Chapter 6: Human Identity in Alice Walker’s Novels

For Celie and Meridian, who are embroiled in a racist and sexist environment, their community is itself polluted with negative behavioral traits. The communities in which they grow up and move into are themselves negative. The individual’s social relationships are very important as they influence the growth of self-awareness and self understanding. Other people's responses to an individual's actions help to create a sense of individuality. These responses may produce emotional reactions of pride, guilt, shame and embarrassment.

The evaluations of other people have an effect on the way the individual will apprehend herself or himself. Their feeling of the Identity may be appreciated or diminished. Individuals, when asked to describe themselves may describe themselves the way the community judges them. That they will identify themselves the way they are observed by others in the group or community. Exact it is the case of Celie at the time when she primarily starts to observe herself as ugly because others have made aware her that she is ugly. John, too, is reverential enough to keep belief that his face tolerates the sign of the devil because he has been told so by his step father Gabriel. When individuals learn not to describe themselves by the labels that the group or community gives them, they are fondly to be viewed as rebels in their communities.

The self may also be developed through imitation of others. In imitating others, an individual may also acquire expectations about the consequences of their behavior. When Harpo, Albert’s misguided and immature son, in The Color Purple asks Celie for advice on how to control his wife, Sofia, Celie advises him to beat her. When Harpo tries to follow up on this advice, he is severely beaten up by Sofia. Harpo learns from
his experience that beating his wife will always leave him bruised. This checks his conduct.

Understanding how individual's think is also crucial to understanding an individual's development because the way a person perceives life and its events often determines how these incidents influence them. ‘Self’ or ‘personal’ apply their thinking to new experiences and gradually modify these to better accommodate reality.

Celie's and Meridian's communities are cast in an environment tinted by racism and sexism. This is a portrayal of the American Southern communities which were emerging from the bondage of the dehumanizing slavery during and after the Society or Community's reconstruction in this environment was molded according to Heritage and Identity. It had covers which reflection was on the areas of community dominion and power. There was the group of the whites in which had white women and white men. The same was executed by the whole community of the Black American peoples. Within this second level was the community of Black American women who suffered suppression at the hands of the white world as well as from the Black American male world.²

This is the struggle that the Black American woman has been up against, the suppressive, Heritage and Identity in a racist, sexiest and the patriarchal world. This condition placed the Black American woman in a desperate position. Illustrated in Hughes' poem is the plight of a desperate mother, a representation of the Black, and in situation she has moved on. This portrays a life full of pain and suffering but with determination and hope for a better future. This was the Black American woman who was twice burdened and denied the privileges of firstly the white world and secondly of the Black American man's world which they were expected to serve without question.
This status core denied the woman of herself and herself identity. She was dehumanized and forced to deny herself and accept herself as wood; without feelings, ambition, needs or plans. This reduced her status to that of an amenity.

Celie, in The Color Purple says, ... He beat me ...\textsuperscript{12} To pretend that she is wood, too tough and too thick to break. Set in this background, both The Color Purple and Meridian reflect these conflicts. Individuals like Celie and Meridian have to struggle and negotiate their places and make an effort to acquire an identity for themselves.

In order to help us understand characters in the two novels negotiate their places in their communities, resort shall be had to the feminist literary theory of criticism.\textsuperscript{3}

Feminists have also had their say about the racist and sexist American Society. They have castigated this kind of social order which has marginalized many people in the communities.

The social construction of communities has been patriarchal in nature and consequently contends that the prevalent trend is that society has adopted a culture in which the man is its most powerful, valued and privileged member. They have argued that the concerns of communities have mostly been those of the perception of injustices at the exclusion of the concerns of the woman. Feminists have reconstructed this status quo and given focus to the woman and her concerns. Their work and literature has endeavored to give prominence to the issues of the woman as shall be seen in the section dealing with the theoretical framework.

Feminists have protested against the subordinated and negative portrayal of the woman in community. They have argued that most groups are largely influenced by the socially constructed patriarchal society. They argue that in most communities, the positions of power and decision
making are in the hands of the man and the woman occupies a subordinated position.

The woman in these communities and literary constructions is cast in feminine qualities of dedicate, self sacrificing, patience, docility, understanding, self effacement, cowardice and humility. She is also cast as indecisive and weak whose main preoccupation is home making and producing babies. She is seen in the traditional image of the woman to use Meridian’s words. This is in direct contrast to the casting of the man who is depict as strong, tough, self assertive, brazen, aggressive, fearless, courageous, determined and brave. To John and indeed the reader, James Baldwin presents Elizabeth as representing patience, endurance and long suffering. She in part reminds us of Faulkner’s Dilsey. Whose love like that of Elizabeth keeps the family together. The portrayal of Gabriel who is cast as a bitter sadistic religious zealot who wields family power and exercises it at will and without question. The reason given for such a portrayal of the two sexes is that they are constructed in male-centric societies. Feminists have argued against this and have pointed out that to be born female is a biological phenomenon while to live as a feminine or masculine being is a social construction.

A variety of sources have been cited for this situation. Among the oldest and perhaps most relied upon basis has been the Bible. They have attributed this problem of the subjugation of the woman to the Bible. Mayes (1981:1) says that According to the book of Genesis, God created man. Woman was not only an aftermath, but also an amenity. For close to two thousand years this has justified her subordination and explains and have contended that the Bible, having been written by the man. They have argued that the subordination of the woman was not ordained by God but by the man who had attain her selfhood by being deviant or a rebel against the male constructed world.
Alice Walker, a black Feminist activist who has argued against this cultural portrayal of the woman. Alice Walker, the Pulitzer Prize winner, has argued that Women have little voice in the Bible, and what voice they do have is given to them only to illustrate insignificance is the birth of a son; they expend much of their energy trying to in racially segregated Eatonton, Georgia, experienced some of the effects of racism and sexism.

In Meridian, Meridian has to rebel against the socially constructed traditional images of the woman. She is a daughter but not obedient, a wife but not devoted and a mother but not adoring. She disobeys her mother, ends her marriage and gives up her child for adoption and joins the civil rights campaign.

Most prominent Black American authors like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison have been cited for having spent most of their energies on the representations, in their works, of the black people's struggles against racism and classicism. Black women feminists like Walker have argued that texts by these prominent Black American authors mostly represented the struggles of the Black American male subjects against the domination of the white male. They observed that the silent Black American female voice could not be adequately represented by the voice of the white man or the elitist and racist white feminists or the sexist Black American man who mostly got preoccupied with their own concerns or were blind to the forms of the Black American woman's oppression and expression. This gave rise to Black American female authors having to write to represent the Black American woman's experiences and point of view. This enabled the Black American woman to express herself and challenge the boundaries that traditionally kept her in seclusion. Alice Walker is a product of this oppression. Alice Walker is not only a writer but also a justice also an activist in feminist/ womanist causes, and issues of social and economic
While most feminist writing has challenged social injustices like racism and written about inter-racial relations, Walker has written about intra-racial relations. She shows the challenges of sexism faced by the Black American woman. She has chosen to give a voice to the woman whose voice was inhibited by poverty, sexism, racism, motherhood, home making responsibilities and slavery. She has endeavored to bring to the fore the oppressed lives of the black woman and how the woman can overcome sexism. Walker has also shown how a woman's liberty lies in breaking some of the rules of the patriarchal society. She casts her characters as rebels who go against the socially constructed norms of the traditional woman in a patriarchal world. She casts her women characters as those who have the capacity to bond with other women for emancipation. In this way Walker, in her works, portrays her version of the ideal woman.

As Walker writes about these things, she has not turned her back upon the men of her community like some of the white elitist feminist do. She has shown that the racist question is not very far from the sexism that the Black American woman experienced. She shows that racism does contribute to the degrading of the Black American woman. She shows how the beastly Black American man is himself a victim of a racist society. Brutalized by his racist environment, the Black American man in turn turns his frustration on the Black American woman.

