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African American Criticism: Marginalization and Eurocentrism in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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Abstract

This paper examines *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker through the lens of African American criticism, focusing on the issues of marginalization and Eurocentrism and drawing on the concept of double consciousness developed by W. E. B. Du Bois, as well as discussions of institutionalized racism, intra-racial discrimination, and hegemony, the article explores how psychological and social oppression experienced by Black women in the racist and patriarchal systems is represented in Walker's novel. The epistolary form of the novel is analyzed as a narrative technique that enables silenced female characters to express their pain and construct their identities through writing. The discussion identifies different types of marginalization, namely gender-related violence, intra-racial discrimination within the Black community, and racial oppression enforced by white authority. In addition, the image of Africa and the Olinka tribe is examined within the broader framework of Eurocentrism and colonial discourse. The study concludes that Walker presents marginalization as a product of institutionalized racism that produces double consciousness, and narrative voice functions as a tool of resistance and self-identification.

1. Introduction

African American literary criticism emerged as an independent tradition, not merely an extension of Euro-American theory but a distinct interpretive framework rooted in the historical and cultural specificity of the Black experience. As articulated by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), this criticism draws on vernacular traditions, rhetorical strategies, and historical circumstances

unique to the Black Atlantic world, thereby challenging the assumed universality of dominant Western critical paradigms. Houston A. Baker Jr. (1984) similarly argues that African American literature must be understood through the material conditions of enslavement, segregation, and racial capitalism that shaped its production. Within this tradition, racialized subjectivity is central to literary meaning, rather than remaining a secondary theme.

A fundamental component of African American intellectual history is the concept of double consciousness, developed by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois describes this condition as a sense of “two-ness,” wherein individuals perceive themselves through the eyes of others (Du Bois, 1903/2007). Systemic racial domination produces this divided subjectivity, forcing Black identity to negotiate between self-perception and the imposed gaze of white supremacy. Du Bois does not frame this division solely as a pathology; rather, he presents it as a historically constructed feature of modern identity. Paul Gilroy (1993) extends this argument by situating Black identity within transnational circuits of the Black Atlantic, asserting that modernity itself is inseparable from slavery, colonialism, and racial displacement. Within this framework, Black subjectivity emerges both within and in opposition to Western modernity. Black feminist theory further enriches African American criticism. In particular, the work of bell hooks (1981) emphasizes that Black women experience intersecting forms of racial and patriarchal oppression, highlighting the necessity of a critical framework capable of addressing multiple and overlapping forms of marginalization. Consequently, the gendered dimensions of racial experience become central to African American literary analysis.

Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) appears within this intellectual and political context. Set in the early twentieth-century American South, the novel dramatizes racial subjugation, economic marginalization, sexual violence, and spiritual alienation. Walker employs an epistolary form, constructing the narrative through letters written by Celie—initially addressed to God and later to her sister, Nettie. As noted by Gates (1988), this is not merely a stylistic choice but a political strategy that transforms silenced speech into textual agency, symbolizing Celie’s movement from enforced silence to self-articulation. Simultaneously, echoing the work of Edward Said (1978), the novel critiques representations, particularly their depiction of Africa and missionary discourse, interrogating Eurocentric epistemologies.

This study employs a qualitative approach of textual analysis based on African American criticism. It is analyzed through close reading of the chosen passages of *The Color Purple* and dwells upon the main narrative moments related to Celie, Sofia, Shug Avery, and Nettie. The analysis connects these texts to primary categories: (1) marginalization as a structural factor, (2) intra-racial relations in the Black community, and (3) Eurocentric representations of Africa in the novel. The paper combines theoretical knowledge of the concept of double consciousness by Du Bois, Black feminist theory, and postcolonial criticism, not as theoretical constructs but as instruments of interpretation directly applied to the textual evidence. This approach enables a detailed analysis of how identity, power, and resistance are constructed within the narrative.

This paper employs African American criticism, particularly the concept of double consciousness, alongside Black feminist and postcolonial perspectives, to analyze representations of marginalization, internalized racism, and identity reconstruction in *The Color Purple*. It argues that the novel portrays fractured consciousness under racial patriarchy and further reconfigures it as a process of self-identification, collective identity formation, and spiritual transformation. By tracing Celie’s transformation from silence to narrative authority, the novel demonstrates the potential for reconciling conflicting identities into what Du Bois describes as a “better and truer self” (Du Bois, 1903/2007).

