

Introduction

Between the 1870s and 1900, European imperialists colonized Africa. To quote Denis Judd, “the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led to the establishment of the imperial structure”.¹ In order to further economic wealth and confirm its Imperialism, they employ means like diplomatic pressures, military invasions, and eventual conquest and colonization. By the early twentieth century, however, much of Africa, had been colonized by European powers. Colonialism affected the colonized country’s politics, economy, culture, language and literature. Influenced by the World War II, thoughts of independence pullulate in the hearts of the colonized. The coming to independence in the 1960s of nation-states in Africa, won not only the independence of politics and economics, but also culture, and literature. These thoughts, gradually, trigger the colonized countries’ sense of abrogation² and resistance. Literature is a form of communication requiring the transference of experience from the author to the reader. As Elleke Boehmer describes, “novels, periodicals, travel writings and scraps of doggerel are the main sources, which offer the colonizers not only the knowledge of their colonies but also their stereotype for indigenous people”.³ As the colonizer relies so heavily on written works as a source of information about the colonized, the latter likewise used narrative to identify and clarify the degradation experienced.

Alice Walker’s textual writing aims to transform and reinvent the African world and, additionally, to subvert the colonialist representation and counter the fixed colonial perception. In Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Nettie’s narration of her stories outside Georgia, from New York, Netherlands, England, Senegal, then to the Olinka, the representative of Africa, serve as the texts of writing back. Walker uses her novel to correct the past colonizer’s image of distortion when confronting black people is re-constructed in Nettie’s tracing back the history of black slavery from Africa to America. Nettie mobilizes her self-writing as an act of political resistance, rewriting the oppressed ritual ceremony to reconstruct tribal culture as post-colonial discourses. As a black intellectual traveling the world in pursuit of “the uplift of

¹ Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1996) 3.

² Abrogation is a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or correct usage. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. (London: Routledge, 1989) 38.

³ Elleke Boehmer, “Imperialism and Textuality,” *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (New York: Oxford University, 1995) 12-21.

black people everywhere,” Nettie’s letters are rather encyclopedic. Yet her letters recount the discrimination Nettie experiences in Africa, enlarging the novel’s scope and revealing that oppression: of women by men, of blacks by whites, and even of blacks by blacks, is universal. The colonial, racial, and cultural conflicts and oppressions Nettie encounters in Africa are in parallel with the smaller-scale abuses and hardships that Celie suffers in Georgia, American South.

Another integral element in colonial literature is the concept of Other⁴. The premise of Other is the superiority of one opposite, White men for example, over another unfamiliar opposites, natives. Depending on the context, this concept could also take the form of “woman or slave, servant or animal, and with the onset of colonization, also became the colonized” (Boehmer 79).

Post-colonialists like Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Edward Said in *Orientalism* and Gayatri Charkravorty Spivak in “Can Subaltern Speak?” state that the colonized under imperialism are like the black wearing white mask under the practice of colonial cultural education and assimilation policy, viewing the self in terms of the white/the colonial, internalizing the white’s deep-rooted racial discrimination to the black’s complex of inferiority and domestication. Imperial strategies to control and oppress the colonized by means of discourses and systems on social, political, economic, and cultural construction of power institutionalization to perpetually manipulate the colonized. Hence, the colonized lost their native cultural originality by appropriating and imitating the cultural code of the colonizer as a result of the inferiority complex engendered in the mind of the colonized. European imperialism had dominated and instituted the colonized politically, economically, and culturally; consequently, this cultural domestication of the oppressed lost his original identity and had been biased as barbarian and uncivilized.

The definition of post-colonialism is not the same as after a colonial period of time. As John McLeod explains:

Post-colonial literatures were at a stroke regarded as politically radically and locally situated rather than universally relevant. They deemed to pose direct challenges to the colonial center from the colonized margins, negotiating new ways of seeing that both contested the dominant mode and gave voice and expression to colonized and

⁴ The concept of the Other, which is built on the thought of, inter alia, Hegel and Satre, signifies that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined.

once-colonized peoples. Postcolonial literatures were actively engaged in the act of decolorizing the mind. (24)

In this respect, the colonized's resistance, is not only to "overturn the assumptions of cultural and racial inferiority imposed by the colonizers and accepted by the colonized" (Walder 11), but also to overthrow the "single-voiced authority of colonial writing" (Boehmer 185).

