THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN ALICE WALKER'S *COLOR PURPLE*

Adiele Zannou

Résumé

Les années 70 ont vu aux Etats-Unis, l'avènement des mouvements féministes. Au sein de ces mouvements, plusieurs courants ont vu le jour. Les plus radicaux se sont prononcés pour l'avènement d'un monde qui exclut les hommes, qu'ils jugent responsables de tout le mal fait aux femmes, tandis que les plus modérés militent plutôt pour un monde plus juste où les femmes auront les mêmes droits que les hommes. Alice Walker appartient à cette génération d'écrivains Africains américains qui ont milité pour la reconnaissance des droits civiques des femmes. Dans quel courant féministe s'inscrit l'auteur ? Peut-on la considérer comme une féministe radicale ou modérée? Lutte-t-elle pour la liberté de toutes les femmes, des femmes Africaines Américaines ou uniquement pour celle de la femme Africaine? Dans le présent article, à l'aide des théories marxistes et des outils de la narratologie, nous analysons la position qu'elle défend dans son roman épistolaire *The Color Purple*.

Mots clés : Féministe, Marxiste, lutte, womaniste.

Abstract

During the seventies, many feminist movements flourished in the United States. These movements split into two main trends. The radical ones wanted to exclude men that they accused of being responsible of all women's suffering, while the moderate ones fight for a fairer society where men and women could leave in harmony. Alice Walker belongs to that generation of African American feminist writers who are engaged in the fight for the respect of women's rights. In which feminist trend can we classify her? Should we think of her as a radical feminist or a moderate one? Does she fight for the freedom of all women, of the African American woman or of the African woman only? In the present article, we will use Marxist theories as well as narratology to analyze her point in her epistolary novel *The Color Purple*.

Keywords: Feminism, Marxist, struggle, womanist.

INTRODUCTION

The eighth child of Willie Lee and Grant Walker, both sharecroppers, Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944 in Eatonville. She attended College and in the sixties got involved in the Civil rights movement. In 1983, she creates the term womanism in which she advocates that both gender and race oppression must be confronted. She writes:

> 1- Wanting to know more and in great depth than what is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown-up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "you trying to be grown". Responsible. In change. Serious.2- Also. A Woman who loves other women, sexually and /or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance or laughter), and women's

> strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally, Universalist. 3- Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and forms an roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Love herself. Regardless. 4- Womanist is to feminist as purple as lavender.(Walker, 1983)

From Alice Walker's definition, it stands out that a woman called a womanist is not only the fat African one who loves fun, music, dance, but also the responsible one that struggles to be respected in the society. Given that in the struggle for their liberation, some women have been radical and others moderate, one can ask oneself which trend of feminism Alice Walker advocates. Our answer to this question is offered by our reading of her best seller *The Color Purple*. This novel is the story of many African American women of whom Celie, the heroine, who suffers in the hands of wicked and brutal men, is a prototype.

This situation is, in fact, generated by contradicting situations between men and women. In this paper, using Marxist theories and narratology, we will first analyze how such contradictions raise between female and male characters. Then we will discuss how the poles of contradiction change as the story unfolds. Finally, we will evaluate the impact of the struggle for freedom undertaken by female characters in *Color Purple*.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

About the place of contradictions in Marxist criticism, Koné Klohinlwele observes:

> Toute contradiction suppose la liaison de deux pôles contradictoires. L'un de ces pôles est dit dominant et l'autre est appelé pôle dominé. L'on utilise également les termes d'aspect principal et d'aspect secondaire de la contradiction. Les signes mathématiques sont par moment utilisés et le (+) désigne le pôle dominant ou aspect principal de la contradiction et le (-) désigne le pôle dominé ou l'aspect secondaire de la contradiction. Ces deux pôles ne sont jamais égaux et se développent de façon inégale.