2. Literature Review

Since its 1982 publication, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* has garnered considerable critical attention, particularly from feminist, African American, postcolonial, theological, and narratological perspectives. Early scholarship primarily focused on the oppression of Black women and the recovery

of voice within patriarchal systems. Drawing on Black feminist theory, critics such as bell hooks (1981) emphasized the intersection of racism and sexism in shaping Black women's experiences, an approach that significantly influences interpretations of Celie's marginalization. African American literary critics have also contextualized Walker's novel within broader traditions of Black expressive culture. Houston A. Baker Jr. (1984) argues that Black literary forms transform historical constraint into creative expression, while Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) emphasizes the recovery of narrative authority through vernacular strategies. In this context, Celie's letters have been interpreted as part of a tradition of testimonial and revisionary narrative practices. Likewise, Janet Gurkin Altman (1982) defines the epistolary form as a mode that fosters intimacy and interiority, a feature that acquires political significance in Walker's novel, where private writing becomes a space for articulating suppressed experience.

Beyond gender and narrative form, critical analyses of *The Color Purple* also explore religion and colonial representation. James Cone (1970) and Delores Williams (1993) offer theological interpretations of Celie's spiritual transformation as a critique of white patriarchal conceptions of God. Simultaneously, postcolonial critics, influenced by Edward Said (1978), Frantz Fanon (1963), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), examine the novel's African setting in terms of missionary discourse, economic exploitation, and linguistic imperialism. Furthermore, Paul Gilroy (1993) complicates diasporic interpretations by framing identity within transnational and historical circulations rather than static origins. Despite this extensive body of scholarship, most studies tend to address these themes in isolation rather than in an integrated framework. While feminist, postcolonial, and theological perspectives have each contributed valuable insights, relatively few studies synthesize these approaches through Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. This study builds on existing research by integrating African American criticism, postcolonial theory, and womanist theology within a unified analytical framework. It argues that the novel not only represents oppression but also dramatizes the restructuring of fractured consciousness across intersecting systems of power.

3. Theoretical Framework

African American criticism forms the primary framework of this study, understood as a historically grounded interpretive approach. This mode foregrounds race, power, and cultural representation as forces that structure literary meaning. As argued by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) and Houston A. Baker Jr. (1984), this critical tradition emerged not from Euro-American formalism but in response to the enslavement, segregation, and racial capitalism that shaped Black expressive culture. Within this framework, identity is understood not as an abstract psychological category but as a construct produced within specific historical power relations. Central to this study is W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, which Du Bois (1903/1993) defines as the experience of perceiving oneself through the eyes of others. This condition reflects a divided subjectivity shaped by the pressure to conform to dominant white norms. In this study, double consciousness is used as an analytical tool to examine how characters internalize and negotiate imposed value systems, particularly in relation to race, gender, and self-perception.

The formation of this divided consciousness is intrinsically linked to institutionalized racism. Institutionalized racism operates through systemic structures embedded in law, economy, education, and culture (Tyson, 2006). These structures regulate access to power and profoundly shape both social position and identity. Expanding on Du Bois, Paul Gilroy (1993) argues that Black identity and subjectivity are not formed in isolated national contexts but rather emerge from transnational processes, specifically, the global histories of slavery, colonialism, and diaspora.

Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony illuminates how power systems endure, not merely through coercion, but by normalizing dominant values. This normalization makes social hierarchies seem natural and inevitable, positioning whiteness as the norm and Blackness as a deviation. This process facilitates internalized racism and intra-racial stratification, as marginalized communities may reproduce dominant hierarchies (Tyson, 2006). Black feminist theory, particularly bell hooks's

(1981) work, extends this analysis by emphasizing the intersection of race and gender. bell hooks (1981) argues that Black women experience simultaneous racial subordination and patriarchal oppression, requiring an analytical framework that accounts for overlapping systems of domination. In this study, this perspective is crucial for examining how gender intensifies the effects of racial marginalization within the novel. Finally, Edward Said's (1978) definition of Eurocentrism describes an ideological system that universalizes European culture while deeming non-European societies inferior. This framework, when intersecting with double consciousness, profoundly shapes how marginalized subjects evaluate themselves within imposed cultural hierarchies. Combined, these theoretical perspectives provide an integrated framework to analyze the novel as a narrative that constructs, constrains, and ultimately reconfigures identity amidst intersecting systems of power.

