
**The Plight of Woman in Olinka's Tribe in Alice Walker's
*The Color Purple***

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Safaa Haqi Ismaiel Assist. Prof. Susan Raheem Rahman Jaf (PhD.)
University of Diyala/ College of Education for Humanities/ Department of
English

safahaqi1990@gmail.com

susanjaf2020@yahoo.com

Abstract

The current study is an attempt to shed light on the plight of woman in Olinka's Tribe in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. It aims to reveal the impact of domestic violence, and to create a new identity for the weak black woman in the American society in the recent era, give them a voice, and make them self-confident: socially, emotionally and spiritually. The novel clearly portrays the multifaceted violence suffered by the blacks, thus, the novelist exposes her themes through the main black characters in order to offer the reader a real insightful depiction and send a message to the entire world about the ill treatment, marginalization and multi faced exploitation that most of the black people have been suffering for centuries.

Introduction

Alice Walker, born February 9, 1944 in Georgia, is a black American writer whose novels, short stories, and poems are noted for dealing with the African American culture. She grew up poor, working with her mother as a maid to help in supporting her big family of 8 children. As a novelist Walker published *The Color Purple* in 1982, her third novel. The novel established the author's celebrity and financial success. It is one of Alice Walker's literary works that addresses black feminism. *The Color Purple* is Alice Walker's magnum opus. Additionally, this novel has won many awards, including Pulitzer Prize and the National Book. Furthermore, it was later adapted into a film. Also, the novel is adapted into a film by Steven Spielberg, featuring Oprah Winfrey and Whoopi Goldberg in 2005. These movies made Walker more popular, successful and controversial.

This novel is set in 1930 in the Southern United States and centres on the lives of African American women. It presented the story of a young African American woman against not only whites but also the patriarchal black culture. Walker asserts in this novel that women are more submissive than men. Celie, a coloured lady with little or no education, is the protagonist of *The Color Purple*. Celie is a little girl who is subjected to terrible treatment by the males around her. She is someone who has been exploited and abused by every man in her life, and as a result, she lacks confidence and desire in her life. She possesses a lack of courage that all she desires is to survive. She learns to enjoy herself, find courage,

and happiness through the different ladies she encounters throughout her life, including Shug, her sister, and Harpos wife.

Black people live in an environment marked by poverty, a labour shortage, and oppression in *The Color Purple*. Despite the fact that Walker's novel is a work of fiction, it aims to provide a realistic portrait of black life in the early twentieth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, the story takes place. During this time period, important developments occurred in the history of America, and the Southern states experienced substantial development. To gain a better understanding of this growth and the living situations of black people, it is important to look in some prehistory.

Walker intends to support the movement that attempts to develop the lives of black women who are oppressed by patriarchal regimes. She demonstrates, however, that just resolving America's racial oppression would not improve circumstances for black women, since she demonstrates that women are still oppressed inside their own black communities that are unconnected to American racism. Consider the Olinka tribe, which Nettie lived in during her time in Africa. (Higginbotham and Gates, 2004: 235).

Walker invented the nation of Olinka. Nonetheless, as Kuhne (1999) asserts, Olinka:

Olinka is much more than a village or a tribe. Olinka is a West African nation with an Atlantic coast and considerable territory . . . Like actual African nations, Olinka has suffered from colonialism, and like many contemporary African nations, Olinka is ruled by a corrupt leader who has little regard for his people . (69)

Additionally, Walker's presentation of life in Africa through Nettie is critical. Kuhne (1999) states that:

The Color Purple also introduces readers to such African customs as ritual scarification and female genital mutilation. The use of African culture and ritual to dramatize the universality of the oppression of women is the most significant manifestation of African settings in *The Color Purple* . (71)

After leaving Celie and Albert, Nettie seeks lodging with a missionary and his wife. They engage her in caring for their two children and also to aid in the propagation of the gospel in Africa. Their children are, in reality, Celie's adoptive children. They travel to Africa and settle in the town of the Olinka tribe, where they spend the majority of Nettie's life as missionaries. Nettie establishes a school and educates the youngsters about the world while also teaching them to read and write. With the Olinkas, Nettie gets to encounter a whole other civilization and a different form of religion, which expands her world even more. Nettie writes to Celie about the Olinka people's way of life, stating that they have a different story of the creation of the world than the one recounted in the Bible. Adam was not the first man, according to the Olinkas. This comes as a surprise to Nettie, who

has never questioned the Bible's veracity. The Olinkas see Adam as the first white man, and since he was nude during the earth's early days, they believe that being white equates to being naked. Confronted with the Olinka's ambiguous interpretation, Nettie is forced to broaden her horizons, appreciating and tolerating many cultures and faiths.

McMullen and Solomon, (1994) mentioned that even though Nettie has travelled the globe, she continues to encounter the same scorn for women that she does at home. She discovers that gender inequality is far worse among the Olinkas than it is in America. She trains the tribe's females to be self-sufficient and diligent in their studies, but encounters much opposition from their parents. In another letter to Celie, she discusses this: "The world is changing, I said. It is no longer a world just for boys and men" (The color purple : 148). The Olinkas are not yet ready for that, and the father of one of the Olinka girls tells her that his ladies are valued, but they want protection:

Do not be offended, Sister Nettie, but our people pity women such as you who are cast out, we know from where, into a world unknown to you, where you must struggle all alone, for yourself. [. . .] We understand that there are places in the world where women live differently from the way our women do, but we do not approve of this different way for our children. (The color purple : 149)

Nettie must battle for gender equality with the Olinka tribe, as well as at home, and she is well aware of her predicament. "So I am an object of pity and contempt, I thought" (The color purple : 149). Nettie persists, and through her lectures, she is able to plant the seed of gender equality among the tribe's members by allowing the girls to study. "The boys now accept Olivia and Tashi in class and more mothers are sending their daughters to school" (Walker: 156). This is a significant accomplishment for Nettie. Her effort is cut short, however, when the white man arrives and lays a road through the community, forcing the villagers to return home.