For Koné Klohinlwele, Marxists find it difficult to imagine a world without dominant people and dominated ones until those who are dominated become conscious enough to decide to struggle for their freedom and challenge the order established by the dominant group. This leads then to open conflict. At the beginning of *The Color Purple*, men are described as the dominant subjects and women as the dominated one. To enforce their domination, men promote a patriarchal ideology intended to justify men's domination over women. Women are said to be useless, weak, and inferior to men. Harpo, Albert's son denies even any humanity to his wife Sofia by comparing her to a mule: "Oh, me and that mule." This metaphor indicates that for Harpo, a woman is just an animal like a mule that is only useful when it works for men. But Harpo is not the author of that downgrading ideology. He holds it from his father Albert. As an advocate of such sexist ideology, Albert, Celie's husband referring to her, says: "Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all (…). Say I'm evil and always up to no good." (209) In the apostrophe "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman," Celie is addressed without any respect. All the adjectives used by Albert to qualify Celie have negative connotations because

according to conception of women, black women are ugly, despicable and cursed. This idea is stressed by the hyperbole "you nothing at all" he uses bring Celie from the status of a beast to that of a lifeless, valueless thing. In Albert's syllogism, being a black woman is synonymous with being poor, ugly and nothing. No wonder that his son treats women the same way. Through the irony "I'm evil and always up to no good," Celie makes fun of that downgrading ideology designed by the patriarchal ideology and inspired from the puritan conception of women. According to such belief, women are evil, satanic because they resemble Eve, the first woman who sinned against God. Claudette Fillard and Colette Colomb-Boureau comment about that puritan ideology:

> Les femmes qui ne se marient pas inspiraient de la pitié, et celles qui se mariaient perdaient tous leurs droits. La position sociale des femmes dépendait de celle de leur mari ou de leur père (…). Les pères Pèlerins, et les colons en général, apportèrent dans leurs bagages un arsenal de préjugés qui tous témoignaient de l'infériorité de la femme. L'innéisme (« innatism »), ensemble de théories non contestées jusqu'au lendemain de la Révolution américaine, consistait à affirmer que la femme était par nature inférieure de corps, d'esprit, de tempérament, et donc vouée à une soumission justifiée par tout un argumentaire (…). L'argument biblique rappelait que la femme était née de l'homme pour l'homme. Une interprétation littérale de l'Ancien comme du Nouveau Testament démontre que la femme devait se soumettre, qu'elle était une création de l'après-coup (« after image »), un cadeau de Dieu à l'homme sans qui et en dehors de qui elle n'aurait aucun sens. Eve reçut le non de « La Vivante », mère de tout être vivant. Pour qu'elle puisse accomplir sa mission maternelle, le Tout-Puissant dota la femme de vertus comme la modestie, la douceur, la compassion, ce qui ne l'empêchait pas d'être dans le même temps créature de péché, tentatrice, responsable de la chute d'Adam. (2003, 10-11)

For these authors, the development of the patriarch ideology started with promotion of puritan ideology in America by both the Pilgrim Fathers and the colonizers. Their sexist attitudes which were challenged for the first time only after the American Revolution stated that women naturally had a body, mind and a temper that couldn't match men's own and were then doomed by all evidence to be rightly dominated. They tried to prove this, with the Bible, saying that since Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs, women were an after image creation, a God given gift to men which would have become of no use when left on their own. Nevertheless, they also painted the woman as evil, an ugly or a satanic creature because she tempted Adam and led him to eat the forbidden fruit.

In *The Color Purple,* Alice Walker refers to the fact that this patriarchal ideology has been passed over centuries, from one generation of American men to another. Pa has taught it to his son Albert, who in turn has taught it to Harpo. Walker further highlights that patriarchal ideology is not specific to American men. Through her allusion to the Olinka tribe, she also connects it to African men. She observes: "The Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. When I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something. What can she become? I asked. Why, she said, the mother of his children." (156-157) By the sarcasm "A girl is nothing to herself," Nettie mocks at men's vanity that leads them to think that without them, women cannot live on their own. Through the rhetorical question "What can she become?" Nettie adds to the burlesque effect by expressing her amazement that men could not think about any other way for women to succeed in life than to become a housewife. Walker denounces the fact that being viewed by men as a sexual object, their possession, Olinka women are mutilated as she

bluntly states: “Although there are ritual they do have to celebrate womanhood is so bloody and painful. I forbid Olivia to even think about it.” (9) Here, Nettie sheds light on a paradox. She views, as an inconstancy, this ritual made to honor and celebrate mature women, which makes them suffer, cry because of the pain caused by genital mutilations. The complications generated by these mutilations even make them loose a lot of blood get infected and even die. The narrator also tells about the tragic story of Anne Julia who is killed by her boyfriend:

> Mr—, the man they say her boyfriend, catch up with her. She got Harpo by the hand. They both running and running. He grab hold of her shoulder, say, you can’t quit me now. You mine. She say, no I ain’t. My place is with my children. He say, whore, you ain’t got no place. He shoot her in the stomach. She fall down. The man run. (29)