4. Marginalization in *The Color Purple*

Marginalization in *The Color Purple* is not presented as incidental suffering but as a structural condition rooted in intersecting systems of race, gender, and class. Walker situates Black women at the lowest level of a hierarchy shaped by both white supremacy and patriarchy. Through Celie's experiences, the novel demonstrates how identity is formed under conditions of exclusion and domination. Black women occupy a position that bell hooks (1981) describes as the intersection of racism and patriarchy, producing layered forms of vulnerability. Celie's life concretely illustrates this intersectional marginalization, as she is subjected not only to white racial structures but also to patriarchal control within her own community. The narrative immediately establishes Celie's marginal position, beginning with her opening letter "Dear God, I am fourteen years old..." (Walker, 2006, p. 11) address to God reflects an enforced silence, as she lacks any legitimate social space to articulate her suffering. Writing thus becomes a substitute for speech, converting silence into a form of narrative presence. Celie's sexual abuse by her stepfather and the loss of her children position her as what Simone de Beauvoir (1949) terms the "Other," deprived of autonomy and voice. This marginalization operates profoundly at the level of the body, rendering Celie both physically and socially vulnerable. Crucially, this personal violence cannot be separated from broader racial structures. W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness helps explain how Celie internalizes inferiority. This internal division is evident in Celie's early acceptance of her perceived ugliness and lack of self-worth. She evaluates herself through external standards she did not create, reflecting what Tyson (2006) describes as internalized racism.

Intra-racial marginalization further complicates this structure, operating within the Black community itself. Nettie's relative privilege, stemming from her beauty and education, reflects the internalization of Eurocentric standards. As Tyson (2006) argues, internalized oppression creates hierarchies within marginalized groups based on their proximity to dominant norms. Thus, the labels applied to Celie, such as "ugly" and "spoiled," function not as objective descriptions but as markers of this internalized hierarchy. At the institutional level, racism reinforces marginalization through everyday practices. Sofia's confrontation with white authority vividly illustrates this dynamic: when she responds "Hell no" (Walker, 2006, p. 39) to the mayor's wife, she powerfully rejects the imposed role of Black female submissiveness. The violent punishment that follows demonstrates what Antonio Gramsci (1971) describes as hegemonic enforcement: the maintenance of social hierarchy through both ideology and force. Marginalization in the novel is therefore multi-layered. It is:

- Bodily—through sexual exploitation and physical violence.
- Psychological — through internalized inferiority and fractured consciousness.
- Communal — through intra-racial hierarchies.
- Institutional — through legal and social enforcement of racial subordination.

Walker does not present marginalization as static victimhood. Instead, she represents it as a dynamic and historically constructed system that shapes identity at every level. The novel demonstrates how racial patriarchy permeates domestic life, religious belief, and communal relations, creating individuals who are both constrained by and aware of their condition. In this sense, marginalization functions in the novel not merely as a theme but as a foundational condition for identity reconstruction.

4.1 Gender Oppression and Patriarchal Violence

Gender oppression in the novel is the most immediate and personalized form of marginalization. Celie's life begins within a domestic structure defined by sexual exploitation and patriarchal authority. Her stepfather's abuse transforms her body into a site of patriarchal control, positioning her as what Simone de Beauvoir (1949) terms the "Other," a subject denied agency and autonomy. The opening line, "Dear God, I am fourteen years old..." (Walker, 2006) immediately establishes both her vulnerability and her structural isolation. Unable to speak publicly, writing becomes her only available form of expression. The epistolary form thus functions as a compensatory space where silenced experiences can be articulated.

According to bell hooks (1981), Black women experience overlapping systems of racial and patriarchal oppression. Celie's condition reflects this intersection: her subordination is not only gendered but also shaped by a racialized social order that historically devalues Black female bodies and exposes them to violence. For Celie, the domestic sphere offers no protection, becoming instead an extension of structural violence. Her forced marriage to Mr. ____ further intensifies this marginalization; she is evaluated not as an individual but as labor and property. Described as "ugly" and "spoiled," she is judged by standards shaped by both patriarchal and racial hierarchies (Walker, 2006); her worth is reduced solely to domestic labor and sexual availability.

