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**Gender Oppression and Women's Emancipation in Both Alice Walker's the
Color purple (1982) and Miral Al-Tahawy's Blue Aubergine (2002):**

A Comparative Study

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Dedications

To my lovely parents and brothers

To my supporting friends

To my helpful teachers

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Abstract

The present research paper is a comparative study of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Miral Al-Tahawy's *The Blue Aubergine* (2002) in terms of a literary representation of women in the light of patriarchy. In fact, the purpose of our thesis is to study the affinities between the two novels or between the female characters in relation to the themes of oppression and emancipation. To cover this study and ground the way to our thesis, we have selected two pivotal theories in the field of feminism, which are Feminist Theory: from margin to center (1984) and Feminism is for everybody (2000) of the Afro-American author and militant bell hooks. Relying on these two major works, which sustains the coming findings, I have tried to bring out the two authors' claims and reflections about women subordination and oppression in male dominated societies, and their demonstration of women's journey towards emancipation and empowerment. To narrow down and discuss the major ideas of the two novels, I have selected the most pertinent chapters from hooks theories, which mainly embody related aspects to patriarchy such as identity, religion, love, marriage and work. Furthermore, these related aspects or institutions seem to be both involved and influenced by the gender-role attribution and gender stereotypes. Thus, in this paper I have tried to incarnate hooks assumptions through the two novels and bring evidences from these case studies.

Keywords: Alice Walker, affinities, Bell hooks, emancipation, empowerment, feminism, gender-role, gender stereotypes, institutions, liberation, Miral Al-Tahawy, oppression.

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I. General Introduction:

Feminism and patriarchy are recurrent themes in the field of literature. They have intrigued many writers and inspired them to produce many fictional and non-fictional works about them. Indeed, several writers have addressed these themes both to denounce the patriarchal values and practices, and to preach feminist thoughts like gender equality and women emancipation. Further, those writers endeavor to portray and testify the discriminating practices towards women and the sexist values that imply their subordination and deny them many basic rights. So, the core concern of the feminist literature is to discuss this cause from different angles and different contexts, as influenced by social and cultural motifs, and to ultimately contribute to the emancipation of women.

Historically, “the term feminism, was first used by the French dramatist Alexandre Dumas the Younger, in 1782 in a pamphlet, L’Homme-femme to designate then the emerging movement for women’s rights.¹ According to the Cambridge dictionary feminism indicates “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way.²

And according to the History magazine

Feminism as a movement has roots in the earliest eras of human civilization. It is typically separated into three waves: first wave feminism, dealing with property rights and the right to vote; second wave feminism, focusing on equality and anti-discrimination, and third wave feminism, which started in the 1990s as a backlash to the second wave’s perceived privileging of white, straight women.³

As a matter of fact, the feminist cause is not a recent one, but goes back to several decades when the members of the first wave of this movement started to thoughtfully reconsider the patterns of the patriarchal society, and rebel against those values, which granted more rights and privileges to men, while marginalizing and depriving women from their basic rights. In addition to being bound to social codes and stereotypes, women have been subjects to a great deal of oppression, submission and violence. They went through and still undergo different forms of social injustice whether inside or outside the home. As a result, many women sought, in one way or another, to express their frustration and ultimately shed the light on their

struggle. Some of these women, including *Alice Walker* and *Miral Al-Tahawi*, opted for literature and writing. Indeed, these two writers are deemed as typical performers of feminism and two effective contributors to this movement for they impressively tackled this theme in their books respectively: *The Color Purple* (19984), *Blue Aubergine* (2002).

This research is more concerned with feminism in its social and literary contexts rather than its political one. Thus, we intend to examine two prominent feminist novels of the two celebrated authors namely *Alice Walker's* and *Miral Al-Tihawi's Blue Aubergine* (2002) in relation to women representation.

Alice walker is a Black feminist writer she has written poetry, short stories novels and essays .Walker is the first African American women to win Pulitzer prize for fiction for her novel *The color purple* (1982) She also won the national book award in (1983) for the same novel , that highlights the status of black women in the patriarchal American society . *Walker* emerged as a leading voice against racism and systemic oppression

Just like *Alice walker*, *Miral Al-Tahawy* is an Egyptian emigrant, a novelist and a storyteller who has been participated in bringing feminism in the forefront of Arabic literature. *Miral Al-Tahawy* is considered as the first Egyptian woman to present Egyptian Bedouin life beyond stereotypes through her novels as representative of the New Age feminist writing of Jil al-Tis'inaat. Which illustrates the quest for a new Egyptian female identity.

My choice of *Alice walker's The Color Purple* (1982) and *Miral Al-Tahawy's Blue Aubergine* (2002) is based on the motif of different cultural backgrounds (eastern and western) in order to study the representation of women from two different cultural contexts and to examine the influence of social motifs and paradigms on the social hierarchy. Hence, our aim is to study the two selected books from a feminist perspective and compare them, to show that there are undeniable common factors which color the experience of women in different societies and bring

out the possible similarities, we rely on bell hook's two complementing theories titled : *Feminism From Margin to Center* (1984) and *Feminism For Everybody* (2000).

Review of the Literature

Alice Walker's and *Miral Al-Tahawy's Blue Aubergine* (2002) are two prominent books, which have received a bulk of criticism for the outstanding literary features that they display both at the formal and the thematic levels. Many scholars have carried out critical analysis separately on them due to the varied subject matters and recurrent social issues that these two books tackle and that largely intrigue and effect society. These scholars have approached the two novels from different perspectives using different theoretical framework to put the light on a given aspect and express a different point of view.

In "Gender, Class, and Identity in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Suzan-Lori Parks" (2019), Manal Abdullah and Mohammad Saleem study *The Color Purple* in relation to gender, class and identity as well as the status of black women in the American society. In other words, they examine the intersection of gender and class to consequently demonstrate their impact on the identity of these women. They argue that "black women have to cut through both racial and patriarchal domination as they are marginalized by both their color and their sex."⁴ Their study is more concerned with color and sex as a double oppressor of women. In brief, they examine the sense of belonging of black women who struggle to forge an identity regardless of skin color or social class motifs. The writers maintain that "Walker asserts that black women can have agency and voice against injustice and can master inner strength to fight oppression and exploitation."⁵

"Predicament of Women in Color Purple" (2015) by Ravindra D. Hajare is a detailed study of the novel where the author discusses several issues such as the slavery of black women, the changes after the Second World War, Utopian Feminism, and the contribution of Afro-American writers such as Alice Walker to the American literature as well as to the feminist movement. Hajare studies the uses of symbols and literary techniques in Walker's works including *The Color Purple*

and writes that “The black women walker has depicted have been taken as symbol, as representative of all women striving to get out of the statement by starting a fight against their fate.”⁶ In fact this analysis as whole examines the “predicament” or the hard condition of black women as represented through the protagonist Celie and the other black women.

In its turn *Blue Aubergine* has been approached by many scholars both Arab and foreign, who seem to be interested in Arab societies and Arab feminism. For instance, Valerie Anishchenkova studies *Al-Tahawy's* novel as an archetype of the 1990s feminist novels which represent feminism in Egypt during 1990s including *Al-Tahawy*. Anishchenkova examines the novel both at the thematic and formal levels and affirms that “The plurality of female identity in *Blue Aubergine* is highlighted through various narrative devices, such as the structure of the text that resembles the phases of Nada’s search for identity.”⁷

In addition to the quest for identity and narrative devices, Anishchenkova tackles some other points such as “the power of voice” which denotes the impact of the writer’s words, and “the power of pen” which refers to the technique of intertextuality or the impact of external texts incorporated by the author in her novel.

For his part, Richard *Woffenden* approaches *Blue Aubergine* from a linguistic angle to discuss the popular jargon and the slang used by *Al-Tahawy*. The use of such language makes it difficult for translators to carry the same meaning in another language. Indeed, *Woffenden* writes that “to produce an accessible English translation was very difficult, for as well as the linguistic issues there are also many cultural issues that have to be explained to the foreign reader.”⁸

Issue and Working Hypothesis

It is clear from the review of the literature that the two books have received a great deal of criticism; they have been examined separately or have been compared to other pertinent novels which display the same cultural background. To our best knowledge, these two works have never been compared together. Our aim, then, is to compare the two novels from a feminist perspective

and bring out the similarities in terms of women's representation. In fact, we have selected these two books which are written from two authors from two different societies and which display two different cultural backgrounds to show that social hierarchy and exists in many societies and it is influenced by respective traditions and values. In other words, patriarchy affects women all over the world irrespective of their skin color, ethnicity and religion. Hence, our analysis will discuss the common thematic features of the novels in relation to feminism and the representation of female characters in a patriarchal context.

Moreover, we will attempt, throughout this work, to bring out the most underlying aspects of patriarchy and feminism as elaborated by both authors. The work will look into the ironic indoctrination and perpetuation of women's oppression by women themselves. It will also explore how oppressed women devise ways to fight patriarchy and create new fulfilling and empowering identities and spaces for themselves.