Alice Walker acknowledges the fact that the Black American woman writer is not taken seriously because she is born a woman and is a Black American. She also acknowledges the fact that a woman is mostly dependent on material things—fine cars, house and jars of face cream as opposed to awareness that love, fulfillment as women, selling one's soul for a golden stool on which to sit. Sit and be bored. Yet Walker's works have endeavored to show that a woman, on the other hand, values relationships, and is most concerned in her dealings with others to
negotiate between opposing needs so that relationships can be maintained.

True to the cause of Black feminists, Walker's works have shown by exploring and interrogating the ways in which the experiences of races as in racism has affected the experiences of gender as in sexism. In these novels, Alice Walker has presented females as leading characters. She has situated her characters in a racist and sexist environment in which they have to find their own identity. The characters have had to overcome most of their society's stereo-type patriarchal norms for them to find their self identity and liberty. Walker sees the self as being part of the community; the inner self being a continuum between the inner self and the outer world. She suggests that for the woman to survive and liberate herself she needs the support, strength and wisdom from her fellow sisters which they also draw from nature.

The challenge will be to examine how a woman, who has opposed the stereo-type patriarchal social construction of the position of the woman in society. The Black American woman in America faces a lot of challenges; from racism to sexism and all related problems. The problem that this research seeks to examine is how the two novels of Alice Walker. Both novels The Color Purple and Meridian present lead characters that are female.

Black American literature is dominated by male characters that play leading roles. These, like their male authors, present a world that is centered on the patriarchal type of societies which are insensitive to the woman's concerns. Alice Walker, among others, is redressing this imbalance by creating works that have women as leading characters. Her works and characters focus on and are sensitive to the issues that affect the woman and her community.
Equally of interest is the examination of the two novel, The Color Purple and Meridian in the context of the Feminist literally criticism. This enables the study of the Black American womanhood in which Walker has created a feminine perspective of womanhood and written works that originate from a woman’s consciousness. The Color Purple and Meridian offer a woman’s perspective from the inside and as a result the novels upset the traditional patriarchal portrayal of the woman inside out and upside down, exposing them as poor reflectors of the truths of black woman’s humanity.\(^5\) The two novels take us into the minds of women characters as created by a woman and expose their thoughts and feelings; defining themselves as being much more than the patriarchal society has cast them to be.\(^{22}\) The research looks at how The Color Purple and Meridian project the vision of the world, society, community, family, the female characters and their lovers and how individuals, Celie and Meridian, negotiate their way in their communities in order to attain their self.

In this view feminists have perceived modern civilization as pervasively biased in favor of the male species. Millett in Sexual Politics\(^{25}\) has criticized capitalism, male power, crude sexuality and violence against women. She believes that the root cause of all this lies in capitalism which has placed enormous powers to the male species. She argues that this is more crudely seen in literature in which she accuses male writers of having distorted the image of the woman by associating her with male deviances. This, she argues further has led to the interior colonization of the woman. Millett has concluded that the interior colonization of the woman by the man is studier than any form of segregation. And that the male species has influenced the oppressive culture and social order of community life. Another term used in feminism is phallocentricism which looks at the phallus or the male sexual organ as the source of power. From this point of view the feminists are seen as being envious of the men because they lack the phallus.
The feminists give attention to the term discourse. This term is understood as a system of thought and communication between people. Communication is seen as being instrumental in the articulation and communication of common sense knowledge and assumptions as well as more formal ideologies. Through discourse, dominant ideologies in society are communicated to members of a given society. This means that the main ideologies of society become so entrenched in its members that it becomes very difficult for anyone to challenge or give alternatives to these patriarchal definitions of social values. Feminists believe that discourses, however dominant, are subjective and can be challenged.

Feminists see the question of discourse as pervading the literary world. They argue that most of the literary canons and texts have been constructed from the male point of view; written by the man for the man. They explain that such literary works have projected male concerns at the expense of female concerns. This is seen as a result of the bias of society in which the woman with her concerns is treated as invisible. Most works regarded as great literature have given Faustus, who portrays.

In such literary constructs the woman plays a marginal and subordinate role and is never presented as autonomous. These works are tailored for the male readers while leaving the female readers either alienated or forced to adopt the perspective of the male reader which is against her. The woman is forced to adopt male values.

Another aspect closely associated with the issue of discourse is the question of language use which Saussure terms linguistic theory. In this theory attention is drawn to the use of language in literature. The theory contends that there is bias in the way language is used.

Showalter's linguistic model gives the view that women speak man's language as a foreign tongue and prefer that the woman's voice should be heard despite the creative impediments encountered by the woman. The
result of the woman having to use language as a foreign tongue is that the woman has resorted to silence. This silence is seen as arising from circumstances of being born into numbed by muzzled by censorship, economic struggle or impeded by the demands of nurturing.

In addition to the problem of language vocabulary and syntax, there is the problem of the dominant male linear logic which tends to downgrade the classification and worth of the woman.

Even though a woman writer may have to use this 'male' language, feminists, apart from identifying subjects they consider exclusively feminine, have also identified sex-related writing strategies. Guerin L. Wilfred, (ed.) (2005;226) explains the identified sex-related writing strategies as: Feminists contend that there is a difference between what is natural to a person and what is acquired as a result of social relations or through discourse.

Feminists use the term gender to make clear the distinction between female and male on one hand and what is feminine and masculine on the other. Feminists argue that to be a male or a female is simply a matter of sex and determined by biology while to be feminine and masculine are patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed on an individual by culture and social norms. These are twin poles of gender which Millett simply identifies as biology and culture.

The point that the feminists make is that one is naturally born either as male or as female while this is not the case with living as a feminine or masculine being. Feminine or masculine orientation is a creation of the dominative patriarchal system which imposes certain demands on the females and makes them believe these values which are attached to all females as natural. Attributes of tenderness, self-sacrifice, patience, docility, humility, understanding, self effacement, cowardice and other
considered feminine qualities are socially constructed and considered as negative and inferior by society.

The conclusion of the feminists to this is that gender is socially and culturally constructed while biology is natural. The result of this conclusion is that feminists are of the view that gender roles are given to the women by the male-centric society. Feminists challenge the social, ideological, institutional and personal power relationships between male and female in the male constructed world.

Within the feminist concept Showalter has expounded on what she calls the psychoanalytic model. This model identifies gender differences in the psyche and also in the artistic process. In this context, the feminist concerns are placed in the social context which racial acknowledges class, national and historical differences which are seen as determinants among women. This model offers a collective experience that unites women over time and space - a binary force.

In Showalter’s psychoanalytic model, the self is seen as still linked to the voice of the mother which is taken as the source of all feminine expression. To gain access to this place is to find an immeasurable source of identity. It is argued that it is because men abstract themselves from the material world as they separate from their mothers and enter the patriarchate that they adopt a violent and aggressive posture toward the world left behind, which is now constructed as an 'object.' For them the mother represents the tie to nature that must be overcome to inaugurate civilization as men understand it (a set of abstract rules for assigning identity, appropriate social roles and the like that favor male power over women). Because women are not required to separate from the mother, no cut is required, no separation that launches a precarious journey towards a fragile identity predicated on separation that simply denies its links to the physical world. As Riukn and Ryan put it, in the mother child
relationship might be found more of the constituents of identity than are given during the later Sigmund Freud's oedipal stage.

Feminists have introduced gender as an important literary criticism which questions the image of women as portrayed and perpetrated in literature. They contend that in most literary works, Literary works have tended to portray the woman in two dominant stereo-types; as a mother who is beautiful, enduring, humble, self-sacrificing or as a witch, a cunning schemer who lives on her exploits of man, a mysterious kind of person- terrible and yet irresistible. Classical examples of these are Delilah and Circe. The feminists challenge these images of a woman.

Showalter, in her Biological model, identifies as most problematic the fact that most texts tend to mirror the woman's body when dealing with the woman. The question that this raises is whether the women are reduced to mere bodies. However, Showalter praises the 'shocking frankness' of women writers who relate the intimacies of the female experience of the female body.

Society, through the patriarchal ideology, has marginalized the woman by giving her an image of custodian of societal values and norms. Some dominant literature has picked on this image to represent the woman in literature as a symbol of cultural values. Society has called the woman who upholds the cultural image that has been placed on her as good and the one who challenges it as bad. Feminists have seen this as a tactful way of tying the woman down to her traditional role, so that the woman who challenges this culturally valued position is considered a rebel.  

