

NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE AND LIBERATION: ALICE WALKER'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE LITERATURE AND DISCOURSE

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 21-05-2025 Revised: 14-06-2025 Accepted: 29-07-2025 Published: 30-08-2025 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 DOI: https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.458	This paper examines Alice Walker's literary contributions and activism through intersectional analysis in the novel <i>The Color Purple</i> . As a black female writer born and raised in a racist and patriarchal society, Walker uses her works to explore the oppression based on race, gender, and social class experienced by African-American women. Through the theoretical lens of black feminism and womanism, this paper examines how <i>The Color Purple</i> portrays the transformation of the main character, Celie, from a state of oppression to self-empowerment through female solidarity and economic empowerment. Home and business ownership in the novel become important symbols that mark Celie's social, spiritual, and economic transformation. By presenting the voices of black women who have been marginalized, Walker not only writes literary works but also engages in social criticism and fosters a discourse of intersectional justice. This work demonstrates that literature can serve as a tool of liberation and resistance, as well as a space for articulating the collective experiences of oppressed women. Through this analysis, this paper highlights Alice Walker's significant role in the realm of literature and contemporary feminist thought.
KEYWORDS	
<i>The Color Purple</i> ; black women; racism; sexism; womanism; Alice Walker	

1. INTRODUCTION

The theory of black feminism plays a crucial role in the analysis of literary works produced by African-American writers, as it can reveal the intricate interplay between race, gender, and class experienced by black women in depth (Labibah & Wajiran, 2024; Wajiran, 2024; Wajiran & Apriyani, 2025). Unlike mainstream feminism, which often focuses on the experiences of white women, Black feminism pays special attention to the experiences of African American women who occupy multiple or even multiple subordinate positions (Davis, 1998; Sheehy & Nayak, 2020; Showunmi, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant in reading Alice Walker's works, especially *The Color Purple*, which features female characters who experience not only domestic violence and patriarchy but also racial discrimination and economic injustice. Through the lens of black feminism, themes such as gender violence, social marginalization, solidarity among women, and the struggle for independence and personal agency in Walker's works can be understood more fully and in context. This theory also helps to appreciate how Walker represents the complexity of black women's identities with distinctive spiritual, cultural, and historical nuances.

Alice Walker is one of the central figures in American literature whose works have significantly impacted the development of feminism, social justice, and intersectional criticism (Berni, 2022;



Medine & Watts, 2024). As a black woman who grew up in the segregated American South, Walker brings the personal and collective experiences of African American women into a literary space that white and patriarchal perspectives have dominated. Her works, whether novels, poetry, or essays, not only enrich American literature but also serve as a medium of resistance to complex systems of oppression (Farhat & Mustafa, 2024).

One of Alice Walker's most monumental works is the novel *The Color Purple* (1982), which won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The novel tells the life journey of Celie, a black woman who experiences violence, injustice, and silencing in a highly racist and patriarchal society. The narrative, told in an epistolary form, is not just a personal story but a structural representation of the oppression faced by Black women at that time. Through using vernacular language and exploring themes of spirituality, sexuality, and female solidarity, Walker presents a powerful and authentic narrative of liberation (Wajiran & Widiyanti, 2024).

From the perspective of black feminism and womanism, *The Color Purple* is a significant text that illustrates how racism, sexism, and class inequality intersect to oppress black women. Walker not only highlights the external domination exercised by white social structures but also criticizes the reproduction of patriarchy within the black community itself. Characters like Mister and Alphonso illustrate how gender domination persists even within marginalized groups. However, Walker also shows the possibility of transformation through solidarity relationships between women that generate awareness, independence, and collective power (Jubair, n.d.; Sangeeth, 2024).

One of the important dimensions Walker raises is the issue of ownership and economics as instruments of liberation. When Celie obtained the right to a house and opened a sewing business, she was financially independent and able to control her life socially and emotionally (Kernohan, 1988; Panjaitan, 2013; Venkatesan & Selvi, 2024). In this context, Walker emphasizes that access to ownership is not only an economic issue but also closely related to the rights to dignity, agency, and voice. This theme aligns with contemporary feminist economic thought, which emphasizes the importance of assets and productive work for women's empowerment.