Methodological Outline

At the methodological level, we intend to undertake our research following the IMRAD method. Our dissertation is composed of five sections. We start our research by giving a general introduction where we give a general overview of our topic based on a comparative study about Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Miral Al- Tahawy's *Blue Aubergine*. (2002). The second section, methods and materials, consists of bell hook's two complementary theories named: *Feminism from the Margin to Center* (1984) , *Feminism for Everybody* (2000) and the summary of both Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Miral Al- Tahawy's *Blue Aubergine*. The results section contains the findings of our research. The fourth section, discussion, is divided into two chapters titled: the indoctrination of the patriarchal discourse and Women's Awakening and Empowerment. The last section is a general conclusion that sums up our study and restates the main findings

Endnotes:

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<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/feminism>
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- (6) Hajare, Ravindra D. "Predicament of Women in The Color Purple: A Critical Study." Gurukul International Multidisciplinary Research Journal, 2015, pp. 1-63.
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- (8) Woffenden, Richard. "The coming: of age *Blue Aubergine*" Cairo Times 24, 2002

II. Methods and Materials

a. Methods

This research paper examines the issues of patriarchy and feminism as represented in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Miral Al-Tahawy's *Blue Aubergine* (2002). To undertake this study, we have relied on the American writer bell hooks' two feminist theories namely *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) and *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000). In fact, hooks is regarded as a pillar in the field of feminism, for she has written several books and articles that serve this cause and guide new scholars in leading their research in this area. These two selected theories have grounded the way to our present research and provided it with a theoretical framework on which our analysis leans.

bell hook's Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984)

Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center was first published in 1984 and revised in 2000. In this book, hooks initially discusses the weaknesses within the feminist movement like the monopoly of this cause by American white women and the exclusion of black ones. hooks advocates more participation and inclusion of black feminist women in the feminist movement, and invites men who undergo racism to join the movement and fight side by side with women.

hooks divides her book into 12 chapters and each chapter deals with a given aspect related to the feminist movement, the American society and the "Political Solidarity between Women", she argues that women themselves tend to be sexist toward each other like when they prefer their sons over their daughters and when they approve male-dominance and don't support each other. Thus, to end patriarchy, they should start sticking together and show solidarity to each other through an intimate attachment of either: sisterly, motherly and friendship. Besides, the author rethinks some other aspects such as power, work, violence, marriage and parenting which are highly influenced by the patriarchal discourse or tradition. She, then, suggests an alternative politics based on

feminist values which call for equality and emancipation, in order to carry out some changes and dissolve the patriarchal structure of society.

In the very last chapter entitled “Development Through Struggle”, hooks emphasizes the importance of rebellion and the promising outcomes that it may engender in favor of women. Indeed, she considers the feminist movement as liberation from patriarchy and an empowerment for oppressed women all over the world.

bell hook's Feminism is for Everybody (2000)

Feminism for Everybody is one of the major works of hooks which has a huge impact in the academic field and which exposes a lengthy study of feminism in a social and a political context. This book has seen the light in 2000 and hooks qualifies it as “a dream come true” ⁽¹⁾ for the time and the efforts that she has devoted to it. The author opens her discussion with an overall definition of the feminist movement and a clarification about its aims and principles. hooks denounces the extremist feminist thoughts and practices and explains that the feminist struggle is against the patriarchal and sexist values rather than man himself since Feminism spans across any and all genders.

Within that large framework, hooks divides her book into chapters to discuss different sub-themes and underlining aspects, which are involved in patriarchy such as: marriage, religion, work, education...etc. to examine the involvement of these institutions in the patriarchal discourse and practices.

Our analysis draws more from the social context of patriarchy and feminism where hooks enlist a set of major stereotypes and clichés about the distribution of roles based on the biological sex, in addition to the transformations that the movement suggest to be carried on at the level of the above mentioned institutions in order to fix society and achieve gender equality. Furthermore, as far as we are concerned, violence is another main concept that we examine in this study relying on hooks' chapter “Ending violence” where she describes the relationship between men and women

as a master-slave, or a dominant-submissive relationship which implies power and violence, she calls attention to the need to end male violence against women as an abusive force of maintaining Domination and the role of society in perpetuating violence, that makes it difficult to eliminate .

b. Materials

Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982)

The Color purple is a novel written by the Afro-American writer *Alice Walker*. It was published in 1982 and has won several prizes including the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The novel was subsequently adapted to cinema and has become a prominent story in the American fiction. Walker's book is of a huge significance to black Americans, particularly black American women, as it describes the struggle of black women in the USA against patriarchy and racism and depicts the inspiring journey of the main character Celie.

Celie's story evolves from a young black girl who is compelled to drop out of school to nurse her dying mother and younger siblings, she undergoes different forms of abuse and oppression since her childhood and she becomes a mother at the age of 14 as a result of rape by her step-father Alphonso who was initially said to be her father. This rape results in two children who were taken from Celie and given to unknown parents.

Illiterate, poor, and unattractive, Celie is compelled to marry a much older widower just to handle the household and raise his children. Though completing all the tasks assigned to her, Celie is still subject to abuse and oppression by her husband Mr. Albert without even protesting. She is desperate and hopeless until she meets a black woman singer named Shug Avery who is her husband's mistress and who will mark a shift in the novel and in Celie's life. Shug, who is described as the total opposite of Celie: attractive, strong and independent, awakens Celie and empowers her to handle her lot in a different manner. Hence, Celie's life takes another road towards empowerment and fulfillment, starting from regaining the bond with her sister Nettie, who

lives in Africa. Celie subsequently leaves her abusive husband and travels with Shug to another city to start a business in cloth sewing. Celie finally feels liberated from male hegemony and rescued from violence and oppression. She could then find peace and love amidst her people including her sister Nettie and her children, whom she meets at the end of the novel.

Miral Al tahawy's Blue Aubergine (2002)

Blue Aubergine is a novel originally written in Arabic by the Egyptian writer *Miral-Al Tahawy* in 2002. The narrative tells the story of the protagonist Nada and revolves around the different stages of her life to emphasize her psychological evolution and her journey towards self-fulfillment and healing from childhood trauma. The core matter of the novel lays in the representation of women in a society. The narrator brings the light both on the struggle of the women of her society in relation to patriarchy and their implication or contribution to perpetuate this tradition. Indeed, Nada undergoes a psychological crisis from her childhood and develops low self-esteem because of her mother who constantly denigrates her and reminds her that she is not a typical social model of girlhood and femininity. In fact, the title of the novel originates from the name given to Nada at her birth; she was a premature baby and her skin looked blue like an aubergine. As a child, she fell from a tree and got a large scar which distorted her mouth and made her mother more ashamed of her. In this way, another woman (her mother) who keeps injecting sexist values and patriarchal thoughts first introduced Nada to social standards of beauty and gender roles.

Moreover, the narrative exposes different underlying aspects like physical appearance, religion, education and marriage, which weigh on the construction of female identity and determine gender roles. The journey of Nada as a young lady evolves through two extremities: from integration and piety to anti-conformism and liberation. Indeed, in the first part of the novel, Nada is described as an isolated religious and chaste girl who meets her society's expectations.

She eventually chooses to respond to her inner voice and to rebel against all the social paradigms that reflect sexism.

III. Results

Through a close reading of *Walker's The Color Purple (19982)*, and *Al-Tahawy's Blue Aubegine (2002)*, it is noticeable that both novels interrogate the cultural conception of womanhood and project its literary representation in the context of "Oppression" then "Empowerment". In fact, the portrayal of women or the female characters in these narratives has been based on social constructs and is related to cultural beliefs or stereotypes that are not in the favor of women. Indeed, this stereotype-based representation perpetuates the inferiority of women and their subordination. Further, this research has demonstrated that women are not only victims of patriarchy, but they are themselves oppressors of other women and preachers of the same values that denigrate them.

Our study of these two books has been carried out after a long contemplation and consideration of the selected theories that we have relied on, and the results of our analysis have basically encompassed two main points. The first is related to the idea of the indoctrination of the patriarchal discourse or the internalization of sexist values mainly through women. The analysis has also shown that both authors represent the role of women as being complicit in the passing down of male superiority through incarnating sexist behaviors and teaching sexist values to their children. Both *Al- Tahawy* and *Walker* have witnessed such behaviors in their societies, thus they both have tried to reflect that women have largely contributed to the perpetuation of their own suppression and denigration.

This analysis has also stressed the implication of social institutions such as marriage and religion in preaching male-dominance and superiority and the subordination of women. It has also shown the extent to which women identity is based on social constructs and stereotypes like: for a girl to be feminine she has to be docile and obey the male of her society, the best place of a women is her husband's home and the best job for her is to give birth and take care of her children.

The idea of women's awakening and empowerment in the light of feminist beliefs is pivotal in both works. We have underlined the changes that occur at different levels and institutions such as marriage, education and work. Through these changes women gain more assertion, recognition and construct their own identity. Confronting their patriarchal societies, women become rebellious and strive to end oppression. Both authors show how traditional gender roles can be disrupted once women gather the strength to fight for themselves, and become the leading voices to each other.