Others include mother-daughter and woman-woman relations in which the most important issues are the personal and affection issues. They claim that no other person can write accurately and realistically about these feminine issues other than the woman herself.
Feminists further demand and claim for equal opportunities with the man. They stand up to challenge their subordinated positions as members of society. It identifies the recurrent and distorted images of the woman and challenges these in their reconstruction of literary works. These critics have set their goal to enlarge and re-order, or displace altogether the male-centric literary canons.

Judith Fetterley in analyzing the poetry of Emily Dickinson identifies and defines the condition of the woman in a patriarchal culture. She points out that the woman's primal act of consciousness is the sense of loss, a phenomenon that Freud in his massive phallocentrism is said to have arrogantly analyzed as a lament for a specific bit of flesh rather than for the possibility of personhood which it represents.\(^8\)Worse than the loss is the confusion of consciousness which obscures the nature of the loss itself.

The woman finds herself enclosed in societal myths and images and dogmas and definitions and laws and strictures and God and Man, and fear. She is deceived into believing the theory about the bit of flesh and the bite of the apple and is kept from knowing of what she is deprived of. In this state the condition of the woman is that of isolation, cast out and consequently herself image tends to be monstrous, all because that is the consequence of the patriarchal predication that to be human is to be male, in which the woman is forced in every way to identify with man and yet incessantly reminded of being a woman.

Fetterley calls the American literature male and argues that to read this literature is to be forced to identify with the male. She further argues that this literature has not left the woman alone. In this condition, the woman loses herself personhood; herself image and herself identity.

In most of the American fiction, the woman, the mother or the daughter is seen as the scapegoat. This is the situation in William
Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* in which Addie Bundren is seen as the main cause of the Bundren family's suffering as they transport her decomposing dead body from the Bundren farm to be buried forty miles in Jefferson.\(^9\)

The same scenario prevails in *The Sound and the Fury* in which the problems of the Compson family members like Quentin, Benjy and others are blamed on Candace's moral conduct. Quentin drowns himself in the Charles River in Cambridge, Massachusetts as a result of his perceived loss of family honour because Candace, mostly called Caddy, has become promiscuous. Benjy, the idiot's suffering is presented as being caused by Caddy's absence.

Fetterley is of the view that most of the available major works of American fiction constitute designs on the female reader a fact that keeps the designs of American literature unavailable to the consciousness of the woman reader. If the woman reader is going to read this literature, it would be to read and subscribe to a literature designed against her. This literature teaches a woman to think like a man and to identify her with a male point of view and to accept as normal and legitimate a patriarchal system of values which promotes the male image and point of view. The end result of this is that it promotes misogyny or the hatred of women as a sexually defined group. In this situation, the woman either accepts the designs against her or she becomes a resisting reader who even as she reads she rejects the ideology being propagated by a particular piece of work. The paradox of this is that the woman finds herself struggling with an identity crisis of being intellectually male and sexually female.

This is the reason Toni Morrison, the first black woman Nobel Laureate for literature, lamented that each time she picked up a piece of literary works to read, she found nothing that suited her and so decided to write something that she and other women like her would enjoy reading. What the woman reader like, Toni Morrison, found oppressive is the fact that when one reality which is against the woman is encouraged, and
when that vision in limited endlessly insists on its comprehensiveness, then it creates the conditions necessary for the confusion of the consciousness in which impalpability flourishes.

From the feminist point of view, Toni Morrison’s stand could be seen as that of a resisting reader who has began exorcising the male mind that is so deeply implanted in literature. This step is significant as male-centric history has often defined the woman and denied her the opportunity to be heard and to define her. The world and everything in it has been defined and named by the man right from the time of Adam in the Bible who was asked by God to name everything that had been created including the woman.\textsuperscript{10} There was no dialogue or discussion in this process. Consequently, feminism is a drive towards self knowledge and a part of the refusal by women of the self destructiveness of male dominated society. The aspect of the woman having a voice is significant considering the power of the taboos that were placed upon the woman like the one that St. Paul of the Bible prescribed for the woman I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men but to keep silent.

Feminists of Marxist orientation have avoided separating the personal identity from class identity and have instead directed attention to the underpinnings of cultural productions such as economics that have inhibited the woman’s creativity, expression and ability to maximize production. Feminist critics have further postulated that criticism should have a cause and that to be engaged criticism must be ideological and moral; that is, it must be revolutionary.\textsuperscript{11}

Meridian, back in the present, goes back to her roots as a former civil rights worker, and commits herself to live and work amongst the people. Truman does not understand Meridian’s fainting spells and paralysis that grip her but admits that he cannot let her go.
The text also reflects the entrapments of the woman in a society which is patriarchal in nature. The woman is trapped in a society that is programmed to serve the interest of the man. At best the society sees the woman as man's slave and at worst as man's sexual object. Sex and motherhood are presented as entrapments of the woman and like Meme, pregnancy spells doom. For a woman to attain full liberty and a sense of the self she has got to rebel against these traditional patriarchal notions of sex and

Meridian is set in time between 1960 and around 1970. It covers the period of the presidency of J. F Kennedy, the assassination of Martin Luther King.

The novel Meridian reflects many aspects of the characters' social relations in their environment. Most outstanding of these are those that deal with the rich and the powerful and those that deal with race relations. The woman is presented as a victim of both vices. First on this social ladder is the white man. Below the white man is the white woman. The black man is below the white woman and at the bottom of the black man is the black woman.

The child, especially the black child has no say in this community. The children can be aborted, killed or raped at will. The community in the text does little to protect the child apart from what Meridian does.

The white community in Meridian is shown to enjoy all the privileges of life in the face of acute poverty among the black people whom they are determined to keep under oppression. The black children are chased about by grown white men brandishing axe handles. Old black women are dragged out of stores and beaten on the sidewalk, their humility of a lifetime doing them no good in their challenging racist environment.

On television, black people are never shown unless they have shot their mothers or raped their bosses' grandparent. If at all they are
featured in news, especially during the civil rights movement, the news
caster, who would look astonished, would hold a handkerchief over the
mike when he presents it to the black person but removes it when he talks
into it himself. Saxon college is also expected to produce ladies who
would subscribe to the patriarchal image of a lady. Meridian and Anne-
Marion are seen as rebels because they do not conform to the dictates of
their community; the regular saying at Saxon is that one can do anything
there as long as one wore spotless white gloves. The implication of this is
that because the gloves must remain clean and white, there is very little
else that the girls can do. Meridian and the other students feel that they
have two enemies at Saxon; the institution of Saxon itself which wants
them to become something - ladies - that is racist society. In this context,
Meridian, the former wife and mother, feels her waking moments to seem
fragmented, surreal.

Ideology plays an important part in Meridian. Capitalism is credited
for the achievements among the people of the white community. The
members of the black community are obsessed by the ideology of
Christianity which seems to oppress them even further. The members of
the civil rights movement are using the socialist ideology to pursue their
voter campaign. But Anne-Marion is able to look beyond the blanket of
ideology. She is bold enough to declare that she is willing to put ideology
aside in order to have a feel of life. Fuck Democracy, Anne-Marion would
say, biting into a cookie. Fuck the Free World. Let the Republicans

This is the case of the story of the mummy woman in the circus
wagon. She is presented by the supposed husband as seeking pleasure
elsewhere while her husband provides her with the comforts of life.

Samuel and Corrine have two adopted children, Olivia and Adam.
Nettie and Corrine become close friends, but Corrine, noticing that her
adopted children resemble becomes ill with a fever. Nettie discovers, from Samuel's narrative that the two adopted children are actually Celie's biological children.¹⁷

The ill Corrine at first refuses to believe Nettie but she accepts Nettie's story as she dies. In the meantime, women's stepfather. Celie begins to lose faith in God, but Shug Avery helps her to re-imagine God in her own way, rather than in the traditional image of the old, bearded white man.

At dinner one night, Celie angrily confronts going to Tennessee. Mary Agnes chooses to go with them. In Tennessee, Celie designs and sews pants.

