

**FEMALE CHARACTER'S OPPRESSION IN ALICE WALKER'S**

***THE COLOR PURPLE***



**A THESIS**

*Submitted to the Faculty of Cultural Sciences Hasanuddin University in a Partial Fulfilment of Requirements to Obtain a Sarjana Degree in English Literature Study Program*

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LEGITIMATION

THESIS

FEMALE CHARACTER'S OPPRESSION IN ALICE WALKER'S  
*THE COLOR PURPLE*

BY

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It has been examined before the Board of the Thesis Examination on  
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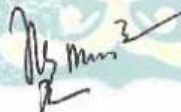
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### AGREEMENT

Today, Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024, the Board of Thesis Examination has kindly approved a thesis by ST. MUSLIHAH AMIR (F041171509) entitled, **FEMALE CHARACTER'S OPPRESSION IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*** submitted in fulfillment of one of the requirements of undergraduate thesis examination to obtain Sarjana Sastra (S.S.) Degree at the English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University.

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The thesis by **ST. MUSLIHAH AMIR (F041171509)** entitled, **FEMALE CHARACTER'S OPPRESSION IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*** has been revised as advised during the examination on Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024 and is approved by the Board of Undergraduate Thesis Examiners:

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Makassar, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024



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Makassar, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024

St. Muslihah Amir



## ABSTRACT

**ST. MUSLIHAH AMIR.** “*Female Character’s Oppression in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple*” supervised by **Herawaty Abbas** and **Abbas**.

This thesis aims to identify the existence of oppression in one of the characters in the novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. The aims of this research are as follows: 1) to describe the suffering of African-American women through the character Celie, and 2) to analyze feminist issues among African-American women in the American environment. In analyzing the novel *The Color Purple*. The object and data source in this research is the novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker.

The results of this research show how women actively resist physical violence. The actions of certain female characters who are finally free from their problems become an explanation for the resistance they put up.

In the novel *The Color Purple*, Celie, the main character experiences oppression. She experiences physical and nonverbal abuse from some of the male characters closest to her in the novel. Furthermore, because of the oppression she faced, Celie, who lived during the Great Depression era in a patriarchal environment, encouraged her to remain silent until she finally had the courage to fight back and defend herself with the help of other female characters in the novel.

**Keywords:** The Color Purple, Oppression, Female, Suffering



## ABSTRAK

**ST. MUSLIHAH AMIR.** “*Female Character’s Oppression in Alice Waker’s The Color Purple*”  
dibimbing oleh **Herawaty Abbas** dan **Abbas**.

Skripsi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi adanya opresi pada salah satu karakter dalam novel *The Color Purple* karya Alice Walker. Adapun tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah sebagai berikut: 1) untuk menggambarkan penderitaan perempuan Afrika-Amerika melalui karakter Celie, dan 2) untuk menganalisis isu feminist pada perempuan Afrika-Amerika di lingkungan Amerika. Dalam menganalisis novel *The Color Purple*. Objek dan sumber data dalam penelitian ini adalah novel *The Color Purple* karya Alice Walker.

Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana sosok perempuan menolak secara aktif dan kekerasan secara fisik. Tindakan tokoh-tokoh perempuan tertentu yang akhirnya terbebas dari masalah menjadi penjelasan atas perlawanan yang mereka lakukan.

Dalam novel *The Color Purple*, Celie, tokoh utama mengalami penindasan. Dia mengalami pelecehan fisik dan nonverbal dari beberapa karakter pria yang paling dekat dengannya di dalam novel. Selain itu, karena penindasan yang dia hadapi, Celie yang hidup selama era *Great Depression* di lingkungan patriarki, mendorongnya untuk tetap diam hingga akhirnya berani melawan dan membela diri dengan bantuan karakter wanita lain dalam novel.

**Kata kunci:** The Color Purple, Opresi, Penderitaan Perempuan



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter dealt with background of the study, identification of problem, scope of discussion, research question, objective of the study, significance of the study, sequence of the study.

