

**KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**



**A WOMANIST APPROACH TO SPIELBERG'S
THE COLOR PURPLE**

GRADUATE THESIS

CANSU FRANKO

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**A WOMANIST APPROACH TO SPIELBERG'S
THE COLOR PURPLE**



CANSU FRANKO

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APPROVED BY:

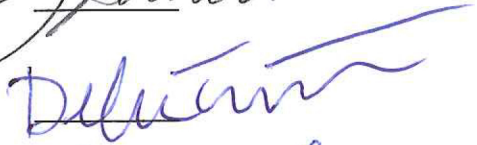
Assist.Prof. Dr. Jeffrey HOWLETT (Advisor)

(Kadir Has)



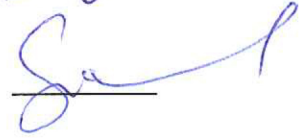
Assist. Prof. Dr. Defne TÜZÜN

(Kadir Has)



Assist. Prof. Dr. Sirma Soran GUMPERT

(Halic Uni.)



APPROVAL DATE: 05/05/2016

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CANSU FRANKO

ABSTRACT

A Womanist Approach to Spielberg's *The Color Purple*

Cansu Franko

Master of Arts in Film and Television

Advisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Howlett

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The present study focuses on the adapted 1985 film *The Color Purple* by Steven Spielberg, *The Color Purple*. Set in the early 20th century United States, the story is about the life and quest of a black woman, Celie, transforming herself from object to subject. It is a women's story, in which the experience is not limited to the main character but also includes the women around her. Silenced, oppressed and insulted, Celie is going through her journey of life struggling to find her voice. Once believing that the only way to survive in a world full of men, pressure and abuse is to remain silent and be invisible, Celie gains her voice and constructs her own narrative through the quest her life forces her to take. She finally manages to break her silence and to establish her own identity by freeing herself from the boundaries of her accumulative oppressive experience by men around her.

In the following study the film will be analyzed by means of a womanist approach. In the course of my analysis, I will first investigate feminist theory and then attempt to answer the question: why is Womanism the best theory to apply to a reading of the film? To support this contention, certain scenes from the film will be analyzed to discuss how Steven Spielberg reflected this women's story on the screen. The theories utilized to draw a frame are Gender studies, Feminism and especially Womanism.

Key Words: *The Color Purple*, Gender, Feminism, Womanism, Steven Spielberg

ÖZET

Spielberg'ün Mor Yıllar Adlı Filmine Womanist Bir Yaklaşım

Cansu Franko

Sinema ve Televizyon Yüksek Lisans Programı

Danışman: Yard. Doç. Dr. Jeffrey Howlett

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Bu çalışma Steven Spielberg'ün 1985 yapımı adaptasyon filmi *The Color Purple*'a odaklanmaktadır. 20. Yüzyılın başlarındaki Amerika'da geçen film siyahi bir kadının nesneden özneye geçerkenki hayatını ve yolculuğunu konu almaktadır. *The Color Purple* yalnızca başroldeki karakterle sınırlı kalmadan, onun çevresindeki kadınların da hayatlarını içeren bir kadın hikâyesidir. Sessizleştirilen, baskılanan ve aşağılanan Celie sesini bulma yolculuğunda ilerler. Önceleri erkek baskısı ve istismarıyla dolu olan hayatında hayatta kalmanın tek yolunun sessiz kalmak ve görünmez olmak olduğunu düşünen Celie, hayatının onu zorla soktuğu yolculuğunda sesini kazanır ve kendi anlatısını inşa eder. En sonunda kendini etrafındaki erkekler tarafından yaratılan birikmiş baskılayıcı deneyimlerden özgürleştirerek sessizliğini kırmayı ve kendi kimliğini oluşturmayı başarır.

Çalışma içerisinde film Womanist bir yaklaşımla incelenecektir. Analiz süresince önce feminist teori incelenmiş ve sonrasında neden feminizmin yanında Womanism teorisine ihtiyaç duyulduğu sorusuna cevap verilmeye çalışılmıştır. Fikri desteklemek için Steven Spielberg'ün bir kadın hikâyesini ekrana nasıl yansıttığı tartışılarak film içerisindeki belli başlı sahneler incelenmiştir. Bir çerçeve oluşturabilmek için Cinsiyet, Feminizm ve Womanism teorilerinden yararlanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mor Yıllar, Cinsiyet, Feminizm, Womanism, Steven Spielberg

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Secondly I would like to thank my dearest friends; Alican, Dilşad, Ece, my highschool friends and my dear colleagues for always being there to support me.

Lastly, my mum and dad, thank you for being the best parents in the world. Thank you mum, for not leaving me alone in my sleepless nights, for being my best friend. Everything I have, I owe you.

Throughout the study, I have shared the journey with Celie. I have tried my best to empathize with her in order to understand and reflect her feelings better. Sometimes, I have lost the distance and found myself walking with her, mostly crying, finally laughing... This study has become the most contributing process of my life. I would like to thank to all my loved ones for supporting me in this journey.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Color Purple is a 1985 American drama movie directed by Steven Spielberg.

The movie was adapted from the novel written by Alice Walker in 1982, sharing the same title. The scenario is by Menno Meyjes and the leading actors are Danny Glover, Whoopi Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey.

The film is about a black girl, Celie, and her journey toward gaining her voice and overcoming the male oppression in her environment. The audience meets Celie when she is 14, impregnated by her step-father and continues viewing Celie's journey for 30 more years until the happy ending.

It is promoted as a realistic story about the lives of the characters in the film. No detail about the story is given either in the poster or in the trailer. To be sure, the readers of the novel already have an idea of the story, but for people who haven't read the book, the trailer does not give any clue.

The film has great effect and received a lot of criticism, especially the fact that Spielberg is directing a totally non-Spielberg, feminist film. Audience expectation from Spielberg is a box office hit, a movie that can attract a wide range of audience. Spielberg explains that he wanted to "challenge [himself] with something that was not stereotypically a Spielberg movie. Not to try to prove anything, or to show off - just to try to use a different set of muscles" (McBride 2010: 121). Later Alice Walker

criticized the film for eliminating some elements such as the lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug, and Celie being raped by her father.

In the present study my target is to provide a better understanding of *The Color Purple* in terms of the theory Womanism, an expression first coined by Alice Walker, who is the writer of the book version of *The Color Purple*. My intention is not to provide a comparative study between the film and the book; rather the film will be examined as a unique discipline. The film and its narration will be reviewed through gender and the Womanist perspective.

2- THEORETICAL BACKGROUND | PATRIARCHY, FEMINISM & WOMANISM

“As cultural hegemony is illustrated by men, so the society assigns primacy and value to males, upholding masculine traits rather than female ones. They elevate maleness to superior and normal stance while they define femaleness as inferior and abnormal” (Wan Roselezam Wan 2010: 232). Patriarchy is the prevailing social order when the power of the society is structured by a male centered vision. In patriarchal societies, men have the power of decision and of ruling in every aspect of life. In most cases, they have the unofficial socially given right of oppressing women, as an effect of the ways men are privileged in such social systems. They have been assigned the active and ruling roles within the society, while women are supposed to be passive and to obey the rules decided by men, which makes the hands of men even stronger.