Through their works Both *Alice walker* and *Miral Al-Tahawy* have shown that gender roles are a creation of patriarchal system in society and Women are perfectly able to do the same things men can do when they finally taste freedom from the obstacles of discrimination. Their whole view of life shifts furthermore, the gender roles become flexible and shift drastically as a confirmation of equality.

IV. Discussion

Chapter One: The Indoctrination of a Patriarchal Discourse

This first chapter undertakes a comparative study between *Alice Walker's The Color Purple*(1982)and *Miral Al-Tahawy's Blue Aubergine* (2002) from a feminist perspective relying bell hook's two compelling theories, namely *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*(1984) and *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000).

As it is clearly noticeable, the title of this chapter gives an overall insight of what is to be subsequently discussed in this first part. "The Indoctrination of a Patriarchal Discourse" will undertake an analytical study of patriarchy from a social and feminist context. In other words, we intend to tackle the theme of patriarchy in relation to the American and the Middle Eastern societies, and shed light on the way sexist and racist values are internalized in people's collective mindset from an early age , we will attempt to refer and cover some related underlying aspects and ideas that seem to highly intrigue both writers in their two respective books.

Our feminism study will rely on bell hooks feminist thoughts in order to support our claims. We will then endeavor to illustrate from the two novels and bring out the most embodied cases that best depict our concern in this chapter. After reading the two novels, we have noticed that they do not only share the main concern as whole, but they also approach it mainly from the same angle and discuss the same aspects that we stated above.

Women as Perpetuators of Patriarchal Values

Patriarchy denotes a social system where men hold a higher position than women and benefit from more privileges because of nothing but thier gender. Thus, the tradition entails that men (fathers, brothers, husbands) are on the lead of their families and on the control of the women of their families in particular and of the women of their society in general.

Both *Alice Walker* and *Miral Al-Tahawy* demonstrate that patriarchy was passed down from one generation to another, and that women themselves played an important role in perpetuating the same values they received and that always denigrated them. Indeed, women as mothers and nurturers have a large impact on their children's perceptions and handling of things or thoughts. They supposedly endeavor to raise them well and teach them good manners and values; however it seems that these women unconsciously transmit racist and sexist values that they themselves were taught, and which affirm their subordination to men. In this respect, bell hooks asserts that "most women are taught from childhood on that dominating and controlling others is the basic expression of power."¹ She adds,

Women, though assigned different roles to play in society based on sex, are not taught a different value system. It is woman's overall acceptance of the value system of the culture that leads her to passively absorb sexism and willingly assume a pre-determined sex role. Although women do not have the power ruling groups of men often exert, they do not conceptualize power differently.²

The Color Purple and *Blue Aubergine*, both embody bell hook's statement. In the first novel, Queen Nariman (Nada's mother) incarnates the role of the oppressive mother. Instead of showing feminine empathy and support to her daughter Nada, she seems to prefer her son and give him more care and support. She is described as abusive for she does not only verbally mistreat her daughter, but she also beats her and bonds her till she gets blue on her body. In fact, "it happened that she tied her to the bed's leg twice....the queen (her mother) hit her and insisted on tying her to the bed leg for an hour."³ Besides, Queen Nariman feels ashamed of her daughter and is never proud of her because she was born as a weak premature baby which looked like a blue aubergine. When Nada is growing up, she doesn't seem to develop beautiful and feminine traits to meet her mother's expectations. In this way, Nada's mother is unconsciously implementing those gender values and stereotypes that she herself underwent.

In another part hooks claims that male-authority can be justified by the fact that males are nourished since childhood with the patriarchal discourse that makes them believe that their

masculinity is measured by their authority over women and their apathy toward their suffering. Thus, men enjoy manifesting their domination and toughness to assert their manliness. hooks affirms that “in return for all the goodies men receive from patriarchy, they are required to dominate women, to exploit and oppress us.”⁴ However, it is illogical and ironic that a woman who has been oppressed, oppresses. If women have no empathy toward each other, how can they expect it from men? In this sense, Cherrie Moraga, a feminist Latina writer in her article titled “La Guerra” she maintains “we are afraid to look at how we have failed each other. We are afraid to see how we have taken the values of our oppressor into our hearts and turned them against ourselves and one another.”⁵

In the same context, female characters from *The Color Purple* prove to be carriers and implementers of sexist beliefs. From the very beginning of the novel, the author introduces us to Celie’s abusive mother, though ill and dying, she does not hold herself from oppressing her daughter. Celie laments, “My mama dead. She die screaming and cursing. She screams at me. She cuss at me.”⁶ Celie, the 14years old gets abused by her step-father, whom she always thought to be her father; he rapes her and keeps sexually harassing her. Her mother notices that her daughter is being exploited and badly treated but she never seems to be upset. She is rather satisfied because her husband abuses Celie instead of her. Celie says about this “and now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook. My mama she fuss at me an look at me. She is happy, cause he good to her now.”⁷

Obviously, women have internalized patriarchal views to the extent that they are convinced that their oppression is the norm, and they believe that they are naturally born to obey men and be subordinate to them. Women, who have always carried these values, find it odd and abominable that another woman rebels and breaks the rules. For instance, in *The Color Purple*, one of the female characters, Sofia, Harpo’s wife and Celie’s step-son’s wife, reflects the image of a bold and brave woman who rebels against her society’s sexist and racist

standards. Sofia's husband loves her dearly, but he seems to be unhappy because he cannot hit her. She objects to being treated like the women of her surroundings. Harpo, the husband, doesn't actually long to mistreat his wife, but he feels inferior to his male peers and thinks that his masculinity is ruined because he doesn't implement the social measures of authority and domination over women.

Celie, who is constantly oppressed and beaten, envies Sofia for the simple fact of being bold enough. She thus incites Harpo –her son in Law- to hit his spouse. Celie says “I like Sofia, but she don't act like me at all.”⁸ She tells Harpo: “Wives is like children. You have to let ‘em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.”⁹ Celie is jealous of Sofia's courage and boldness. She doesn't strive to be like her, but instead, she prefers that Sofia becomes like her, oppressed. In this way, oppression seems to be a norm. hooks maintains,

Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are “natural” enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well.¹⁰

The above quote illustrates how women have largely contributed to their own suffering through embracing their subordination and their inferiority as a status quo. They do not only yield to abuse and oppression but they also, whether consciously or unconsciously, participate in perpetuating this and passing down this tradition.

As a result, hooks considers a woman who perpetuates sexist values as being more dangerous than a sexist man. She points out that “a female who remains wedded to sexist thinking and behavior infiltrating feminist movement is a dangerous threat.”¹¹ She believes that it is imperative that women review their patriarchal education and be more aware of the impact of their contribution to their own denigration and marginalization. She further writes that “the enemy within must be transformed before we can confront the enemy outside. The threat, the

enemy, is sexist thought and behavior.”¹² In short, women should fight their interior enemy which is their sexist thought so that they can fight the enemy outside which is patriarchy.

Identity Based on Gender Stereotypes

Women and men have long been assigned different roles and labels based on their sex. Their respective identities are associated to a set of codes and standards that they are taught and are expected to incarnate in order to fit and meet the expectations of society. However, the male-target standards reflect the superiority and domination of men, while those designed for women imply their inferiority and subordination. In a patriarchal society, a man is active and a woman is passive, the former orders and the latter obeys. In this context, Mary Becker says,

Men are men to the extent they are not women: masculine, independent, invulnerable, tough, strong, aggressive, powerful, commanding, in control, rational and non-emotional. Real women [...] are dependent, vulnerable, pliant, weak, supportive, nurturing, intuitive, emotional and empathetic. Real women and real men are essentially different in patriarchal culture.¹³

The above quote displays the opposing characteristics and stereotypes respectively ascribed to men and women. Furthermore, a female’s primary role is to serve her male relatives and be at their disposition. She needs to be beautiful to please her husband and satisfy his desires, strong to perform multitasks and bear the sufferings, docile and obedient, timid and chaste. On the other hand, man is the head of the house, the authoritative protector. Less importance is given to his physical looks and his manners; he can be whatever he wants and behave without restraints and protocols. In this way, gender stereotypes evolve around a cultural belief system, which classifies attitudes, behaviors and characteristics based on sex.

Both *The Color Purple* and *Blue Aubergine* epitomize the gender stereotypes. In the *Color Purple*, Celie is an illiterate woman, who was forced to leave school. She is described as dumb and lacking intelligence, thus she remains at home to help her sick mother and take care of the household. She says: “the first time I got big Pa took me out of school, he never care that

I loved it[...] you too dumb to keep going to school, Pa say.”¹⁴ Though some females in the novel are educated like Celie’s sister Nettie, the majority stay at home to perform domestic tasks.

