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*The Color Purple* (1982).**

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# Contents

Acknowledgments

Dedication

Contents

Abstract

<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	1
Review of the Literature.....	3
Issue and Working Hypothesis.....	5
Methodological Outline.....	6
<b>II. Methods and Materials:</b>	
1. Methods.....	8
2. Materials.....	11
<b>III. Results</b> .....	14
<b>IV. Discussion</b> .....	15
1. Chapter One: Gender Relations in Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias' <i>Tropiques amers</i> (2007).....	15
2. Chapter Two: Gender Relations in Alice Walker's <i>The Color Purple</i> (1982).....	40
<b>V. Conclusion</b> .....	64
<b>VI. Selected Bibliography</b> .....	66

## **Abstract**

*The aim of this study is to examine the question of gender relations in Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias' Tropiques amers (2007) and Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982). In the two chapters devoted to each of these literary works, we have borrowed certain theoretical concepts, namely Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus in his Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique (2000), Alice Walker's Womanism in her collection of essays "In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose" (1983) and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in his book Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), in order to highlight the way some black women have participated in the maintenance of patriarchy, the struggles of others to achieve gender equality and the success of some in carnivalizing gender roles. For a better understanding of the present dissertation, a historical approach to the two novels has been adopted in order to illustrate the difficult conditions and realities in which black women lived in Martinique during the periods of slavery (eighteenth century) and in South American society during the period of segregation (early twentieth century). In the first chapter, Gender Relations in the Tropiques amers (2007), we have seen how some black women during the period of slavery helped to maintain white patriarchy, how others fought white supremacy, and then how some were able to regain power over the white man by becoming black matriarchs. The second chapter, Gender Relations in The Color Purple (1982), has revealed some of what Black women had to endure from their Black counterparts after their emancipation from white supremacy. This chapter has revealed how some Black women reinforced Black patriarchy by endorsing their gender roles, how others resisted the gender hierarchy within their communities, and how some were able to subvert the gender order and carnivalize it. In conclusion, the comparative study of the two novels has allowed us to see that the two French authors and the American author, albeit from different backgrounds and lives, have similarly portrayed how Black women have experienced the dual oppression of racism and sexism both during slavery and after the emancipation of the Black community.*

## **I. Introduction:**

Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.<sup>1</sup>

-Michel Foucault-

The problem of power is at the heart of Michel Foucault's thinking on the relations between society, individuals, groups and institutions. The fundamental idea that emerges from his work is that power is not concentrated, but diffuse, dispersed and omnipresent in society<sup>2</sup>. For him, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere. It is therefore at work in every human interaction, including rituals and gender practices. Gender relations are therefore power relations<sup>3</sup>.

Gender relations constitute a distinct and asymmetrical division and distribution of human skills and capacities. They create two types of people: men and women. The definition of the identity of a man or a woman and the rigidity of the criteria themselves vary considerably between cultures and times. Nevertheless, gender relations, as far as we have been able to understand them, have been relations of domination<sup>4</sup>. In other words, gender relations have been defined and controlled by one of their interdependent aspects, namely the man<sup>5</sup>.

Pierre Bourdieu affirms that because the dominant class benefits from a large and adapted symbolic capital (a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honorability<sup>6</sup>), it manages to impose its culture on other classes. The individual who dominates a social field (structured spaces that organize around specific types of capitals or combinations of capital<sup>7</sup>), the man, will adopt a strategy of conservation where he will try to maintain his position<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the dominated individuals, i.e. women, will either submit or adopt subversive strategies to try to reorient the social order in their favor<sup>9</sup>. In order to do so, they will have to succeed in imposing a conception of society that values them.

In recent years we have seen a particular concern for the gender identity of black women who are actively trying to enhance their position in society. These women not only struggle with sexism, as white women do, but they also face a wave of racism that continues to operate despite their long journey since the period of slavery. Being black and female means facing the double oppression of sexism and racism. This discrimination, as such, could be the subject and the problematic of our research. From the literature studied so far, which could be endless, we have chosen *Tropiques amers* (2007) and *The Color Purple* (1982). These two literary works have not, to our knowledge, been approached as a case of comparative study from a gender perspective.

The present dissertation aims to explore the question of gender relations in two different literary works: *Tropiques amers* (2007) by Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias and *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker. Indeed, we will attempt to explore the question of gender relations in French Martinique and the rural American South. We will also examine how black women lived during the period of slavery in Martinique (18th century) and in the post-slavery era in the American South (early 20th century) and their respective struggles. We will shed light on some black female characters and the way they are portrayed by the two French authors Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias as well as by the African-American Alice Walker, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus, Alice Walker's Womanism and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic.