Feminism is a convergence of several movements sharing the same vision and targeting the achievement equal rights in every aspect of life for women.

(Hawkesworth 2006) (Beasley 1999) The main struggle of feminism pursues the goal of acquiring rights and achieving equality.

As an outgrowth of feminist activism, feminist theory tries to understand gender differences and focuses on the social development of gender. In a feminist point of view, gender is a wide concept consisting of socially assigned roles, women's place in society and so on. They differentiate gender from sex since gender is not established biologically; instead it is a social concept. The modern feminist movement is categorized into three periods: first wave, second wave and third wave.

(Humm 1990) (Walker 1992)

First Wave Feminism is the first organizational movement of which the main struggle is to achieve rights and equality. It mainly deals with the political and social rights and rectifying the inequality of women within the canons of law. The period of this first wave activism is the 19th and early 20th century and it is followed by the second wave feminism.

In many ways, black women must be considered as a separate branch in the development of feminist thought. The apparently "benign" gender stereotypes that assigned white upper class women to the gilded cages of social convention clearly did not apply to women who were valued only for their labor. Thus, black women were in a position to deconstruct gender roles several decades earlier than their white counterparts. Sojourner Truth's speech "Ain't I a Woman?" can be given as an example where the issue arose earlier. The speech was made during the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851. In her speech, Truth attacks the ongoing discussion in the convention which gathers all women under same category and frames the way they should be treated. She says "That man over there says that

women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place, and ain't I a woman?" (Truth 1851) Her speech attacks all the gender stereotypes that characterize [white] women in the 19th century. Although her statement and the idea that she attacks cannot be fully understood until second wave feminism, we can say that she has made a significant contribution and created a basis for the idea that black women's issues are not covered by universal Feminist thought.

The prevailing view in patriarchal societies is that man and woman are two separate kinds of human beings. The definition of female is constructed on the comparison of the other, the male. The male-centered definition of woman, that is, true womanhood, is based generally on a male interpretation (those by a husband, brother, or father) and could be attained through four cardinal virtues including piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. (Carby 1987) The binary opposition between male and female is mainly based on attributes assigned to them by the society. Masculine attributes are assigned to men and feminine attributes are assigned to women. For instance, stereotypically men are supposed to work outside in jobs requiring muscular force and women are supposed to do housework and take care of children. If women really have to work, they are supposed to work in easier jobs, which do not require physical strength.

The norms of these assignments are changeable within communities and cultures, but though the traits can differ, the concept is the same in all patriarchal societies. To sustain masculinity, patriarchy ensures that in the real world power stays in the hands of men, the dominant order always seeking to intensify gender distinctions through keeping the boundaries between what is supposedly feminine and what is supposedly

masculine “clear and distinct”. (Eisenstein, 1983:96) In order to rationalize this, men execute their congenital physical strength and use it as a tool to claim power over women, and ensure their leadership due to their “male” traits. The claim of power includes social and patriarchal power as well, in addition to physical strength. By using their physical power and their so-called ability to protect the “weak and defenseless” women, men extend the scope of this superiority within all aspects of life in order to claim superiority over women.

Patriarchal discourse constructs the gender roles in a way that male strength is benign and exercised in the woman’s behalf “for her own good.” Women are supposed and assigned to remain one step back from men and act in the way society approves, which is to be obedient, limit daily activities to house requirements and work in jobs that do not require physical strength and do not allow any room to grow, if they really need to work.

Men are also under the oppression of their own assigned roles. They are oppressed by masculinity; socially constructed behaviors associated and assigned to males, such as courage, physical power, strength, independence and toughness. The male dominated societies assigned men so called “manly” behavior and they also have to obey these roles, as women do. They have to work in the more difficult and strength-related jobs, be tough and act in a masterful way. Otherwise they are not respected and are marginalized in the society by being stigmatized. So we can say, men are also being oppressed by the order patriarchy has established.

Second wave feminists address the traditional gender roles directly and point out that gender is not biological. They argue that it is cultural because every society has a differentiation between the two sexes, and it is changeable because the roles assigned

are different in each community. Societies provide an approved ideal for both male and female and those who act in accordance with this ideal, are accepted by the societies. This ideal role can be different in each society. Thus, gender is a socially constructed behavior rather than an essentially determined one. (Wan Roselezam Wan 2010: 233) Black feminists agree with this theory partially, underlining that every society has their own cultural differences, which should be appreciated.

This behavior constructed by the society is imposed so intensely that it is accepted as normal. Mary Evans comments on this imposition, stating that woman is not made by her hormones or instincts; she is modified by the way her body is treated by others. (Evans 2001) This treatment and social imposition create the concept of gender based on performance. Both men and women perform the roles they are assigned. “Gender is performative; it is an effect of performance and is constituted in performance.” (Brooks 1997:22) The idea that gender roles are socially constructed is first coined by Simone de Beauvoir in her work “The Second Sex”. She mentions that women are regarded as “the other” in western societies (Beauvoir 1949) adding that women’s genetically provided features are not reason enough to regard them as a “second sex,” which brings us to the fact that women are identified by being compared to “men.” Their identification is not based on their natural existence but is based on their comparison with men. The important idea here is that second wavers always consider gender roles as social constructs with no roots in biology. The goal of activists in this period is the achievement of personhood without regard to sex: some form of redistributed social roles that have no relation to one’s reproductive system.

The origin of male structures of dominance over females is explored by the radical feminists. First arising during second wave feminism, radical feminists regarded

patriarchy as the primary source of male oppression. (Willis 1984) They regard men as a class which continues its existence by oppressing women and taking its power from patriarchy. Patriarchy is a system which grants privileges to men based on assumed superiority and divinely granted rights. Radical feminism critiques patriarchy for its description of women as the partners/associates/and possessions of men exclusively.

In patriarchal societies, women are regarded as occupying a lower class. This point of view makes the lives of women harder and worse than those of men in every field.

Women have to obey men and do nothing other than what they are supposed to do. Patriarchy presents itself as benign yet radical feminists interpret this code of values as oppressive to women. Women in all patriarchal societies have to struggle against this oppression. Alice Walker views oppression as an essentially masculine activity which originates from the desire to rule over females. (Wan Roselezam Wan: 2010)

The third wave feminist movement began in the early 1990s as a response to the problematic parts of second wave feminism. One of the problems is the limitation of the scope of feminism; that women from other ethnicities, colors and cultures also should be included within the scope. Third wave feminism also includes “difference feminism” which contests Beauvoirian ideas of gender and claims there are significant differences in the ways men and woman use speech, solve problems’ etc. In addition, third wave feminism extends the scope and includes women from other colors, cultures and identities, and even their degree of identification with prevailing gender roles. (Tong 2014) While second wave feminism suggests the idea that women from all societies, backgrounds, classes and races should have their own space within feminist theory, third wave feminism points out the culturally-bound definition of women and opens the discussion to an analysis of gender dynamics

outside the first world and the middle class. In accordance with this, we can say that the third wave has addressed the second wave's deficiencies in this issue. In order to include African American women into its scope, third wave feminism had to clearly address the unfortunate daily problems black women faced, which includes but is not limited to oppression from males, white or black, rape, forced invisibility, physical and psychological violence and so on. Black women had to achieve the right of survival before proceeding further with other rights such as education, equality and voting rights. At this point, it is clear that a new concept should come onto the scene.