Thus they propose the concepts of hybrid, divergent and interdisciplinary counter-discourse to mirror culture, politics and literature. Their theory is built around the concept of resistance as subversion, or opposition, or mimicry—but that resistance always inscribes the resisted into the texture of the resisting. This resistance subverts the colonizers' Othering and cultural hegemony; whilst at the same time clarifying the complexities and perplexities around the difficulty of conceiving how a colonized country can reclaim or reconstitute its identity in a culture that is now but was not its own culture. Post-colonial writing de-centers and pluralizes canon, official history and Western hegemony to re-vision History: "revising, re-appropriating, or reinterpreting history as a concept, and in doing so to articulate new "codes of recognition" within which those acts of resistance, those unrealized intentions and those re-orderings of consciousness that "history" has rendered the silent or invisible can be recognized as shaping forces in a culture's tradition.

This paper aims at Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as a research text, examining how Nettie frames her stories overseas with her racial/ethnic group history, tracing back the history of black enslavement from Africa to America. Nettie mobilizes her self-writing as an act of both racial and ethnic resistance to decolonize the operations of power relations to negotiate her post-colonial subjectivity. Nettie attempts to strategically inhabit in what Homi Bhabha calls the in-between space to define herself. Nettie and Celie, both black and women alike, doubled as the weak, silenced, backward Other, in an attempt to reclaim and reconstitute their identity by means of writing back technique as well as narrating history of the black in Africa, in quest of the black origin to evoke the collective identity and display the colonizer's cultural bias.

Narrating Strategy : Epistle as Framing Structure

Subverting the imperialists like the patriarch, Alfonso and Mr. ____ as representatives, to the black women, and the colonial whites to the Olinka men as well as educating the oppressor's realization of the oppressed's subjectivity, Alice Walker utilizes the epistolary form as narrative device to effectively construct her characters' identities. Regarding the

suppressive attitudes towards women in *The Color Purple*'s Deep South, Walker's stories represent marginalized women collectively.

The Color Purple explicates the process of a black female from enslavement to liberation, employing an epistolary form, an approach that narrative structure unfolds in a series of letters and diary entries. This format allows Celie to tell her story in her own voice, reliable and trustworthy, uninterrupted by the oppressive men in her life. From the very first page of the novel, the reader is confronted with vivid images, violent words, and morally difficult concepts. The purpose and functions of vulgarity and violence display the most difficult details of Celie's lives in order to fully comprehend their situations. Celie's epistolary monologues are, in fact, quest for –communication between speech object and inner reflections, eventually affecting her awakening.

The goal of postcolonial writers lies in reconstructing American black and African black people's identity and history, departing from the stereotype of undeveloped and non-historical, by reconstructing their culture and history like stories and rites as their collective identity to not only historicize their past, but also their means of resistance and anti-hegemony. Both in refuting the superior image of the colonizer and reminding the oppressed of their own history, culture and values as the strategies to declare the black culture, writing back reclaims the colonial history, instead of the colonizer's. Celie's and Nettie's letters can correct the past image of God as well as the black in Africa and in America. Rewriting the oppressed stories or rites is the way to reconstruct tribal culture as new post-colonial discourses. Narrative writing has long been considered as the effective way to present culture and writing back is the very way in re-writing cultural discourses on imperial hegemony as well as releasing the colonized from their dependence on the imperial discourse and then, beginning their self-history, geography and politics. In this process, the post-colonial writers use the same language and literary structures which they wish to subvert through literature.