### 1.1 Background of The Study

Everyone has the right to live in peace, free from the pressures of family and society. However, it is frequently seen that women are undervalued, with the belief that they do not have the right to live accordance to their choice. Gamble (2006: VII) stated, feminism is the notion that women are treated unfairly in society, where society primarily cares about men's thoughts and opinions. In other terms, feminism is a social opposition movement to the patriarchal system. Furthermore, women should have the right to express their opinions and to pursue equality. Based on History.com, a key figure of the feminist movement is Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she was an abolitionist, human rights activist and one of the first leaders of the women's rights movement. She came from a privileged background, but decided early in life to fight for equal rights for women.

In the era of the Great Depression (1929-1939) the worst impact was experienced by African-American women. Black people in general experienced discrimination and segregation in America during the era of the economic crisis. According to Ward (2018:9), during the 1929 economic crisis, African Americans were severely oppressed. Prior to that incident, they had faced discrimination in



northern cities due to their growing numbers. Environmental segregation and racial unrest became commonplace. However, African American women feel the double oppression by society (white) and also from their own race. In addition to racial discrimination that occurs in black groups in society, black women also experience sexual and physical harassment from both white men and black men. As White mentioned in Bent-Godley (2004: 309), a great number of African- American women are afraid to report the abuses that they experienced, in fear of discrimination in justice system. The harassment they experienced actually made them even more depressed and did not dare to fight because they thought that they would not be able to fight black man and also white man.

The novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker is one of the literary masterpieces that explores feminism. Alice Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia on February 9, 1944. She is a novelist, short story writer, and poet best recognized for his nuanced representation of African-American culture in her novels, short stories, and poems. Walker is the seventh child of an African- American sharecropper. She was married to activist Mel Leventhal from 1967 to 1976; the couple had one daughter, Rebecca Walker (also a prominent activist and writer). They pay particular attention to the challenges of African Americans, especially women, and they stand up against oppressive and violent societies. Her books also emphasize the significance of black women throughout history and culture such as *Love and Trouble*, *The Third Live of Grange Copeland*, *The Secret Joy*, and *The Color Purple*, which consistently speak to the suffering of oppressed black women. She is well-known in the liberal political



anding up for



unconventional and controversial opinions out of moral obligation. Based on Royal Holloway Students' Union, Walker was a bold leader in the fight for racial equality, "She's written on topics such as abortion, depression, beauty standards, domestic abuse, and patriarchy, and has spoken out about her lesbian relationship with Tracy Chapman". She took part in the 1963 march on Washington which advocated for the civil and economic rights of African Americans and volunteered to register Black voters in Georgia and Mississippi with the aim of decolonizing the supposedly democratic systems in place

Walker's best-known work is the novel *The Color Purple*, was published in 1982. The portrayal of a young black lady navigating both patriarchal black culture and racist white culture was a financial success, and readers of all ages, genders, and races connected with the plot and characters because of how immediately relatable they were.

African American men are frequently the subject of criticism in Walker's writing, particularly in relation to *The Color Purple*. The portrayal of male characters in *The Color Purple* drew significant criticism when it was first released. The primary issue raised by much of the criticism was that it seemed to paint the male characters as either buffoons or cruel and abusive (Albert/Mr. and Harpo). This criticism grew after the movie's debut since the narrative left out a sizable chunk of Albert and Celie's eventual resolution and reconciliation.

The story centers on Celie, a black adolescent who is mistreated by her stepfather whom she refers to as Pa, and her husband, Mr. \_\_ (unnamed), a widower with children. Celie was subjected to such cruel violence that she



was sexually harassed by her own stepfather. Every ailment she endured was documented in a notebook that she addressed to God. When she was 14, she wrote her first notebook, in which she honestly detailed being raped by Pa. Pa slept with Celie frequently until she became pregnant twice and vowed to tell no one about her experience.