In this regard, third wave feminism and Womanism share the same bases, since both support the idea that a movement arisen to highlight women's goodness should not be limited to a specific group of women. Although Womanism was first coined during second wave feminism, we can say that its base has affected third wave feminism to include women of color into its scope.

Until now, my intention was to create a theoretical basis for my actual critical tool "Womanism." The theory was first coined by author and poet Alice Walker in her short story "Coming Apart" dated 1979. Although the term was coined in "Coming Apart" it was first employed as a critical concept in Alice Walker's 1983 essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: A Womanist Prose".

"Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender."

The Womanist theory defined itself through its differentiation from other feminist and gender based theory. In order to come up with a clear critical theory, I will be trying to explain my own idea of Womanism after providing the ideas of different Womanist theorists, Alice Walker, Clenora Hudson-Weems and Chikwenye Ogunyami.

The theory “Womanism” distinguishes itself from Feminism since it pre-acknowledges that Feminism takes the issues race, ethnicity, class and culture as the second priority. Womanism allows the opportunity for women of color to express themselves and their daily problems. Womanism does not take race ethnicity and class as a prior issue, but it supports a universal unity and believes in the harmony of women and men. Womanism differentiates itself in the way it gives a space for black women to survive. In an ideal world proposed by Womanism, men and women from all cultures, classes and backgrounds can co-exist harmoniously, which destroys the double marginalization of certain groups of people such as women of color, women who face violence, oppression and inequality. Harmony brings co-existence.

The roots of Womanism are found in the racial and gender abusiveness experienced by black women. This experience includes but is not limited to slavery and its cultural heritage, rape, physical and psychological violence and, in short, not being regarded as a human being. The oppression of African American women is not only limited to the oppression by white men. They are also oppressed and violated by black men, who are likewise oppressed by the white man. Thus, black women are twice as violated as any other oppressed groups. This makes their case special and worthy of particular consideration since they don’t share the same destiny with women from other cultures. However, the term has varied and contradictory definitions provided by different theorists. This study will mainly focus on Womanism from the perspective of Alice Walker together with my own views.

Womanists felt the necessity of using the term Womanism during the early periods of the Feminist movement. They regarded feminism as a movement whose priority was middle-class white women in search of gender equality in their social lives.

However, black women found it difficult to identify with, since the daily problems

experienced by black women were different when compared to those of white women. In their view, white women can debate and talk about political, economic or social rights but for black women, they first have to achieve the right of survival before going one step further to talk about these rights. According to their argument, feminism was ignorant of race and class-based oppression while concentrating on gender-based inequalities. (Maparyan 2012)

The idea first shows itself in Sojourner Truth's 1852 speech "Ain't I a Woman?" It attacks the idea of gender categorization and the way that women should be treated does not cover the issue of black women but instead is mostly applicable to white women. Refusing to see woman as a fragile, weak, domestic and moral creature, Truth expands the definition of woman, while challenging the limiting gender roles applied to white women. Though not theorized, black women have always been placed in a different category and their issue has never been included in universal Feminism thought.

Although the term Womanist is first coined in Alice Walker's "Coming Apart", the term was first fully conceptualized in her "In Search of our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose". Here, Alice Walker describes a womanist as: "A woman who loves another woman, sexually and/or non-sexually. She appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility... [she] is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health... loves the spirit... loves struggle. Loves herself. Regardless." (Walker 2004: Epigraph)

Thus, the chief qualities of Walker's concept center on relationships between women—without regard to men—a unique understanding of women's culture as

separate from men's, an understanding of women's emotional life as a distinct and important realm of experience, and a responsibility for the welfare of society as a whole. As mentioned in the above definition, Walker's point of view does not intend to place a separation in any way. Instead, it intends a world where all people, male and female, can coexist. Men and women are different in nature and biology, but socially they should be regarded as the same and should be able to coexist in a non-threatening environment. In opposition to the patriarchal system, womanism places relationships between women in a position of primary importance. Under various systems of patriarchy, the woman's basic relationship is always with a man. Women are thus generally in competition with each other. Womanism builds networks between women, encourages love and admiration rather than competition.

Womanism sees something essentially unique and valuable in women's emotional nature, as "difference" feminism does. It implies that building a culture upon these emotional values is more healthy and sustaining than those traditionally assigned them. Womanism, while it supports black women primarily, does not limit its ultimate benefits to a single sex or ethnic group.

Alice Walker regarded Womanism as a theory of survival of the black race; the theory that takes the experiences of black women, black culture, black myths, spiritual life and orality into consideration. (Anih: 2013) However, Womanism supports universalism and coexistence; it does not support distinction. It does not attack a specific culture or men. Womanism intends to create a world in which women of color can find themselves a space, where they can live in a non-threatening environment. In my opinion, the primary consideration seems to be black women in Womanist theory since its roots are the fact that women of color cannot identify themselves with the issues proposed by Feminist theory as articulated by

white middle class women. Feminist theory mainly deals with daily problems of the middle class, which consist of social and political rights, equality and gender roles, whereas black women have to survive in a world full of oppression, violence and rape so that they can go one step further to seek for other rights.

However, Womanism by no means supports distinction. Therefore, a white woman can also be regarded within the concept of Womanism if she can identify herself within that. Of course it is only possible if white women are able to see the world of black women and understand it properly. While Womanism supports a world where men and women can live in a non-threatening environment, black men can also participate in the debate since their oppression by the white man creates the basis of black men's oppression of black women. When it comes to white men, the majority, it is debatable since they can be regarded as the mirror of social construction, which causes the oppression. Womanism does not intend to eliminate the oppression experienced by black women only, but it is in search of a social change of inequalities experienced by all people. Its roots are based on black women's experiences and problems, but its broad perspective covers all people.

Hudson-Weems explains how she developed the term Africana Womanism:

“Africana Womanism is a term I coined and defined in 1987 after nearly two years of publicly debating the importance of self-naming for Africana women. Why the term ‘Africana Womanism?’ Upon concluding that the term ‘Black Womanism’ was not quite the terminology to include the total meaning desired for this concept, I decided that ‘Africana Womanism,’ a natural evolution in naming, was the ideal terminology for two basic reasons. The first part of the coinage, Africana, identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base—Africa. The second

part of the term Womanism, recalls Sojourner Truth's powerful impromptu speech 'Ain't I a Woman?', one in which she battles with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana Woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood. Without question she is the flip side of the coin, the co-partner in the struggle for her people, one who, unlike the white woman, has received no special privileges in American society." (Hudson Weems 1995: 22-23)

My view of Womanism is more on Alice Walker's model. That is to say, Womanism is a theory to imagine an ideal world where people can find a non-threatening space for them to survive. Survival is a crucial part of Womanism, since it is crucial to survive and live in a safe world so that people, especially women, can begin seeking for social rights such as education, equality and suffrage, which are the main concerns of Feminism. While feminist movements analyze and focus on the relation of women with men, Womanism takes the relation between women into primary consideration. Womanism builds networks between women, encourages love and admiration rather than competition. Womanism sees something essentially unique and valuable in women's emotional nature. It implies that building a culture upon these emotional values is more healthy and sustaining than those traditionally assigned them. They believe that upon building such a culture, wholeness and co-existence of men and women shall be possible. In accordance with this, a Womanist woman is a woman who seeks for further knowledge than what is imposed and what is universally accepted as "good for all people", and who is brave, joyful, outrageous, and passionate and who acts in her own desired way instead of the way society expects. Central to this project is asserting one's voice, feeling free to speak and conduct one's affairs in an independent way without reference to patriarchal rules. Womanism elevates women's emotional flexibility as a central value in fighting

oppression, yet stays centered on the experience of the body and the physical zone in which oppression is encountered and can be reversed. It promotes the ownership of one's body, not just in rejecting brutal control at the hands of others, but in experiencing the body as a source of pleasure and pride in itself, without regard to external standards and definitions.