The narrative strategies of writing back include three kinds: first, the colonized subvert the source-text; second, the silent voice out on their own; third, they abrogate and appropriate the colonizer's discourse. These writing strategies, not only allow the colonizer to see the trauma they created for the colonized, but also teach the colonized to re-examine what they lost in the past. The problem with glossing in the cross-cultural text is that it may lead to a

considerably stilted movement of plot as the story is forced to draw an explanation or footnoting behind it. In *The Empire Writes Back*, “[t]he requisite sense of difference is implicitly recorded in the gap between the word and its referent, a “referent” which (ironically) accords the English word the status of the “real”. This absence, or gap, is... but positive in its effect” (Ashcroft 61). Canadian author Dennis Lee also reckons that “this gap is both the site and the challenge of the post-colonial writer” (Lee 141) to explore this gap, its acceptance, and its bridge as the legitimate subject-matter of the post-colonial writing. Re-narrating stories is the extension of deconstructing and its main purpose is to abridge gaps and silences among paragraphs. Further abrogation and appropriation can be replaced by other texts and ideologies or re-organize the colonized own norms and principles of canonical texts.

The strategy of writing back applies itself in *The Color Purple*, which employs the marginal and female characters like Celie and Nettie to question the justification of black men’s enslavement of black women and imperial invasion in Africa. Postcolonial writing uplifts the marginal characters as the focal narrators and their importance is never recognized in the colonial discourses, issues like race, trade, and enslavement challenging the imperial hegemony and forming these heteroglossal and dialogical dialectic.

The Color Purple overthrows cultural order of the patriarchy and establishes new foundation. Meanwhile, Celie’s and Nettie’s letters contrast each other by their structure, as well as their content—America v.s. Africa. Thus, epistolary style not only reverses male behavior, but also declares the patriarchy—male dominance is all the same in the world.

Celie’s and Nettie’s epistolary approach brings the reader into close proximity with the protagonist's current status in life, which involves the intersection of gender, race and class - she is oppressed by her abusive husband Albert, who himself is a member of a discriminated underclass. The protagonist's brutal existence is uncompromisingly direct "Well, sometime Mr. ____ git on me pretty hard... This life soon be over, I say" (39), and its impact isn't softened through any possible diluting narrated by a third person.

The novel begins with Celie’s big inquiry for God: “Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me” (1). Celie’s miserable life from her childhood to old age is divided by her letters to God. Her earlier stage in correspondence with God, the receiver is titled as “Dear God,” “Dear ”... etc., without Celie’s signature. Among these

miserable letters with tears, Celie murmurs her life and state of her mind, without scolding others and complaining anything, instead of her submissive tolerance and silenced obedience for God's pity and care.

In the process of narrating, the sameness and differences between America and Africa are compared and analyzed. The central characters are both female. The female are the symbolic marginal characters of the post-colonial discourses. Nettie sees the historical events from different perspectives as heteroglossal dialectic, individual narrating as each own text, and the reader need to make up their own minds to see the black enslavement history.

Re-narrating/re-writing fills in the neglected absence of source-text; instead, writing the black women's silences to resist imperial text, in allusion to the absent text, Nettie's African experience like the story of Tashi's grandmother in America as a slave. These stories reconfirm that absence lies at the point of interface between the two cultures. Although language does not embody culture, and therefore proposes no essential difficulties to the communication, of an indecipherable connection between cultural realities, is often constructed in the text as that of identity. Nettie's cultural discourse on the black, not directly and the consequent exchange between the African black and the American black, which does not mean that the black have not its own culture once the whole context is re-filled, but rather that the process of allusion installs historical distance itself as a subject of the text.

Post-colonial texts may indicate difference in their representations of place, naming, and through the development of themes. But it is in the culture that the curious tension of colonial revelation and colonized silence is manifested. Most of these strategies, in which difference is constructed and appropriated, are shared by all the colonized societies as polyglossic. As Nettie's identity is stuck in American black and woman, the silenced female under the imperialism/patriarchy, now speak out loud to resist, to interrogate, and to subvert the imperial/patriarchal texts, intending to reconstruct the truth of black/female texts. The synecdochic function of such strategies is to bridge between the "center" and "margin," eventually defining their unbridgeable gaps.