By using the apostrophe, “Mr—,” which anonymous, the narrator alludes to the fact she is addressing all men who act violently against women as Anne Julia’s boyfriend. By the sarcasm “You mine,” the narrator makes fun of the fact that many men consider women so much as objects, as their unique possession, that they think that only them have the right to decide to keep them , discard them or even destroy them . By telling this pathos, Walker makes an emotional appeal to the reader and relates to men’s sense of justice and love. On her part, the narrator denounces the tyranny of men who think that they have the right because they are men to rape women: “First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he graps hold my titties. Then he put thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry.” (1) The alliterations in “i” that are recurrent in such expressions as “First, his, thing, gainst, my, hip, wiggle it, titties, he, inside, pussy,” mimics the painful cry shouted by a woman being raped. These alliterations remind the reader that a rape is not an act of love; it is a shameful act that rather makes women suffer. This is also stressed in the euphemism “his thing” which refers to the sex of the rapist as something despicable.

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel. It is a series of letters between Celie and her Sister Nettie. These letters testify to the intimacy between them as Celie confesses: “No matter what happens, Nettie steady try to teach me what go in the world (…) Most days I feel too tired to think.” (17) In this foils, Celie praises her sister for all the efforts she has made in order to know how to read and write and she wails about her inability to do likewise. She mocks about her handicap “Most days I feel too tired to think.” Writing a letter becomes then the metaphor of an intimate communication with the universe as Celie writes to everything basically: “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God.” (291) The anaphora “Dear God” stresses the fact that those letters take sometimes the form of a prayer to God. Such intimacy between Celie and God is also shared with all God’s creation, including her sister Nettie for she acknowledges it in the simile: “Anyway, when I don’t write you I feel as bad as I do when I don’t pray.” (130) A letter to Celie is just as intimate as a private prayer. Consequently, the confiscation of Nettie’s letters by Celie’s husband is compared to a violation of women’s intimacy and even has a sexual connotation. The sexual connotation is clearly suggested by the secret place where those confiscated letters are hidden by Mr—. Celie notices: “One night, when Mr—and Grady gone, us open the trunk. Us find a lot of Shug’s underclothes. Some nasty pictures postcards, and way down under tobacco, Nettie’s letters. Bunches and bunches of them. Some fat, some thin. Some open, some not.” (126) Mr— appears here as a perverse man, a voyeur who takes delight in violating women’s intimacy and looking at their naked body. The expression “nasty picture” is a euphemism of porn magazines that Mr— keeps hidden in his trunk, in order to satisfy his libido. In the personification “Some fat, some thin. Some open, some not,” the letters are given female body parts that can be fat or thin. In fact, Mr— resorts to that violation of

intimacy, after trying to literally rape Nettie. She confesses: "When I left you all's house, walking, he followed me on his horse. (…) You know how he do, you sure is looking fine, Miss Nettie, and stuff like that (…). After while, I had to rest, and that's when he got down from his horse and started to try to kiss me, and drag me back in woods. Well, I started to fight him, and with God's help, I hurt him bad enough to make him let me alone." (127) Through ~~By~~ the euphemism "when he got down from his horse and started to try to kiss me, and drag me back in woods," Nettie expresses all her contempt for Mr—'s shameful attempt to rape her. He tries to comfort himself or make for this failure by maintaining a firm grip on something coming from Nettie, a letter coming from her that represents her in his subconscience. About Mr—'s voyeurism, Henry Louis Gates explains:

> The very form of *The Color Purple*, then, produces an analogue to the female body within the text, as both are continually fragmented and remembered. Mr— conceals Nettie's letters because she refuses to be seduced by him; he rapes her language because she is denied her body. The location of these letters also reveals a link with the body; they are hidden in a trunk along with Shug's underwear, and pornographic pictures. Mr—'s erotic desires are displaced onto letters as well as pornography. "The male's desire to view female's letter is namelessly voyeuristic,'' Eagleton states. Both the female body and its texts become subject to violation by the males who retain the power to encroach upon these private spheres. (1993, 264)

For Gates, Mr—'s confiscation of Nettie's letters equals to a kidnapping and a rape for Mr—'s erotic desires are displaced onto letters as well as pornography in order to make the satire of men's lust for women, their conception of women as nothing than a sexual object. We can then conclude with Diarassouba Souleymane that like Ayi Kwei Armah's female characters, Alice Walker's female characters in *The Color Purple*, are like "sexual object which are possessed by male characters because of their seemingly physical and intellectual passivity (2013, 190). Nevertheless, Walker is not pessimistic. Being womanists, her female characters are mainly convinced of the need to struggle for a change.