Celie's response to this violence is shaped by internalization rather than resistance; initially, she does not interpret her suffering as injustice. This reflects Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony: domination achieved through consent rather than force. Her silence is not simply passivity but the psychological result of prolonged subordination. As Tyson (2006) explains, institutionalized oppression often produces self-regulating behavior, leading individuals to internalize and reproduce dominant norms.

Celie writes to God because no social structure allows her to speak openly. Her letters, therefore, form a private space where a marginalized consciousness can emerge outside dominant discourse. The very act of narrating her abuse constitutes an initial claim to subjectivity, making gender oppression in the novel not incidental, but foundational. Walker demonstrates how patriarchal violence shapes not only the body but also identity, belief, and self-perception. To achieve any process of identity reconstruction, these intertwined forces of racialized patriarchy and internalized inferiority must first be dismantled.

4.2 Intra-Racial Racism within the Black Community

Walker demonstrates that racial hierarchy in the novel is not maintained solely by white authority but is also reproduced within the Black community through internalized systems of value. This dynamic is evident in the scene where Celie is effectively exchanged in marriage as a form of labor. When Pa tells Albert, "She is not so smart either. However, she can work just like a man" (Walker, 2006); this reveals Celie's intellectual devaluation alongside her simultaneous valuation for physical labor. She is not recognized as a subject but rather evaluated as a functional body. In contrast, Nettie is protected because she is younger, more educated, and considered more attractive. This distinction reflects the internalization of Eurocentric standards within the Black community. W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness helps explain this internal hierarchy, describing the process of evaluating oneself through a dominant gaze shaped by exclusion and devaluation. Celie's acceptance of her inferiority illustrates this process; she rarely questions the assumption of her inferiority, her silence reflecting belief rather than mere fear. As Tyson (2006) argues, this is a form of internalized racism, where dominant values are reproduced within marginalized communities.

This hierarchy finds further emphasis in the figure of Shug Avery. Celie's profound admiration: "I want to go see her... I'd be thankful to lay eyes on her" (Walker, 2006), underscores Shug's symbolic significant power. Shug embodies visibility, independence, and desirability, directly contrasting Celie's own domestic invisibility. Even before recognizing her emotional attachment, Celie perceives Shug as

powerful and socially valued. This aligns with bell hooks's (1992) argument that beauty politics within racialized societies often privilege proximity to dominant aesthetic norms, creating stratification even among marginalized groups. Consequently, Shug's social capital sharply contrasts with Celie's marginalization, reinforcing an internal hierarchy of desirability.

Masculinity within the Black community also reflects internalized structures of domination. Harpo's attempt to assert control over Sofia, "He tries to slap her..." (Walker, 2006), demonstrates [he tries to dominate her by beating her up → his attempt to assert authority through violence]. Sofia's resistance, however, disrupts this expectation, thereby challenging the normalized association between masculinity and domination. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony helps explain this dynamic: systems of domination are internalized and reproduced even within marginalized groups. Harpo's behavior thus reflects learned models of authority, shaped by a broader societal system that equates power with control. This internalized tension within the Black community is also evident in debates over survival strategies. For instance, when Shug attempts to secure Sofia's release by appealing to white authority, she is accused of "uncle Tomming." This accusation reflects an awareness of the ethical complexities surrounding accommodation to dominant power. Shug's response, "Uncle Tom was not called Uncle nothing" (Walker, 2006), highlights the intricate balance required to navigate oppression, suggesting that survival may necessitate negotiation even when such strategies risk reinforcing existing hierarchies.

Celie's conversation with Sofia offers further insight into internalized hierarchy. When Sofia asks why Black people have not resisted more violently, Celie responds, "Too many to kill off..." (Walker, 2006). This reply reveals an awareness of structural imbalance, acknowledging both the reality of oppression and the perceived limits on collective resistance. Later, Nettie's observations of the Olinka introduce a striking inversion of racial meaning: "Their word for naked is white..." (Walker, 2006). This linguistic inversion directly challenges dominant racial coding by presenting whiteness as a lack rather than a mark of superiority, thereby exposing the constructed nature of racial hierarchies. Consequently, intra-racial racism in the novel emerges not merely as betrayal but as a residual effect of systemic oppression. It reflects the psychological afterlife of white dominance, shaping perceptions of beauty, gender roles, and power within the Black community itself. As Du Bois suggests, the "veil" does not only separate Black and white worlds but also refracts self-perception within Black communal life. Ultimately Walker demonstrates that true liberation necessitates confronting not only external systems of oppression but also the internalized values that perpetuate them.