In terms of their own developing writing, however, the position of the black woman is a special one because they are "doubly marginalized—pushed to the psychic and political edge of societies which themselves have experienced the dilemma of colonial alienation" (Ashcroft 142). For this, they demonstrate a capacity to subvert "received assumptions about literature." The link with the black and its effects on Celie's and Nettie's texts, maybe can be

“writers from these societies seize the post-colonial means of communication in a different way from its appropriation in colonial cultures” (143). On the other hand, Celie is by no means entirely isolated or enclosed, not to mention without any senses of resistance. When she was young, she went to school with her sister to study to make her become cleverer, and ran away from home with her sister for freedom. After marrying Mr.____, she writes to God, by letters which has errors in grammar, spelling and words, building a space for a black woman’s confessions, as well as a living space for narrating her self-story to support her living hope and will. Although Celie’s epistolary space is a both one-way, self-narrating, and no responding, unknown sender, Celie’s letters and their delivery weaves her a social space which locates her, the black woman in the historical and cultural background of her time and space, to show the connection between the individual and the society, enhancing the misery of the black woman in her society.

In the latter half of writing letters to God, Celie signs herself as the sender name with questioning the existence of God, which means that Celie begins her awakening and independent thinking. Celie rebukes God’s neglect of her begging and prayers, regardless of her feelings and situations. Until one time Shug tells her that “God is a man.” Eventually, Celie regains the strength from God’s abandonment and away from Him.

Constructing Sisterhood as Resistance and Anti-Patriarch

Walker believes that a woman’s identity can be strengthened through successful relationships with other women. It would appear that she regards effective communication and the mastery of language that this entails as being crucial for female empowerment.

“Marginality is the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged centre, an “Othering” directed by the imperial authority. But the abrogation of that centre does not involve the construction of an alternative focus of subjectivity, a new ‘centre’ “ (Ashcroft 102-3). Celie and Nettie draw their energies from a vision of marginality, “and particularly of the intersection of different kinds of marginality, which dismantles all notions of a centre to consciousness and self ” (103).

The “marginal” and the “central” are grounded in and alienated from colonial body. Such concerns are incorporated into the multi-faceted relationship Celie develops with Shug

Avery. Walker intends to by means of her writing, reconstruct and reinforce the collective gender identity. The episode of sewing the quilt describes that women's potential creative possibilities and their contribution to their empowerment. The sewing motif in *The Color Purple* symbolizes the autonomy women can achieve through channeling their creative energy. The pants sewing business that Celie establishes towards the story's end can be viewed as a woman achieving economic independence, and therefore having no need for a violent husband. Celie becomes an independent and confident woman for she knows who she is and gets her own business. Therefore, the color purple, which means royalty and divinity, can describe Celie's condition now.

The construction of the quilt echoes the novel's detective framework but could also be seen as relating to the empowerment theme. The idea of quilting was a means for a silenced group, black women, to express themselves creatively, if they weren't so oppressed, they might be writers or artists. The dramatic change of her miserable life is because she gets other women's encouragement and help physically and mentally, contributing to Celie's success and transformation. Every woman's confidence and independence come from their ability of money-making, resulting from female creativity.

Similar friendship/sisterhood appears in Nettie's African experience. Tashi's mother, Catherine befriends with Nettie, and becomes the most industrious of all Tashi's father's widow because her fields are clean, productive and attractive. Moreover, through work, Catherine becomes friends with her husband's other wives. They "giggle and gossip and nurse each other's children, then they must be happy with things as they are(166)."

Female creativity helps these repressed women to get rid of the oppression from the male-dominated society and even to help other oppressed women.

Education to Voice Out the Oppressed's/Colonizer's History

There is obviously a huge inequality in terms of education. Nettie and Celie go to school but only while they are unwanted for domestic chores. As soon as Celie is married, her education interrupts. Nettie's is continuing at Celie's sacrifice. Nettie is fortunate to be adopted by Samuel and Corinne and with their help accomplishes a career and education. She

senses that Corinne and her husband Samuel are respectable and as a result able to go abroad as a missionary assistant to Africa with Samuel and Corinne.