THE INVERSION OF THE POLES OF CONTRADICTION

In *The Color Purple*, the conflict between men and women is not static. As women fight for their freedom, they become stronger than men who were dominating them. In return, these men become even weaker than them. As the story unfolds, the women's fight for freedom regulates the social life and makes the theme of fight an omnipresent one. In Shug Avery's words "You got to fight them Celie, (…). I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself," the anaphora "You got to fight" sounds like a cry of rally shouted by Walker in order to gather all women to become womanists. In the novel, almost all the female characters respond to that cry by taking action intended to subvert men's tyranny over them. As the novel unfolds, they change their conception of women's role in society and their attitude toward men. Music becomes a mode of subversion of the patriarchal system. Celie states:

> First Shug sing a song by somebody name Bessie Smith. She say Bessie somebody she knows. Old friend. It call a Good Man Is Hard to Find. She look over at Mr—a little when she sing that (…). Shug saying Celie. Miss Celie (…). She say this song. I'm bout to sing is call Miss Celle's song (…). It all about some no count man doing her wrong, again. (…) I look at her and I hum along a little with the tune Shug singing a

> hot one, who should come prancing through the door of Harpo's but Sofia (…). He smile pleasant and us keep listening to the music. (73-74)

As a womanist Shug Avery loves fun, music. Nevertheless, the allusion: "First Shug sing a song by somebody name Bessie Smith" indicates that Shug Avery's music is not intended only to have fun or entertainment. Bessie Smith, is a singer whose lyrics advocates the improvement of African Americans' condition in America. Her song "It Call a Good Man Is Hard to Find" is also relevant. It is an aphorism to denounce the fact that many men are not good or kind with their mates they mistreat rape or even kill. In her song, Shug Avery uses the sarcasm "It all about some no count man doing her wrong, again" to denounce Mr—'s mistreatments of his wife. Presumably, by presenting music as a mode of subversion of the patriarchal system, Walker suggests that artists of any kind, including musicians, should engage in the fight for the improvement of women's condition. With Shug Avery's leadership, most female characters start viewing man as alter ego they can compete with and not as their master to serve. For example, Celie is no longer afraid to talk about Harpo, her husband's son, as lazy and weak: "Harpo complain about all the plowing he have to do (…) Me and him out in the field all day (…) I'm roasted coffee bean color now. He black as the inside of chimney (…) His face begin to look like a woman face." (28) In this foil, man is described as so lazy and weak that he is incapable of working hard like a woman. In the synecdoche "His face begin to look like a woman face," man is even given women's traits embodied by the woman face. This figure of speech makes of a woman man's fellow and destroys the myth of men's superiority over the woman.

Like Celie, Sofia and many other female characters in the fiction stop condoning men's demeaning and tyrannical attitudes and question the social role given to men and women in society. Commenting on women's struggle for freedom, Bernard Saladin D'Anglure states:

> Si l'on excepte les tentatives de quelques précurseurs pour sortir les rapports de sexe du déterminisme biologique tels Fourier, Engels et Freud, c'est l'anthropologue Margaret Mead qui la première remit en cause ce déterminisme dans les années 1930 (…) Avec Simone de Beauvoir, la définition socioculturelle des sexes connut un approfondissement majeur (…). Le renouveau féministe des années 1970 suscita un grand développement de la réflexion théorique sur les rapports sociaux du sexe. (2010, 5-6)

For him, though Fourier, Engels, Freud stressed the biological differences between men and women, it was Margaret Mead, the first feminist in America who really tackled the issue by putting into question the social roles differently assigned to men and women. Moreover, with the revival of the feminist trend in the seventies, feminist writers like Alice Walker have renewed with that tradition. Female characters reject the idea that women are by nature, weak, prone to cry for casual things, stupid and should be dominated by men.