As far as education is concerned, during Nettie’s missionary trip to Africa for educational and religious purposes, she becomes frustrated that only boys are allowed to go to school. When she asks one of the mothers why she does not send her daughter to school, the mother answers that “A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something.”¹⁵ Once again, a woman is a carrier of the patriarchal discourse. When Nettie says that a girl could be a nurse or a teacher, the father protests and says “there is no place for women to do those things.”¹⁶ Nettie reflects on men-women relationship in Africa and proclaims,

There is a way that men speak to women which reminds me too much of Pa. they don’t even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not look in a man’s face as they say. To look In a man’s face is brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees ¹⁷

These excerpts above illustrate how women are deprived of their basic rights like education and freedom of speech. As a result, they grow up lacking intelligence and skills. Thus, they are easily convinced that they do not know more than their brothers and husbands do, and they are not concerned with any affair other than the domestic ones. In short, their appropriate place is home and their basic task is nurturing. In this sense, Barbara Welter points out that “Home was supposed to be a cheerful place, so that brothers, husbands and sons would not go elsewhere in search of a good time. A woman is expected to dispense comfort and cheer.”¹⁸

Al Tahawy starts her novel with reference to beauty norms, she describes her protagonist Nada as a “disappointment”¹⁹ in the eyes of her family, especially her mother because she doesn’t

seem to inherit her beauty features. “They soon discovered that I would be a disappointment,” says Nada.²⁰ They call her Blue Aubergine because of her dark complexion and her skinny body. The author describes Nada as “Small and skinny, her head bigger than her body, her legs unable to carry her, she looked more like a small clown whose every silence, gesture, and lips were comical.”²¹ Her grandmother calls her “the price of a needle” which signifies that “in the market of young girls she will fetch no more than the price of a needle.”⁽²¹⁾

Under patriarchy, a female’s identity is to a large extent articulated in relation to the beauty paradigm. In other words, a beautiful girl or woman is more feminine than an ugly one, the beautiful one incarnates the real picture of womanhood, and thus she is regarded as fit, and most importantly desired by men, which is indeed her foremost role. Furthermore, society has internalized the belief that a female needs to be beautiful, to adopt a shy behavior and conform to strict standards just because she is a female and she needs to look feminine. In contrast, males are not restricted to beauty and behavior norms, they are males and can behave authentically without caring if they look weird or vulgar.

To come back to beauty norms, Nada’s mother feels ashamed when her female friends ask her about her daughter; they tell her that she doesn’t look like her. They say: “Glory be to the creator. No one looking at her would ever guess she was your daughter, darling.”⁽²²⁾ Queen Nariman strives to instill those beauty standards in her daughter. She always tells her how to behave, otherwise she punishes her. Nada says,

and my mother will talk about my voice which is supposed to remain soft and quit, and about my mouth, which is supposed to be completely closed especially in the presence of her guests, and my laughter which should be short, polite, and appropriate.⁽²³⁾

In this way, Nada’s mother is at once implementing and indoctrinating those patriarchal assumptions and stereotypes about the identity of females. Nada, affected by her mother’s remarks and her society standards, strives to meet those beauty norms in order to fit and to make her mother proud. She says: “My mother wants me to be a princess, she made me wear shoes

that were too small... I would have to become taller because all princesses had slender figures.”²⁴

The following passage sums up Nada’s efforts to fit;

She tries to be a little taller so she hangs from trees to grow at least another centimeters[...] she puts two bricks on her head and charges around the garden to learn balance and poise, she stands on her hands against the walls so the blood rushes down her head and she becomes a genius, or her cheeks turn red like Shirley Temple’s.” And after trying every face mask beginning from apple and honey, and yogourt with lemon, and bran with cruldred milk, and drinking a cup of hot water first in the morning, and sleeping early, and putting tea bad on her eyes, and covering her eyelashes in castor oil, she looked in the mirror, eye to eye, and realized that her dreams were nothing but the ups and downs of the swing.²⁵

Obviously, Nada feels frustrated and imprisoned by her mother’s as well as the social expectations. As a result, she would do anything to acquire the mainstream beauty traits even if that would cause her physical pain.

As a group, women are denied (via sex, race, and class exploitation and oppression) the right and privilege to develop intellectually. Most women are deprived of access to modes of thought that promote the kind of critical and analytical understanding necessary for liberation struggle.²⁶

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As a group, women are denied (via sex, race, and class exploitation and oppression) the right and privilege to develop intellectually. Most women are deprived of access to modes of thought that promote the kind of critical and analytical understanding necessary for liberation struggle.²⁷

Women are not concerned with any affair other than the domestic ones. In short, their appropriate place is home and their basic task is nurturing. In this sense, Barbara Welter points out that “Home was supposed to be a cheerful place, so that brothers, husbands and sons would not go elsewhere in search of a good time. A woman is expected to dispense comfort and cheer.”²⁸

Normalized Violence

Violence is a major characteristic of the patriarchal discourse. It is normalized and justified in the name of authority and dominance. If a male uses violence over a female, it is because she acts inappropriately and she breaks the rules. It is supposed that women need to be beaten to be reminded that they are inferior and devalued. In this respect, hooks declares, while I agree with Schechter that male violence against women in the family is an expression of male domination, I believe that violence is inextricably linked to all acts of violence in this society that occur between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated.²⁹

hook believes that violence is not limited to the patriarchal context (between men and women), it is used whenever there is a powerful side and a powerless one, a dominant we part and a submissive one, which is evidently the case in male-female relationships. She adds,

many of us who were raised in patriarchal homes where male parents maintained domination and control by abusing women and children know that the problem was exacerbated by the fact that women also believed that a person in authority has the right to use force to maintain authority.³⁰

Accordingly, violence becomes a natural practice even for women who are subjected to it. They have always witnessed their female parents and relatives being mistreated and beaten without protesting, thus they do not only accept it for themselves, but they also strive to hold this tradition and pass it down like is the case of Celie who wants Harpo to suppress his wife Sofia.

Though Nada does not seem to endure violence from men for the reason that she barely has physical contact with them, *Al-Tahawy* reflects this issue through another female character namely Safaa, who is Nada's friend at university. Safaa is involved in a love affair with someone who abuses her, his name is Ziyad. She says,

After holding up my underwear in front of the neighbors while he slapped her cheeks. The glass was under my body but I didn't scream, and after he given me a thorough

kicking he said I was writing secret reports about him for state security.... I was bleeding and my whole body was in pain.³¹

Safaa, a university student, though enlightened and informed about her rights and duties, keeps accepting violence and oppression, she doesn't only consent to be ill-treated, but she is also adjusted to it. She says, "All this became a regular occurrence and I got used to it."³² She adds, "the scars on my back haven't healed yet. He says I am a whore."³³ hooks reflects on violence in the lights of personal relationships and notes,

Women reading romances are being encouraged to accept the idea that violence heightens and intensifies sexual pleasure. They are also encouraged to believe that violence is a sign of masculinity and a gesture of male care that the degree to which a man becomes violently angry corresponds to the intensity of his affection and care. This is often the case in women's lives. They may accept violence in intimate relationship.³⁴

Indeed, Safaa, and other women like her romanticize violence in the sense that they believe it to be stimulated by love and fueled by violent emotions and passion. They conceive it as a masculine trait and this encourages their male-partners to perpetuate this practice.

On the other hand, Celie doesn't romanticize violence, she knows that she is being oppressed but also feels helpless to protest. She constantly gets beaten by her husband and never says a word about it. She says: "he beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt... it all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself. Celie, you a tree."³⁵ She tells her sister, "but I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive."³⁶ Celie has been oppressed all her life, by her mother, father and then her husband. She is jealous of Sofia because she fights and never accepts to be beaten. She tells her, "I say it cause am jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't....fight I say."⁽³⁶⁾ And Harpo tells Celie, "when Pa tell you to do something you do it. When he say not to, you don't. You don't do what he say he beat you."³⁸ Celie responds: "sometimes beat me anyhow, whether I do what he say or no."³⁹

Hooks maintains: Society's acceptance and perpetuation of that violence helps maintain it and makes it difficult to control or eliminate. That acceptance can be explained only in part by patriarchal rule supporting male domination of women through the use of force.⁴⁰

This passage implies that the perpetuation of violence is due to society's acceptance in general and most particularly to women's acceptance of this practice. The acceptance and normalization of this issue contributes to the maintenance of male domination and patriarchal structure. It has always been this way and anyone who seeks to rebel or intends to break the rules would be deemed as an outcast and a non-conformist.

Marriage and Sexual Relationships

Both *The Color Purple* and *Blue Aubergine* shed light on the issue of marriage and the intimate relationship between a man and his wife or simply between a man and a woman . In the same context of the patriarchal discourse, marriage is thought to be the best lot for a girl and her ultimate destiny. Indeed, women under the conditions of a patriarchal system are defined in the light of their marital life. A girl apparently comes to this world to be subsequently a burden on her parents' and family's shoulders, they are only relieved once this burden is removed through marriage. Therefore, a female is socialized to adopt a womanish behavior and to learn domestic skills that qualify her as a true woman and a ready wife. It is maybe important to mention that our focus does not imply the criticism of the institution of marriage as a concept and a ritual, but we are mostly concerned with marriage as a gender role and a sexist practice.