Like Celie she has a strong sense of duty and a devotion to her family. She maintains contact with Celie, but for many years her letters are withheld by Albert. She writes even when she believes that there is no possibility other letters reaching Celie as an act of faith and part of the optimism is the eventual happy reunion of the sisters. By her role, the development of Celie's children and the effect of foreign intervention on the African way of life has been observed and displayed in her letters to Celie. Her experience in Africa; her thoughts and feelings about the relationship between the Olinkas and the Americans. Nettie thinks that Olinka men's dominance of their women, and she compares this with that of the white Americans to their black countrymen; Nettie's care for Celie's children is considerable, as is her regard for Tashi, who eventually marries Adam and comes back with him to America.; her views on religion and her developing love and eventual marriage to Samuel form the basis of the letters in the second half of the novel.

The characters who perform violence are themselves, victims, often of sexism, racism, or paternalism. Many characters break the boundaries of traditional male or female gender roles. Sofia's strength and Mary Agnes' pursuing a singing career, Shug's sexual assertiveness, and Harpo's insecurity are major examples of such disparity between a character's gender and their traits. This blurring of gender traits and roles sometimes involves sexual ambiguity, as the sexual relationship that develops between Celie and Shug. Disruption of gender roles sometimes causes problems like Harpo's insecurity about his masculinity leads to marital problems and his attempts to beat Sofia. Likewise, Shug's confident sexuality and resistance to male domination cause her to be labeled a tramp. Gender and sexuality are emphasized to subvert and defy the traditional ways to understand women to be women and men to be men. The assertion of what the African-American femininity is compared to the exploration of African-American male struggle with masculinity. The idea of femininity among African-American women is focused around the abilities of husband to care for the wife and family. The normative roles by men are the source of oppressive behavior by men. Therefore, the African-American male is predicted to fulfill his role for the African-American woman to fulfill her role of femininity.

All the characters in Celie's family and the extended family she comes into contact with through Shug and her husband's children are the poor exploited blacks of the American South. They are almost exclusively ill-educated, badly housed, unable to travel or to better themselves. The exceptions to the rule, Nettie's benefactors, Samuel and Corinne, are unable to progress in their homeland, having to travel to Africa to be "successful" as missionaries. Ironically, they are sneered at by the tribe of Olinka who they set out to evangelize and rescue, being considered by them in the same way as they see white men--interfering and valueless, the black wearing white mask. When Nettie is going to Africa, a white man says "Niggers going to Africa...now I have seen everything." When they return to Europe they are treated with suspicion and unease by the white church elders.

How Nettie frames her stories overseas with her racial/ethnic group history, tracing back the history of black enslavement from Africa to America. Nettie mobilizes her self-writing as an act of both racial and ethnic resistance to decolonize the operations to negotiate her post-colonial subjectivity. Nettie attempts to strategically inhabit in what Homi Bhabha calls the in-between space to define herself.

While in Africa, Nettie becomes the caregiver of Samuel and Corrine's children and religiously writes to Celie for decades. Through explaining her experience to Celie, Nettie encourages Celie to be more enthusiastic and optimistic about life. Nettie finds that while there is not racial disparity in Africa, gender disparity exists. The women of the tribe are not treated as equals, and are not permitted to attend school.

Keith Byerman talks about the situation of how women's right of accepting education is deprived by the patriarchy. This situation exists not only in the African village like the Olinka, but also in American South. The oppression of women's education is transcultural; nevertheless, the reasons why men keep women from accepting educations are the same—to keep the authority of controlling women.

People in the Olinka do not like girls to go to school for learning, so most of the girls are not educated. For most of the people in the villages, think that the women in Olinka can live under their husbands' protection. Under the circumstance, Olivia is the only girl in the school. Although Olivia is the only girl in the mission school, she is the smartest student there. However, most of the boys in the school refuse to talk to Olivia except Adam because she

always does the thing supposed to be boy's, like receiving education. These boys resist talking to Olivia because they are controlled and influenced by the patriarchy that thought women should stay home taking care of children and doing house chores. Thus, they do not know how to get along with the woman who does not follow their rules; as a result, they do not know how to communicate with this kind of woman. Thus, if women can get the chance of being educated, they can be competitive to men. Apart from Olivia, Tashi also desires for learning. Both Olivia and Tashi confront the same situation that their wish of learning is not encouraged in the society they live in.