In *The Color Purple*, for example, Celie describes, Harpo as crying like s women: "Harpo sitting out on the steps, crying like his heart you break. Oh, boo-hoo, and boo-hoo. He get his head in his hands, tears and snot running down his chin. I give him a hawsker (…)"After being beaten by his wife, he starts crying helplessly. In the irony "Harpo sitting out on the steps, crying like his heart you break," Celie mocks at Harpo. To her, he is so weak that his heart can be easily broken by any single thing. He is as helpless as a woman being beaten and who cries without letup. While the onomatopoeia "Oh, boo-hoo, and boo-hoo" adds to the comic effect, by capturing Harpo's childish sounds when crying, the hyperbole ''He get

his head in his hands, tears and snot running down his chin" focuses on the abundance of tears shed by creating an analogy with the waters that fill the stream. This caricature is intended to present women's sensitivity as something natural which is not specific to women and should not make of them less important creatures than men. Shedding tears becomes something natural for, men too, can weep. Men's so-called supremacy over women is then put into question, for women appear as much resistant, even more powerful than men whose stamina decreases as the story unfolds.

The inversion of roles is one of the motifs used by feminist writers. For Kone Klohinlwehe this phenomenon is known as the inversion of poles of contradiction in Marxist theory and is a normal part of social dualism:

> A ce stade de l'évolution de la contradiction, la lutte entre les deux pôles contraires ne peut plus être résolue autrement que par l'élimination de l'un de ces pôles. L'unité dialectique se rompt donc pour laisser place à une nouvelle réalité et une nouvelle unité dialectique. Au niveau de la dialectique social, la résolution d'une telle contradiction prend la forme d'un conflit ouvert, d'une guerre, … dont le dénouement aboutit à une situation sociale nouvelle (…). La lutte des contraires est un principe absolu et universel. (2013, 74)

Indeed, for society to advance, it is understandable that men and women fight each other as social classes. From such struggle, the social order can be put in crisis, and men's hegemony subverted. Alice Walker questions the patriarchal system put into place by men in society by showing her discontent about the fact that, in most cases, women work more than men. By making fun of Harpo's laziness, she insinuates that men are naturally lazy:

> Why do people eat, Miss celie tell me that. To stay alive, I say. What else? (…) Then some is gluttons. They love to feel they mouth work (…) Harpo? He eating more and more everyday. Maybe he got a tape worm? (…) Haro eat when he ain't even hungry (…) Last night for example he ate a whole pan of biscuits by himself (…) And had two big glasses of butter milk along with it (…) instead of washing plates, he cleaning 'em with his mouth. Well maybe he was extra hungry (…). And this morning, for breakfast, darn if he didn't have six eggs. (63)

In the rhetorical question, "Why do people eat?" men are described as strange lazy creatures that are despised by women too much. In the caricature "Maybe he got a tape worm," men's laziness is viewed as a sickness. The comic effect is stressed by the sarcasm "instead of washing plates, he cleaning 'em with his mouth" that contrasts men's eagerness to eat food cooked by women with their mouth and their laziness or reluctance to use their hands to wash their plates after eating.

By the end of the novel, Harpo observes that his father starts behaving like a woman: "He out there in the field from sunup to sundown. And clean that house just like a woman. Even cook, say Harpo. And what more, wash the dishes when he finish." (225) In the simile "And clean that house just like a woman." Harpo ironically compares his father to a woman to make fun of the fact that his father understands lately that cleaning the house and making other house chores are not only made for women and do not make of a man, a woman. Masculinity appears then no longer as a biological trait, but rather as something defined by the social habits.

What make men be men are no longer the physical traits with which God endowed them, like the bear, the strong muscles, the bass voice, etc. Masculinity are experienced in the fiction by both male and female characters. Such existentialist philosophy is basically advocated by Alice Walker's female characters. Some female characters are not concerned only about the condition of African American women. Nettie, Corinne and Doris Baines leave America and go to Africa in order to fight against women's mutilation, scarification, and injustice. They strive to build schools where little African girls can learn how to read and to write. For Thomas R. Frazier, it was crucial for feminists to fight for women's education because they believed that education allowed a woman to "improve her marital choice, allow her and her husband to sleep more securely, and to demonstrate her moral worth through self-support under the most trying circumstances." (1983, 73-74) In an eulogy intended to praise Corrine and Nettie's courage, Samuel argues:

> These two ladies had been through marvelous things together (…). They'd been attacked by lions, stampeded by elephants, flooded out by rain, made war on by natives. They were so staid looking. So proper. You really couldn't imagine them actually building- with their own hands- a school in the bush. Or battling reptiles. (237)