3- ANALYSIS

Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple* was adapted into a film by Steven Spielberg in 1985. The film takes place in the early 1920s in the Southern United States and the story is about an African American woman named Celie and her life full of suffering and abuse. The film opens with a bright, musical scene showing the joy of two sisters Celie and Nettie, playing their ritual game of sisterhood and running by the purple lavenders. It is a foreshadowing scene which is combined with the reunion scene of Celie, Nettie and Celie's children. At the end of the movie the four reunite in the same garden and their song comes true:

"Me and you, us have one heart,

Ain't no ocean, ain't no sea,

Keep my sista' 'way from me."

In this particular scene, the specific shot of Celie and Nettie playing in the yard, Celie's pregnancy is visually hidden by the lavenders. And once she gets out of the lavenders, it is apparent that she is pregnant and the camera does not move for a considerable amount of time in order to underline her condition as a pregnant child. This technique is used two more times in order to show the point of view of Mr.____.

One is in the scene at 17:39 when Nettie comes to Mr. ___'s house. Nettie and Celie ask for permission from Albert for Nettie to stay with them. The Camera is behind Mr. ___ and only his legs are visible. The Girls are displayed as very small in relation to him. Celie looks down while Nettie looks directly at Mr. ___'s eyes. The angle continues for another 40 seconds until Albert turns right and the POV hides Celie. Only Nettie remains in the shot for another 10 seconds.



The same thing happens at 23:00, and this time while the sisters are playing in the yard, Mr. ___'s newspaper hides Cellie and focuses on Nettie.



The display of the pregnant Celie is overlapped by her father coming, which shows the audience that the childish joy is gone immediately as the father appears. Father Alphonso insults Celie's smile and Celie hides her mouth with her hand. Later in the

movie, Celie will keep covering her smile. Nettie immediately takes her hand away from her mouth. This is where we see the network between women in the movie for the first time.

It then cuts to the scene of Celie giving birth to her second child by her father Alphonso. At 04:40 we see the big hands of Alphonso taking the baby away from Celie. The close up is on the hands only; we can't see Alphonso at all. The big hands here symbolize the hands of order and patriarchy in Celie's life, taking away her childhood.



Her abuse begins with her father raping her and continues with her marriage to the rich widower Albert. Albert marries her to use her as a slave. We understand this for the first time in the scene where Albert and Alphonso bargain on the girls and Alphonso makes the statement that Celie is very good at house work. After that, Celie and Albert go home together for the first time and Celie is forced to walk that long road, carrying the luggage while Albert is on his horse. In the scene at 09:48, although it is a full shot, Cellie is represented as a very small figure and the shot continues for 7 seconds, underlining the roles of both.



Harpo throws a stone at Celie, saying “she is not my mother” before Celie even gets inside the house. She is introduced as their new mother, but Albert does not seem to care about her. He treats her as worthless stuff and constantly insults her. Forced to be silent by all the men around her, Celie only shares her feelings with God. The film uses voice-over to show her talking to God. This technique is significant because only the audience is allowed to witness Celie talking to God; none of the characters are provided this information, which gives the audience a noteworthy clue about Celie’s silence. One example of this voice over technique used in the movie in order to replace the letters Celie writes to God is the scene at 05:10. She purposely looks at the sky and starts her talking with the same phrases she uses in her letters “Dear God”.



Insulted, silenced and abused, Celie normalizes her condition and does not resist until she meets Shug Avery, a famous singer with whom Albert is in love. She first sees Shug's photo in Mr. ___'s bedroom, while having sex with Mr. ___. The face of Celie is overlapped by the shot of horse saddles, symbolizing the slavery condition of Celie at 10:28. Celie only tries to talk against Mr. ___ once and it results in Mr. ___ beating her: "when da las time somebody comb day hair...not since day mama died ooww, ooww...shut'er up...I can't it hurts her." After this time, she never tries to say a word against Mr. ___ and keeps her silence until the very end of the film.



Her close friendship with Shug Avery lets Celie see a quite different perspective of being a woman. Self-confidant, strong and a womanist, Shug teaches Celie to appreciate being a woman. Once saying that the only thing she knows is how to stay alive, Celie comes to the end of her voice quest and finally saves herself from the pressure of her environment. That Shug has an affair with Albert does not seem to affect the relation between Shug and Celie. It is just a reason for them to meet for the first time. Their relation does not include any regard that is related to man in their life. As womanism suggests, Shug teaches Celie to appreciate herself and being a woman, independent from men.

Like Celie, Harpo's wife Sofia has also suffered from men's oppression, but unlike Celie she has always confronted this oppression and fought against it. In the film, she explains to Celie: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my uncles. I had to fight my brothers. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men, but I ain't never thought I'd have to fight in my own house!"

When it comes to survival and one's existence as a human being, the base is the sole property right over one's own body. But what does it mean to actually "own one's body?" In general, it is to be the only one who has the right to make decisions, direct, act and interact on one's own body and not let outsiders to have any kind of right on it, this includes, but is not limited to, rape, direct, forceful acts, physical and psychological violence.



The body is the zero point of personal property. Everything that can be owned from birth such as class and title, or property due to legacy is debatable. However, one's rights over his/her own body is the only and unchangeable universal privilege.

In Celie's case, her right to her own body is first corrupted when her step-father raped her. She is not even given the chance to keep the baby to whom she has given birth. Her babies are taken by her step-father and given to a family. She is forced to keep silent by her step-father's threats to kill her mother. After that she is forced to marry a man with whom she is not in love. She is not given the right to comment on this decision. Actually, Alphonso bargains on letting Mr. ___ marry Cellie instead of Nettie, just like bargaining on purchasable stuff, in the scene where Mr. ___ comes their home to ask permission to marry Nettie.

"I can't let you have Nettie. She too young. But I'll tell you what. I'll let you have Celie. She the oldest anyhow, she ought to marry first. She ain't fresh, but I spects you know that. She's spoiled. Twice. Celie is ugly but she ain't no stranger to hard work. God done fixed her. You can do anything you want to do with her and she ain't gonna make you feel it. But Nettie, you flat out can't have, not now, not never."

The original story by Alice Walker was intended to be a womanist novel, a story of women, from the creator of the theory. Apparently, the film makes a great effort to stay loyal to the concept of book. However, the film and the book, both are different disciplines and the film is an independent text after being shot, despite being an adaptation. Therefore, the approach should be independent from the book as well. But since the study concerns the womanist theory proposed in the novel, a reference to the novel is also required. For this reason the comparison will be limited to the representation, not the media.