Nettie and Samuel marry. Adam marries Tashi, a native African girl whom he falls in love with. The whole family returns to America together with Tashi. Emotionally drained but joyful by the reunion with her sister, Celie notes that though she and Nettie are now old, she has never in her life felt younger.

Celie and Mr. _______ reconcile. The financially, spiritually, and emotionally and independent Celie is no longer bothered by Shug Avery's passing flings with men. Sofia remarries Harpo and now works in Celie's clothing store.

The novel is set in a racist and sexist environment. It is set against the turbulent backdrop of the civil rights movement which gained force in the 1960's. It reflects the times of the Civil Rights movement in America; especially the time in which black Americans were being sensitized to participate in the nation's voting process. The sensitization triggered sit-ins, demonstrations and protests against the racist and segregationist policies that controlled and shaped the lives of black Americans in the South.
The text also reflects the entrapments of the woman in a society which is patriarchal in nature. The woman is trapped in a society that is programmed to serve the interest of the man. The society expects the woman to be subordinate to the man and to concentrate on the roles of the woman: sister, obedient daughter, submissive wife and adoring mother. At best the society sees the woman as man's slave and at worst as man's sexual object. Sex and motherhood are presented as entrapments of the woman and like Meme, pregnancy spells doom. For a woman to attain full liberty and a sense of the self she has got to rebel against these traditional patriarchal notions of sex and roles of motherhood.\textsuperscript{18}

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The inscription on the circus wagon categorizes the prevailing concepts of a woman. These concepts of woman subservient. Any deviation from this image is seen as wrong and rebellious. This is the case of the story of the mummy woman in the circus wagon. She is
presented by the supposed husband as seeking pleasure elsewhere while her husband provides her with the comforts of life.

The man is easily forgiven while he cashes in from displaying the supposed body of his wife together with the crime she is alleged to have committed.\textsuperscript{19} This is the patriarchal established arrangement with its entrapments that the woman would have to fight against in order to have her freedom and have a sense of the self.

Meridian is not cut out for domestic chores as the members of the patriarchal world would expect. She is frigid in bed and simply endures her sexual experiences. Making love to her is like an assault Meridan compels to do ask to search out what does he mean and Eddie explains; I have to fight to get your legs open; ... They're like somebody starched them shut. Sex is clearly very important for Eddie. For Meridian, she does not see how he can feel she was less interested in sex for she feels that she has never shown anything approaching interest. She cannot even imagine why any woman should have interest in sex. Yes, she loves the warmth, the lying together and the peace. She endures the sex because it gives her these things. She would have been just as happy, even happier, without it. But Eddie is said to be good to her because he does not cheat on her or beat her.

Meridian recalls her experiences with George Dexter, the owner of Dexter funeral home. Dexter would entice her into his office with candy for a swift, exploratory feel. Meridian never enjoyed these sessions. The only part she liked was when he sucked her nipples.

In the absence of Dexter, his assistant took over the show. In an effort to convince her of his serious intentions to have sex with her, he organizes for an episode of sex with another girl of about sixteen for Meridian to watch. For as much as Meridian's body wanted to have sex, she never had any intention of giving in to sex.
The magazines Meridians reads never help: they only convince her that a woman's body is a mindless body, a sex creature, something to hang false hair and nails on. The magazines help her know for sure that her marriage is breaking up.

After the child has grown a bit and Eddie deserts Meridian in pursuit for sex, Meridian would take the child to spend the day with his uncle, his father's baby brother who was only three years old. Meridian takes the moments alone to meditate on her condition, unconscious, at first, of what she did. She realises that she is still only seventeen years old and yet she is already a drop-out from high school, a deserted wife, a mother and a daughter in-law.

Meridian unconsciously resents the institutions that have held her down; wifehood, motherhood and the institute of being a daughter in-law. She is suspicious of pleasure and sex because she sees these things as entrapments that lead to a woman's bondage. As a wife, a woman is overwhelmed by her husband whose demands are endless; from being a sex tool to being a servant. As a mother, the woman is trapped by the duties of motherhood, especially child minding. To Meridian, motherhood was like being restricted in ball and chain. As a daughter in-law, the woman has got to strive to subscribe to the patriarchal social expectations of a good daughter in-law and win the approval of her in-laws.

The men co-modify women and in this case even in death. MarileneO'shay's husband, Henry, is cashing in on the display of the supposed corpse of MarileneO'Shay. Meridian is enticed into sexual grappling at the embalmers by gifts of chocolate. Later Meridian gives in to the sexual grappling from her professor, Mr. Reynolds, in exchange for some food and money to buy school requisites. These acts that compel women to give up their selfhood in exchange for gifts slowly begin to have an effect on Meridian who becomes determined to break free from these chains of oppression.
Back in time, Mrs. Hill's mother (the mother of Meridian's Mother) is married to a man who has many admirable qualities but has no desire to raise children - though he enjoys sex with any willing, good-looking woman who comes his way. He also beats his wife and children with more pleasure than he beats his mules. This pictures the relationship between men and women in an unbalanced state. The man does not want children but enjoys his sex very much. The man not only enjoys sex with his wife but with any willing good-looking woman who comes his way. The man is also pictured as a monster that beats his wife at will. He is portrayed as enjoying beating his wife more than he enjoys beating his mules.

The result of this unbalanced relationship between men and women is that Meridian's mother grows up scurrying out of her father's way. Later, when she is in pleasure and sex because she sees these things as entrapments that lead to a woman's bondage. As a wife, a woman is overwhelmed by her husband whose demands are endless; from being a sex tool to being a servant. As a mother, the woman is trapped by the duties of motherhood, especially child minding. To Meridian, motherhood was like being restricted in ball and chain. As a daughter in-law, the woman has got to strive to subscribe to the patriarchal social expectations of a good daughter in-law and win the approval of her in-laws.

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The result of this unbalanced relationship between men and women is that Meridian's mother grows up scurrying out of her father's way. Later, when she is in her teens, she learns to be scurrying out of the way of white men. It is pointed out that this was especially necessary because she was good-looking, defenseless and black. This marks a continuation of a life dominated by the dominant male who treats his wife as an appendage to his property. This fear of the husband is translated into a fear for all the men.

Meridian's grandmother and later her mother grow up in environments in which they are not allowed any choices. This is a different environment from the one in which Meridian grows up. Meridian has the freedom to make choices. She can decide to leave her child and go to College or indeed decide to join the civil rights movement. These are the choices that her two elderly women did not have. As a slave, her great-grandmother had to plead to be with her children. The ability to make a choice and act on that choice also reflects the levels of freedom; the freedom to be free to do what one wants to do or what one wants to be, the freedom for self expression both in word and deed. This reflects the passage of time and the fact that the community has undergone change with time.
Sexual relations in Meridian are presented as vile. Meridian originates from a background of physical abuse which forces her to partner with stronger male partners she does not love in order to escape from harassment and other male pursuits. Her marriage to Eddie is an accident as her mother never tells her the truth about sexuality. She endures the marriage which ends in divorce. She eventually has to succumb to sexual abuse from a man who promises her financial support.

When she finally falls in love with Truman; she discovers that Truman is false, that Truman is a senseless womanizer. His interest is only conquest and dominance. He is adventurous and mesmerized by the white ladies and anything foreign as a way to assert his dominance. She gets out of a marriage, survives sexual encounters with Truman and gives away one child and aborts another. In these acts Meridian has done what the patriarchal society would not expect her to do. She is not an obedient and dutiful wife and she is not an adoring mother. She has rebelled against the cherished norms and values of her society to attain a sense of her individuality.

No one has told Meridian the truth about her sexuality. Her mother, Gertrude Hill, only tells her to be sweet without specifying what she means. Gertrude lacks any concern about her daughter’s morals. Having told her nothing, she expects her to do nothing.