Since power is seen as a volatile and unstable element that can always be contested, power relations, and thus gender relations, need to be constantly renewed and reaffirmed<sup>10</sup>. It is therefore necessary to bring in the three theoretical approaches used in this dissertation in order to illustrate and explain the complex and unstable set of processes constituted by and through the interdependent parts of gender relations and their dialectical functioning in the selected works.

## **Review of literature:**

Both Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias' *Tropiques amers* (2007) received much criticism. To our knowledge, there has been no review of the novel *Tropiques amers* (2007) by Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias. However, a review of the TV series *Tropiques amers* (2007) - an adaptation of the novel - entitled "Tropiques Amers, Quelle Représentation de L'esclavage aux Antilles", was published to establish the challenges of the representation of slavery in *Tropiques amers* by focusing on three elements: historical accuracy, the link to Africa and the narrative's point of view. The review assures that despite the fictional characters, the TV series uses real events as a backdrop and draws parallels between white and black reactions to these events. "While the master, Théophile, struggles to maintain his prosperity, the slaves constantly remind themselves in their discussions that nothing changes for them. No matter what happens in France, or even the uprisings in Guadeloupe, their priority is to survive on a daily basis"<sup>11</sup> [Translation ours].

Regarding the link to Africa, the article shows that few elements reflect African culture. It points out that the TV series does not show the capture of black people on African soil, that the slave characters speak grammatically perfect French, equal to that of their master, with only a few Creole expressions, and that apart from Adèle's mother, Manon, the slaves do not envisage freedom by returning to Africa. Concerning the point of view of the narrative, the article denounces the invisibilisation of other slaves in *Tropiques amers* (2007) by focusing on the house slaves and the absence of the theme of the place of mixed-race people within a slave society.

Alice Walker's epistolary novel *The Color Purple* (1982) has been so popular that it is not surprising that it has been the subject of much criticism. In her critic "On The Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence" (1984), Trudier Harris argues that the novel "had done a great

disservice through its treatment of black women and a disservice as well to the Southern black communities in which such treatment was set.”<sup>12</sup> According to her, the novel gives validity to all white racist notions of pathology in black communities, reinforces traditional black sexual and violent stereotypes, and silences blacks through its perpetuated domination by popular media. Moreover, she asserts that

the portrayal of Celie was unrealistic for the time in which the novel was set, that Nettie and the letters from Africa were really extraneous to the central concerns of the novel, that the lesbian relationship in the book represents the height of silly romanticism, and that the epistolary form of the novel ultimately makes Celie a much more sophisticated character than we are initially led to believe.<sup>13</sup>

Another critic, made by Brenda R. Smith in “We Need a Hero: African American Female Bildungsromane and Celie’s Journey to Heroic Female Selfhood in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*”, explains how Walker developed a narrative that transcends and transforms socio-cultural pathologies by creating a heroine, Celie, who embodies a modern myth of emancipation for African American women, freeing them from their history of oppression, subordination and silence. Smith asserts that the protagonist achieves heroic female selfhood when she

successfully subverts those conventions of the established social order that oppress and subordinate her. She creates an identity that embodies her unique perceptions of self and privileges her individual experiences within the social order. Most definitively, the female protagonist achieves heroic status when she discovers or creates a “community of equals” ... that sustains or promises the survival of her newly-created self.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Smith declares that Alice Walker’s protagonist is “a relevant, relatable, life-changing myth of empowerment that liberates African American women and other individuals from their respective histories of oppression, subordination, silence and passivity and actualizes the achievement of agency in all areas of their lives.”<sup>15</sup>

Louis H. Pratt also criticized Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* in his “Alice Walker’s Men: Profiles in the Quest for Love and Personal Values”. Pratt argues that Alice Walker’s black male characters appear either as quiet men whose existence must be validated and

filtered through the consciousness of her women, or as weak, self-absorbed, unruly men whose humanity is imperiled by their inability to develop loving relationships with their wives and children. He argues that “Walker’s men have not been victims of a society where injustices have been imposed individually. Rather, they have functioned in a racial climate where oppression has been administered systematically to Black people collectively.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Pratt claims that Black men in Walker’s world need to redeem themselves from the racism, oppression and sexism that still plague our society and emphasizes on the interdependence of black men and women and their involvement in achieving a state of wholeness and reaffirming their humanity.

### **Issue and working hypothesis:**

This review shows that the two novels *Tropiques amers* (2007) and *The Color Purple* (1982) have not received an equal amount of criticism. Moreover, to our knowledge, no comparative study of these two literary works has been undertaken as a subject matter before.

This comparative study is based on the assumption that, although the two novels were written by different authors, at different times (2007, 1982) and in two different geographical locations, they can be brought together and studied from the same perspective. We therefore propose a study of the two authors on the basis of what they share in the representation of the image of black women in Martinican and South American societies.