Based on the description above, this research aims to examine Alice Walker's contribution to the world of literature by analyzing *The Color Purple* through the theoretical lens of black feminism and womanism. This research is essential in demonstrating how literary works can serve as a space for articulating resistance and transformation for marginalized groups, particularly Black women. By examining the novel's social, economic, and cultural dimensions, this research is expected to contribute to a critical understanding of the relationship between literature, identity, and intersectional justice.

Several researchers have published on Black Feminism theory and African American works, including Azizah (2024), who emphasized the importance of intersectional feminism in analyzing poetry by African American women from various eras. The paper highlights how poets express the intertwined experiences of racism, sexism, and class oppression. This approach aligns with Black Feminism, as it reveals the layered struggles women of color face, similar to those depicted in Alice Walker's works. This study shows that poetry reflects such complexities and a form of resistance, highlighting the continuing legacy of oppression (Azizah, 2024).

Besides Azizah, Mindi's (2015) work, which discusses *The Color Purple*, highlights the interrelated oppression of race, gender, and class faced by Black women. This perspective reveals the complexity of their experiences with domestic violence, patriarchy, racial discrimination, and economic injustice. Through black feminism, themes of gender violence, social marginalization,



and the struggle for self-reliance and agency become more evident, featuring Walker's representation of black female identity enriched by spiritual, cultural, and historical contexts (Mindi, 2015).

Kohzadi and Aiz (2011), in their publication titled "An Overview of African-American Feminism," emphasize that black feminist theory provides a historical and cultural analysis that integrates various forms of oppression, making it essential to understanding the experiences of African-American women. This approach reveals their intersectional challenges, such as racism and sexism, which are crucial for analyzing literary works like Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Through this perspective, the themes of gender violence, social marginalization, and the struggle for independence in Walker's narrative can be understood in their true complexity (Kohzadi & Azizmohammadi, 2011).

Patterson (2009) also emphasizes that black feminism plays a crucial role in analyzing African-American literature by exposing the intersectional oppression based on race, gender, and class that black women face. In contrast to mainstream feminism, black feminism emphasizes the unique experiences of African-American women who are subject to multiple forms of subordination. In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, black feminist theory elaborates on themes of gender violence, social marginalization, and the quest for independence while highlighting the complexity of black female identity through spiritual, cultural, and historical lenses (Patterson, 2009).

Another paper published by Charlery (2007) titled "Le patriarcat ou le féminisme noir", highlights that black feminist thought, which emerged since the late 1970s, emphasizes the intersections between race, class, and gender oppression in the lives of black women. This perspective is an alternative to black patriarchal discourse, making it particularly relevant for analyzing literary works such as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Through this lens, the themes of gender violence, social marginalization, and the struggle for independence in Walker's narrative can be understood in the context of the multiple oppressions faced by African-American women (Charlery, 2007).

The novelty of this paper lies in its intersectional analytical approach, which integrates the theories of black feminism and womanism to discuss the economic, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, with a special focus on the issue of ownership as a form of black women's empowerment. Unlike previous studies that generally only highlight aspects of feminism or gender violence partially, this study places economic ownership as a central element in the social and psychological transformation of the main character, as well as an instrument of resistance to racist and patriarchal systems. Thus, this research expands the horizons of feminist literary studies by presenting a political-economic perspective rarely touched upon in an in-depth reading of Walker's work.

2. METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a literary text analysis approach. This method was chosen because it is suitable for revealing the meaning, values, and ideological structures of literary works, especially in examining the representation of identity, power, and



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injustice in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. This approach allows researchers to understand and interpret the text in depth within the social, cultural, and political context that surrounds it.

In this research, the theories used as the basis for analysis are the theories of black feminism and womanism. Black feminism theory, as developed by Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, focuses on the intersectionality between race, gender, and social class as interrelated factors of oppression. Meanwhile, womanism, introduced by Alice Walker herself, emphasizes the importance of black women's solidarity, spirituality, and collective liberation as part of women's narratives and struggles. These two theories complement each other in uncovering the structures of oppression and forms of resistance in the text.

The type of data in this research is qualitative, consisting of both primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained from the novel *The Color Purple*, which serves as the main object of study. Meanwhile, secondary data includes scientific journals, feminist theory books, Alice Walker's writings, and other relevant references that support the analysis and interpretation of primary data. Secondary data is also used to strengthen the theoretical argumentation and contextualization of literary texts in the social and cultural framework.