In Tashi's case, she is eager for knowledge, but she is not expected to do so because it is unusual in the tribe. Only men in the Olinka tribe are highly viewed and needed to be educated because they are the dominance in the patriarchy. Therefore, even Tashi is smarter than the boys at her age; her wish is hard to be granted. Later, the mothers in the Olinka tribe gradually sense the importance of getting their daughters educated in the mission school. However, this is still contradicted with the men in the tribe. But their mothers intend that education can help their daughters both to get rid of the miserable life they used to live, and to be competitive with men. Doris Baines can be the best example who can write, read, and live independently, but refuse to marry because she is afraid that marriage life will destroy her literary world, regardless of the social value. As Patricia Hill Collins in "Rethinking Black Women's Activism," says that "education has long served as a powerful symbol for the important connections among self, change, and empowerment in African-American communities" (147). The Olinka men refuse their women to accept education is the means to keep the authority of dominating women.

Re-writing the African Experience/ History of the Black in Africa

The letters indicates that Nettie is now a missionary, accompanying a missionary couple, Samuel and Corrine to Africa to do ministry work. Nettie is very vocal in her attitudes toward the native Africans, especially the self-centeredness she perceives in them, and their clear sexism.

Additionally, by highlighting the self-centeredness Nettie perceives in the Olinka community, as well as its clear subordination of women, her depiction of race and identity

getting complicated. Though the Olinka are oppressed by a colonial force, the rubber company, there is still significant oppression within the Olinka community itself. This internal oppression, coupled with the self-centeredness of the Olinka people and their indifference toward African-American slavery, complicates the categories of oppressor and oppressed.

In her letters, when Nettie, Corrine, Samuel, the children, and their guide, Joseph, travel for four days through the jungle to reach an Olinka village, their final destination, the Olinka villagers crowd around them because they rarely see African-American missionaries.

The Olinka society is at first fascinating and astonishing but as the time proceeds Nettie begins to realize that it has its own annoying customs. Women are treated abominably, not allowed education or independence and are under the “protection” of men, this protection is no better than dominance and subservience. Nettie befriends a woman named Catherine, whose daughter Tashi quickly develops a friendship with Olivia. According to Keith Byerman, “the African traditions, made available through the device of Nettie’s letters, suggest the universality of oppression” (62). Because, as girls, Tashi and Olivia are not allowed to enter the local school, they join Nettie in her private hut to talk, tell stories, and share secrets. Tashi is the only one of the Olinka villagers who wants to hear about African-American slavery, and it angers Nettie that the Africans fail to acknowledge even partial responsibility for the slave trade. Consequently, Nettie begins to feel that Africans are just as self-centered as white Americans.

Nettie, like many of the women in Georgia is not accepted by the men of the Olinka because they are threatened by her independence and free spirit. Only Tashi comes round to her way of thinking and tells stories as oral literary tradition in Africa. But when Olivia’s version of “Uncle Remus” written in America, “how Tashi’s people’s stories got to America,.... She cried when Olivia told how her grandmother had been treated as a slave”(165). The history of enslavement of the black from Africa to America is connected here. Slavery is the black’s collective identity, which they don’t want to face. Thus, “no one else in this village wants to hear about slavery, however “(165). She is ostracized and leaves the tribe to marry Adam traveling back to America with Nettie and Celie’s children.

The practice of female circumcision and facial scarring is also revolting to Nettie, who regards it as degrading but understands it to be a custom which enables the Olinka to cling on

to its tribal identity in a changing world. It is a barbaric custom and Nettie feels helpless to influence the tribe or to help the girls there.

The saddest part of the African experience is the way in which the people of the tribe are exploited by the white traders who drive their roads into the interior obliterating ancient settlements and destroying lifestyle which have lasted for centuries. The Olinka are hospitable and give the builders food while they destroy the village and the roof leaf supplies, serving as a picture of a dying lifestyle and an obsolete people.

The tribal people are driven out of their legal homes for white economic deprivation, forced to pay for the right to live in huts and becoming victims to disease because their yam crops are damaged. The link between the people in America and the Africans is that both are the oppressors of the white oppressed.

