyteller. Her characters in the novels create space for the readers to realize and to understand the people far better. Her novels help many women to conscious about happenings around them and also succors women to self emancipates from the oppression they endure.

Walker as a womanist writer uses the epistolary form to scrutinize how African-American women characters are silenced in the novel. It also discovers the voice which allows them to achieve self-determination from oppression. Hsiao agrees and believes that “the instability of language, the fluidity of personal identity, and the combat for one’s silenced voice: those are essential lessons for EFL learners to comprehend and analyze western literature and culture” (Huskey).

Being a womanist, Alice Walker’s portrayal of female characters brings out a picture of what is the true condition of a black women in the doubly marginalized society. Walker’s women characters display strength, endurance and resourcefulness in confronting and overcoming oppression in their lives. Yet, Walker is frank on depicting the often-devastating circumstances of twin affections of racism and sexism. Walker writes through her feelings and her concepts of morals that she has grown with. She writes about the black women’s struggle for spiritual wholeness and sexual, political and racial equality. Alice Walker, the founder of womanism, is one of the most popular African-American writers today, and her work covers a wide range of themes that reflect the diverse experiences of the African-American community in the United States, from her first novel, The Third Life of Grange Copeland, to In his latest collection of essays, Walker examines the entire history of African Americans, from the turbulent era of slavery and the long struggle for civil rights to the victories achieved in overcoming negative stereotypes and restrictions. by white society. This struggle represents an integral part of African American matrilineal inheritance, which can be clearly seen in Walker's novels, especially in the portrayal of her female characters who find strength in their female pioneers and the oral heritage bequeathed to them.

As Walker's literary horizons expanded and she became a more mature writer and political activist, she recognized the need for a movement that was distinct from feminism and offered colorful streams.

space for women to shape their own politics. She called it femininity. in the center feminism is a concern for women and their role in the immediate (family, local community or workplace) and global environment. Walker defines a feminist as a "black feminist or feminist of color who seeks to survive and maintain integrity" who loves other women and/or men sexually and/or sexually, values and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's power. people, male and female" (Walker 1983: xi). She is described by black mothers as "wanting to know more and more deeply than is considered 'good' for anyone" and whose behavior is "rough, bold, or willful" clearly situates feminism within a black matrilineal culture based on the word femininity used to describe girls (Walker 1983: xi). Thus, the focus is on behavior that is simultaneously responsible and playful, fearless and compassionate. In Walker's more metaphorical definition of feminism: "A woman is a feminist from purple to lavender" (Walker 1983: xii), she clearly glorifies femininity and contrasts it with the powerful color of purple, which is often depicted as the color of royalty. Feminism pales in comparison to the fainter lavender, and this assessment is reminiscent of one of the debates in the 1980s and 1990s about whether feminism really had lost its appeal for many women. As a light color, lavender is also cleverly associated with the notion that feminism is more about white women than women of color. As Montelaro rightly points out: "The contrast of colors in Walker's definition is consistent with his political intention of pointing out the crucial difference between the terms 'woman' and 'feminist': according to the semantic analogue he creates, only white, bourgeois feminism literally pales in comparison to the broader, non-exclusive female concerns represented by the rich and undiluted purple" (Montelaro 1996:14). The divide between white and women of color is very visible the beginning of feminism as a movement. Although in the beginning it was the goal of feminism to gain equality and suffrage for women, as white women refused to support black women's struggle for their rights in the nineteenth century, it became clear that there were two separate women's movements. For example, white women in the US, especially in the South, built their egos by oppressing black women at the bottom of the social ladder. The refusal of white women to recognize the basic rights of black women can be found in the many testimonies of slave women such as Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson. In her famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech, Sojourner Truth challenged such white women's politics and demanded equal rights for all women. Frances Harper highlighted the difficult choices black women made during the 19th-century struggle for suffrage, as black men demanded their right to vote and they decided to support black men in their struggle although that meant postponing the attainment of their rights. Another good example is the story of Saartjie Baartman who was taken from Africa as a slave and then paraded in England and France as a freak because her physique did not correspond to Western standards. Instead of being treated as a human being, she was objectified and derogatorily dubbed as the Hottentot Venus.