Primarily, the film has a completely different narrative structure. The book consists of letters written by the protagonist to God and it is somehow inapplicable, at least not intended to be applicable in the film. Thus, the main objective will be the consideration of womanist concepts in the film, which is directed by a man. The key Womanist aspects mentioned above shall be examined within the movie.

In both the novel and film version of *The Color Purple*, it is clearly underlined that in order to build your identity and sense of self, one has to develop his/her own narrative. That is to say, expressing yourself is the key to survive with your own existence. Throughout the story, the viewer is continuing Celie's journey to gain her own voice, transforming herself from object to subject.

Forced by her step-father to keep silent and not to say a word about rape and children to anybody with his remarkable words "*Better not tell anybody but God*", Celie believes that the only way to survive is to continue her silence. She even claims that "the only thing she knows in life is to survive". This point of view makes Celie become an object in all sentences made up on her life. She has neither power nor effect on her own life. She is objectified by the "subjects" of her life, the rule and power of oppressive men she encountered. She only expresses herself to God, which is given in the film as voice-over speeches. We realize that she is in need of expressing herself, but since she is forced to keep her silence, she finds that the only safe way to do this is talking to God, since nobody can hear. As she also mentions in the film, she only knows how to stay alive, and obeying is the primary method she uses to survive.

The primary consideration of Womanism is the relation and network between women and Celie's journey of gaining her voice is greatly affected by the women around her as Womanism proposes. In the movie, the story is established on four different women, Celie, Nettie, Shug and Sofia. Although the protagonist is Celie, the story would not have been completed without the other three women. Celie begins her journey with her sister Nettie, but continues and completes with Shug and Sofia. Throughout the movie, the audience witnesses the importance of relationship and

network established between women; that support between women is crucial to survive.

As her sister, Nettie is one of the key woman figures in the story and in the life of Celie. First she teaches Celie how to read and write so that they can write letters to each other if someday they are forced to be apart.

“Nettie: What could I do if I couldn't talk to you?

Celie: We can write

Nettie: Can you read good enough?

Celie: I can't say I do

Nettie: I'll just have to go to school for the both of us. Then I'll learn real hard before he break us apart.”

Literacy is a significant motif in here since although Celie cannot express herself verbally, she still can write letters to vent her feelings. While writing, one is the author of the narrative s/he develops and in this narrative s/he has the authority. Developing one's own narrative allows constructing his/her own interpretation of world.

Although Mr. ___ prevents Nettie and Celie from keeping in touch by hiding Nettie's letters, still the point where Celie finally finds her strength to talk is when she finds the hidden letters of Nettie. The Letter is an important motif throughout the movie, since Celie has also been constructing her own narrative by writing her letters to God, as the beginning part of her survival journey. One important scene where we can recognize the change in Celie is the scene where Celie and Shug rush to find Nettie's letters hidden by Mr. ___. While searching for the letters, Celie suddenly sees the hanging coat of Mr. ___ and winces. However, she immediately pushes the hanger and drops it. Her attitude and way of looking harshly at the hanger, shows us how Celie has already exceeded her limits and foreshadows the scene of Celie leaving home.

Unlike Celie, Nettie is a beautiful girl, who chooses to fight against the abuse attempted against her. First of all, she escapes from her step-father's attempt to sexually abuse her. She comes to Celie's house and teaches Celie how to read, so that they can keep writing to each other if they are forced to be separated one day. That Nettie is a literate girl makes her stronger than her sister. She has the power of leaving and getting rid of all oppressing figures in her life; her father and Mr. _____. She is able to establish herself a new life. She resists the sexual attack of Mr. ____ and is forced to leave because of her rejection. She never gives up on writing to Celie despite having no response. Her determination on constantly writing to Celie, as she promised, is the key of Celie's turning point.

“ Celie: Write!

Nettie: What?

Celie: Write!

Nettie: Nothing but death can keep me from it!”

At the end of her journey, finding Nettie's letters makes Celie reach her boiling point and she finally finds enough strength in her to talk loudly and leave Mr. ___'s house.

Secondly, Sofia is a significant role model for Celie to come to her turning point.

Sofia has certainly got her voice and strength. She is a strong woman, struggled a lot because of the men in her family, according to her statement. She has fought a lot to gain her independence. During her life, she has had to stay strong and constantly fight to keep this independence. Although it has caused twelve years of imprisonment, at the end she has still achieved her independence. She tells about her years in prison as:

“Sat in that jail, I sat in that jail til I near about done rot to death. I know what it like to wanna go somewhere and can’t. I know what it like to wanna sing... and have it beat out ‘ya. I want to thank you, Miss Celie, 'fo everything you done for me. I members that day in the store with Miss Millie-I’s feelin’ real down. I’s feelin’ mighty bad. And when I seed you- I know’d there is a God. I know’d there is a God.”

Her marriage with Harpo, although not an ideal one, is still much better than that of Celie. In the wedding scene, we see a significant stress on women’s support, when Mr. ___ approaches Sofia and her friends prevent him immediately at 40:53. They don’t even let him get close to Sofia.



Sofia is a strong and rebellious woman, rejecting all kinds of inequality between men and women, and expecting her husband to be supportive and respectful. This is quite related to Walker’s concept of Womanism, because Womanism supports the coexistence of women and men together. The kind of relationship between Celie and Mr ___ and the way he acts against Celie are not acceptable and applicable in Sofia’s mind. She clearly mentions in the film that she has tried so hard to achieve her independence, in a family full of men, and will do everything to maintain it.

Secondly, Sofia shows Celie that there are other kinds of relationships between men and women and that the experiences of Celie are not the only ways possible. She is a strong and rebellious woman, who leaves Harpo because of his attempts to make her an obedient woman. She leaves Harpo together with her children, which can be regarded as a brave act even today. Although Sofia's rebellious attitude causes her many years in prison, at the end she gains her freedom again. Celie is quite jealous of Sofia, because she is able to act against the oppression of patriarchal order, Celie even advises Harpo to beat Sofia because this is the only way Celie knows when it comes to men and women's relationship. Seeing Harpo and Sofia, Celie realizes that there are other ways a woman can act, than hers.

She learns from Sofia that one can resist force and impositions. Celie learns that freedom requires struggle, by looking at Sofia's life and struggle.

Lastly, Shug Avery is another woman, maybe the most effective one, in Celie's journey. Shug Avery is the personification of the Womanism idea of Alice Walker in the story. She is a very beautiful, strong, independent, brave and socially inappropriate woman, who specifically has gained her voice against the patriarchal order. That she is a singer is a metaphorical proof that she has got her voice, which means that she can establish her own identity and existence through her ability to narrate her own story. She rejects living a domestic life and has affairs with men not because she has to but because she wants to, unlike Celie, who is forced to marry Mr._____.