In the meantime, Nettie and Samuel have married. They have become disillusioned with their missionary quest in Africa and plan to return to America. Before they leave, however, Adam falls in love with Tashi, who has recently undergone the painful rituals of female circumcision and facial scarring, rites to uphold the traditions of her ancestors to resist cultural hegemony. In solidarity, Adam undergoes a similar facial scarring procedure.

All Nettie's experiences as a missionary in West Africa begins as being excited at the prospect of returning to her roots in order to convert her ethnic brothers and sisters. A series of disappointments and disillusionments follow, as she realizes that that they are uninterested in slavery, the black experience in America, or really in the religion which missionaries have brought them. Paradoxically, Corinne, Samuel and Nettie are alien outsiders among their own original people. There is no racial unity between the three of them and the Olinka despite the color of their skins and their shared heritage.

Celie's Achievement of Self-Autonomy

Storytelling and communication are crucial to self-understanding. Failed communication between Celie and Alphonso; between Celie and Mr. _____; among Nettie, Samuel, and Corrine; and between Celie and Nettie. As the novel progresses, some of these ruptures in communication are repaired through narratives of one kind or another. Celie finds Nettie's

letters, Samuel tells the story of his children to Nettie, and Celie confirms this story with Alphonso, learning the truth of her own family history. Failed communication exists between men and women, between American blacks and American whites, between American blacks and Africans, and between Africans and European imperialists.

Celie's discovery of her true family history brings about a major change in her pattern of communication, as she develops surrogates for God and her parents, in the form of other women. After learning of her tragic background, Celie feels that she has lost her faith in God, and closes what she intends to be her final letter to God by scolding, "You must be sleep." Instead, Celie begins to write letters to Nettie. Likewise, though Celie is unable to locate her parents' graves, to which she looks for closure, Shug tells Celie, "Us each others peoples now." These strong, surrogate ties that Celie makes with other women allow her to create a new family in the face of the tragedies she has endured. Celie ceases to wait for the kingdom of heaven and begins to search for peace and happiness in her own life.

Religious belief is treated as an important component of a strong sense of self. Celie has always imagined God as a distant figure who likely does not listen to her concerns. She sees God as a white man who behaves like the other men she knows and who does not listen to "poor colored women." This image of God held by Celie—and, ironically, by Nettie, Corrine, and Samuel in their missionary work—is limiting. In thinking of God as an old, bearded white man who does not listen to her, Celie implicitly accepts white and masculine dominance and makes the assumption that her voice can never be heard.

Shug's concept of God, on the other hand, is much more personalized and empowering. Unlike Celie, Shug does not ascribe a race or gender to God. Instead, Shug believes that each individual manifests God in his or her own way. Celie's recognition that she has control over her concept of God and does not have to blindly accept the religious viewpoints that are handed to her is an important step in her quest for autonomy and self-respect.

Celie's assertion of herself comes forcefully in this section. Her defining moment, the speech she gives to Mr. _____, contrasts sharply with her former silence. Celie's assault on Mr. _____ releases years of pent-up emotion and hurt that had been silenced. Mr. _____ tries to counter by stripping Celie of her sense of self, as he has throughout the novel. He tells her that as a poor, black, and ugly woman, she is "nothing at all." But Celie's sense of self is

strong enough that she is no longer a helpless object, so she resists Mr. _____'s proclamation, reinterpreting his words in a defiant context: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook. . . . But I'm here." The fact that Celie's speech inspires Mr. _____ to reassess and rebuild his life shows that Celie's attainment of self-respect has truly broken a cycle, not only liberating Celie, but others as well.

An equally important component of Celie's empowerment is her newfound economic independence. Celie's clothing design is a form of creative self-expression, but it is also a form of entrepreneurship and a means to self-sufficiency. Celie has taken sewing, traditionally a domestic chore, and turned it into an instrument of independence. Walker implies that such economic independence is crucial for women to free themselves from oppressive situations. When she inherits her family's old property, Celie completes her independence, becoming a fully autonomous woman, with her own money, business, story, and circle of friends.

Celie's final letter also shows that, like Shug, Celie has formed an interpretation of God that encompasses the entire everyday world. She writes, "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God," revealing that she no longer sees God as a distant figure with which she feels she has little or no connection. The remarkable transformation of an impoverished, abused woman of color into a successful, propertied entrepreneur who delights in her own sexuality and is enmeshed in a supportive and loving community.