Which define women's responsibilities mainly on the basis of being a mother and housewife, rather than the basis of occupational roles, Therefore man are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers Indeed, William Little an adjunct assistant professor in Sociology at the University of Victoria where he has claims that "Marriage was seen as a stabilizing force because keeping the home and family in order was a wife's main duty."⁴¹ In brief, a women's fundamental's role here is a housewife.

Most female characters in the two novels do not get married for love and complicity. They do not choose their partners and even worse some of them like Celie repulse their

husbands and hate them. Indeed, Celie was forced to marry Mr. Albert, he too doesn't have any emotions for her and he is in love with another woman namely Shug. Celie says, "Mr- marry me to take care of his children. I marry him because my daddy made me. I don't love Mr- and he don't love me."⁴²In this respect, Rajvi Desai argues:

In these considerations, love was hardly ever the reason people got married, which made the purpose and primary focus of marriage a transaction –one that solidified gender roles and determined a strict division of labor within the home. Women took care of child care and housework, and men earned the bread and butter for the household.⁴³

This quote depicts the way society paradigmatises marriage and confines both women and men to their respective gender roles. Similarly, some female characters in *Blue Aubergine* surrender to the idea of a conventional and traditional marriage. For instance, Alia, who has loudly expressed her love to Nader, ends up getting married to her cousin who is pretty older. She says, "My cousin's Age isn't important... love isn't necessary at all. I've come to understand life more rationally."⁴⁴ Alia, though adopting a non-conformist attitude, seems to be finally subdued to the reality of her society and conforms to its norms.

The sexual relationship between men and women is largely affected by society's sexist beliefs. The body of a woman serves as a goody to men, no more than of a source of erotic pleasure and an extinguisher of desire. hooks sustains,

Implicit in the idea of sexual preference is the assumption that anyone of the preferred sex can seek access to one's body. This is a concept that promotes objectification. In a heterosexual context it makes everyone, especially women, into sex objects. Given the power differential created by sexist politics. Women are likely to be approached by any man since all men are taught to assume they should have access to the bodies of all women.⁴⁵

As it is noted above, the body of a woman, devoided of its spirituality, serves as a sexual object. Men, as given the label of the dominant, believe they can have access to the female's body whenever they want, even when she doesn't consent. In this case sex is deemed as marital rape.

Accordingly, *Blue Aubergin* brings the light on the issue of sex through Safaa. This latter engages with her abusive boyfriend Ziyad in repeated sexual practice. Ziyad abuses her body and performs his fantasies even if she doesn't like it. She says:

He exhibits his sexual skills a number of times and when I can hardly take it anymore I tell him I don't feel pleasure this way and he says I'm frigid. Sometimes he thinks there is a biological malfunction in my body and he insists that I was a prostitute.⁴⁶

Safaa is not married to Ziyad, he doesn't love her, and neither does she; their bond is based on a sexual relationship. Though she is voluntarily engaged with him, she is sometimes compelled to satisfy his desire when she does not have lust.

Celie, though different from Safaa, as she doesn't voluntarily sleep with Mr Albert, she experiences the same sexual oppression. She says, "Mr- clam on top of me, do his business, in ten minutes us both sleep... No matter what I feel. It just him. Heart feeling don't even seem to inter into it."⁴⁷ She adds, "most time I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep."⁴⁸ Celie and other women that she represents getting sexually oppressed and raped by their partners. Their bodies do not pertain to them but to their husbands. hooks notes,

Social norms as they are currently socially constructed have always privileged active sexual expression over sexual desire. To act sexually is deemed natural, normal-to not act, unnatural, abnormal. Such thinking corresponds with sexist role patterning. Men are socialized to act sexually, women to not act (or to simply react to male sexual advances).⁴⁹

Religion:

The patriarchal discourse mainly affects different social aspects and involves around different institutions including that of religion. Indeed, religious patterns are thought to carry a patriarchal ideology that entails the submission and the subordination of women. It preaches the importance of women's staying at home and serving their husbands, to be good mothers and caring wives. Once again, the identity of women is inevitably related to men and to domesticity. Barbara Welter argues that "one reason religion was valued was that it did not take a women away from her "proper sphere," her home. Unlike participation in other societies or movements church work would not make her less domestic or submissive."⁵⁰

In Al-Tahawy's novel, Nada is at first an extremely religious girl. She wears the veil "jilbab", gloves, recites religious texts and restrains from "el moharamat" or instinctive desires including sex.

Furthermore, religion represents purity and piety: two vital features which make a woman more feminine and innocent. Barbara Welter Points out that "religion or piety was the core of a women's virtue, the source of her strength."⁵¹ She further adds that "purity is as essential as purity to young women. Its absence as unnatural and unfeminine."⁵² Additionally, religion serves as a refuge for powerless people like women. They have faith in God and his supernatural power. Thus they pray and think He will rescue them and end their misery. Celie writes letters to God believing that he watches. Both she and Nada think God will save them from oppression and reward them for their good attitude and patience. However, they soon lose faith in this institution and in its ideals. Nada says, "In those days I still feared the Lord who can see us, but I did not believe that patience is the key to the door of paradise, or that the most beloved of his servants are the poor."⁵³ In her turn, Celie says, "I don't write to god no more,"⁵⁴ "the God I have been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown."⁵⁵ Celie rejects God because she had been taught to see God as being like the people who had oppressed her. In short, the theological ideology proves to be an effective method to inject the patriarchal discourse and convince the masses of the subordination of women as a divine instruction and a natural condition.

This chapter has emphasized the partaking of women in patriarchy not only as victims but mostly as active participants and carriers of sexist values that perpetuate their own denigration and subordination in society. In fact, we have seen, throughout this chapter, the common thematic characteristics between *Alice Walker's* and *Al-Tahawi's* novels which illustrate the above discussed ideas through Celie and Nada in addition to the other female characters. We

have deduced that their depiction of the two characters is in one way or another fraught with culturally-based beliefs that put women in the vein of inferiority and oppression.

In the following chapter, we will focus on the turning point of the characters and their empowerment in the light of feminist beliefs.

Endnotes:

¹bell. hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 85.

²Ibid.

⁽³⁾ Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*, 22.

¹Bell. hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, ix.

⁽⁵⁾Moraga, Cherríe. “La Güerra.” *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 4th ed., State U of New York P, 2015, pp. 22-29.

⁽⁶⁾Walker, *The Color Purple*, 12.

⁽⁷⁾ Ibid, 11.

⁽⁸⁾ Ibid, 42.

⁽⁹⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁰⁾Bell. hook, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 45.

⁽¹¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹²⁾Ibid.

⁽¹³⁾ Mary, Backer. “Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism,” *University of Chicago Legzl Forum*: Vol. 1999: Iss, 1, Article 3.

⁽¹⁴⁾a Walker, *The Color Purple*, 149.

⁽¹⁵⁾bIbid, 149.

⁽¹⁶⁾Barbara, Welter. “The Cult of True Womenhood”. *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 18, No. (1966): pp. 163, accessed May 23, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2711179>

⁽¹⁷⁾ Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*

⁽¹⁸⁾Ibid, 8.

⁽¹⁹⁾Ibid.

⁽²⁰⁾Ibid, 12.

⁽²¹⁾Ibid, 22.

(22) Ibid, 27.

(23) Ibid.

(24) Ibid.

(25) Bell. hook, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 109.

(26) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*, 19.

(27) Ibid, 144.

(28) Bell. hook, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 118.id.

(29) Ibid.

(30) Bell. hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 124.

(31) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 30.

(32) Ibid.

(33) Ibid.

(34) Ibid

(35) Ibid.

(36) Bell. hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 120.

(37) Little, William. *Introduction to Sociology: 2nd Canadian Edition*. B.C Open Textbook project, 2012. <https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology2ndedition/chapter/chapter-14-marriage-and-family/>.

(38) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 66.

(39) Rajvi, Desai. "Mariage is an Inherently Unfeminist Institution." The Swaddle. Last modified Jul 31, 2019. <https://theswaddle.com/mariage-is-an-inherently-unfeminist-institution/>

(40) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*, 71.

(41) Bell. hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 155.

(42) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*, 70.

(43) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 68.

(44) Ibid, 79

(45) Ibid

(46) Bell. hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, 150.

(47) Barbara, Welter. "The Cult of True Womenhood". *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 18, No. (1966): pp. 153, accessed May 23, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2711179>

(48) Ibid.

(49) Ibid.

(50) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*, 56.

(51) Ibid

(52) Barbara, Welter. "The Cult of True Womenhood". *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 18, No. (1966): pp. 153, accessed May 23, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2711179>

(53) Ibid

(54) Walker, *The Color Purple*, .