To develop our topic, we intend to adopt some theoretical concepts such as Pierre Bourdieu’s Habitus in his book *Esquisse d’une Théorie de la Pratique* (2000), Alice Walker’s Womanism from her book *In Search for Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). These theories will help us to approach the two novels to reflect the perception of gender relations in

Martinican and South American societies and will be used to show the struggles of black women in the gender hierarchy.

### **Methodological outline:**

To give our work a methodological orientation, our presentation will be divided into sections. The first section includes the introduction, which gives an overview, the aim of our study and the criticism of some researchers on the two literary works. In the second section we will elaborate the Methods and Materials. In Methods, we will provide an insight on Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus in his book *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique* (2000), Alice Walker's Womanism from her book *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In Materials, we will provide brief summaries of the two novels *Tropiques amers* (2007) and *The Color Purple* (1982) and the Result section will highlight the general conclusions of our research. The discussion, which constitutes the third section, consists of two chapters. These two chapters provide a brief historical context for the books (*Tropiques amers* in the first and *The Color Purple* in the second) and then examine gender relations using Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus, Alice Walker's Womanism and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in both novels. To end with, the general conclusion of our dissertation will be restatement of the main ideas of the reached results of our work.

### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage books, 1990), sect.2, §1.

<sup>2</sup> Sergiu Balan, "Michel Foucault's View on Power relations," *ResearchGate*, June 2010, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/M.FOUCAULTSVIEWONPOWERRELATIONS.pdf>.

- <sup>3</sup> Radtke, H. Lorraine and Henderikus, J. Stam, "Power/gender : Social Relations in Theory and Practice Inquiries in Social Construction," *ResearchGate*, August 2020, accessed December 28, 2021, [file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/Powergender\\_socialrelationsintheoryandpractice1994SAGE-libgen.lc.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/Powergender_socialrelationsintheoryandpractice1994SAGE-libgen.lc.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> Velislava Chakarova, *Development of Gender Relations in the Context of Social Transformation* (France, European Institute, 2003), 10.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Øyvind Ihlen, "Symbolic Capital," *ResearchGate*, October 2018, accessed December 28, 2021, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/preprintsymboliccapital.pdf>.
- <sup>7</sup> David L. Swartz, "Bourdieu's Concept of Field," *Oxford Bibliographies*, October 07, 2020, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0164.xml>.
- <sup>8</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 2000), 259.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Sergiu Balan, "Michel Foucault's View on Power relations," *ResearchGate*, June 2010, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/M.FOUCAULTSVIEWONPOWERRELATIONS.pdf>.
- <sup>11</sup> "Tropiques Amers, Quelle Représentation de L'esclavage aux Antilles," *Karukerament*, 2020, accessed July 25, 2021, <https://www.karukerament.com/special-edition/tropiques-amers-quelle-representation-de-lesclavage-aux-antilles->.
- <sup>12</sup> Trudier Harris, "On the Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence," *Black American Literature Forum* 18, no 4 (2016): 155, accessed July 25, 2021, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/harris1984.pdf>.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 157.
- <sup>14</sup> Brenda R. Smith, "We Need a Hero: African American Female Bildungsromane and Celie's Journey to Heroic Female Selfhood in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," *Studylib*, 2009, accessed July 25, 2021, <https://studylib.net/doc/8365139/alice-walker-s-the-color-purple>.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Louis H. Pratt, "Alice Walker's Men: Profiles in the Quest For Love and Personal Values," *Studies in Popular Culture* 12, no 1 (1989): 56, accessed July 25, 2021, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/review%20of%20Alice.pdf>.

## **II. Methods and Materials**

### **1. Methods :**

This part of our dissertation copes with the theoretical framework. We have borrowed some concepts, which are suitable to our subject from Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus in his book *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique* (2000), Alice Walker's Womanism from her book *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).

#### **1.1. Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus:**

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is a notable French sociologist and one of the most important voices of social critique and theoretical innovation. In his *Esquisse d'une théorie de la Pratique*, Bourdieu established an analysis of the mechanisms of reproduction of social hierarchies and developed a theory of practice. The concept of habitus is at the center of Bourdieu's sociology. According to him, the habitus refers to a system of preferences (a lifestyle particular to each individual) that gives a predisposition to act and which influences the daily practices of individuals: the way they dress, speak and perceive. These predispositions are unconsciously internalized during the socialization phase, during which the individual adapts and integrates into a social environment<sup>1</sup> [translation ours].

Moreover, Bourdieu asserts that the habitus is not simply a phenomenon of reproduction of a behavior inculcated by the social environment, but rather it represents a "powerfully generative"<sup>2</sup> system since it is at the origin of a practical sense. Pierre Bourdieu thus defines habitus as "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures"<sup>3</sup>[translation ours]. 'Structured structures' since the habitus is the product of socialization; but it is also 'structuring structures' because it generates an infinite quantity of new practices and reinforces positions in the social space.