Conclusion

The Olinka is regarded as the undeveloped, barbarians and non-history that trigger Nettie's resistance and abrogation. In order to clarify their resistance and anti-hegemony, Nettie puts a great emphasis on speaking of a particular place, evolving out of the necessities of its history, past and current and the aspiration and destiny of its people. Therefore, writing back rewrites the oppressed black women in the American South, as well as the Olinka in Africa, to reconstruct not only history and identity of American black women, but also the Olinka tribal culture as post-colonial discourses.

Colonial discourse distorts the Olinka's (the colonized's) historical discourse as paying rent on their own land to English rubber company. The imperial company activates the gesture as their loyalty to the colonizer. Thus, Nettie's writing resists the distorted texts and

abridges the gaps of the silenced texts by the imperial hegemony on the colonized. The motivation of writing back focuses on specific geographical ethnic groups like the Olinka tribe in Africa and the black women in America to re-narrate their past history and prospect of now and future destiny.

The part of writing how the colonial whites rob the Olinka of their raw materials like rubber and ship back to their home country, displaying history of imperialism. A road is built right through the village of the Olinka by a rubber manufacturing company, and it destroys the entire village. They are forced to relocate to a more barren area with poor water.

The theme of writing back lies in the self-identification of nationality and ethnic groups, the change and reconstruction of self-nation and ethnic groups. Walker ends her novel by homecoming as the strategy of writing back. The history of the colonized is stated in two parts, divided by the imperialists' invasion. The theme of writing back in *The Color Purple*, begins with Nettie's disappearance from Celie's life for seeking a better life abroad, and eventually her re-appearance in her lost letters (as herself) in Celie's home. This plot records with details a history—changes of history of black enslavement to America, then to black women in the South of America. The ceremonial episode of the new owners of the land charge the Olinka for water and for the new tin roofs which they are forced to use, symbolizing the Olinka's willing to be governed by the colonial whites, though many of the people leave to join the mbeles, a group of natives deep in the jungle who are struggling against the white man.

Nettie and Celie, both black and women alike, doubled as the weak, silenced, backward Other, in an attempt to reclaim and reconstitute their identity by means of writing back technique as well as narrating history of the black in Africa, in quest of the black origin to evoke the collective identity and display the colonizer's cultural bias. The values of the traditional culture and narrative writing of rites resist the dominance of cultural hegemony as well as voicing out their cultural subjectivity as black and the women minority. Nettie's epistemological writing to Celie empowers her strategic integration of her personal and collective history.

Works Cited

- Abbandonato, Linda. "Rewriting the Heroine's Story in *The Color Purple*." *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 2000, 296-308.
- Ashcroft B. al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Butler-Evans, Elliott. "Rewriting and Revising in the 1980s: *Tar Baby*, *The Color Purple*, and *The Salt Eaters*." *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989. 151-209.
- Castle, Gregory. *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "Rethinking Black Women's Activism." *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1990, 139-162.
- Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove, 1967.
- Fredrickson, George M. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "The Taming of the Shrew." *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997, 137.
- Henderson, Mae G. "The *Color Purple*: Revisions and Redefinitions." *Modern Critical Views: Alice Walker*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989, 67-80.
- Hooks, Bell. "Reading and Resistance: *The Color Purple*." *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 2000, 284-295.
- Judd, Denis. *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.
- Lee, Dennis. "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space,"

- Boundary*, 1977. Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 1-6.
- Macleod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Mcdowell, Deborah E.. “Generational Connections and Black Women Novelists.” *Modern Critical Views: Alice Walker*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989, 135-151.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Spivak, Gayatri. “Can Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. By Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988, 271-313.
- Stichele, Caroline Vander et al. Eds. *Her Master's Tools?: Feminist And Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, 2005.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
- . *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.
- Wall, Wendy. “Lettered Bodies and Corporeal Texts.” *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993, 261-274.
- Winchell, Donna Haisty. “Letters to God: *The Color Purple*.” *Alice Walker: Twayne's United States Authors Series*. Ed. Frank Day. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992, 85-99.