The data analysis process was conducted through critical reading and the interpretation of thematic text. The researcher identified and categorized key themes, including racism, sexism, class inequality, and economic ownership, and examined how these themes were integrated into character development, conflict, and narrative structure. The analysis was conducted systematically by relating the text's findings to the theoretical frameworks of black feminism and womanism. Each analyzed passage is understood not only as an aesthetic element but also as an ideological representation that reflects certain social conditions.

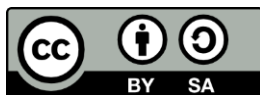
To maintain the validity of the research, theoretical and data triangulation was used, namely by comparing the results of the text analysis with the views of experts and relevant previous studies. Additionally, the researcher ensured that the interpretation was consistent with the theoretical principles used. This method aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Alice Walker's contributions to fighting for intersectional justice through her literary works, making the novel *The Color Purple* a relevant object of study in literary studies and contemporary feminism.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Alice Walker's contribution to literature

Alice Walker is an important figure in American literature whose works include fiction, poetry, and critical essays. Themes of race, gender, and social justice mark her writings. Born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, Walker grew up in the racially segregated rural South, where she experienced firsthand the intersection of poverty and systemic racism. These early experiences shaped her literary voice and inspired her lifelong commitment to exploring the complexities of African-American identity and motherhood. After attending Spelman College and graduating from Sarah Lawrence College in 1965, Walker began her career as a writer, educator, and activist at the height of the civil rights movement (Bates, 2005).

Walker's leading novel is *The Color Purple* (1982). The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award, making her the first African-American woman to receive these prestigious awards. The novel chronicles the life of Celie, an African-American woman in the early 20th century who experiences violence, oppression, and marginalization but eventually finds her voice and independence. The novel's epistolary narrative form and strong use of African-



American vernacular offer a mesmerizing portrait of resilience and spiritual growth. *The Color Purple* has since become an important text in African-American literature, widely taught, and adapted into a critically acclaimed film and Broadway musical.

Besides *The Color Purple*, Walker's other major works of fiction include *Meridian* (1976), a novel centering on a young woman involved in the civil rights movement, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), which raises the issue of female genital mutilation. The short story collection *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973) explores African-American women's emotional and psychological lives, while *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) traces the generational trauma caused by racism and patriarchy (Bates, 2005). These works collectively highlight Walker's concern for personal and political liberation, especially for black women in historical and contemporary contexts.

Walker's academic contributions have also been significant. Her collection of essays, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose" (1983), introduced the concept of "Womanism," a term she coined to describe black feminists or feminists of color who value culture, community, and unity.

In contrast to mainstream feminism, which often focuses on the experiences of white women, womanism highlights the specific struggles of black women and emphasizes their agency, creativity, and resilience. This theoretical framework has had a lasting impact on feminist theory and African-American literary criticism, placing Walker as a key figure in the development of intersectional discourse (Leslie, 2014).

She actively participated in the civil rights movement and supported various causes, including anti-apartheid activism, environmental justice, and women's rights worldwide. Her activism is reflected not only in her writing but also in her public engagement and humanitarian work. Walker has consistently used her platform to criticize systems of oppression and fight for the rights of marginalized groups, especially those whose voices have long been silenced. The integration of art and activism in Walker's work demonstrates her conviction that literature serves as a powerful tool for social change. Her work challenges dominant narratives and expands the boundaries of the traditional literary canon. By placing the black female experience at the center and exploring themes of trauma, resilience, and spiritual awakening, Walker has created work that is both aesthetically rich and socially relevant. Her narrative strategies and thematic concerns continue to inspire scholars, writers, and activists.

Alice Walker's contributions to literature and social justice are profound and enduring. Her ability to weave together personal, political, and cultural narratives into a compelling literary form has established her as one of the most influential writers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Through her novels, essays, and activism, Walker has transformed the American literary landscape and fostered critical conversations about race, gender, and human rights on a global scale.

The Color Purple

The Color Purple is a prominent novel by Alice Walker, first published in 1982. Set in the rural American South in the early 20th century, the novel chronicles the life of Celie, an African-American woman who experiences persecution, marginalization, and silencing throughout her life in a highly patriarchal and racist society. The story is told through a series of letters, first to God



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and then to her sister, Nettie, intimately revealing Celie's inner struggle and slow journey towards self-empowerment. The story is also enriched by a network of female relationships that foster solidarity and resistance, making the novel not only a personal account of trauma and recovery but also a broader commentary on the lives of black women under systemic oppression. Alice Walker wrote *The Color Purple*, intending to give voice to the experiences of black women who are often ignored and silenced. She sought to address the intersection of race, gender, and class by illustrating how these structures operate within both white-dominated and black communities. Walker is particularly interested in showing how patriarchal norms can emerge within marginalized communities themselves, often resulting in the double oppression of women. The novel also reflects her womanist philosophy, which emphasizes spiritual unity, community healing, and the importance of female bonding. By placing Celie's voice and experiences at the story's center, Walker aims to reclaim narrative space for black women marginalized from dominant literary and social discourses.