(55) Ibid, 175

Chapter Two: Women's Awakening and Empowerment

In the first chapter we have discussed the indoctrination of the patriarchal discourse and we have seen the gender issues and relation-inequalities in addition to women's subordination and oppression as illustrated in the two studied novels. In this chapter, we will focus on the turning point in the lives of the female characters which shows up as a watershed that breaks the rules and brings a massive change to society patterns as a whole and most importantly to women.

Indeed, this second chapter highlights the transition from weakness to empowerment, from submission to rebellion, and finally from integration to awakening. In fact Alice Walker and *Al-Tahawy* endeavor through their writings and the depiction of their fictional characters to prove that women are not naturally doomed to oppression and suppression, that their society's decisions and norms are not static but flexible, and that they have as much potential as men to handle their own lives and choose their own lot.

Moreover, the premise of this chapter is based on women's awakening and empowerment, thus we will attempt to bring the light on the different aspects. Indeed, this chapter sets forth underlying and intertwined aspects of women's empowerment.

bell hooks claims:

To end patriarchy, we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action.¹

Feminist writers such as *Walker* and *Al-Tahawy* strive through their writings to contribute to the promotion of the feminist movement. They do not only depict the struggle of women in the midst of a patriarchal society but they also try to offer alternatives like work, education that give these women a more honorable and respectful position in society . They attempt primarily to picture the status quo of the female characters through the lens of patriarchy and a sexist

society. However, they eventually decide to mark a divergence from this representation and propose an unconventional identity to their fictional females. In doing so, the writers seek to demonstrate that the reality and the lot of women depend on them; their status quo can be changed if they want to, but most importantly if they stick together and uniformly advocate their rights.

Sisterhood for Empowerment:

The very first step towards women liberation and empowerment is solidarity and compassion. Indeed, women fathom that their sexist socialization and their hatred for each other is the most foremost catalyzer that fuels the patriarchal practices and perpetuate them. hooks asserts that “challenging and changing female sexist thinking is the first step toward creating the powerful sisterhood that would ultimately rock our nation.”² Walker reflects this assumption in her novel through the different female characters, but most prominently Celie and Shug. We have previously demonstrated how Celie is described as a weak and an abused woman who is helpless to change her situation. But, as the novel evolves, the narrator introduces us to Sugar Avery whose nickname is Shug. She shows up in the novel as a feminist character, an important singer, and an eccentric and independent woman who would change the rest of Celie’s life. Shug is involved in a love affair with Mr. Albert, Celie’s husband. At the beginning of their encounter, they seem to repulse each other, but later on Shug becomes very ill and Celie takes care of her till she fully recovers. Being thankful to Celie, Shug dedicates a song to her that makes Celie feel important and strong. Furthermore, Shug awakens Celie on many issues including her apprehension of men’s reality. She proves to her that the world does not center on men, and that they are only much dominant and authoritative when women allow them to be. She says, “man corrupt everything, he on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere you think he God. But he ain’t.”³

Moreover, Shug discovers many letters that Mr. Albert hides from Celie. These letters are from her younger sister Nettie who lives in Africa. Celie faces Mr Albret and finally dares to tell him all the bad things she always thought about him, she says: “Sofia so surprise to hear me speak up she ain’t chewed for ten minutes.”⁴ Celie and Shug read the letters and discover many important facts about Celie’s life and her family. Shug decides to take Celie to Tennessee, her home country to face her father, who turns up to be her stepfather, and to regain her own legacy.

Walker utilizes the character of Shug as an empowerment motif to show that women can lean on one another and uplift each other, and in doing so they create a strong invulnerable bond that man and society can’t break. Celie leaves everything behind her, her husband, the household, the duties and the expectations of her society, to start her own journey with Shug toward liberation and self-assertion. She now feels empowered, and most importantly loved. She says, “Shug say, Us each other’s people now, and kiss me.”⁵ bell hooks affirm: Feminist sisterhood is rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no matter the form that injustice takes.⁶

In this excerpt, hooks emphasizes the importance of the feminist movement in giving voice to the oppressed women and encourages them to exchange their experiences, and eventually bind together to end social injustice and gender inequality, and eventually to change their unprivileged position and assert both their own collective and separated identities.

New identity

As we have already seen in the first chapter, a female’s identity is largely bound to her physical appearance, conventional codes of femininity, gender roles and other patriarchal norms. However, in this section devoted to women’s awakening and empowerment we will highlight the issue of female identity as adjusted and modified by women themselves. Walker and *Al-Tahawy* shed the light in the first place on the stereotypes and the traditional definition

of femininity and womanhood to represent the identity of women as determined by the patriarchal discourse. Then, they both shift to another portrayal of an unconventional female identity to claim that only women can decide who they want to be or to look irrespective of the labels and the roles assigned to them. hooks notes that “before women’s liberation all females young and old were socialized by sexist thinking to believe that our value rested solely on appearance and whether we were perceived to be good looking, especially by men.”⁽⁷⁾ In addition to beauty standards, we have put the light on some other features that a true woman should display like chastity, virtue, shyness, obedience and so on. However, as women start to consider their liberation and self-esteem, they decide to defy their oppressive environment and to assert their own thoughts and manners. They start to wear unconventional clothes, attend places they were denied access to, adopt boyish behaviors and perform jobs that were only targeted to men.

Blue Aubergine is a bildungsroman or a novel which revolves around the different phases of the protagonist’s life. In the first section of the novel, Nada is portrayed as any typical girl in a patriarchal society. Traumatized by her mother’s tough and abusive personality, she becomes confused about her identity and ambivalent in the sense that she longs for an adventurous life, but also seeks the approval of her family and society. In fact, Nada’s life can be divided into two stages: conservatism and emancipation. Indeed, in the first stage, Nada is depicted as a religious girl who wears the veil and the gloves and isolates herself. However, Nada grows introspective and leads an inner conflict about her identity. The veil doesn’t not only cover Nada’s body but also her erotic thoughts and desires. *Al-Tahawy* uses the technique of juxtaposition to contrast Nada to her university roommate Safaa. This latter is the very opposite of the religious and conformist Nada, she is the ultimate incarnation of the emancipated and anti-conformist woman. Safaa transcends the limits that her restrictive and conservative society sets, and challenges the taboos. Safaa serves as a catalyst for Nada’s

awakening. She shares the very details of her sexual experience with Ziyad, she strolls with him in the city streets at night, she wears tight and uncovering clothes and she smokes tobacco and drinks alcohol. Inspired by Safaa's outgoing personality and boldness to assume her own desires, Nada decides to plunge into the other opposite extreme. She defiantly takes off the veil and the gloves, she lets her long hair lay down on her shoulders and blow in the wind, and she now wears tight pants and revealing clothes. Nada's radical transformation is a transition from integration to rebellion and self-assertion, she is likely to revolt against the social taboos, which implied her frustration and buried desires. Nada engages in her first sexual experience with a man she loves and describes her first night as "her birthday."⁷ She is now satisfied and convinced of her own choices as she says in her interior monologue:

Convinced in that moment that you were finally playing a role that suits you, and that you are not a coward or blind, nor tied to the trunk of a palm tree. You are a rational human being, past the age of consent, with a right to make your own choices.⁸

In other words, Nada describes her conversion as a rebirth. She admits that she used to be "coward" and lacking boldness to manifest her true identity. Hitherto, she decides to free herself from the social constraints and responds to her inner voice.

Similarly, Walker tackles the theme of identity from two angles: the patriarchal perspective at first, and the feminist one second. Indeed, she first of all represents the female characters as defined and perceived in the midst of their sexist environment: oppressed, subordinate, inferior, servants, submissive.... Nonetheless, Walker alters to a feminist perspective to give another definition to female identity to demonstrate that women are able to change their status quo when they feel brave enough to revolt against the mainstream sexist practices, and fight both their inside and outside sexist thoughts.

Similar to Nada who gets awakened by her friend Safaa in *Blue Aubergine*, Celie's life takes another sense once she meets Shug Avery who awakens Celie and gave her possible glimpse to revolt She encourages her to start her business in tailoring thanks to Shug Celie takes power in her own hand. Indeed, both writers introduce the feminist and anti-conformist

characters namely Safaa and Shug as a motif to announce the break from the conventional and traditional perception of the feminine identity. It is a strategy to affirm women's recognition as complete entities with separated identities different from those given to them by the patriarchal society.

Identity in our context is implicitly related to the body: beauty standards, clothing, physical relationships and so on. When women want to rebel and assert their freedom, they usually display it through their bodies, their unconventional dressing and hair styling, their gestures and physical practices. hooks reflects on this point and says, Understanding that females could never be liberated if we did not develop healthy self-esteem and self-love feminist thinkers went directly to the heart of the matter- critically examining how we feel and think about our bodies and offering constructive strategies for change. ⁹

This passage restates what we have said above and clearly explains that empowered women reconcile with their bodies and take control this time over their choices of how they want to look or what they want to wear. hook adds, Just to be able to wear pants to work was awesome to many women, whose jobs had required them to be constantly bending and stooping over. For women who had never been comfortable in dresses and skirts all these changes were exciting. ¹⁰

Walker illustrates this claim through Celie who typically decides to handle her body and pronounce her liberation through changing her clothing style. Celie, incited by Shug, can now wear pants. The author writes: Well, she say [she refers to Shug], looking me up and down, let's make you some pants.