When Meridian leaves the house in the evening with her boyfriend, the one who is always eager, her hot-breathing lover, one who always takes her straight to the nearest lovers’ lane or its equivalent, which in their case is the clump of bushes behind the city dump, her mother only cautions her to be sweet. And while not enjoying the sex, she has it as often as her lover wants it, sometimes every single night. She did not know that having sex could produce a pregnancy.
Truman's sexual ideology is presented as contradictory. He wants a virgin who is as experienced in worldly sexual matters as he is himself. Because he is obsessed with the idea of a virgin, Meridian conceals the fact that she is a mother. And as Truman wants to make love to her, Meridian is scared because she has no worldly sexual experience to speak of. When he makes love to her it is almost impossible to penetrate her; it is as if her vagina is sealed shut by a taut muscle that fights him.

It is only later that he begins to understand why her vagina has been clenched so tightly against him. She has been intermittent with fear. Meridian's fear is due to the fact that for her, sex has always been burdened with ugly consequences. She is afraid because if she does not make love with him she might lose him, and if she does make love with him he might lose interest as he must have seemed, to her, to have done. This is one of the reasons Meridian gives as to why their relationship does not work out. Meridian feels that in Lynne, Truman finds his ideal; a woman who is a virgin and eager for sex and well to do enough to have the worldly experience. Lynne understands Truman better. She calls him a vampire who sucks the blood of young white virgins to keep him vigorous. Lynne's analysis of the situation is that Meridian and Truman should smoke reefer, fall into each other's black arms and fuck their brains out.'

After Truman and Meridian make love, Truman discovers that Meridian has a child. He believes that he cannot have a woman who has had a child and worse still a woman who has had a child and then given that child away. As a result, a strong repugnance arouses in him against her. Truman takes it as normal that he should find Meridian guilty of this, forgetting his own various immoral relationships. This is evidence that Truman's ideas of a woman conforms to the patriarchal image of a woman as a faithful and dutiful wife and an adoring mother.

Truman has always wanted a virgin and has been raised to expect and demand a virgin. He has never questioned his own thinking. Not
once has he asked himself where he expects his virgin to come from short of heaven. This reasoning by Truman reflects the fact that the men believe that the women are there for their pleasure and that they must present themselves before the men in unblemished conservative manner. This dehumanizes the woman to the position of an appendage to the man, a subservient being to the man.

To Tommy Odds, sex is a race weapon. He believes that the best way to revenge for the injustices brought upon him by the whites is by raping their women. He uses sex as a weapon of the racial war. He rapes Lynne after he loses his lower part of the arm in a racial related shooting as he emerged from the Liberty Trinity Baptist Church. To him, Lynne is guilty because she is white. Randolph Kay, the Movie Star and Tom Johnson have lived with white women for years before they leave them in order to please their fellow back people. Despite the fact that they have been living together in harmony for a number of years, they still leave the white women because of racial hatred. The whole relationship is reduced to just a question of personal taste in ‘pussy’.

Lynne takes sex as a form of charity and a form of reparations for the atrocities committed by her white race. And near the end of her ordeal her arms stole around his neck and before he leaves she tells him that she has forgiven him and kisses his slick rounded stump that is now the color of baked liver. Lynne who once lived in the East Village, the Lower East Side, on 12th Street could not walk down the street without niggers wanting to have sex with her;

Truman’s interpretation of reality is different. He feels that Lynne has always fantasized being raped by a black man. Truman, too, is not innocent of the vice. But then, Lynne grows on him and proves to be a hard worker who does better than black women who always want to argue a point instead of doing what they were told to. And Lynne likes doing things for Truman.
Lynne's mistake has been to view all the black people as a people who have suffered without hatred. This belief makes her like a child in awe of them. She neglects to think of the black people as individuals. Individuals like Tommy Odds whose thin defense against hatred brakes down under personal assault. Revenge is his only comfort.

Lynne, despite her trauma, gives Tommy Odds some credit for his choice of his victim of rape. Some blacks have, in their frustration, gone off to get drunk on the weekend and gone on to stab another black man to death. Others have gone on to marry a black woman in order to possess, again erroneously, their own whipping post. To Lynne, this is proof of a kind of a weird personal growth on Tommy's part.

Lynne also offers sex as a way to show gratitude. Alonza, Altuna's brother, has been kind to her and has shown her kindness and friendship. For his kindness, Lynne invites him to sleep with her. In his gratitude, he licks her from her ear lobes to her toes. Lynne hopes that being Aonza's friend will protect her from sexual assault. This is not the case. The assaults from whichever black man wants to take her continue. Lynne is so traumatized that she comes to believe that the men who sleep with her do so because they love her. She tells herself that she can live with the constant rape as long as the blacks do not hate her. When the black men stop coming to her for free sex or rape, she believes that she needs them more than they need her.

Gertrude Hill sees sex in terms of children and motherhood. For her, motherhood is taken in the traditional patriarchal sense. Meridian looks at her mother as Black Motherhood personified encompassing the patriarchal aspect of the great marriage and motherhood institutions which Meridian is in terrible awe, comprehending as she does the horror, the narrowing of perspective, for the mother and for the child, it invariably meant.
Eddie, once Meridian’s husband, enjoys sex for fun. He is frustrated in his sex life with Meridian because he feels that Meridian does not open her legs sufficiently enough to allow him complete access to her sex canal. He has to struggle to reach her.

Mr. Reynolds, a professor at Saxon College, does not mind taking advantage of the needy students like Meridian. He is a predator who offers Meridian money and food in exchange for sex favors. The doctor from Saxon College who performs an abortion on Meridian tries to take advantage of Meridian. He offers to tie Meridians fallopian tubes in exchange for sex. For this doctor, sex can be used as payment for a service rendered. He is one other man who does not have any problems with the co-modification of women.

The sex ideology of the two races is also base. At times, Lynne entertains the idea that black men are rapists. She entertains the idea that all that black men are interested in is the rape of white women. And like Sybil she fantasies on the idea. To Lynne black people are like art; an interest and a fascination.

To Tommy’s three friends, the ones he comes with to gang rape Lynne, Raymond, Altuna Jones and Hedge, rape is only so when the victim dies in the process. In fact for Altuna Jones rape is having sex with a corpse.

Motherhood is no better for Meridian; she finds herself in a labor that lasts for a day and a half. Her motherhood is characterized by unwelcome night duties to her baby. The duties are so demanding that she frequently thinks of scratching the baby out of her life; to lock it in its room to starve. The thoughts of murdering her own child are so strong that she forces herself to think of methods of killing herself instead. This is far from the patriarchal expectation of a mother. The patriarchal
established society expects motherhood to be sweet and a mother to be adoring of her child. Meridian revolts against this image.

Eddie’s conduct does not help. He does not mature beyond the excited school boy hero and his aim of being in school is merely to complete school without caring whether he learns anything or not. His frustration comes from the fact that he is not contented with the sex that Meridian is giving him. To him a woman has a duty to provide good sex services to the man. This image fits in the patriarchal image of a woman as a devoted wife. This is the image that Meridian rebels against.

Even if Meridian’s mother, Gertrude Hill, and enjoyed having someone with whom to share the minute occurrences of her day, no one has warned her that this enjoyment and joining of bodies can result into pregnancy and babies. Pregnancy, for her, proves to be a difficult time. It is a time which makes her distracted from her body. Her mind and her body are divided. She does not know what part of herself is hers and which one is not. She cannot blame anyone for her condition. She starts to as if she is being buried and that is alive, brick by brick her own life walled away from her.

Like Meridian, Gertrude decides to rebel. She never learns how to cook well, never learns how to braid hair prettily or to be any other way creative in her home. She could have learned had she wanted to but her refusal to do so is deliberate and a protest; a protest against those she cannot express her anger or shout out to that it was not fair. Gertrude passes on the things she rebels against onto her daughter as the ideal things to follow. Meridian does not miss the point her mother is trying to hide from her.