Shug teaches Celie that she is the only owner of her body and, most importantly, she can create her own way of identifying herself. She is a singer, a beautiful, independent woman, she has affairs; she symbolizes everything that a patriarchal

society would not accept within a woman's character. She dresses in colorful, attractive clothes. Her strength and beauty are constantly highlighted by all the other characters. The movie supports her features by color techniques, which are usually brighter than those of Celie's. A good example might be the scene where Shug Avery performs the song she has written for Celie in Harpo's bar. And most importantly, the movie spends a considerable amount of time stressing the strength of her voice. There are three specific scenes in which her voice is the main feature. Firstly, we see her singing in Harpo's club and audience admiring her. In this scene the audience also witnesses the first evidence of a relationship between Shug and Celie from the song Shug composed for Celie:

“Sister,
you've been on my mind
Sister, we're two of a kind
So sister,
I'm keepin' my eyes on you
I betcha think
I don't know nothin'
But singin' the blues
Oh sister, have I got news for you
I'm somethin'
I hope you think
That you're somethin' too

Oh, Scufflin',
I been up that lonesome road
And I seen a lot of suns goin' down
Oh, but trust me
No low life's gonna run me around

So let me tell you somethin' sister
Remember your name

No twister,
gonna steal your stuff away
My sister
We sho' ain't got a whole lot of time
So shake your shimmy,
Sister
'Cause honey the 'shug
Is feelin' fine”

Shug is not just an ordinary singer who is being watched by the audience; instead her voice has the power of bringing the crowd behind her. We see her power when she goes to her father's church singing, walking and being followed by a large audience, singing the song with her. She is a strong woman, who receives this strength from her voice, literally and metaphorically.

As a singer, she certainly got her voice and she stays strong, rejecting all kinds of oppression. Even a cruel man like Mr. ___ is in love with her and he totally accepts her the way she is. He does not treat her as he does Celie. Shug and Celie eventually become friends and Shug teaches Celie that she can create her own narrative, by calling her “virgin.” Specifically, in the scene when Shug compliments Celie's smile, it is the first time Celie feels that she should not be ashamed of her body; instead she should be fully responsible for herself; she should be the only one who has the right to decide on her body. Here Shug teaches Celie that she can interpret her own self and she is not limited to what is forced upon her.

When Celie and Shug chat in Shug's room after Shug's singing performance in Harpo's bar, Celie wears Shug's clothes and admires her display in the mirror. While she is still trying to cover her smile, Shug encourages her not to. Celie manages to

smile without hiding and admires herself so much that she can't stop her laughter.

This is one of the most significant steps she takes during the quest.



During their conversation Shug learns more about Celie and Mr.'s life together. She realizes that Celie is not aware of the fact that having sex is a two person relationship and can only be performed if both parties are willing. She has internalized the dictum that her decision or desire does not matter and she has to obey if a man wants to have sex with her. We realize this from her surprise at Shug's definition of sex. Hearing that it is a pleasurable activity she is quite surprised.

“Shug: Do you mind if Albert sleep with me?”

Celie: Do you like sleeping with him?”

She is not aware that a woman can have sex to have pleasure. When Shug learns that Celie has never had sex with Mr.____ willingly, she tells Celie that she is still a virgin. This new interpretation leads Celie a new sense of self, which the audience realizes when Celie laughs while looking at the mirror, wearing Shug's clothes. This is the first time we see Celie laughing. This scene is quite significant to the story. Because in order to gain her voice, Celie needs to learn to tell her own story and create her own sense of self. She begins gaining her voice by first achieving the property of her own body, which means to be the only owner of her body. In this scene, Shug teaches Celie that a new interpretation of self is possible.

Although this is not a full and complete realization of self, Celie takes an important step towards her journey to gain her voice. Besides, Shug's redefinition of virginity at 01:16:20 is a clear attack on patriarchal rules controlling a woman's body. She rejects the biggest weapon of patriarchy, which is authorizing the definition and practice of virginity, and establishing its control over women. As a victim of patriarchal society, Celie gains power against it. She attacks the patriarchal pressure on woman's body directly, which takes penetration as the primary definition of sex, not the pleasure and willingness. (Hite 1989) "... in a male-dominated society where women are marginalized because of outdated and degrading religious norms and values, Shug manages to threaten the Christian patriarchal order and hold her head up high – because she is a Womanist."(Janusiewicz 2014:23) By doing this, Shug allows Celie to take control of her own body, instead of having sex imposed on her.

"Celie: He just climb on top of me and do his business.

Shug: "Do his business"? You sound like he going to the toilet on you.

Celie: That's what it feel like.

Shug: Why then, Miss Celie... that means you still a virgin!"

Throughout the film, Celie walks in a journey of self-realization, self-esteem and self-empowerment. This journey finds help from other women in Celie's life, which is suggested by the Womanist aspect of the original story as well.

She learns how to read and write from her sister Nettie, which later allows her to read Nettie's letters and learn the reality in her life, that the man she knows as her father, is actually her step-father and her daughters are alive and with her sister. Reading brings knowledge and awareness. Celie learns and becomes aware of the reality by reading Nettie's letters. By looking at Sofia's life Celie learns that it requires struggle to gain independence, freedom and survival. Finally, Celie learns from Shug that she can take over the control on her own body. By allowing Celie to rename herself, Shug allows her to create a new interpretation of self. In a figurative way, this interpretation is connected to literacy she learned from Nettie, and strength she learned from Sofia, since without being literate one cannot interpret and without being strong; one cannot tell her own story.

In the end Celie finally finds the strength in herself when she finds the letters of Nettie with the help of Shug, through the combination of strength of literacy, the realization of another life is possible and the recognition of the property of her body belongs to herself only. She finds her voice with help of three very important women in her journey. Before leaving Mr. ___'s house she expresses what she feels for the first time:

"Celie: Nettie and my kids be comin' home soon, and when they get here we gonna' set around and whip your ass."

...

Celie:] I curse you. Until you do right by me everything you think about is gonna crumble!

Sofia: Don't do it Miss Celie. Don't trade places with what I been through.

Shug: Come on Miss Celie let's go to the car.

Sofia: He ain't worth it, he ain't worth it.

Albert: Who you think you is? You can't curse nobody. Look at you. You're black, you're poor, you're ugly, you're a woman, you're nothing at all!

Celie: Until you do right by me, everything you even think about gonna fail!

Grady: It's been a pleasure meeting all of you. Good-bye.

Sofia: Look like I came back just in time.

Old Mister: Well we need some stability around here, that's for sure.

Albert: I shoulda locked you up. Just let you out to work.

Celie: The jail you planned for me is the one you gonna rot in!

Albert: I'm a knock you under...

Celie: Everything you done to me, you already under, you. I'm poor, I'm black, I may even be ugly, but, dear God, I'm here, I'm here!

Albert: You'll be back, Ha-Ha. What you gone do? You'll be back. Ha Ha.

...

“Celie: The jail you planned for me is the one you're gonna rot in.”

...

“Shug: [after telling Albert that she and her husband are leaving] Celie is coming with us.

Albert: What?

Shug: Celie is coming with us to Memphis.

Albert: Over my dead body.

Shug: You satisfied? That what you want?

Albert: NOW What's wrong with you?

Celie: You a low down dirty dog, that's what's wrong. Time for me to get away from you, and enter into Creation. And your dead body'd be just the welcome mat I need.”