Finally, Pierre Bourdieu asserts that habitus is central to the reproduction of social structures and indicates that; by being incorporated; it ensures the active presence in each individual of the history of relations of domination and social order.

## **1.2. Alice Walker's Womanism:**

Alice Walker (1944) is an internationally renowned American novelist, short story writer, poet and social activist. In her collection of essays *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker coined the term "Womanism" to give a name to the struggle of black women against white patriarchy, white women's racism and sexism of black men. Thus, womanism presents the sexism, racism, dehumanization and even intra-racial racism that black women are forced to face in their lives and that feminist theory totally overlooks<sup>4</sup>.

According to Walker, the womanist identity has numerous aspects. One of them is that the affect and behavior of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength, capability and independence<sup>5</sup>. She describes a womanist as a thinking subject who is always in search of knowledge, "wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one"<sup>6</sup>. Thus, challenging the epistemological exclusions she experiences in intellectual life in general and feminist research in particular.<sup>7</sup> After that, she highlights womanists' agency and describes it as courageous, audacious and willful.<sup>8</sup> Next, she maintains that womanists love themselves and other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, and this love transcends boundaries to reach all of humanity (male and female) wanting all people to survive and thrive.<sup>9</sup> Then, Walker notes that womanists celebrate life to the fullest, through the arts, such as music and dance, as well as through the spirit.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Alice Walker asserts that womanists are collectivist and community-oriented in that the goal of womanism extends beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire peoples and communities, and then to humanity as a whole<sup>11</sup>.

Walker's construction of Womanism and its various meanings is an attempt to situate the black woman in history and culture, moving her away from the negative and inaccurate stereotypes of society<sup>12</sup>. Her intention was to awaken black women's self-consciousness and to call on them to be self-respected, self-supported and self-liberated.<sup>13</sup>

### **1.3. Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic :**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) is apparently among the greatest German idealists and one of the outstanding philosophers of western thought. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel intends to tell the story of the development of the human spirit through a history of consciousness. In the section on "Self-Consciousness" wherein the Master-Slave Dialectic is found, we point out two kinds of self-consciousnesses; a 'master-self-consciousness' and a 'slave-self-consciousness'; standing opposed to each other and interacting interdependently<sup>14</sup>.

At the outset, the 'master-self-consciousness' is self-sufficient and free and the 'slave-self-consciousness' is dependent.<sup>15</sup> The former enslaves the latter upon threat of death and to save his life, the latter agrees to do the necessary work.<sup>16</sup> However, when forced to manipulate nature (the act of labor or work) to create goods for the master, the slave experiences creativity while the master on the other hand "experiences stagnation living off the work of the slave."<sup>17</sup> Through the slave's work, the slave has learnt that he has some control over the master and is thus regaining his consciousness<sup>18</sup>. He is gradually being "transformed into a truly independent consciousness."<sup>19</sup> The independent consciousness of the slave represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master.<sup>20</sup> Through the slave's creativity, his closeness to the Spirit, as well as the struggle under threat of death, the slave becomes independent while the master, defined only through the work of his slave, becomes dependent.<sup>21</sup> The end-result of the process is the recognition between master and slave of interdependence between the two.<sup>22</sup>

The choice of Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus, Alice Walker's Womanism and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic as pertinent approaches to our comparative study in terms of gender relations may be explained by the fact that those theories bring into light the Foucauldian power relations. Analyzing power means understanding the deeper meaning of patriarchy; gender is therefore inextricably linked to issues of power. Hence, gender relations are power relations.

## **2. Materials:**

### **2.1. Summary of *Tropiques amers*:**

*Tropiques amers* (2007) is a novel written by Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias which takes place in Saint-Pierre, Martinique, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1788-1810). The novel illustrates the West Indian society on the eve of the French Revolution: hostility of the local elite to the royal power, reality of the triangular trade, slavery and application of the "Black Code"...etc.

The novel takes as an example a French colonial planter, Théophile Bonaventure, who fights to keep his right to slavery. At the same time, the story shows us the lives of his slaves such as Amédée, Rosalie and Adèle. Amédée is a slave supervisor of Théophile's domaine who ends up having his hand cut off in order to reach his freedom. Rosalie who is in love with Bonaventure wants to get back her place nearby her master and therefore gets very jealous of the colonist's wife, Olympe de Rochant, or even of his new mistress, Adèle. Amédée's daughter; Adèle; is a young and beautiful slave-maid on whom the master has set his sights but is in love with the rebel Koyaba. She loses both her son (Jean Baptiste) and her mother (Manon) because of her master. To save her father's life, Adèle agrees to submit to her master's wishes and even to love him.

We have not found an English version of *Tropiques Amers* (2007); therefore, all the passages from the book that you will find in this dissertation are from our own translation.