For both Gertrude and Meridian, motherhood is an entrapment from which they seek escape. Marriage is a false institution, a prison which steals a woman’s independence and happiness. Sex, for the mother and
daughter, is a lie and a deception which provides a false sense of joy. No sooner is one enjoying sex than they are trapped into the prison of wife and motherhood. This feeling runs very deep and can be traced from Meridian’s great grandmother, Feather Mae, who, even at that far back period in time, is able to put into a coherent thought process even before she married Meridian’s insatiable great grandfather that she would soon be becoming a woman:

It is thus not surprising that Meridian, too, rebels against this bondage and opts for a life outside the home. Truman, the man she comes to love and with whom she wants to make hot, quick, mindless love whenever he is near her, confirms her reluctance in giving herself fully to a man. Even if she trembles and feels faint with desire each time she is with him, he leaves her for the white exchange student girls. When he tries to come back into the love life of Meridian, Truman’s motives are shallow. It is for a selfish reason. He makes a ridiculous proposal to Meridian His only reason for getting back to Meridian in these words is that Meridian must give him black babies. Despite all the sexual experiences that Meridian has, one baby and one abortion she has not once been completely fulfilled by sex. This proves the futile nature of sex in Meridian. It is an illusion of happiness.

Meridian believes that Truman leaves her to date the white girls just for sex. She thinks that Truman is merely fascinated by the idea of having sex with white girls and that he would not fall in love with them. For Truman this seems not to hold water as he is clearly infatuated with the white girls.

Meridian’s views show the prejudices of the time. She regards her strong point to be that she is black. But being black means that she is seen by the white race as exotic and a sex object with which the white boys would be initiated into adulthood. She is black and female, the two tags that banish the black woman into a being less than human; this
relegates the woman to someone worse than a slave. She is cast as a sex tool and one without an identity.

There are two brands of religious beliefs reflected in Meridian. Meridian's mother subscribes to the old patriarchal form of religion. This form of religion negates the position of the woman. The woman in this is expected to be submissive to the man and to be a mother. This is the reason Meridian's mother finds it very difficult to forgive Meridian education and civil rights campaigns.

Gertrude urges Meridian not to abandon her son, Eddie Jr. She argues that Meridian must want her child especially that she originates from her Christian home. Delores, one of the friends who accompany Meridian to face her mother challenges Gertrude's view; The last time God had a baby he skipped too. The idea here is that God cannot be used to justify the imprisoning of a woman on account of motherhood. If God abandoned the actual task of being a parent to His son and left the task to another man Joseph and the woman Mary, Meridian is equally justified to let her mother bring up her son too.

Gertrude is so brainwashed by religion that she literary believes that the church building, that is the mortar and the bricks, to be holly; she believes that this holiness has rubbed off from years of scripture reading and impassioned prayers. She believes that holiness covers the walls of the church like paint. She literally takes the church building to be the house of God and believes that she feels the presence of God whenever she enters the door to the church.

Meridian's mother is not happy that her daughter, Meridian, is participating in the civil rights movement. Her reasoning is that God separated the sheep from the goats and the black from the white folk. This stance shows resignation to the oppressive system. Gertrude has surrendered and forces herself to be contented with the oppressive She
justifies the unfair status quo and gives it authentication by tracing its origins from the Bible. It is no wonder that Gertrude spends most of her time making the ill fitting prayer pillows. Mr. Reynolds gives another aspect of the hypocritical nature of the old patriarchal religious belief. He limps Meridian round his desk. He emerges as an elderly man who exploits a younger girl’s sexuality in exchange for gifts of food and money. He is a typical sugar daddy of the time. The wondering thing about this fact is that Mr. Reynolds is an elder in the Episcopalian Church and has won an award as the Masonic Temple’s Man of the Year 1935-36.

The old form of Christianity is also portrayed as hypocritical as it fails to meet the immediate needs of the people. When the Wild Child dies and Meridian and the girls try to give her a decent funeral in the college chapel, the authorities deny the body entry into the chapel.

Mrs. Turner, too, reflects the narrowness of the old patriarchal type of religion. She believes that prayer alone will make miracles happen. She does not believe in voting in order to improve her community; The good Lord He take care of most of my problems. You know he heal the sick and race the dead. Comfort the uncomfortable and blesses the meek. Lynne challenges her to life’s realities; Mrs. Turner needs the road in front of her house fixed, she needs an improved house and sanitary and health facilities. Lynne asks Mrs. Turner if these problems can be resolved by prayer or indeed questions if Jesus Christ is pleased that she leads a poor quality of life. For the likes of Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Turner, religion is an opiate, a comforting myth which dims the horrors and brutalities of oppression. They relinquish all responsibility for their own welfare to God.

The second brand of religious belief is the religion that Meridian finds being practiced in a Baptist Church. This church is more concerned with the daily occurrences in the lives of the people. It is involved in the struggles of the people. It Meridian disobeys her mother and abandons her child for her college education and civil rights movement activities.
Then, even further back in time, Meridian's mother, Gertrude Hill, is repulsed by Meridian because she does not accept god in her life in the traditional patriarchal way in which she is required to subordinate herself to God, Jesus and the men in her community. Gertrude Hill writes Meridian to tell her that she has failed not only to honor just her parents but anyone else. This is the oppressive biblical misunderstanding that Gertrude Hill tries to impose on her daughter Meridian. This obscures Meridian's sense of identity as it places her below the male folk. This biblical teaching places the woman in subordination to the male folk.

Equally of importance are the sex views expressed by Meridian. She expresses some of the sex stereotypes of her community. The black community represented by Meridian's grandmother, an erect former maid and midwife, holds strong opinions. Firstly, she professes that she has never known a white woman she liked after the age of twelve, secondly, that a white woman is useless except as a baby machine which would continue to produce white people who would grow to oppress her and thirdly, that without servants all the white people would live in pigsties. She portrays the white women as lazy and machines for producing babies and who soon sink into permanent oblivion.

The black woman on the other hand is portrayed as always trying to imitate Harriet Tubman- escaping to become something unheard of an outrageous; becoming soldiers knowing all about enemy installations and radio communication. Some black women go away and come back, years later as doctors or school teachers. Other women go away married to men but come back married to their fellow women. Tongues wag for a time but they gain an acceptance with time. There are also other black girls who go away and return as good-time girls, who come back home full of lewd stories about their exploits in the big city. These are watched seducing the local men with dazzling ease. These command attention. Only those who reject this experience and adventure fall into the domestic quagmire
that even the most intelligent white girls appeared to be destined for. In her joining the Civil Rights movement and her leaving her child with her mother, Meridian joins the rebellious women who break the long traditions of women who conform to social dictates.

Meridian realizes that in her relationship with Eddie, she has lacked courage, initiative and a mind of her own. She notices, though, that Truman does not want a general besides him. He does not want a woman who tries to claim a mind of her own. Truman wants an attractive woman who is asleep, one who is passive and docile. Meridian is not that kind of woman and Truman has to be told that he has got to respect Meridian and he is in the end left behind as Meridian faces her own future on heron.

The community in The Color Purple is set against the background of racism and sexism. The black community is deprived of all social, economic and human privileges and is forced into an existence of severe hardships. The results of this are very clear; suffering, pain, and an existence that is dehumanizing; an existence that denies the people in the black community of their individual identity.

The Color Purple, which was published in 1982, reflects situations that prevailed in rural Georgia between 1910 and 1940. The author does not give us any dates and most of the information about the setting of the novel is derived from the descriptions that are given in the text. These descriptions range from how people behave and the clothes they wear to the mode of transport that the people use.

It is noticed, at the start of the novel, that Mr. ____ arrives at Fonso’s home and inspects Celie from the horse-back like a commodity for sale and that Celie goes to town for the first time in a horse drawn wagon with Mr. ____ in which Corrine, the missionary Samuel’s wife, seeks rest after conning from the shop. After Celie establishes that the baby that Corrine is carrying, whom she calls Pauline, is actually her baby
Olivia, they have a good laugh with Corrine. Corrine jokes about Celie's
treats them like infantile adults. He scolds them asking why they are
laughing like fools. The women are shown to be under the dictates of the
man and have no say in what they want to do, not even to laugh.

It is also noticed that horse drawn wagons but driving cars. Sofia's
prize-fighter boyfriend Henry Buster Broadax, the Mayor and his wife Miss
Mollie, Odessa and her husband Jack, Shug Avery and Celie are all
driving cars by the time the novel concludes. The women are shown to be
taking charge of their own lives regardless of what the men think or say
about them.