What I need pants for? I say [Celie is talking], I ain't no man [...] Mr- not going to let his wife wear pants.
Why not? Say Shug.¹¹

The use of pants by the writer transcends its literal connotation; it is rather used as a symbol of empowerment and equality. Women now can wear pants just like men. In another passage Celie says, "So me and Shug dress up in our new blue pants that match and big floppy

Easter hats that match too. Cept her roses red, mine yellow.”¹² The use of colors is another symbol to reflect the vitality and the energy that comes from the innermost of the two women. Finally Celie fathoms that all the stereotypes and the sexist roles that they have internalized and socialized to women, are patterns to keep them under the control of men and their disposition. Celie’s identity shifts from an insignificant helpless black woman to an assertive one who has her own choices and control over her body and her whole life.

Education and Work

Walker and *Al-Tahawy* stress the centrality of education and work for the Autonomy of women. Indeed, a female who develops intellectual skills and a critical thinking can face and challenge sexist practices. In an article about the role of education for women, Raouf Ahmed Bhat asserts that “education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life.”¹³ Education is crucial in women’s empowerment for understanding the gender relations and the ways in which these relations maybe changed, in addition to developing a critical thinking to discern their rights and duties and choose what role they want to perform. Moreover, education and work grant women an active and crucial role in society and permit them to develop a sense of self-worth or a belief in their own ability to have full control on their own lives. Christine Lagarde, a managing director of the international Monetary Fund identifies three prerequisite conditions for women’s empowerment which she calls the 3 L’s which refer to: Learning, Labor, and Leadership. She claims that “learning helps women to help themselves and break the shackles of exclusion”¹⁴ and that “labor enables them to flourish and achieve their true potential.”¹⁵

In *Blue Aubergine* Nada incarnates the role of a well-educated woman equipped with knowledge and a university degree. As she has always witnessed several forms of women

oppression and abuse in her patriarchal society, Nada sets up to write a doctoral dissertation on “The Dialectic of Rebellion and Gender Oppression”¹⁶, where she expresses her engaging thoughts about patriarchy and male-domination. Nada uses this dissertation as a tool to denounce the irrationality of her society, raise consciousness among women, and encourage them to lead battles if necessary to prove their personalities and obtain their rights. Likely, Walker reflects the pivotal role of instruction for the empowerment of women through the character of Nettie. This latter is spared from the same miserable experience of her sister Celie thanks to her intellectual skills. Nettie is an educated woman who acquired knowledge to share. She travels to Africa with her tutors as a missionary to enlighten the native children and instruct them. Nettie could have been like the majority of the females of her society and undergo violence and oppression without protesting. But her potential permits her to perform an active role in her life without being bond to and dependent on men.

Furthermore, though Celie was uneducated Black woman, she seems to find an alternative which helps her to be autonomous: Celie starts a small business. Shug notices that Celie have some skills in sewing and she can make beautiful pants and clothes, so she encourages her to sew more especially those floppy comfortable pants for women, she tells her, “let’s just go ahead and give you this diningroom for your factory and git you some more women to cut and sew, while you sit back and design.”¹⁷ Celie develops her traditional skill of sewing to make patterns and designs new clothes where women can feel both attractive and comfortable. She succeeds in making a profitable business and she soon launches her own enterprise called Folk pants. Celie’s journey evolves from an oppressed and uneducated child who rears her younger siblings to an enslaved housewife who also rears her stepchildren, works hard in the fields under burning heat, and above all bears her husband’s violence, to eventually an empowered independent woman leading a fulfilled life without dominant men. After that Celie achieves the threshold of her ambitions and can finally recover from the traumatic experiences of her

childhood and womanhood, she longs for only one last thing which is to meet her beloved sister and her own biological children whom she gave birth to as a result of her rape by her stepfather Alphonso. In her letter to Nettie she says, “Am so happy, I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children.”¹⁸

Celie and Nada, in addition to the other female voices in the two novels such as Safaa, Sofia, Shug and Nettie, represent all women in the world, regardless of their race, class and culture. *Al-Tahawy* and *Walker* demonstrate how these women can revive from the ashes and rise when they believe in themselves and equip themselves with knowledge and skills. Education and work permit women to lead a better life and ensure an economic independence.

On Love, Marriage and Sexuality

As a matter of fact, marriage and male-female relationships are recurrent themes in the Feminist discourse. The early advocates of this movement reclaim the reconstitution of marriage and its definition as they suggest it to be based on love and mutual responsibilities instead of domination and segregated gender roles. Besides, women adhering to a feminist attitude restrain from traditional marriage and prefer to remain single instead of getting married with a random man that society or family considers suitable. For instance, *Al-Tahawy's* protagonist longs for love and a romantic partner, but she is at the same time not able to maintain a stable relationship and struggles to build strong bonds with the rough and dominant few men she knew throughout the different stages of her life. Nada plunges into loneliness and emotional void as long as her romantic aspirations of marriage do not seem to see the light. Moreover, love under patriarchy is a complex and sensitive issue, which often contradicts with the feminist discourse. In other words, feminist women display an ambivalent attitude when they long for love and at the same time abstain to make sacrifices in favor of men and close their eyes on some patriarchal values. hooks declares, “Romantic love as most people understand it in patriarchal culture makes one unaware, renders one powerless and out of control.”¹⁹

Therefore, feminism calls for another definition of love which suits both men and women.” as a feminist activist, hooks admits that she yearns for love, but in its feminist context, she writes, “but I still wanted the love of a good man, and I still believed I could find that love. However I was absolutely certain that first the man had to be committed feminist politics.”²⁰ Marriage in its turn has to be adjusted to the feminist discourse, which implicatively excludes violence and any other form of domination in the midst of this institution. In other terms, empowered women have finally an assertive voice to proclaim their marital rights and manifest their discontentment in case of any offensive practice toward them. hooks maintains that “Romantic love as most people understand it in patriarchal culture makes one unaware, renders one powerless and out of control”²¹. However, after women get awakened and empowered by each other, and as they can rely on their own potential to cover their need without depending on men, there is less pretext for men to exercise power and domination on women. This premise is clearly reflected by Celie who could finally speak for herself and confront the abusive men in her life starting from her husband Mr. Albert, to her stepson Harpo and finally her stepfather Alphonso. Ki

When Celie discovers that Mr. Albert hid the letters that her sister Nettie was sending her for long years, she protests and raises her voice in front of him for the first time. She tells him: “You lowdown dog is what’s wrong, I say it’s time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need.”²² In another passage, Celie says: “Mr- reach over to slap me. I jab my case knife in hand.”²³ Later on, she leaves for Memphis to settle down there with Shug without even asking for his consent. He tells her that he should have locked her up. And just let her out to work ²⁴ but Celie responds that “the jail he plans for her is the one in which he will rot.” ²⁵ Days pass by and Celie’s life takes another sense, she leaves home, she runs a successful business and lives in peace with her people in Memphis. Surprisingly, Mr.

Albert shows up again in her life, but he seems to be another man. They discuss and Celie reconciles with her past and with him as well, and she even enters him in her own business. However, when he sincerely proposes to her again, Celie declines his proposal, she says: “Mr- done ask me to marry him again, this time in the spirit as well as in the flesh, and just after I say Naw, I still don’t like frogs, but let’s us be friends.”²⁶

Accordingly, *Walker* introduces us to another conceptualization of marriage which implies a spiritual bond between the two concerned individuals and with their complete consent. Celie refuses to marry Mr. Albert again because she doesn’t love him, and now that she knows that her body is only her own and not his, she would not permit him to touch her and have undesirable intimacy with him. As far as marital intimacy is concerned, the feminist discourse implies the dismissal of the objectification of women’s bodies. In other words, women’s bodies should no longer be regarded as sexual objects that pertain to men. Women should not be subdued to marital rape and sexual practices when they want it the least or do not feel any pleasure. In fact the patriarchal discourse injects the thought that a male is sexually active where a female is passive. It means men are sexually dominant and can openly express their desires and fantasies whereas women supposedly wait there to respond to these desires. In other words, men are given much freedom to talk about sexuality, while women are taught to feel ashamed to express their needs or to take the lead in such practices. In this respect, hook write :

Sexist thinking taught to females from birth on had made it clear that the domain of sexual desire was always and only male, that only a female of little virtue would lay claim to sexual need or sexual hunger.²⁷

In the same context, Nada initially tends to hide her body’s desires in the name of devotion and virtue, but she ends up responding to her impulsive voice for erotic pleasure. She uses her doctoral dissertation to criticize the traditional concept of sexuality and argues that “the concepts used to explain the honor of the body are deeply rooted concepts of social misrepresentation and hypocrisy.”²⁸ Furthermore, she assumes that women have the free will

“to behave in accordance with the logic of the possession of her own body, and the possession of her chastity and her virginity, rather than accepting the commodification of her body.”⁽²⁹⁾

The two characters, Safaa and Shug, represent the liberated women who assume their biological impetus for sexual pleasure and who do not feel ashamed to talk about their experiences. Shug talks about her intimacy with Mr. Albert and say: “so when I met Albert, and once I got in his arms, nothing could git me out.it was good.”³⁰ In contrast, Celie does not know much about sexual pleasure; she also does not have much knowledge about her body. One day, Shug tells Celie to take off her clothes and sit in front of the mirror to contemplate her body and she enlightens her about what parts are most concerned with sexual excitement. After that, Shug asks her if she feels that excitement with Mr. Albert, when she answered by “no” the former tells that she is still a “virgin”³¹. Celie is literally not a virgin, but Shug describes her as such because she is a stranger to sexual fulfillment.