Celie is the eldest of two children, and when her mother died, she was forced to mature. It turns out that terrible luck almost occurred to her sister, Nettie, who was the focus of her stepfather's violence at the time and was the reason Pa introduced Celie to Mr. \_ and married them right away. Mr. \_, on the other hand, wants to marry Nettie, but Pa keeps attempting to persuade him to marry Celie since she is an obedient kid who will not avoid anything she is commanded to do. In contrast to Nettie, he is a rough and rebellious young man.

Mr. \_, Celie's spouse, likewise abuses her inhumanely; he is treated like a maid and is responsible for Mr. \_'s child. Until Celie meets a lady who was before had a relationship with Mr. \_, the novel's minor character is Shug Avery. Celie, on the other hand, has feelings for Shug Avery, and she finally falls in love with her, forcing her to rise above the persecution she is subjected to.

Furthermore, the writer motivated to choose this novel as the subject of her research because the author describes the pain of black women, particularly the main character, Celie who lived in America, and amazed by Celie's struggle to rise from her oppression as well as her battle and journey against patriarchal society. Alice Walker as the author of this novel also speaks out for persecuted women and created

the role of black women in America and their living



condition. Meanwhile, for this research the writer using the structuralism approach and the subaltern theory of Spivak on her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). According to Spivak, subaltern or inferior rank refers to the lowest social status held by minorities. This idea is consistent with Celie's experiences, which are depicted in the novel as facing discrimination because she is minorities and women.

This novel also discusses education, feminism, women's position, women's roles in society, women's rights, and the history of oppression and discrimination against black women in America. As a result of the preceding description, this thesis is titled Post-colonial Feminist Analysis "Female Character's Oppression in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis".

## **1.2 Identification of Problem**

After reading the novel *The Color Purple* written by Alice Walker, the author realizes that in analyzing literary works it is necessary to formulate a problem to make it easier for the author to research. The formulation of the problems that have been found are:

1. Inequality of men and women in general.
2. Double oppression of black women in American society.
3. Sexual harassment in the novel.

## **1.3 Scope of Discussion**

To focus on this research, the writer needs to limit the research, which only focuses on describing the suffering of African-American women, especially the



main character contained in the novel *The Color Purple* using a post-colonial feminism approach.

#### **1.4 Research Question**

As mentioned above, the writer focuses on the suffering of African- American women especially for the main characters contained in the novel and determines the questions for this research as follows.

1. How does Alice Walker present the oppression of African American women through Celie's character in the novel?
2. In what particular point does Celie's resistance against oppression in the novel?

#### **1.5 Objective of the Study**

Based on the problems in this study, the writer formulates the research objectives as follows.

1. To describe the oppression of African-American women presented through Celie's character in the novel
2. To explain particular point of feminist's issues on African American women in American society.

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

1. Theoretical Benefit

The writer hopes this thesis can be useful as references, additional, and contribution, also as suggestion to larger the knowledge in the topics such as feminism, injustice, and to the novel *The Color Purple*, itself.



actical Benefit

The findings of this study should be helpful information for readers, enabling them to appreciate one another and avoid prejudice based on race and skin color, to enhance the understanding and education on racism, oppression, and the injustice that African American community experiences, and also as suggestion to larger the knowledge in the topics such as feminism, and to the novel *The Color Purple* itself.

### **1.7 Sequence of the Study**

This research contain five chapters, as listed below:

1. Chapter One includes of Introduction, Identification of Problem, Scope of Problems, Statement of Problems, Objective of Problems, Significance of the Study, and Sequence Writing.
2. Chapter Two consists of Previous Study, Theoretical Background, and Feminist Theory
3. Chapter Three covers Methodological Design, Method of Collecting Data, Method of Analyzing Data, Procedure of Collecting Data
4. Chapter Four includes the analysis of the novel and the results.
5. Chapter Five is the conclusion and suggestion from the writer.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consist of previous studies, structuralism approach, theoretical background of post-colonialism feminist, postcolonialism, subaltern, and double repression.