Here Nettie and Corrine behave like men. They fight against wild animals like lions and elephants and they make war against the natives. The expressions "They'd been attacked by lions, stampeded by elephants, flooded out by rain, made war on by natives," are a series of hyperboles intended to exalt the great courage that allow these women to overcome many obstacles that could have prevented them from coming to Africa in order to fight for African women's freedom. These hyperboles subvert stereotypes according to which women are naturally weak and fearful. They rather appear as heroines who do not fear terrifying animals like lions, elephants or ~~as~~ soldiers who have won a war. The style is epic. The image of war here highlights women's ability to withstand natives' resistance in their fight undertaken for African women's freedom. Unlike Nettie and Corrine who are African Americans, Doris Baines is white. But the latter does not consider herself less African women than the other do. Expressing her eagerness to fight for their freedom, she says: "I don't think, it was commonly believe, I was a woman (…). Anyway, she said, when I get to England, I'll put a stop to the blooding encroachments (…). I am a very wealthy woman, and I own the village of Akwee." (232, 234) The euphemism "the blooding encroachments" refers to women's genital mutilation as something shameful. Doris does not think of herself as inferior to the men of the village of Akwee. She even considers herself as their chief, as the one who should take their lead. Consequently, she views all African people, including men, not only as her relatives but also as people that she must protect. She thinks she is not a woman, but a man: "I don't think, it was commonly believe, I was a woman." Toward the end of the novel, Sofia and Shug Avery, though women are also described as men. Being womanists do not make of female characters haters of men. Celie reveals: "Shug act more manly than most men." Together, Celie and Shug Avery become partners in a pant plant established on a land owned by Shug Avery. There is a connection between feminism and women owing properties for "it should be remembered that one of the first feminist demands in the United States was for the right to own property and engage in trade." (Holloway, 1990, 233) The pants are commonly worn by men. Making pants and wearing pants are part of the actions intended to claim the right to be like a man. Celie boasts:

> I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants now in every color, and size under sun. Since us started making pants down home, I ain't able to stop I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem; I change the fullness of the leg (…). Pants all over chairs; hanging in front of the china closet. Then finally, one day I make the perfect pant of pants. (215)

"I sit in the dining room making pants after pants." is a paradox because dining-rooms are not made to make cloth. They are just for having dinner or lunch. This paradox creates a rupture and stresses the fact that women do not only cook and serve food in dining-room, but they can also make money as men. Besides, Celie is determined to subvert men's conception of pants. The anaphora "I change" expresses her strong determination to change men's categorization of women dresses. By manufacturing pants for fattest ones like Shug Avery, Celie subverts also the western conception according to which pants are made only for slim ones. Shug Avery's business plant that employs both men and women is a symbol of entrepreneurship as a motor of capitalism that offers to everybody, a way to achieve emancipation and freedom. Nevertheless, though most female characters do not have any inferiority complex and openly show their opposition to men's tyrannical treatments they do not all share the same point of view about the way they must fight for their freedom.

THE CONFLICT OF TWO DIFFERENT FEMINIST TRENDS

In *The Color Purple*, at least two feminist trends conflict each other. The radical one is embodied by Celie and Sofia who are ready to use violence (beating, killing of men, etc) as a strategy to fight the patriarchal system. Summing up her point of view, Sofia says: "All my life, I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd to have fight in my own house (…). I love Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me." (40) By saying that she loves Harpo but she will kill him dead before she lets him beat her, Sofia contrasts the action of loving with that of of killing in order to stress the fact that for the sake of love for a man, a woman should not keep quiet and bear any kind of treatment inflicted on her. Sofia advocates for women's right for self-defense. The amplification "I'll kill him dead" emphasizes the idea that killing is not for her a dreadful eventuality. Sofia does not fear the punishment that could be inflicted on her because of her radical position. When the mayor and his wife summon her to work as their children's baby-sitter, she dares slapping the mayor and is sent to jail. On her part, after being victim of many mistreatments from men (beatings, rapes, insults, etc), Celie finally no longer wants her husband to touch her. He becomes so disgusting to her that she wants to kill him. She even changes her sexual orientation and starts a lesbian relationship with Shug Avery, her husband's girlfriend. But, Shug Avery embodies a less moderate feminist trend. Though she initiates Celie to lesbianism, unlike her, she continues to have sexual relationships with men. She even changes male partners. After Albert, Celie's husband, Shug Avery falls in love with Grady and later with a boy who is even three times younger than her. When Celie wants to convince her to put an end to that last relationship, Shug Avery answers back without any hesitation:

> And you know I'm a high natured woman (…). And I know how you feel about men. But I don't feel that way. I would never be feel enough to take any of them seriously, she say, but some men can be a lots of fun (…) Celie, she says. All I ast is six months. Just six months to have my Celie, she say. All I ast is six months. Just six months to

> have my last fling. I got to have it Celie. I'm too weak a woman not to (…) I love this child and I'm scared to death. (254)

Shug Avery, in fact, makes fun of Celle's radicalism as she insinuates that despite all what Celie can do, it is utopian to think that she can live in a world from where men can be excluded. Through the understatement "I'm too weak a woman," Shrug Avery expresses her pride to be a woman and be womanist that loves not only men and also women likewise. She makes an emotional appeals trying to refer to women's natural feelings about men when she says: "some men can be a lots of fun." She exalts and celebrates the love she feels for her boyfriend: "I love this child and I'm scared to death." In this hyperbole, she insinuates that true love between men and women should last till death .For Henry Louis Gate Jr. and K. A. Appiah, Shug Avery and Celie's lesbianism is a parody:

> Her intent is not to sexually titillate but to arouse disgust, outrage and anger at male sexual exploitation of females, to encourage appreciation and acceptance of same sex female sexual pleasure (…). As the fictive autobiography of an oppressed black woman's journey from sexual slavery to freedom, *the Color Purple* parodies those primary tests of autobiographical writing which have shaped and influenced the direction of African American fiction- "the slave narrative" with the publication of slave autobiographic oppressed African-American slaves moved from object to subject, from slaves into creation, a revolutionary literature. (1993, 287, 291)

Shug Avery has not totally changed her sexual orientation. She just initiates Celie to lesbianism. It provokes men's disgust, outrage and anger. The lesbianism between the two women is a mode of subversion of the patriarchal system, a way of expressing women's revolt against the oppression and the sexual slavery men impose onto them. Moreover, lesbianism creates an intimacy, a sisterhood between women who become aware of the necessity for them to unite in the fight against patriarchy.

In *The Color Purple*, the evolution of Celle's conception of motherhood and childbearing also pictures to some extent, that of many women that were influenced by birth control feminist movement in America. For Ellen Chesler, this movement, founded in 1848 at Seneca Fall, led many women to gradually reduce the number of their children, secure the right to abort and not to marry (Chesler, 1992, 34, 59, 84-85). Like Celie at the beginning of *The Color Purple*, the African American woman views "sex as fundamental to procreation, and procreation as a religious duty to ensure the continuation of the family line." (Holloway, 1990, 161-162) Celie's changing conception of sexuality shows the gradual change that ~~the~~ African American women underwent with the help of the feminist movements. Alice Walker also experiences a change in her conception of motherhood as she confesses that she was about to commit suicide when she became pregnant of a second child. (Idem, 185). While before the seventies, when she was supporting the Civil rights movement of Martin Luther King, from the seventies, she adopted a less radical position in her writing, she becomes more radical and provocative later on. No wonder that in the *The Color Purple*, there is the presence of some characters like Celie and Sofia who become more radical in their representation of sexuality and motherhood. Those characters use sarcasm, irony, rhetorical questions in order to unmask, make fun and put into question men's sexist attitudes. Walker's ideology of feminism is known as womanism. About this ideology~~,~~ Nicki Hitchcott writes:

> L'équilibre entre l'individu et la communauté, la modernité et la tradition est toujours a renégocier. Cependant, il faut souligner que le féminisme qui ressort de ces écrits

> ressemble plus au féminisme anglo-saxon qu'a son homologue français. Ceci ne veut pas dire qu'il n'y a aucun problème pour appliquer une idéologie qui se veut internationale à une culture où l'on refuse carrément de l'accepter. D'ailleurs, le fait que le féminisme soit reconnu comme idéologie occidentale pose un problème politique sur un continent jadis colonise par l'Occident. Cependant, il est bien possible que ce soit le terme lui-même qui est problématique, surtout dans le contexte francophone où le « néo-féminisme » parait avoir subsumé toute autre interprétation. Pour répondre a cette question Alice Walker a invente le terme « womanism, » soit une adaptation du féminisme a la situation de la femme noire. Ce choix d'un nouveau mot renforce notre hypothèse que ce soit l'étiquette et non pas le concept qui est prob1ématique. « Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender, » écrit Walker, suggérant que les deux termes ne s'excluent pas; plutôt que le womanisme est une version du féminisme plus intense et plus précise. (Hitchcott, 1986, 38-39)