The novel's last portion, which deals with Nettie's letters about Africa, is written in the style of previous African works, and although the depiction of violence is local, the issues they address are really worldwide. Africa is spatially positioned as a source of violence in western discourse. Nettie describes how Africans' land was seized:

without compensation, to build roads and how the villagers were forced to pay for water which had been their natural right. Nettie sadly points out how, Children of eight and over are ... workers in the fields. In order to pay rent for the barracks, taxes on the land and to bring water, food and wood, everyone must work (The color purple : 205).

Girls from Olinka are denied education, and women are defined only by their worth to their husbands. One of the Olinka ladies informs Nettie: "A girl is

nothing to herself, only to her husband can she become something: the mother of his children” (The color purple : 162).

Celie's daughter-in-law, the African lady Tashi, who also serves as the heroine of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, must experience cultural abuse in order to develop a stronger connection to her African ancestors. She becomes a victim of her people's rites, a rite that killed her sister in a pool of blood years before. Female circumcision and face scarring are ceremonial activities that rob African women of joy and spiritual vitality as they attempt to reconcile their two conflicting cultural consciousness (Ray & Kundu , 2004:63).

Hearing about how women are treated in Africa and recognising how similar it is to American culture strengthens her feminist convictions. She is taken a back to learn that the Olinka ladies see her as a lady who is worthless due to her lack of a spouse. Nettie explains to Celie how Olinka women in Africa do not believe in female education, since their only purpose in life is to be the mother of their husband's children.

The Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. When I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: A girl is nothing to herse; only to her husband can she become something. What can she become? I asked lf. Why, she said, the mother of his children . (The color purple : 140)

When Nettie informs Olivia, who turns out to be Celie's daughter, Olivia draws a parallel to how black women are treated in America : “They’re like white people at home who don’t want colored people to learn” (The color purple :141). Later, Nettie writes to Celie, saying that she is reminded of how their stepfather has treated them :

There is a way that the men speak to women that reminds me much of Pa. They listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don’t even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not ‘look in a man’s face’ as they say. To ‘look in a man’s face’ is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behavior around Pa. (The color purple : 146-147)

The men in the novel are clearly in charge of their spouses, which illustrates how gender stereotypes and male dominance are still prevalent in American culture.

Male oppressive behaviour does not end in America; it extends to Africa's Olinka males. As with Celie, the chief's ladies do all of the labour but get little recognition and should be grateful to be the chief's wife:

Even though they are unhappy and work like donkeys they still think it is an honor to be the chief’s wife. He walks around all day holding his belly up and talking and drinking palm wine with the healer. (The color purple : 133)

On the other hand, the leader shows no passion, adoration, or respect for his wife. He takes them for granted and acts as a representation of his patriarchal society. Women have internalised gender stereotypes and believe that their lives are important only if they are married and responsible for their children and husband. Several of these females convey this sentiment to Nettie.

Conclusion

All in all, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, aims to expose the brutality of the customs and traditions that this tribe experienced, of which women are victims. Olinka males treat their wives as property, as women lack legal protection. The woman in this tribe seeks to be one of the chief's many wives and to have a large number of male sons in order to provide a kind of protection for her on the basis of who they marry and the social status of their husbands. This means that women who have an important position are treated better than others. Walker tries to say that abuse is not part of white culture, but is rooted in the customs and traditions practiced by blacks among themselves, especially with regard to women and their rights. This was evident in Nettie's letters on Africa, where she elaborated on the local violence that this tribe used against its members of the women. According to Walker, Africa occupies a major position of violence in Western discourse.

معاناة المرأة في قبيلة ولنكا في رواية الس وكر اللون البنفسجي

الكلمات المفتاحية : التهميش ، قبيلة ولنكا ، قمع الذكور

٢٠١٠م ٠١٠٠ سوزان رحيم رحمن

صفاء حقي اسماعيل

جامعة ديالى كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

تحاول الدراسة الحالية إلقاء الضوء على موضوع معاناة المرأة في قبيلة ولنكا في رواية ألس وكر "اللون البنفسجي". الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة تأثير العنف المنزلي ، وخلق هوية جديدة وإعطاء صوت للضعفاء من السود في المجتمع الأمريكي في العصر الحديث وجعلهم يتقون بأنفسهم اجتماعياً وعاطفياً وروحياً. تصور الرواية بوضوح العنف متعدد الأوجه الذي عانى منه السود. تخبر الكاتبة موضوعاتها من خلال الشخصيات السوداء الرئيسية من أجل تزويد القارئ بتصوير حقيقي وثاقب وإرسال رسالة لكل العالم من خلال سوء المعاملة والتهميش والاستغلال متعدد الأوجه التي يعاني منها معظم السود منذ قرون.

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