#### 2.1 Previous Study

To increase the qualities of this study, the writer uses previous studies that are relates as references to support this research. There are several thesis that had been done before the writer decided to do this research.

The first researcher is Muhammad Wizari Yusuf (2016) entitled “Catherine’s Struggle to Be Free From Oppression In Ernest Hemingy’s in the novel *A Farewell To Farewell To Arms*”. In this study the researcher analyzed the injustice and struggle endured by the main character’s novel, especially a woman's character. The feminist point of view is the view of this study. In conjunction with the issues the researcher uses the philosophy of feminism as the theory to examine this book, the researcher aims to discuss the concept of feminism in this study based on inequality. The researcher uses literary criticism of feminism to address the above statement of problems especially focusing on inequality and struggle against women. In addition, in evaluating the results, the researcher uses a qualitative approach. This thesis conducts the literature discussion, including explanation, examination and





The second researcher is Eka Serli Sudani (2017) entitled “The Struggle of Women in Angela Morrison's novel *Sing Me to Sleep* By Angela” with the goal of determining the types of women's struggles and struggles to obtain love in the novel *Sing Me to Sleep*. This study focused on Virginia Woolf theory and used a qualitative descriptive method. Note taking was used as a research tool by the author. Women's struggles can be divided into three categories, according to the author. The first is the struggle to accept life's facts, the second is the struggle to realize a dream, and the third is the struggle for affection, and the last struggle to win her love. The goal of this study is to provide more information, description, and understanding about women's struggles. As a result of this study, it can be concluded that the novel *Sing Me to Sleep* (2013) depicted ten different types of women's struggles for love, such as Beth's struggle to keep Derek alive while trying not to think negatively about his feelings.

The third researcher is Eka Dasmawati (2018), who are research is entitled “Analysis of Feminism in the Novel of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott”. The goal of the women's movement is to achieve equality of rights with men in many areas, including politics, social issues, economics, and culture. Regardless of whether men or women play a role, everyone should be treated equally unless special circumstances exist. The problem addressed in this study is feminism, specifically types of feminism within the female characters in the novel and how feminism is reflected in the character is ongoing development. The study's goals are to explore different types of feminism and how they are reflected in novel *little women*. The

study came from the novel *Little Women* and was



collected using a qualitative descriptive method. The study concluded that there are four types of feminism, as depicted in the novel *Little Women*. Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Existentialist feminism, and Radical feminism were all reflected in the novel's characters. Feminism, on the other hand, is reflected in the characters' struggle for survival, in their placement of their lives in the world of men (patriarchy), in their comfort with themselves to do what they feel comfortable for her, and in their protest form to no longer be the object of men's violence.

The advantage of this research is that the writer tries to reveal the novel from a feminist perspective based on postcolonial feminism theory using Gayatri C Spivak's subaltern theory. In some of the research results above, there are similarities in the problems in the writer's research, namely discussing novels about the problem of feminism, qualitative research and literature. Therefore, another similarity is the same topic, namely discussing the main character who is the object of this research.

## **2.2 Structuralism Approach**

Genetic structuralism is a literary research method that is popularly used in analyzing literary works, including novels, short stories and poetry. Faruk (2012, 159-163) argues that genetic structuralism provides a means of understanding both the structure and the meaning of literary works. Genetic structuralism can be identified as a non-pure method and is a method of opposition to pure methods which only emphasize literary research on intrinsic values.



The structuralism approach is an internal method that focuses on the components that literary works are constructed of. The aim of structuralism approach is to explain how each literary work's constituent parts interact and serve as a structural whole that results in a coherent meaning (Teeuw 1984:135).