Conventional Religion or Spirituality

Feminist activists consider that conventional religious patterns have a fundamental role in inflecting and perpetuating patriarchal values which imply hegemony and gender inequalities. Thus when the feminist movement came to review the implementation of the patriarchal ideology in the social institutions, it set religion at the head of the list. Khushi Kabir, a Bangladeshi feminist activist writes,

All religions, and am very clear about in stating *all* religions, are patriarchal in nature by the very way they are created and the way they are practiced. Religions especially revealed religions, tend to take their holy books literally, which means there is not much room for adjustment. Discrimination of women, therefore, is the result of centuries old beliefs, manifested in religious writings and performances which cannot be questioned.
³²

Religions often preach patriarchal values and stereotypes in relations to gender roles. For example women are given the role of nurturing, caring and giving birth. While these roles are presented positively and as essentials, they reinforce the gender norms in society and the

patriarchal power structure. So, many women who set themselves up to revolt against patriarchy look skeptically at religion and start to turn to spiritual faith instead of theological beliefs. In brief, masses of women have lost faith in conventional religions. hooks asserts that “Choosing alternative spiritual paths has helped many women sustain commitment to spiritual life even as they continue to challenge and interrogate patriarchal religion.”³³

In *Blue Aubergine*, *Al-Tahawy* portrays women’s disappointment in the traditional religious paradigm through the anti-conformist characters Safaa and Nada who undergo a profound religious crisis. In the following passage, Nada talks about a university comrade who assumes that God is an invention to justify the power norms. She says, “he looks at my head covering and continuous: “your lord rules as from a superior position.” [...] his words were provocative but I didn’t disagree.”³⁴ This excerpt reveals that Nada is ambivalent and confused about her faith; she says that his words were provocative, but at the same time she didn’t disagree. While she still wears the veil, Nada seems to be deep-down unconvinced. In another passage, Safaa openly declares her disappointment about religion using these words, “I didn’t believe that patience is the key to the door of paradise, or that the most beloved of his servants are the poor.”³⁵ Both Nada and Safaa lost faith in the religious ideals and choose to fully live their own lives and find joy in spirituality.

Similarly, Celie expresses her disappointment when she opines that God is unfair to let her go through much suffering. In fact, at the very beginning of the novel Celie addresses God and says, “I am a fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.”⁽³⁶⁾ Besides, the first part of the story is written in form of letters where Celie addresses God and chronicles the details of her life

pleading him to make end to her suffering. However, she eventually gives up writing him letters thinking that he is absent and indifferent to her pain. She tells her Sister Nettie in one of her letters: “I don’t write to God no more, I write to you.”³⁷ And when Shug asks her about what happened to God Celie firmly responds: “what God do for me?”³⁸ She thinks that God is as harsh and cruel as the men she knew; he made her undergo the most awful things without mercy. She declares: “the God I been praying and writing to is a man, and act just like all the other mens I know.”³⁹ Shug tries to convince Celie that God exists, but he is not the one people worship and pray to in the church, she says that she never found God at the church, all she found is “bunch of folks hoping for him to show.”⁴⁰ Shug introduces Celie to another God that she finds in beautiful things and emotions like when she lays back alone, or pass by a field and admire the color purple.⁴¹ She tells her: “the things I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else.”⁴² On the other hand, Celie finds God in Shug and her Sister Nettie who awakened her to see beauty in herself and in other things and empowered her to be enough strong to confront the world.

To sum up, hooks affirms,

Feminist spirituality created a space for everyone to interrogate out modeled belief systems and created new paths. Representing God in diverse ways to restoring our respect for the sacred feminine, it has helped us find ways to affirm and re-affirm the importance of spiritual life.⁴³

Accordingly, many women departed from the fundamental religion which they think to be patriarchal, and found alternatives in spiritual beliefs which rather match with logic and rationality.

To summarize, this second chapter has highlighted the potent moments of the protagonists’ lives and their journey from oppression to liberation

Endnotes

(1) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, ix.

(2) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 15.

(3) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 149.

(4) Ibid, 181.

(5) Ibid, 167.

(6) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 15.

(7) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 31.

(8) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*, 81.

(9) Ibid, 81.

(10) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 31.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 136.

(13) Ibid.

(14) Bhat, Rouf Ahmad. "Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India." *Journal of Education and Practice*, v6 n10 p188-191 2015. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1081705>

(15) Christine, Lagarde. "Daring the Difference: The 3 L's of Women's Empowerment", International Monetary Fund. May 19, 2014.

(16) Ibid.

(17) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*,

(18) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 192.

(19) Ibid, 193.

(20) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 110.

(21) Ibid,101.

(22) Ibid, 101.

(23) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 181.

(24) Ibid, 187

(25) Ibid, 127.

(26) Ibid, 247.

(27) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*,85.

(28) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*

(29) Ibid.

(30) Walker, *The Color Purple*,115.

(31) Ibid.

(32) Kabir, Khushi. *Made for Minds*: “We need to talk about religion and patriarchy.” October 22, 2019.

(33) hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 108.

(34) Al-Tahawy, *Blue Aubergine*, 61.

(35) Ibid, 56.

(36) Walker, *The Color Purple*, 11.

(37) Ibid, 175.

(38) Ibid.

(39) Ibid.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Ibid, 176.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁴²⁾ Ibid, 177.

⁽⁴³⁾hook, bell. *Feminism Is For Everybody*, 106.

V. General Conclusion

Throughout our work, we have attempted to shed light on women's struggle in the light of patriarchy and their journey towards empowerment. We have analyzed those *Alice Walker's The Color Purple* and *Miral Al-Tahawy's The Blue Aubergine* based on bell hooks' *Feminism is for Everybody* and *Feminism from Margin to Center* highlighted the changes that occur throughout that journey which eventually marks a passage toward freedom and recognition.

Despite the fact that the two analyzed novels are written by authors from different backgrounds, they emphasize the same experiences with their protagonists, they were born in patriarchal societies and witness sexist practices since their childhood. Having had personal experiences with patriarchy, *Walker* and *Al-Tahawy* highlight the common social norms and paradigms that exclude the role of women as active participants in society. They also stress the implication of women in the perpetuation of the patriarchal tradition through accepting it and performing it on other females. In this way, women are considered as both oppressed and oppressors.

In our analysis of the two narratives, we have attempted to cover the most relevant aspects of patriarchy and feminism. The two writers have shed the light on the role of women and other institutions such as religion in the upholding of a sexist mentality which grant men more privileges. In the light of this assumption, several examples were provided from the two novels which demonstrate the gender role segregation based on stereotypes and social standards of beauty and behavior. The research has also focused on the fulfillment journey and the shift that marks the female protagonists and other female characters in both narratives. The characters get empowered when they stick together and reject the sexist values towards them.

Through our study we have noticed that the two authors' endeavor not only to represent women's struggle in the light gender discrimination but also to show how women's suffering and denigration have resulted in creating solidarity with each other, their awakening and empowerment to fight against patriarchy. Women are finally granted more freedom and recognition through advocating women's rights and equality.

Nada and Celie, though belonging to different cultures and backgrounds, they both suffer from similar predicaments and pain, and undergo similar journey from conformism to rebellion and liberation. In this way Walker and El-Tahawi transform their novels from their own experiences in their respective societies into a story of women at large. Both of them transcend the barriers that society set, and boldly criticize the conventional institutions like marriage and religion, and evoke taboos such as sex and homosexuality.

Nevertheless, *walker's The colour purple* and *Al-Tahawy's Blue Aubergine* diverge in some details .in Arab society traditional patriarchal values are related to Islamic identity which helps mal dominance. Women are put in second position they were obliged to wear hijab and do not have access to public sphere . Which is not the case of Black women's suffering due to thier gender and skin . Furthermore Walker gives a happy ending to Celie and pictures her as being free, successful and loved by friends and family. While Nada ends up lonely, misfit because of her anti-conformist attitude and rebellious acts, and most importantly frustrated as she did not find the pure and true love that she has long been longing for.

Last but not least, the scope of this work did not allow us to deal with all the issues, though both novels are still rich grounds for new perspectives. The research can be enlarged and tackled from other angles such as the intersection of gender and race and as contributing factors to female's discrimination and oppression.

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