4.3 Resistance and the Cost of Defiance

While Celie initially survives through silence, other women in the novel adopt more direct forms of resistance. Walker, however, avoids romanticizing this defiance, instead highlighting its often violent consequences within a racially and patriarchally structured society. Sofia, for instance, embodies this most explicit form of defiance. When the mayor's wife asks, "Have you ever thought about being a maid?" Sofia responds, "Hell no" (Walker, 2006, p. 53). The brevity of this response is significant: it is not an argument but a refusal. In rejecting the expected role of Black female submission, Sofia disrupts the social order imposed upon her.

The immediate violence that follows reveals the heavy cost of such defiance. Following her imprisonment, Sofia is physically diminished; Celie observes, "Sofia looks half her size..." (Walker, 2006, p. 60). Her previously strong and solid body is now visibly weakened. This physical transformation is symbolic, turning Sofia's body into the site where power is violently reasserted. Her initial strength represented resistance, while her subsequent diminished state reflects the system's capacity to discipline and suppress such defiance. This dynamic illustrates Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, in which domination is maintained through both force and normalization.

Resistance in the novel is also notably gendered. When Mary Agnes attempts to negotiate Sofia's release, she is sexually assaulted by the prison warden. Though the violence itself is not graphically detailed, its brutal consequences are clear. Mary Agnes's experience thus highlights a different form

of resistance—negotiation rather than confrontation. However, the violence she encounters starkly demonstrates that even strategic compliance offers no guarantee of safety; the system, it reveals, is designed to exploit vulnerability regardless of the method of resistance employed. Yet, resistance can also manifest in more subtle ways. Mary Agnes's rejection of the name "Squeak" and her insistence on "Mary Agnes" represents a powerful reclaiming of identity. This act of renaming functions as a form of discursive resistance, aligning with Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s (1988) assertion that voice and naming are central to the assertion of subjectivity in African American literature. By renaming herself, Mary Agnes refuses the diminished identity imposed upon her and actively moves toward self-definition.

The tension between resistance and limitation is powerfully illustrated in the exchange between Sofia and Celie. When Sofia asks, "Why aren't we already killing them off?" Celie responds, "Too many to kill off..." (Walker, 2006, p. 104). This interaction simultaneously reveals both intense emotion and a keen structural awareness. Drawing on Frantz Fanon (1952), such expressions of anger signify responses to systemic violence. However, Celie's reply acknowledges the structural limits imposed by demographic and institutional power. In contrast to these overt forms of resistance, Celie's transformation is gradual and internal. Initially, her letters, beginning with "Dear God, I am fourteen years old..." primarily serve as a means of survival. Over time, however, writing evolves into a tool of self-reclamation. Her pivotal shift from writing to God to writing to Nettie signifies a profound change; authority moves from an external, silent figure to a reciprocal human relationship. This reflects a journey from isolation to connection and from submission to self-recognition.

Walker presents multiple forms of resistance, including Sofia's defiance, Mary Agnes's renaming, and Celie's narrative transformation, each carrying significant cost. Sofia's body is broken, Mary Agnes is assaulted, and Celie endures prolonged oppression. Consequently, resistance in the novel is neither heroic nor idealized; instead, it is embodied, constrained, and often painful. Yet, through voice, naming, and self-definition, Walker suggests that marginalization is not a fixed state but a structured one. These structures, while powerful, can be challenged, though never without consequence. Celie's transformation is further reinforced through spiritual redefinition. When Shug challenges the image of a distant, white patriarchal God, Celie begins to reconstruct her understanding of divinity. This culminates in her final address: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees..." (Walker, 2006). The shift from a singular to a plural form of address reflects a movement toward epistemic and spiritual liberation, demonstrating that resistance is not only social or physical but also deeply internal and philosophical.