## **2.2. Summary of *The Color Purple*:**

*The Color Purple* (1982) is an epistolary novel written by Alice Walker, which takes place mainly in rural Georgia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1909-1947). The novel focuses on the story of the main character, Celie, a 14 years-old black girl, who writes many letters to God for the reason that she does not tell a human soul about her struggles. After her father impregnates her twice and apparently kills the children, Celie ends up marrying a man; Mr.\_\_\_\_ (later called Albert); that physically, mentally and verbally abuses her. Nettie; Celie's beloved sister who runs away from home and becomes a missionary in Africa; has written countless letters to Celie, all of which Albert has hidden. Meanwhile, Celie is introduced to many independent women –Shug Avery, a glamorous Blues singer who is her husband's mistress and, Sofia, the wife of her stepson, Harpo- who inevitably makes her the strong woman that leaves her abusive husband, finds and reads Nettie's letters to discover many truths, then starts her own life as a successful seamstress awaiting her sister's arrival from Africa.

### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Chloé Coudray, "L'Habitus, Pierre Bourdieu (Fiche concept)," *Partageons l'Eco*, November 2019, accessed July 14, 2021, <http://partageonsleco.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FC-Bourdieu.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 2000), 257.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

<sup>4</sup> Thema B. Davis and Lillian C. Diaz, "Introduction: Womanist and Mujerista Psychology," *The American Psychological Association*, 2016, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/Womanist-and-Mujerista-Psychologies-Intro-Sample.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), §1, [file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20\(z-lib.org\)%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20(z-lib.org)%20(1).pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Long Shi, "Womanism and The Color Purple," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 490 (2020): 654, accessed July 15, 2021, [file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/Womanism\\_and\\_The\\_Color\\_Purple.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/Womanism_and_The_Color_Purple.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), §1, [file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20\(z-lib.org\)%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20(z-lib.org)%20(1).pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, §2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, §3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, §2.

<sup>12</sup> Long Shi, "Womanism and The Color Purple," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 490 (2020): 654, accessed July 15, 2021, [file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/Womanism\\_and\\_The\\_Color\\_Purple.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/Womanism_and_The_Color_Purple.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 653.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Bornedal, "Hegel's Master Slave Dialectics," *Academia*, accessed May 28, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/2494539/Hegels\\_Master\\_Slave\\_Dialectics](https://www.academia.edu/2494539/Hegels_Master_Slave_Dialectics).

<sup>15</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 115.

<sup>16</sup> Sabrina Zerar, *Hegelian Themes in Black American Thought: from Frederick Douglass to Malcolm X* (Tizi-Ouzou, University of Mouloud Mammeri, 2009), 63.

<sup>17</sup> David C. Shishido, "Apotheosis Now: A Hegelian Dialectical Analysis of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*," *Berkley Undergraduate Journal* 24, no 3 (2011):113, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5pg2n9f8/qt5pg2n9f8.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 119.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> David C. Shishido, "Apotheosis Now: A Hegelian Dialectical Analysis of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*," *Berkley Undergraduate Journal* 24, no 3 (2011):113, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5pg2n9f8/qt5pg2n9f8.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

### III. Results:

In this dissertation we have explored the issue of gender relations in the American rural South and French Caribbean societies taking Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias' *Tropiques amers* (2007) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) as a case study. Our literary analysis has attempted to demonstrate the difficult living conditions of black women in these patriarchal societies and their rebellious reaction against men's superiority and domination. The implementation of the theories of Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus in his book *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique* (2000), Alice Walker's Womanism from her collection of essays "In Search for Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose" (1983) and Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) has revealed that some black women take on the role assigned to them by the patriarchy, while others rebel and fight to improve their lives and achieve gender equality. Some go even further and succeed in overturning this gender order.

Our study of gender relations in the two novels revealed that, despite the different times in which the two novels were written, black women were oppressed by men in the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, both in the rural American South and in French Martinique. This study has attempted to show how black women faced both racism and sexism which worked together to dishonor their role and existence in order to maintain male power, as they faced not only the racism and sexism of the white patriarchy but also the sexism of the black patriarchy. By giving them a narrative voice, the authors of these two literary works attempt to rehabilitate the image of black women and emancipate them from white racism and patriarchal power.

## IV. Discussion

### 1. Chapter One: Gender Relations in Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias' *Tropiques amers* (2007)

This chapter deals with Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias's *Tropiques amers* (2007). Its aim is to set up the interaction of this text with Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus, Alice Walker's Womanism and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic. These theories have identified very important themes and concepts concerning the struggle of black women during the period of slavery (18th century) in Martinique, in terms of gender relations. The discussion will focus on the discrimination of some of the black female characters in *Tropiques amers*, their struggles to achieve gender equality and their success in the carnivalization of gender roles, but first, it provides a brief historical background for the novel.