From a feminist theoretical perspective, *The Color Purple* can be read as a sharp critique of patriarchy, especially its impact on black women. Feminist theory, particularly black feminism and womanism, helps illuminate how Celie's life is shaped by racial and gender oppression. Celie's journey represents the transformation from powerlessness to self-discovery, a central concern in feminist discourse on subjectivity and empowerment. The oppressive male figures in the novel, such as Mister and Alphonso, are not merely individual antagonists but symbols of the broader patriarchal system. However, the novel does not demonize men entirely; instead, it shows that even those who are violent are products of the same structures of oppression, implying that liberation must be collective. One of the novel's key feminist messages lies in the healing power of female relationships. Characters like Shug, Avery, and Sofia play crucial roles in helping Celie redefine her sense of identity and reclaim her power. Shug, in particular, introduces Celie to spiritual and sexual autonomy, encouraging her to challenge dominant concepts of God, love, and obedience. This relationship illustrates the feminist principle of solidarity, in which women support each other's growth and reject the roles imposed by patriarchal society. The communal strength among women in the novel contrasts sharply with the isolation and suffering caused by patriarchal domination, emphasizing the importance of emotional and social connections in feminist practice.

The Color Purple is an intensely personal narrative and a broad social critique. Through the lens of feminist theory, particularly womanist thought, the novel exposes the multidimensional oppression faced by black women while offering a vision of liberation through self-discovery, community, and love. Alice Walker's intention is not just to expose injustice but also to imagine a world where healing and transformation are possible. Her work became a milestone in feminist literature, challenging readers to face uncomfortable truths while inspiring hope and resilience.

3.2. Racism, sexism, and social class

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* explores the intersecting oppressions of racism, sexism, and social class through the lived experiences of its protagonist, Celie, and other black women. From a black feminist perspective, the novel reveals how these systems of oppression function simultaneously to marginalize African-American women. Black feminist theorists such as Bell



Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins emphasize the importance of analyzing oppression as an interrelated matrix rather than in isolation. In *The Color Purple*, this intersectionality is depicted through Celie's social position as a poor and uneducated black woman who is repeatedly silenced and abused by the patriarchal forces of both white and black people.

Racism in the novel is not always the most visible form of oppression, but it is always present in the social structures that surround the characters. The African-American community is depicted as an economically and politically marginalized group, with white supremacy maintaining its power through systemic poverty and restricted access to education and land ownership. For example, Celie and her community are subject to laws and customs that limit their mobility and autonomy. Nettie's letters from Africa further expose parallel colonial racial hierarchies abroad, creating a transnational context for understanding racism. Walker subtly critiques overt racial violence and more subtle forms of racial neglect, emphasizing how black people, especially women, are undervalued in a white-dominated society.

Sexism is one of the most dominating themes in the novel, especially in the personal sphere. Celie's life is characterized by constant sexual and physical violence from male figures such as her stepfather Alphonso and her husband, Mister. These experiences highlight the patriarchal assumption that women, especially black women, are subordinate and exist for men's pleasure and labor. From a black feminist perspective, the novel illustrates how patriarchy is reproduced within the black community itself as a response to external racial oppression. Men like Mister, powerless in a white-dominated world, claim control over women as a way to reclaim lost authority. The novel critiques this cycle, revealing how internalized patriarchy fractures communal solidarity and maintains trauma among black women.

Class is another central axis of oppression in the novel. Celie's economic dependence on men reflects the socioeconomic disempowerment of black women in the early 20th century. Her educational and property inadequacies make her vulnerable to exploitation. However, as the novel progresses, Walker reimagines the roles of work and independence as sources of empowerment. The development of Celie's clothing business symbolizes her transition from economic oppression to self-reliance. From a black feminist perspective, this path is significant because it demonstrates that resistance and liberation often emerge through the everyday acts of self-creation and labor. Economic empowerment becomes a means to challenge racial and gender hierarchies.