In the scene when she finally talks and leaves home she says “Everything you done to me, already done to you. I'm poor, black, I may even be ugly, but Dear God, I'm Here.” Celie accepts the definition of Mr. ___ for herself; however she refuses to internalize the negative associations of that definition into her existence. Instead of being invisible according to the outer definitions, she finally chooses to lead her life by her own narrative; despite the labels she is given.

Secondly, another trait of a Womanist is to seek for further knowledge than what is imposed and what is universally accepted as “good for all people”. In the movie, the case of knowledge is provided both literally and metaphorically.

The first time we see Celie seeking knowledge is when she starts learning how to read and write. In a male dominant world, education is not a birth-given right. It is a right that should be achieved by women. This is an imposed restriction in women's lives, since it is regarded that women do not need education. They just need to do what is expected of them; be a good mother, a good housewife, be obedient and keep silent. In Celie's case, as an abused and oppressed woman, married at 14, she has no chance to go to school and be educated. But she struggles to gain literacy in order to keep communicating with her sister. Nettie teaches her how to read and write and they have to keep it as a secret between them. Even after Nettie is forced to leave the house of Mr. ___, Celie keeps studying using the one single book she has and she manages to learn. This is the first and most important step she takes in her journey.

The second time is when Shug realizes that Mr. ___ is hiding Nettie's letters. They search through the house to find the letters, which are going to let Celie learn the reality that Nettie is actually alive and has been constantly writing to Celie. This

knowledge opens the door for Celie to finally find the strength in herself to leave Albert and establish a new life for her. This is the point where Celie finally finds her strength to talk.

Here we can comment that Celie needs to exceed the limits of knowledge imposed on her first, so that she can proceed further on her quest of voice.

Another trait mentioned in the above definition is to be a woman who is brave, joyful, outrageous, and passionate and who acts in her own desired way instead of the way society expects. The clearest example of this throughout the movie is Shug Avery. To highlight the idea, Walker writes in her book *The Color Purple*: “*Shug act more manly than most men . . . he say. You know Shug will fight, he say. Just like Sofia. She bound to live her life and be herself no matter what. Mr. _____ think all this is stuff men do. But Harpo not like this, I tell him. You not like this. What Shug got is womanly it seem like to me. Specially since she and Sofia the ones got it.*”

(Walker 1982: 269) In a womanist way the passage attacks the traditional gender roles and redefines them in the opposite way. It highlights the strength of Shug and Sofia as women, which is traditionally supposed to be a manly trait.

When it comes to bravery we can give Sofia as an example. As explained in the above passages she is a woman who managed to survive in a family full of men, as expressed by her own words. She never gives up on her freedom, even though it resulted in years of imprisonment. In the scene where she is offered to work as a maid in minister’s house, she says “hell, no!” and because of her reaction she is first beaten by the society around and then imprisoned for several years.

Lastly, Womanism sees something essentially unique and valuable in women’s emotional nature. It implies that building a culture upon these emotional values is

more healthy and sustaining than those traditionally assigned them. They believe that upon building such a culture, wholeness and co-existence of men and women shall be possible. A good example for this aspect is again Shug Avery. In her life, there is no space for the imposed and assigned roles. She lives her life as she chooses and even the way Mr. ___ acts against her is different than the way he acts against Celie. When the audience ignores the relationship between Mr. ___ and Celie, they can even regard Mr. ___ as a kind and nice man. He actually respects Shug a lot. He does not even criticize or judge her. He accepts Shug the way she is and does not try to change her life style. When we ignore and do not regard how he acts against Celie as a benchmark, we can even comment that Mr. ___ and Shug totally “coexist”

The way Mr. ___ behaves toward Shug is quite ironic when his general attitude is taken into consideration. He is a man who regards violence and oppression against women as quite normal but he never thinks about behaving toward Shug in such a way. Actually Mr. ___ respects Shug a lot and I believe the reason why is more than the fact that he is in love with her. In my opinion, the most important reason behind this respect is that Shug is a strong, independent and brave woman. She obviously attacks the patriarchal order and her attitude affects the way Mr. ___ behaves toward her as well. Shug never takes Mr. ___ seriously and she is only with him because she likes to be, not because she is obliged to.

4- CELIE’S TRANSFORMATION

Throughout the movie, the audience witnesses Celie transforming herself from object to subject step by step. At the beginning of the movie, in the scene at 08:00 when Mr. ___ comes to Alphonso’s house, the first camera angle of the shot is low and we

see Mr. ___ as a very big man. Then in the next shot the angle changes to back of Celie and Mr. ___ is seen as a small head in a circle. Celie's first perspective of Mr. ___ shows that she does not take him too seriously.



But at the same time, we realize that Mr. ___'s POV sees Celie as a very low level on the shot at 09:20 from the high angle looking at Celie. Celie's nightmare begins with this shot.



After their marriage when Nettie moves into their house, we see Celie in the scene at 19:57 as a shadow. This representation shows Celie transforming to a shadow in order to survive. From then on, her challenge would be transforming herself into a woman with a voice, from a voiceless shadow.

Passing through the steps that are mentioned in the above chapter, we see Celie wearing nice clothes for the first time at 01:03:00. After this scene, we will see Celie considering her appearance as a way of her existence.



The first time we see Celie as a supporting figure to other women characters, is when Sofia goes to a store with the Mayor's wife. Celie is also there and she sees Sofia in a very bad condition. First she helps Sofia do the shopping and then at 01:30:22 she tells Sofia to keep her head up, just like Sofia has told her before. As a woman who has started to take steps in her life journey, she starts acting as a supporting figure just like her friends do.

The turning point in Celie's journey is at 01:39:00, while she and Shug are looking for Nettie's letters. She sees Mr. ___'s hanger and immediately pushes it down. This shot symbolizes Celie pushing Mr. ___ down. This shot is probably one of the most significant before Celie actually gains strength and leaves Mr. ___'s house.



And finally, she finds enough strength in herself to leave the house, and she speaks for the first time.

Celie: Everything you done to me, you already under, you. I'm poor, I'm black, I may even be ugly, but, dear God, I'm here, I'm here!

After that, we see a very different Celie. At 02:03:13 we see her high heels first before Celie. Red gloves, a cigarette in her hand, wearing a fur, all are womanish aspects she has learnt from Shug. They are aspects she has been regarding that she does not feel worth having before. She even “shakes her shimmy” as Shug has taught to her.



Finally, having gained her voice and gained her life back, she establishes her own pants store and starts living her own life with her children, sister and Shug.

5- CONCLUSION

The Color Purple is the story of a woman trying to find her voice and identity through a quest for survival. It is a story of women, supporting each other in a world that only the stronger can survive.

Since it is also based on Walker's narrative, the film also supports this structure, and the order established is not calculated to conform to the patriarchal view. However, referring to the identification of the characters, it is easily seen that the characters who do not act based on the roles given by patriarchy are caricatured throughout the film.