For Hitchcott, Walker advocates a typical form of feminism called womanism. This type of feminism is closer to the writer's representation of women's status in the American and the African context is used in *The Colour Purple*, by Walker in order to share with us the pain and the suffering of African women, their life and desire to fight for better conditions of living. Using the technique of pidginization, Walker makes her female characters speak like the African women. Commenting on the role played by pidginization, Joseph E. Holloway argues: "Pidginization as a first step toward creolization occurs throughout the African's history in America. Morphological, phonological and grammatical principles underlying popular English have constantly played havoc with the African past." (Holloway, 1990, 22) It is therefore relevant to notice that pidginization in ~~e~~ Walker's fiction *is* a mode of expression of her pride to be both African and American. By subverting the morphological, phonological and grammatical principles of Standard English, Walker exalts the beauty of African culture. For Chantal Gagnon, ~~the~~ womanism is not only a concept or a feminist ideology. It is a claim for the recognition of African women's unique place in the vast Anglo-Saxon feminist movement:

> Depuis quelques décennies, les femmes afro-américaines prennent leur place dans la société, une place qui leur a longtemps été niée. La parole womanist est l'une des formes de cette prise de pouvoir. Par exemple, des auteures comme Alice Walker et Toni Morrison créent des personnages féminins afro-américains qui survivent aux difficultés du quotidien grâce à leur grande force de caractère. Le terme womanism a été employé et défini pour la première fois par Alice Walker dans son livre *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*. En voici la définition: (Walker 1983 : 2) From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish" i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of colour. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish" i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. (GAGNON, 2011)

From Gagnon's viewpoint, the term womanism is a type of feminist ideology which promotes African American women's power contest. It is inspired from African folk expression of mothers to female children and usually refers to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we can say that finally, Alice Walker is not only concerned by the improvement of African American women, but also by that the one of all Africans. *The Color Purple* gives an insight into her conception of feminism. Her characters are mainly womanists. Though towards the end of the novel Celie and Sofia seem to be prone to use violence in order to fight for women's freedom, Walker does not advocate a world where women will be totally separated from men. Womanist characters reject men's patriarchal conception of motherhood and sexuality. Discussing Walker's gradual change of vantage point in her writing, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K. A Appiah argue: "Alice Walker's haunting doubts about her position as a black person in the seventies have resulted in a number of poems which are more radical and provoking than the earlier civil right poems (…). Sometimes it seems as if she wanted to compensate the lack of personal radicalism by writing about it." (1993, 188) In fact, the African mother's bold message to her females children, conveyed through Walker's work can be summed up by Nettie's words: "The world is changing, I said. It's no longer a world just for boys and men." (161)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Campagne mondiale pour l'éducation, *La grande lecture*, Online, 20-26 Avril 2009.

Chesler, Ellen, *Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control* Movement in *America*, USA: Simon and Shuster, 1992

Diarassouba, Souleymane, *Altérité et spiritualité dans KMT d'Ayi Kwei Armah,* Abidjan: *RILE n°6,* 2013.

Fillard, Claudette et Colette COLLOM-BOUREAU, *Les mouvements féministes américains*, Paris : Ed Ellipses, 2003.

Frazier, Thomas R . *The private Side of American History Reading in Everyday Life*, USA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Gagnon, Chantal, «La traduction Des Textes Womanist: Le Cas De La Couleur Pourpre D'Alice Walker », *numéro spécial Journées de linguistique*, 2011.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and K. A. APPIAH, *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: ALS, 1993.

Hitchcott, Nicki. *La problematique du feminisme dans la litterature francophone des femmes africaines*. LittéRéalité**.** UK: Pernin, 1986.

Holloway, E. Joseph. *Africanisms in American Culture*.USA: Indiana UP, 1990.

Klohinlwhele, Koné, *Des contradictions et leurs résolutions: Une lecture marxiste de la crise africaine dans la fiction Romanesque d'A.K.Armah,* Abidjan: Ed RILE, 2013.

Walker, Alice, *The color Purple*, HBJ: NY, 1982