The time span is also indicated by the events in the lives of the
characters; Celie is an elderly stable woman by the end of the text, very
different from the fourteen years old girl who has been abused by a man
she has known to be her father. About thirty years have passed since
Celite and Nettie last met. At the time Celie is twenty years old. It is clear
that we are looking at a time frame of about fifty years. Celie's two
babies, Adam and Olivia, have grown into adults; Adam has fallen in love
with an Olinka woman, Tashi, whom he marries. The brutal men are more
in the background supporting the reunion of the women and the whole
family.

The whites live in a better part of the community with privileges that
the blacks donot have. They are treated better than the blacks. Even the
white children are more respected than the elderly black people. Sofia,
despite being a mother of six children, is still called a girl. And she has
been beaten by Mr. ____. Even Mr. ______ beats Celie just like he beats
the children.

The difference being that Celie is beaten more often than the
children. And when Celie is being beaten, the children are able to watch
the abuse through the cracks in the wall. Mr. ____'s answers to Harpo's
question as to why he beats Celie are most tyrannical. He gives four
reasons; the first is that Celie is beaten because she is stubborn, the
second is because Celie is a woman, the third is that Celie is a woman
and all women are good for beating and the fourth, Mr. ____ says, is
because Celie is his wife and that as his wife she is especially good for
beating. This is the same answer Harpo is given years later when he asks
how he can make his own wife, Sofia, do as he pleases. To this seeming
predicament of Harpo's Mr. ____ asks if Harpo ever beats his wife. This
implied that the way to relate to a woman and turn her into a robot that
does man's bidding is by beating her.

Harpo is having his lessons from his role model, his father, Mr.
____. He is learning how a husband and a father are supposed to behave
and treat others. And from the way the lessons are going, it is clear that
Harpo is likely to grow into another fierce father who will be a womanizer
and wife beater unless he is challenged along the way. When Harpo tries
to seek clarification on his father's statement from Celie, his question
reveals the fact that Harpo has adopted some of his society's values. He
asks Celie; Why you obstinate?

The complexity of this question is that Celie has an option not to be
stubborn. The implication is that if Celie stopped being stubborn she
would not be beaten. The reality is that by so doing Celie would further be
silenced. She is being asked to avoid the abuse by being passive; to stop
asserting herself in order to avoid further abuse. Yet Celie's main problem
is that she does not assert herself. What the men in her life are unhappy
about is that Celie, despite the abuse does not break down. However,
Harpo's question also makes clear that Celie cannot avoid the abuse that
comes to her because she is a woman and a wife.

For Celie who has suffered abuse all her life, there are no options at
the moment but to accept her status of being a black woman who is a
black man's property. Celie accepts the situation in which Mr. ____ takes
out his frustration of being a black man, abused under the system of racism, on her. Celie responds to the constant abuse by manipulating her own emotions and in the process sinking deeper into the abyss of silence, losing more and more of her individuality. She does not fight. She imagines herself to be wood, strong and unmoving. She is, in a sense, a woman buried alive. She is a woman who has lost herself identity.

The rape of Mary Agnes by her uncle, Bubber Hodges, the prison warden, is evidence of the lack of respect for a woman and the perverted male attitudes that see a woman as a sex object. Despite being her uncle, Hodges rapes his niece instead of protecting her. This is first, because of the perverted male attitudes and second, because Mary Agnes has black blood and, according to the law of the time, she is a slave with no rights, no dignity and no identity.

This violent act shows the impunity with which man regards the life of a woman. This is in addition to the other violence against the woman that is witnessed in the text.

The relationships within the community of black women have their own challenges. Some women ascribe to the tenets of the Patriarchal arrangement of community life. Celie encourages Harpo to beat Sofia in order to make her fit in with what she then thinks is the proper role of the woman. Celie wins their support because she is clean and able to maintain the house as opposed to Annie Julia who, according to the two sisters, was not so clean.

Mr. ____'s sisters come to inspect the wife while his brother comes to take a look at Mr. ____'s girlfriend, Shug Avery. The two sisters subscribe to the traditional patriarchal ideology with regards to the role of a woman. She has to do domestic work, look after the children well and offer sex services to the man. The brother is interested to see how good this girlfriend of Mr. ____ is. The question in such a mind is is this woman
beautiful and can she be sexually exciting in bed? In such a mentality, the value of the female is not in her person with her own identity but in her ability to serve domestically and sexually; what Sofia describes as treatment associated with a dog.

The experiences of Nettie with the missionary family are no different. The man brings in the children and the wife accepts them in the family despite her suspicions that the children are as a result of her husband’s cheating on her. The only time she raises the question is when she is about to die, a time when the knowledge of truth will not be of any practical use to her. This situation is similar to that of Celie. Mr. _____ brings the sick Snug Avery home to be taken care of by Celie. Celie is not consulted; bearing in mind especially that Celie is the wife of Mr. _____ while Shug Avery is Mr. _____’s mistress with whom he has had three children. But I do not want to say anything. Celie cannot even give a word of welcome to Shug Avery because she has never, and does not feel like Mr. _____’s house is also her house. She feels more like a slave of the house. Celie is indeed more than buried in her grave of slavery.

In Africa, the African families have the same sexism witnessed in America. The woman is submissive to the husband who has the final say in everything that takes place and the woman is at the service of the man. Nettie makes an observation in her letters to Celie that the way men in Africa speak to their women remind her of her own father and generally the men in America. The woman’s voice is silenced. Her value is only recognized in association with the man. Nettie is not respected because she has no husband. Olivia is teased that she is very intelligent and may grow up to be one of the chief’s wives. The difference between the American woman and the African woman is that the African woman can graduate and become an honorary man. In this state she is independent and respected. This honour, however, only comes if the woman has had children- five in the case of the Olinka Catherine- and her husband has
Shug Avery, who is in control of all her relationships with both men and woman, is seen as a deviant and a social outcast.

In *The Color Purple*, the problem of sexism is shown as cutting across the racial divide in that women, regardless of race, face the same problem of sexism.

The economic power in *The Color Purple* rests with the men who regard their wives as domestic beings who do domestic work and who are generally weak. The women are expected to be subordinate to the men.

Fonso commends Celie to Mr. _____ on account of her being a good domestic worker. This view gives emphasis to the fact that the value of a woman to a man, among other things, is in her being a good domestic worker. One who will do her domestic work without question? This view is also held by Carrie and Kate, the two sisters of Mr. _____ who despise their brother’s late wife, Annie Julia, because she was a nasty ‘oman about the house. Her guilt’s are that she does not cook and acts as if she has never seen a kitchen before. In contrast, Mr. _____’s sisters praise Celie because she keeps the house clean, cooks well and is good with the children. Corrie makes her point clearer. Kate, who has shown kindness to Celie, rebukes Harpo, Celie’s step son, and admonishes him to help Celie bring in water. Harpo’s response to this projects the patriarchal view of domestic duties.

The issue in question here is that domestic work, like drawing water, is a woman’s responsibility. A man, even when he is able to, cannot do a woman’s work simply because he is a man. It is the men in Celie’s life who are the bread winners. However, all the domestic and field work is done by Celie. The responsibility of raising the children is hers. When her mother is ill Celie takes over all her mother’s responsibilities. At a tender age of fourteen she becomes burdened with cooking, cleaning and caring
for her many brothers and sisters. At this age she also becomes a sex slave to the man she has always known to be her father.

Tobias, Mr. _____’s brother comes to visit Mr. ____ to have a look at Celie. He immediately notices Celie’s hard working qualities. He sees an economic advantage with this aspect of Celie. It is obvious that Margaret is not as hard working as Celie and as a result Tobias is spending more money than he would have if only Margaret was as hard working as Celie.

When Snug Avery comes to sing in the Lucky Star in town for the first time since Celie got married to Mr. ________, her advertising is done by Mr. ____ who stickposts on the trees and has sixty posters with him still. Celie is compelled to help Mr. ____ look his best when he meets his mistress, Shug Avery. Celie is left behind as Mr. ____ goes to the Lucky Star. Celie is left to labour in the cotton field like a mule. Meanwhile, Mr. ____ is having so much fun and sex with his mistress, Shug Avery, that by the time he comes back home he is exhausted to the point of being sick.