For instance, Harpo is a caring and loving man, unlike his father, and is not behaving in his father's way against his wife. However, as a man raised in such an environment, which offers and supports violent patriarchal order, he is under the pressure of this attitude. He is instinctively and environmentally forced to make his wife obedient to him. Although he wants his wife to be more obedient and seeks advice from his father and Celie, he never plans to change his attitude towards Sofia, until he is convinced that beating her is the only way to consolidate his role in the family. This is because the only role model he has is his father Mr. ___ and, although he does not seem to be following his father as an example all the time, still such attitudes and gender roles are normalized within his mind, although it is contradictory to his heart. Such roles are gained and normalized through environmental pressure and this is one of the pressures which Womanism seeks to expose and correct. Womanism supports a harmony between men and women and to achieve a world where no such kind of oppression is acceptable. It is apparent that Harpo was quite regretful after beating Sofia

Both characters, Sofia and Harpo are quite deep and could be further analyzed, but throughout the film they are underestimated by being caricatured. Both are images of comedy in the film. Harpo, characterized as a less-smart and untalented man, falling off the roof in every attempt to repair it; and Sofia is characterized as a stereotypic image of a woman walking in the garden, holding a baby and yelling all the time. Sofia is actually a figure of power and resistance; however she is represented as a comic matriarchal figure. For instance, the scene where Sofia meets her children after several years of imprisonment, which was going to be the saddest scene in the film, becomes funny because of the mayor's wife's illogical attitude. This scene could have been one of the most striking and sad scenes in the film, but the effect was undercut by the funny driving and childish talking of the mayor's wife. It can be said that Harpo and Sofia's relationship being outside the conventional portrayal of patriarchy, is screened as unrealistic and comic. At 01:26:05, in order to remind the audience that Sofia is just a woman, she falls down when people there attack Sofia after she resists the mayor, and we see her underwear. This is an attack on her ownership of her body and it is against the values Sofia has been fighting for all her life. Humor at the expense of Sofia being torn down by such an attitude, is an attack upon and a tearing down of the strong woman figure, which allows the white patriarchy to relax after this attack.



The aspect of comedy is used to lessen the harshness of Mr. ____ as well. A good example is the scene when Mr. ____ tries to find clothes suitable for the time when he will see Shug Avery after a long time. He runs in the house in a funny way to find his article of clothing and keeps yelling at Celie. This scene is actually quite pathetic because Celie is helping her husband to get dressed for the woman he is in love with, and she is being scolded and insulted by him at the same time. However, since the way Mr. ____ is acting is quite funny, the audience regards it as a comic scene, even Celie laughs at Mr. _____. The scene can be regarded as parodic since Mr. ____, as a brutal oppressor, is being shown as a comedy figure. As a black man, he represents difference although he is a petty tyrant himself. Humor that makes fun of the norms and thus promotes change is parody. It's possible that our laughter at Mr. ____ is parodic, as he is the oppressor of Celie. But for me, it is undeniable that his brutality is being minimized for the view of audience, not for Celie though, since it is still an insulting thing for a woman to help her husband to get dressed for his lover.

Another question in the movie is why Shug is accepted as a better image of strong woman than Sophia. Unfortunately, even in the context of equality, where gender stereotypes are being questioned, there still are factors that affect the way a woman is treated. Factors such as appearance, sexuality, fame and attractiveness are still helping certain women to begin the game one jump ahead. This is an ironic side of the story, which attacks the norms it defends. Shug is a beautiful, famous and talented singer while Sofia is a fat, ordinary woman, not as charming as Shug. Being a beautiful, attractive and famous woman, Shug can be regarded as an example of womanism while Sofia is reduced to a clown.

Another problematic representation of Shug is her victimization by her own choice of life. Her strength is decreased by her longing for her father. That her father is a

preacher symbolizes her despair against the order, thus patriarchy. The preacher character is created for the movie; he did not exist in the novel version. Thus we can comment that he has been placed in the movie on purpose. Shug is shown as a woman who regrets having the life she preferred. She is desperate and helpless by her decisions and way of life. This representation is purposely created by the director, which damaged the womanist view of the movie.

The same representation problem involves Celie as well. Her journey ends with a clear success thanks to the help of the network established between her and the women around her. However, the film's representation suggests that the happy ending is a consequence of good faith and luck.

Another womanistic problem in the movie is the belief of women that married women are in a higher position within the society. Womanism never places a woman in the society based on their marital status. This belief involves Shug and Sofia, the two women characters who are known as independent and strong. At her wedding, Sofia shows her happiness by saying "I am a married woman now!". Her happiness is not because of marrying Harpo but more than that she is happy to "get married." Whereas, at 01:38:01 Shug comes to Mr. ___'s house after getting married and as soon as she sees Celie she says "We're two married ladies, us married ladies." She underlines the word twice. And after that when her father passes by the road, she runs after him and shouts "I's married now, I's married now!" She believes that after getting married her position will get to a higher level and she will be able to receive her father's mercy. While longing for her father's approval on her life, even Shug is identifying her identity based on her marital status.

This study does not intend to compare the film and the book, but still it is an important question “has Spielberg managed to reflect the Womanist concept suggested in the book by Alice Walker?” If the question was “has Spielberg provided the story with fidelity to the book?” the answer would be no; because the film eliminates a lot of items in the book, especially the climax. The difference between both climaxes is most clear from the opening scenes. The book opens with Celie’s letter to God, asking for an answer what is happening to her with a detailed explanation of the first time she is raped by her father; whereas the film opens with the scene where Celie and her sister Nettie play around in the garden, with joy.

Despite the story itself, which is by Alice Walker not by Steven Spielberg, I do not believe that the film includes any Womanist aspects. First of all, to make it an audience-appropriate film, Spielberg excludes the sexual relationship between Celie and Shug. The relationship between them is limited to a level of admiration and appreciation.

Besides, the film makes fun of all characters that are not acceptable for a patriarchal order. The most important and the clearest example of this is Sofia and Harpo. In the relationship of Sofia and Harpo both undertake unsuitable roles for themselves. Sofia is a tough, strong, rebellious woman, who expects her husband to help with the housework, child care and all the stuff a woman is supposed to do in a patriarchal society; whereas Harpo is a kind and insecure man and he is not acting in the way the order, symbolically his father, imposes upon him. To all the scenes in which they are visible, Spielberg adds a comic aspect, especially the examples of Sofia and Harpo as stated in previous chapters. Sofia’s strength and Harpo’s good heart are underestimated throughout the film, and they are constantly made fun of, in a satirical way.

In addition to Sofia and Harpo, Shug is also an inappropriate character for a patriarchal order and the most underlined feature of Shug is her attractiveness and sexuality. Her strength, power, giftedness and intelligence are underestimated. For instance, when she sings in Harpo's bar, her vocal performance is excellent; however, the male audience only focuses on her body, her sexuality, and nobody seems to care about her singing performance. "*She can catch a fish w/o dah fish net.*" For this reason, nobody is impressed by her song to Celie.

The only time her giftedness is highlighted is when Mr.____ compares Shug and Celie when Celie is leaving and says "*She'll be back. Shug got talent and she can sing. She got spunk. She can go anywhere and talk to anyone.*" In the other scenes, she only exists with her sexuality and beauty.

In conclusion, despite not being able to transform Walker's whole idea into film, I believe Spielberg has contributed to the genre and allowed the abused women to have a voice on the screen, despite the fact that this type of film is not one that is expected from Spielberg when his past films are examined. He brought light to issues of abused women but he did not constitute a womanist view of them. I believe that it is just a successful adaptation when the story is examined independently from the idea of the book the film is adapted from. Celie has now gained her voice on the screen and finally had the chance to tell her own story to more people.

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