Convinced that history is as important as the text itself, the American literary critic, Stephen Greenblatt, developed, in the 1980s, a new interpretive strategy in the study of both history and literature, which he called 'New Historicism'. The New Historicism is "a form of cultural analysis which examines the ways in which a cultural product, especially a literary text, interacts with and participates in its historical context"<sup>1</sup>.

In his introduction to *The New Historicism* (1989), H. Aram Veesser asserts that literary and non-literary texts "circulate inseparably"<sup>2</sup> and claims that "the new historicists combat empty formalism by placing historical considerations at the centre of literary analysis"<sup>3</sup>. Veesser's point is that the relationship between literary texts and their cultural and historical context is intertextual, and that the new historicists do not treat a literary text in isolation from its historical context.

### **1.1. Historical background of *Tropiques amers*:**

Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, several European countries attempted to construct their empire wherein new lands were discovered and colonized; regardless of the populations that had been living there for ages; new systems of government were instituted and new social models were created<sup>4</sup>. At first, the European colonizers relied on native people and European indentured servants to cultivate the conquered lands, but soon they turned their attention toward the African continent as a source of cheap labor, and this marked the beginning of the slave trade.

The transatlantic slave trade (the triangular trade) was one of the most significant forced migrations experienced in history in terms of volume and duration. From 1529 to 1850, over 12 million Africans were shipped<sup>5</sup>, mostly along the coasts of West Africa, and forced to undertake the Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean to reach the conquered lands. The main destinations of the Middle Passage were Brazil, North America and the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup>

In the Caribbean, the four major colonial powers were the English, Spanish, Dutch and French.<sup>7</sup> Before finally being secured as established colonies, many of the Caribbean islands switched hands several times. French colonies were established in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the 1630s, and a significant French presence took official possession of St.Domingue; the Western portion of Santo Domingo; in 1697<sup>8</sup>.

The first French settlement in Martinique (1635) began with the construction of the Saint-Pierre fort in the town of Saint-Pierre.<sup>9</sup> Soon the first tobacco plantations, which relied primarily on the labor of white indentured servants, were set up. However, the profitability of sugar produced by enslaved labor soon led to the rapid installation of sugar plantations in the areas that were most suitable. Because the economy of Martinique depended on the cultivation of crops, the need for agricultural labor led to the establishment of slavery and the development of plantation economy.<sup>10</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century; when the Christian religious argument was no longer sufficient; a racist argumentation that wanted to be scientific, associated with a mercantile vision aimed at justifying the logic of the establishment of the slave system. For the whites, the black man was first and foremost an instrument of labor, a beast of burden acquired at a high price which by his regular work was to bring them enormous profits. This logic has led to a social (structured inequalities between groups in society, in terms of their access to material or symbolic reward<sup>11</sup>) and racial (structured inequality based on ethnic-racial group membership<sup>12</sup>) stratification.

The social pyramid of colonial Martinique during the eighteenth century was as follows: The white planters at the top, the freedmen in the middle and the slaves at the bottom<sup>13</sup>. The mulattoes were also considered as slaves but were treated better than black slaves because the darker the skin of the slave, the less rights he had in the whole colonial space. The colony of Martinique was a truly racist society that promoted internal conflicts<sup>14</sup>. This society was a space of enslavement, defamation and violence.

In order to maintain this hierarchical order, the whites have put in place a set of laws called the “Slave Codes”<sup>15</sup> [Translation ours]. These laws were passed to restrict slaves’ rights and liberties and, far from protecting them, were for a long the inspiration for planters in their daily mistreatments<sup>16</sup> [Translation ours]. It offered to the whites (men and women) every opportunity to satisfy their natural inclination to violence and their unlimited taste for authority over these creatures that interest had delivered to their mercy.

As in any system based on arbitrariness, it gave rise to acts of barbarism ranging from the simplest and most bearable tortures to the most extreme ones<sup>17</sup> [Translation ours]. These tortures took many forms, including imprisonment, whipping, and mutilation, sometimes even worse, murder. In fact, the motive of punishment served as a pretext for torture. The ingenuity

of the white masters in the art of inflicting torture and causing pain was always flourishing, and the infamy always pushed far.

Women were subject to the same punishments and abuse as men but faced additional difficulties that were related to their feminine condition<sup>18</sup> [Translation ours]. Defined as fragile, dependent and vulnerable, they were usually confined to particular areas of work, shaped by an ideology of domesticity. Women servants could occupy the function of maids, cooks, ladies-in-waiting, nannies, and laundresses. The close contact between these servants and their masters worked special hardship on them, since they were vulnerable to sexual as well as labor exploitation<sup>19</sup>.

Since the logic of the Black Code was that the slave's body did not belong to him, but rather to his owner who could use it as he saw fit, the white master made rape and sexual exploitation part of the absolute power that he had over his object. This sexual practice was committed within the private domain, and each female slave; whether major or minor; could have been a potential prey for her master or any member of his family. Black women were seen as sexual objects that had to satisfy the white man's desire<sup>20</sup> [Translation ours].