5. Eurocentrism and Colonial Representation

While *The Color Purple* is primarily set in the American South, Walker deliberately expands its narrative scope through Nettie's letters from Africa. This expansion is not merely geographical but conceptual, positioning racial oppression within a broader global, Eurocentric framework. Through Nettie's perspective, the novel demonstrates that domination extends beyond domestic patriarchy to encompass colonial, economic, and epistemological systems. Initially, Nettie experiences Africa with a profound sense of spiritual connection, describing the land as deeply moving. However, this early perception is gradually complicated when the missionaries, despite sharing a racial identity with the Olinka people, are not fully accepted. This tension reveals that diasporic return does not erase historical and cultural differences; instead, it exposes new forms of alienation.

The arrival of the British rubber company marks the most visible manifestation of colonial power. While ostensibly promoting development through the construction of roads and infrastructure, these efforts ultimately serve extractive economic interests. Nettie observes white men surveying the land with a detachment that underscores their lack of connection to the local people or environment. This purported progress leads directly to the displacement of the Olinka community, unequivocally revealing colonialism as a system of exploitation rather than genuine advancement. This

displacement extends beyond the material realm, impacting cultural and epistemological spheres as well. Missionary education, for instance, promotes English and Christian doctrine as universal standards of knowledge. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) argues, language functions as a central tool of colonial domination. Walker illustrates this through Nettie's observations of the Olinka language, particularly in the statement "Their word for naked is white..." (Walker, 2006). This striking linguistic inversion challenges dominant racial assumptions by presenting whiteness as an absence rather than a mark of superiority.

Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony explains how colonial power sustains itself beyond direct force, normalizing dominant values through mechanisms like education and religion. Nettie's missionary role exemplifies this tension: while seeking to educate and support the Olinka, she also carries implicit assumptions rooted in Western hierarchy. However, Walker complicates any simple opposition between colonizer and colonized. The Olinka community itself enforces patriarchal restrictions, particularly in denying girls access to education and maintaining practices such as female circumcision. This reflects what Homi K. Bhabha describes as the ambivalence of colonial spaces, where resistance to external domination can coexist with internal systems of oppression.

Nettie's realization of the Olinka's historical connections to the slave trade further complicates diasporic identity. This disrupts the idea of Africa as a unified origin, revealing instead a more complex historical reality. As Paul Gilroy (1993) argues, identity thus emerges not as a return to static roots but as a dynamic product of transnational and historical movement. Eurocentrism also operates on a spiritual level. Celie's early conception of God reflects a white, patriarchal authority figure, mirroring dominant social structures. This internalization aligns with W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, where self-perception is shaped by imposed norms. Shug challenges this image by redefining divinity as present in nature and everyday life, illustrating James Cone's (1970) suggestion that theology can either reinforce or resist systems of domination.

The novel concludes with a redefinition of spiritual and epistemological authority. Celie's final address, "Dear God. "Dear stars, dear trees..." signals a transition from a singular, patriarchal deity to a plural and inclusive vision of existence. This transformation aligns with what Delores Williams (1993) identifies as a key element of womanist theology: survival and self-definition without the sanctification of suffering. Thus, the novel critiques interconnected domains of Eurocentrism, specifically the following:

- Economic: land seizure and capitalist extraction in Olinka territory.
- Linguistic: privileging English and Western scripture.
- Religious: racialized imagery of God.
- Psychological: internalized inferiority and epistemic hierarchy.

Walker's linkage of the American South with the African colonial context reveals oppression as systemic rather than localized. This understanding necessitates resistance that extends beyond individual experience to challenge the broader structures sustaining domination.

6. Identity Reconstruction and the Reconfiguration of Double Consciousness

The *Color Purple* not only illuminates structures of racial, gendered, and colonial oppression but also ultimately posits identity as reconstructible rather than permanently fractured. Celie transcends the confines of marginalization, progressively redefining her self-perception. This reconstructive process is inextricably linked to the novel's epistolary form, which elevates writing into a potent medium for self-articulation and identity formation. Initially, Celie's consciousness manifests the "double consciousness" described by W. E. B. Du Bois. She perceives herself through a lens of external judgment, assessing her worth against the standards imposed by a dominant social order. Her opening statement was, "Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl"

(Walker, 2006, p. 11), reveals a subject who seeks validation through obedience rather than through autonomous self-definition. Her identity is thus externally constructed, and her writing initially functions as a space of containment rather than one of empowerment.