Celia accepts the fact that her husband is having an illicit affair with a blues singer because she has a tragically small amount of self-worth. She has been so brutalised that she is silenced. Instead of questioning the actions of her husband, Celie is resigned to her situation. She accepts the status quo because it has always been like that and this status quo has never been challenged.

Another reason for Celie’s tolerance of her husband’s infidelity with Shug Avery is because Celie is fixated with Shug Avery. Having been told that she is ugly, she feels happy that she is sharing her man with Shug Avery whom she considers fantastically beautiful.

Overall, Celie’s acceptance of her husband’s conduct with the glamorous Shug Avery is a resignation to her life’s status quo, the status
quo of a woman who lives a life in a narrowly defined sexist and racist society.

The fact that Celie is labouring in the cotton field while Mr. ____ is having fun and a lot of sex with his mistress, Shug Avery, is indicative that the woman or the wife is treated like a beast of labour for economic purposes. This is blatant exploitation of the woman. Celie is once again co-modified by Mr. ____ just like Fonso did in his bargaining with Mr. ______ to get rid of Celie.

As a result of her experiences Celie does not find men to be likeable. To her, most men look pretty much alike. Most of them have been brutal to her. So to her men are not appealing. They have abused and silenced her. When Celie laughs with relief after seeing a baby she feels is her baby, Olivia, Mr. ______ ridicules her;

Why you sitting here laughing like a fool fer? Celie's confidence and sense of the self are constantly attacked. Her self identity is pulverised by such and many more dehumanising abuses and verbal attacks.

Sofia's mother, as a woman, is always under the thumb of her husband and her husband never loves children. The mother and the children are hated yet the man keeps on having more children because he loves sex. The woman is used as a beast of labour and a sex slave. In these circumstances, the woman is dominated by the man and has no room to actualise her self identity as she is dominated by the man. The only option for a woman to attain her own identity in these circumstances is to rebel against the established patriarchal society.

There is also a view presented in The Color Purple in which a man regards a woman as untrustworthy because she is considered to be full of trickery. This fits in with the way Lady Macbeth, Circe and Delilah are presented and interpreted. The basic label is that of one who seduces. Man sees the woman as a dangerous being who seduces man to his
doom. When Harpo brings Sofia home for the first time so that his father, Mr. ____, can meet her, Mr. ____ accuses Sofia of seducing Harpo so as to make him take responsibility of a pregnancy that is not his. Mr. ____ asks the pregnant Sofia; not his or if it is his, then she has been chased from home and she is now homeless and has Mr. ____'s assumption is obvious, Sofia is trying to pin a pregnancy on Harpo that is picked on Harpo for shelter. His reasoning in this is that a woman will seduce a man and make him take responsibility of a pregnancy. This looks to have been certainly the situation of the time but not for Sofia. She has got pride and she is definitely different. She is not going to depend on a man who himself is still being looked after by his father. She makes it clear that her sister has accepted that she can stay with her and her husband. This is like a slap in the face of the Patriarchal Mr. ______. In Mr. ____'s patriarchal community, Sofia is a rebel who has behaved in a manner inconsistent with the community's patriarchal establishment.

Harpo says nothing as his father verbally abuses Sofia. He is internalizing the lesson that his father is teaching him about women. He will also expect women in his life to be under his control. He has been raised to think that women can only exist in the context of the patriarchal society in which they are subordinate to men. Harpo's frustration, later on, results from the fact that he would like Sofia to take up her traditional role of wife and mother. Unfortunately for him, Sofia does not subscribe to this traditional notion. So the roles traditionally considered male are taken up by Sofia while those traditionally considered to be female roles are taken up by Harpo. We see Sofia taking a ladder and climbing up the roof of the house to fix the roof while Harpo is in the kitchen washing the dishes.

That's the only solution that a patriarchal man can think about. In frustration Harpo turns to Celie, a woman who has grown up under sexist oppression. His problem is how to make Sofia mind, how to take her a peg
down. As might be expected, Celie's answer reflects what society has taught her as the norm of life;

Beat her.

But then, Sofia is not the usual woman of the time. Celie describes her as a big strong girl; She orders Harpo about even to care for the baby.

And so, it comes as no surprise when Harpo is next seen with his face a mess of bruises. Harpo has had to come up with reasons to explain his disfigured face. For Celie, Sofia's headstrong independence is an alien and frightening phenomenon. Celie observes that although she likes Sofia, Sofia does not act like her. She is different. Sofia is much a woman as she is a man. She mothers like a mother and fights like a man. In this light, Sofia comes forth as a typical rebel in this patriarchal community. Yet this is what a woman in such a society must do for her to attain selfhood.

The second Marriage of Celie's mother is presented as an attempt by the man to deprive Celie's mother of her economic empowerment after the demise of her first husband. Fonso marries Celie's mother purely for economic reasons, to be able to control the huge estate that comes to her after the demise of her first husband.21

The Mayor's wife, too, is economically dependent on her husband. She is not the Mayor herself. The prestige that she enjoys comes from the fact that her husband, and not herself, is the Mayor.

Reverend Samuel can bring home babies and the wife does not verify the true origin of the children until she is on her death bed. Despite the fact that she is the wife of the minister and her home is supposed to be exemplary, she has lived her life in fear. Fear that the adopted children might actually be those of her husband and their hired hand maid Nettie. In this she shows her subordination to her husband.
In Africa, the woman is presented as enhancing the economic status of the family. They are the workers who bring about the sustenance of the family. They are presented as a form of cheap labour. Men, like the chief, behave like Mr. ____.

They are married into polygamous marriages in which they are expected to work while their husband is the supervisor having the power of life and death over his women. They are denied a European education. They believe that a girl is nothing by herself; only through her husband can she become something. This elevated position that the African community has given to the husbands is frightfully dominating. The women are generally presented as weak and at the mercy of their men. Like Celie they are domestic workers who are weak and abused by their husbands.

Shug Avery, Sofia, Mary Agnes and Celie - towards the end of the text -, however, upset this when they manage their own affairs. Shug Avery is able to order Mr. _____ about. When Mr. ____ is smoking while Shug Avery lies in bed, Shug Avery is able to order Mr. _____. It is the first time that the reader comes across the name Albert. With shock the reader learns that Albert is the name of Mr. ____. The reader learns that Shug Avery, Mr. ____‘s girlfriend uses the name freely and to reprimand Mr. ______ while Celie barely uses the name and takes an effort to remember that Albert is the first name of her husband. It is Shug Avery who camps with Celie at Albert’s house to ensure that Celie is protected. Celie, too, is able to revolt and accompany Shug Avery away from Albert and his abuses. Sofia’s accomplishments are clear; despite all the setbacks that she encounters, she is an independent woman. Consequently, Sofia and Shug Avery are perceived as deviants, rebels who go against the established social norms. Celie and Mary Agnes have conformed to the patriarchal established norms of their society and have had to endure a
lot of suffering and abuse while Shug Avery, who has never conformed, lives a carefree and happy life.

Both Shug Avery and Celie are mothers who have not lived with their children. Shug Avery, on one hand, has chosen not to live with her children and has surrendered them to her own mother. This means that Shug Avery’s children grow up with their grandmother. Celie, on the other hand, has been forced to live apart from her children. The situation of both women is not the normal expectation of a mother. Society expects a woman to conform to the image of an ‘adoring mother’ who must sacrifice her life for the children. On this score, both women come out as deviants despite the different circumstances that compel them to live apart from their children whom their patriarchal community would have expected them to raise.

The men in the text spend most of their time trying to assert their perceived authority over the women. Fonso does this on Celie’s mother and her children. Albert repeats the dominance over Celie, Nettie and his family. Harpo tries to do so with Sofia. Fonso is confronted with rebellion and is eventually left by Celie who is married off and Nettie escapes first to live with Celie but runs away when Albert starts to pursue her, then secondly she gets a domestic job with the Samuels. Albert is eventually challenged into changing his ways by Celie and Shug Avery and becomes respectful.

Harpo is literary beaten into submission by his wife, Sofia. And as might be expected in a patriarchal arrangement, this marriage does not last. It breaks up till Mary Agnes, nick named Squeak, decides to leave Harpo to Sofia.
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