The rift between white feminists from western countries (or so called First World countries) and colored women from minority ethnic groups and economically underdeveloped countries (often referred to as the Third World countries) remained. Similarly, to patriarchy which rests upon binary oppositions in which man always occupies the first part in the equation and is seen as the norm, while woman is seen as his opposite, as weak, unfulfilled, as the Other, feminism began to operate on the same principle of binary oppositions, but this time it was the colored woman, the poor woman who was seen as the Other because of her difference in terms of origin, race, ethnicity and class. Michie contends that white feminists wanted to preserve their position of speaking subject and that they marginalized colored women because they did not fit into the prescribed norms (Michie 1991:60). Spivak and Allen

also criticized white feminism which according to them consisted of various forms of elitism and cultural imperialism reflected in the imposition of white women's norm upon the rest of womanhood. In their opinion, feminism kept the axioms of imperialism alive by accepting and utilizing the ideology of individualism which was at the center of colonial forces designating the first place to white western citizens who were seen as subjects and second or third place to colored people who were then seen as objects (Allen 1995a:2; Spivak 1991:798). Hence the division into First and Third world countries.

Feminists accepted patriarchal policy and built their dominance at the expense of women of color's gains, by distancing themselves from them and excluding their work. As Baym puts it, "a difference more profound for feminism than the male-female difference emerged: the difference between woman and woman." (Baim 1991:73). In catering to the needs and goals of white First World women and operating from the premise of exclusivity, it did not include the needs and goals of colored women and Third World Women.

In conclusion, Womanism reflected the decision of colored women to clearly state their objections to such an exclusive position of white feminists and to create a paradigm which would incorporate values important to them. Not only did womanism distance itself from feminism, it also presented itself as stronger and more original thus applying the feminist strategy of distancing in order to underscore the restrictiveness of their paradigm. Womanists wanted to decenter white feminists and challenge the 'normality' of their perspective (Bryson 2003:228). As an alternative to dominant patriarchal and feminist models, womanism served as an example of different modes of behavior and thinking, and retrieved the submerged history which led to the transformation and redefinition of existing norms and to the broadening of traditional views. According to Valerie Bryson, black women's analysis of the interlocking and interdependent nature of oppression has constituted a paradigm shift in feminist understanding: "Placing African American women and other excluded groups in the center of analysis opens up possibilities for a both/and conceptual stance, one in which all groups possess varying amounts of power and privilege in one historically created system" (Bryson 2003:229). While womanism does not claim that black women have discovered the "truth", their insight into the multi-faceted and interlocking nature of class, race and gender can enable awareness of other systems of oppression such as age, physical ability and sexual orientation (Bryson 2003:230).

So, While Morrison stresses the mother/daughter relationship, Walker concentrates on a different kind of female bonding. Celie, the central character of *The Color Purple,* is silenced by the long-standing oppression and sexual abuse she experienced since her teenage years, first from her presumed father and later from her husband. She finds her voice through the influence of strong, independent women, be it her sister Nettie, Sophia, the wife of her stepson Harpo, and, most importantly, Shug Avery. It is through this female bonding that Celie learns the real value of herself, that she finds the strength to stand up for her rights and takes her life into her hands. The powerful metaphor of Celie's life is in the art of quilting, because, as pointed by Tucker, "it involves the making of a useful object from material which is customarily regarded as worthless: scraps and throwaways. Yet what can be created out of these worn bits is a truly beautiful and useful work of art". Thus, Celie puts the bits of her learned experience together to create her own life.

It would be wrong to assume that Morrison and Walker concentrate solely on women. Walker, who proclaims herself a "womanist", thus emphasizing her commitment to the paradigm of a female struggle, describes womanism in this respect as "committed to survival of wholeness of entire people, male and female". Men within these novels find themselves in the similarly exploited situation as women do.

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