The epistolary form is central to Celie's transformation. As Janet Gurkin Altman (1982) notes, letter-writing fosters a sense of immediacy and intimacy. For Celie, this intimacy gains political significance, as writing offers a private space to articulate experiences she cannot express publicly. Initially, her letters reflect silence and submission, a consequence of being forced to conceal her abuse. Yet, through this act of writing, she gradually begins to recognize herself as a subject. This journey of self-discovery directly counters the internalized inferiority reinforced by language and social interaction. Celie is dismissed as "not smart" but useful for labor, her worth defined by utility rather than individuality (Walker, 2006, p. 9). This highlights a system where identity is externally imposed. However, as Houston A. Baker Jr. (1984) suggests, African American expressive forms often arise from conditions of constraint. In Celie's experience, this constraint, which initially limits her self-perception, ultimately becomes the very catalyst for her transformation.

Celie's discovery of Nettie's hidden letters marks a critical turning point, disrupting the isolation that has defined her experience. Reading Nettie's words restores a sense of connection, history, and self-worth, while simultaneously revealing how her previous understanding of reality was shaped by imposed limitations. Thus, writing and reading become reciprocal processes through which her identity is reconstructed. Her transformation further develops through her relationship with Shug Avery. Shug challenges not only social norms but also Celie's understanding of herself and the world. Crucially, she introduces a new conception of spirituality that rejects the image of God as a distant, white patriarch. Instead, divinity is reimagined as present in nature and everyday experience. This shift allows Celie to detach her identity from oppressive structures and begin to construct a more autonomous sense of self.

Celie's transformation extends to her economic independence; her creation of a pants-making business marks a pivotal shift from dependency to self-sufficiency. This material autonomy directly reinforces her psychological evolution, demonstrating that identity reconstruction is a multifaceted process—internal, social, and economic. Through this development, Walker links Celie's personal empowerment to broader structures of agency and control. By the novel's conclusion, Celie's voice reflects a reconfigured consciousness. Rather than experiencing division through double consciousness, she achieves a more integrated sense of self. This does not mean that oppression disappears, but that it no longer defines her identity. Her final address, "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees..." (Walker, 2006), powerfully signals a shift from seeking external validation to embracing internal affirmation.

Identity reconstruction in the novel is not a simple resolution, but rather a complex process shaped by resistance, connection, and self-recognition. Celie's transformation demonstrates that subjectivity, though shaped by oppressive systems, is not fixed. By reclaiming her voice, redefining her spirituality, and achieving autonomy, she reconfigures the fragmented identity described by Du Bois into a more coherent and self-defined form. Ultimately, the novel moves beyond merely representing marginalization to articulate the profound possibility of transformation.

7. Conclusion

This study examines Alice Walker's novel through an African American critical lens, focusing on marginalization, intra-racial dynamics, and Eurocentrism. Drawing on W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, alongside Black feminist and postcolonial perspectives, the analysis demonstrates that marginalization in the novel is not incidental but rather structurally produced through intersecting systems of race, gender, and power. Walker represents marginalization as a multi-layered condition, manifesting at bodily, psychological, communal, and institutional levels. Through characters like Celie, Sofia, and Mary Agnes, the novel illustrates how oppression is both

externally imposed and internally reproduced. In particular, intra-racial hierarchies and internalized standards of beauty and value underscore the enduring impact of dominant ideological structures within marginalized communities. Simultaneously, the novel challenges Eurocentric assumptions by extending its narrative to the African context. There, colonial exploitation, linguistic domination, and missionary discourse expose the global dimensions of power. These parallel structures demonstrate that oppression is not confined to a single location but operates across interconnected social, cultural, and historical systems globally.

The analysis demonstrates that *The Color Purple* transcends a mere representation of oppression, instead exploring the profound possibility of transformation. Through narrative voice, relational bonds, and spiritual redefinition, Celie reconstructs her identity, thereby reconfiguring the fractured consciousness described by Du Bois. This process highlights the crucial role of language, self-recognition, and autonomy in resisting dominant structures. Walker's novel thus presents marginalization not as a fixed condition, but as a historically constructed system that can be challenged through both individual and collective resistance. By integrating African American criticism with feminist and postcolonial perspectives, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how identity, power, and resistance are negotiated within the text. Ultimately, *The Color Purple* affirms the possibility of reclaiming subjectivity and redefining selfhood within, and against, the constraints of oppressive systems.

Disclaimer

The article has not been previously presented or published, and is not part of a thesis project.

Conflict of Interest

There are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest to declare.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript

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