In conclusion, *The Color Purple* presents a compelling narrative that embodies the core tenets of Black feminist thought. By highlighting the intersectional experiences of African-American women, the novel criticizes the systemic forces of racism, sexism, and classism. Alice Walker illuminates the suffering inflicted by these oppressions and celebrates the possibility of healing, sisterhood, and transformation. Through characters who reclaim their voice and power, Walker presents a vision of resistance rooted in individual resilience and collective solidarity. Her work remains a cornerstone in black feminist literary criticism and continues to inspire a deeper understanding of intersectional justice.

3.3. Importance of Ownership and Economic Status

In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker powerfully illustrates the importance of ownership in the face of economic injustice and racial oppression. From a black feminist perspective, ownership in this novel serves as both a symbol and a practical tool of empowerment for African American women, especially the protagonist, Celie. Initially, Celie is economically and socially marginalized; she



owns no property, earns no money, and does not even control her own body. Her economic dependence on abusive male figures such as stepfather Alphonso and husband Mister reflects the broader historical reality of how black women are systematically denied access to ownership and autonomy due to the intersecting forces of racism, sexism, and poverty. The turning point in Celie's journey occurs when she inherits her family's house and store and later establishes her clothing business.

This acquisition of property and economic independence marked a radical shift in her social and personal position. Walker uses this transformation to critique how, historically, black people, especially black women, have been trapped in a cycle of labor and slavery without the ability to accumulate wealth or control resources. Celie's ownership of property and business allows her to escape dependence on patriarchal figures and assert her identity on her terms. This narrative reflects the historical struggle of African Americans to acquire land and property in a system designed to prevent them from accumulating capital. Walker's description aligns with a broader understanding that ownership is crucial to overcoming the legacy of economic oppression rooted in race. In the novel, when Celie owns her own home and business, she is financially independent and emotionally and spiritually liberated. This highlights a central insight of black feminists and critical race theorists: economic justice cannot be achieved without addressing who owns and controls resources. Celie's shift from being a non-owner to a property owner marks her emergence as a subject with agency, not only in economics but also in terms of voice, choice, and dignity. Additionally, Walker portrays belonging as a communal and relational accomplishment. Celie's success was sustained by her relationships with other women, such as Shug Avery and Sofia, who supported and encouraged her development. Her business was not just for her advancement, but became a space of mutual creativity and support. This ownership model reflects feminist economics' emphasis on cooperative and care-centered economies, as opposed to capitalist and patriarchal models prioritizing individual wealth and domination. In Celie's hands, ownership becomes a means of healing, resistance, and community building.

The Color Purple shows that belonging is not just about material wealth; it is about reclaiming agency, resisting racial and gender exploitation, and transforming lives. Through Celie's journey, Alice Walker critiques the historical denial of economic power to black women and re-imagines belonging as a path to liberation and justice. The novel powerfully suggests that for historically oppressed communities, especially black women, the ability to own property, control labor, and generate income is key to destroying the structural roots of racism and patriarchy.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, it can be concluded that this work is a powerful and complex representation of the experiences of Black women in America in the face of intersectional oppression. Through the character of Celie, Walker illustrates how racism, sexism, and class inequality work together to form a repressive life structure for African American women. However, this narrative portrays suffering and the liberation process through solidarity between women, spirituality, and efforts to build identity and self-agency.

A key finding in this study is how economic ownership serves as a pivotal turning point in the protagonist's journey toward emancipation. The inheritance of Celie's house and the success of her sewing business symbolize financial freedom and serve as means of self-actualization and



liberation from patriarchal domination. In this context, Alice Walker's visionary position asserts that ownership is the key to liberation, reinforcing the view of black feminism and womanism that structural transformation must include access to economic resources. The novel critiques oppressive social structures and offers an alternative narrative about the possibility of a more just life for black women.

For future research, it is suggested that the interdisciplinary approach be further developed by linking black women's literary works with feminist economic studies, identity politics, and contemporary social policies. The research can also be expanded by comparing Alice Walker's works with those of other African American women writers, such as Toni Morrison or Zora Neale Hurston, to examine how different narrative and ideological strategies are employed in constructing a discourse of resistance and empowerment. Thus, this study strengthens the position of the literature not only as a social mirror but also as an instrument of change that is relevant today.

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