The sexual abuse of female slaves was primarily a matter of power where the white master showed his slave the full extent of the power that the status of "master" gave him. In Martinique, as elsewhere where blacks were held in captivity, the sexual exploitation of female slaves was one of the most specific and widespread social practices of the slave system. These women were sexually stalked, harassed and raped and were forced to comply with sexual advance by their masters on a regular basis<sup>21</sup> [Translation ours].

Many women slaves became concubines for their master and thus created a sense of hatred between the slave women and mistress of the house<sup>22</sup> [Translation ours]. The sexually victimized enslaved women became targets of the mistress's fury. In fact some irate mistress

whipped, disfigured, sold them or sold away their mixed-race children, resulted from the illegal relation. Therefore, women slaves had two burdens: the first was being black and the second was being a woman.

Because of the power relationship between white men slave owners, on the one hand, and enslaved women on the other, the threat of punishment and coercion meant that women had little option to resist unwanted sexual advances<sup>23</sup>. Yet such relationship, particularly long-term relationships between a master and a favored concubine, could be complex<sup>24</sup>. Gender identities, masculinities and femininities, constituted one axis through which colonial regimes established their legitimacy, and through which colonized subjects accommodated new realities<sup>25</sup>.

*Tropiques amers* (1788-1810) uses real historical events as a backdrop and perfectly reflects the Martinique society of the 18th century. The novel highlights the way black women were treated during the time of slavery and illustrates how they were treated at the time. It also highlights how racism and sexism combined to dishonor the role and existence of women in order to maintain male power. Patriarchal power undoubtedly affects women and the nature of femininity, as models of femininity are embodied in women's ways of thinking and are embedded in their routines of action. This phenomenon is called gender habitus.

## **1.2. Gender Habitus in *Tropiques amers* :**

According to Bourdieu, there is no fundamental difference between the class struggle and the gender struggle<sup>26</sup>. The conception of the male and female sexual roles is predominant in society. This social division of the sexes assigns a role to each sex that is linked to tradition or custom rather than to specific laws<sup>27</sup>. Concerning the question of the difference of the sexes and the social relation between them, Bourdieu perceives a male domination which imposes a certain conception of the female role<sup>28</sup>.

In *Masculine Domination* (1998), Pierre Bourdieu examines the mechanisms and persistence of patriarchy. He seeks to examine the ways in which individuals will not act so as to disrupt structures of domination, such as patriarchy, from which they suffer.<sup>29</sup> According to patriarchal history, women are different from men because they have different bodies and different biological functions. These differences therefore justify different positions in the hierarchy, in the sense that they dictate different behaviors for men and women. Bourdieu asserts that this patriarchal form of gender roles is deeply embedded in the bodies, thoughts and identities of individuals and defines this phenomenon using the term ‘symbolic violence’<sup>30</sup>.

Symbolic violence is, according to Bourdieu, the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity.<sup>31</sup> It does not express itself physically on the bodies of those it violates, but mentally on their thoughts, thus leading those who are subjected to it to consent, and thus to be complicit. Bourdieu argues that gender inequality is symbolic violence because women (and men) voluntarily conform to it, without needing to be coerced, and because it has the effect of creating normative symbolic images of ideal gender behavior<sup>32</sup>. He conceptualizes this shaping of individuals in terms of habitus.

Pierre Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to explain how social norms are anchored in individuals and how these rules are obeyed. According to him, an individual’s habitus develops in response to the social sphere in which the individual lives and acts and as people react to the circumstances in which they live, they become accustomed to these particular responses and, over time, repeat them with little or no awareness or choice<sup>33</sup>. In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu describes how women are condemned to participate in the symbolic violence of gender and cannot but adhere to the structures and agents of domination.<sup>34</sup>

In *Tropiques amers*, Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias embody the Afro-Caribbean woman’s habitus in the characters of Rosalie and Man Josèph. These two characters have

developed a habitus in response to the 18th century social sphere in which they lived and have become accustomed to these norms and, over time, have repeated them with little or no awareness or choice. The social norms of that era have become embedded in the mental of these two enslaved black women, which explains their adherence to patriarchal gender role norms and their participation in the symbolic violence to which they are subjected.

### **1.2.1. Rosalie in *Tropiques Amers*:**

Bourdieu argues that gender, as a category and social construct, limits individuals' choices in part by shaping their preferences<sup>35</sup>. Thus, women desire symbols and causes of female inferiority. Rosalie is a beautiful light-skinned mulattress who is completely devoted to her white master and willing to defend her position at all costs: "This position that she had conquered nearby the master, she defended it, jealous as a tigress, claws and nails out, and was not ready to give it up to whoever it was."<sup>36</sup> The light-skinned mulattress is proud to be the master's *cocotte* and has no problem with being considered as his sexual object. Her body is a thing of flesh on which Théophile has a hold, and uses it for his pleasures:

Théophile grabbed Rosalie by the arm, pulled her to him and buried his wet face in her neck. She gave a cry of surprise.