Thus, it can be said that the structuralism approach is a method used in the science of literature that builds literary works from the inside out by examining the structural aspects and then determining how relevant these parts are to achieving a conclusion. The structure of a literary work should be examined closely since it may be understood as the way that elements and materials are combined to create exciting new shapes. These components serve as the primary focus of the literary work itself and can be used to recognize, evaluate, and explain the roles and connections between the novel's aspects. Characters, stories, locations, and themes are just a few of the intrinsic elements that constitute up the intrinsic approach.

### **2.2.1 Character**

Character is one of the most important part in a story. Characters can be identified by how they communicate with other characters, by their opinions on life, traditions, and how the author usually describes or explains the character's personality. According to Edgar V Roberts (2003:17) each character in a novel has unique characteristics, and the author has classified each character based on which category they are.

### **2.2.2 Plot**



Plot is the series that happenings in a story which aims to make readers understand the storyline to achieve an emotional effect on the reader. According to Abrams, plot is constituted by its events and actions, as these are rendered and ordered toward achieving particular artistic and emotional effects (1999:224). Plot is important for make a dramatically happenings in a story that have been arranged. According to Gustav Freytag (2004:113) there are five components that when combined, give the storyline completeness.

These part are:

- a. Exposition, the beginning of the story.
- b. Rising action, the process of learn characters and storylines
- c. Climax, story conflict
- d. Falling Action, the conflict starts to fade and eventually ends.
- e. Resolution/denouement, final part or the end of the story.

### **2.2.3 Setting**

In literary works, the setting is the environment that surrounds an event in the story or is the place where the event/case occurs. Background is related to elements that give an abstract impression of the environment in the form of place and timw. According to Nurgiyantoro (2013:216) says that setting is an understanding of the relationship between place, time and social environment for the events being told.

#### **a. Place**

The setting gives a concrete, clear and realistic impression of the storyline created by the author. In this way, readers will feel that it is easier to operate their



imagination. Through the setting, readers can feel and assess the reality, truth and actualization of the setting through the narrative so that it becomes more relatable.

#### **b. Time**

The issue of when the events in a work of fiction are told is called time setting. It has anything to do with historical events or actual time.

#### **2.2.4 Theme**

A theme is the primary issue that will be discussed as a topic of conversation in a novel or literary work. Authors choose the theme that will drive conflict in their works before beginning any kind of writing, be it poetry, fiction, or short stories.

In a story or literary work there is a central issue that will become the topic of discussion which is called a theme. Before writing a story, a novel, poetry or short story, the author first determines the theme that will be the central of conflict in their work. Based on (Nurgiyantoro, 2013: 32) theme is something that forms the basis of a story which is always related to various life experiences, such as love, compassion, longing, fear, death, religious, social, and so on.

#### **2.3. Double Repression**

The aim of this research is to find out how oppression operates. Double discrimination can be interpreted as an indicator of oppression. In this situation, however, the research will concentrate on how people are oppressed depending on their ethnicity and gender. As a result, one of Bhabha's social constructs is prejudice that leads to oppression of categorization. Discrimination has become a separate force against injustice that affects many aspects of life including race and



sexuality. Racial discrimination has been a problem in colonial and postcolonial studies. Then, discrimination is typically practiced against racial minorities, notably African Americans, by upper class white people. They are dominating oppression in African American society.

Oppression in both verbal and nonverbal forms. Verbal actions are typically performed by persons who believe themselves to be superiors; most of them perceive themselves to be upper class citizens with a desire to oppress the lower classes, in this case, people of various skin hues. However, the colonists' forms of discrimination, both verbal and nonverbal, were not limited to race, class, or belief. They have a history of discriminating against people based on their gender. It is inseparable from males, women, and other genders.

As a result, this study provided more light on sexism, which is a problem that is mostly based on gender. However, gender is more than just a biological construct; it is also a social construct that encourages men and women to engage in risky behavior based on their own experiences. Sexism has a negative impact on children and adults because it reduces their creativity as humans. It also occurs in order to transform them into something other than themselves. Sexism, on the other hand, may be used as a 'shield' for the dominant gender which is male.