-But that's what's good! The strong odors of women and cum! ...

Théophile caressed her breast with a grimace.

- What if I need you? [In his bed]

Rosalie gave him a little pat on the hand, while addressing him a malicious smile.<sup>37</sup>

For Bourdieu, habitus is essentially an unconscious assumption or internalization of the rules and structures of the social world<sup>38</sup>. Through our reading of *Tropiques amers*, we can see that Rosalie plays her role perfectly, not only as a black slave but also as a sexual slave to her master as a woman. Not only is she proud to be the master's *cocotte*, but she also approves of his marriage to a white woman and takes charge of the preparations. When Théophile arrives at his estate, Rosalie is concerned that he will be late in St. Pierre to welcome his white bride, Olympe, and her family:

- [Rosalie] Hurry up master! You are late for the boat! ...

He [Théophile] gave her a slight pat at her buttocks, teasing:  
-... Are you in such a hurry to see me with another woman?  
Rosalie ... laughed with him.<sup>39</sup>

From the moment Rosalie was appointed to serve her master's wife, Olympe, the maid put her heart and soul into her mistress's service and accompanied her through the ups and downs of her journey. She was loyal and supportive to the person who was supposed to be her rival. She upheld her during her affair with another man, her pregnancy and delivery. On the day of Olympe's birth, an uprising was in the offing and when Rosalie had caught Amédée in the study stealing the pistols from the master's safe, she did not want to get involved or even run away with him when Amédée offered to. Rosalie made it clear that she did not want to join them and replied: "To do what? Live like a savage with those maroon Bossales? Are you insane?"<sup>40</sup>.

Furthermore, Rosalie's participation in the symbolic violence that Théophile inflicts on her is demonstrated by her acquiescence to his betrayal and infidelity towards her. In fact, after his marriage with Olympe, Mr. Bonaventure had an affair with a slave younger and more beautiful than Rosalie. When this latter caught him having sex with his new prey, Adèle, Théophile inflicted a bloody gash on Rosalie's left cheek. Instead of showing her displeasure to her master and making him regret what he had done, Rosalie directed her rage and thirst for revenge towards Adèle, the one she considered the thief of her status as "the master's cocotte".

Despite all the emotional and physical suffering Théophile inflicted on her, Rosalie never stopped desiring the symbol and cause of her female inferiority, namely Théophile. Her gender habitus generated a submissive nature that did not allow her to rebel against her tyrannical, violent and sexist oppressor. She not only remained loyal to him and his wife, but also to their daughter. She raised her, treated her as her own daughter and supported her

through all the difficult times she went through, including when Constance needed an abortion, which resulted in Rosalie's death.

### **1.2.2. Man Josèph in *Tropiques amers*:**

Even if Man Josèph, the cook of Théophile's domain, does not appear often in the book, the few passages that concern her demonstrate that she illustrates the typical Afro-Caribbean woman's habitus. Pierre Bourdieu argues that habitus is not only a system of preferences but also a principle that generates behavior according to tastes acquired in the course of life<sup>41</sup>. Thus, each individual develops a regular and coherent behavior that seems natural to them but which is in fact the product of all their past social experiences and which guides their future experiences<sup>42</sup>. Man Josèph's submissive character generated by her previous social experiences guides all her future experiences. Her gender habitus prevents her from rebelling or even expressing her displeasure. She even discourages other slaves from committing any act of rebellion.

When Amédée expressed his displeasure at the betrayal of the master who had promised to set him free, and said that he would no longer care about the welfare of his business, Man Josèph said to him: "You're acting mad, but if the master died for good, you'd be sold. It's better to be here."<sup>43</sup> Moreover, when Rosalie had rebelled and revealed Adèle's affair with Kayaba in revenge for Adèle stealing her place as the master's *cocotte*, Man Josèph had said to Rosalie:

-Shame on you, Rosalie! Shame on you! You wanted revenge and you did a lot of harm...

-... Listen to me, you bad breed! Adèle is more beautiful and younger than you, you must accept it. Afterwards there will be other younger and more beautiful girls and the master will do the same with them.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, after the insurrection where Adèle had to sell her soul to the master in order to save her father's life, Man Josèph said to Adèle: "So you've become the master's thingy,

after all! Well done to you for being so proud! All this for a miserable African! ”<sup>45</sup> and added: “Stop it with this one [Koyaba]! Isn’t it enough, all this unhappiness we have because of you? You’d better think of your father instead of running around like a bitch after your nigger!”<sup>46</sup>

From these passages, we can see that both Rosalie and Man Josèph accept their condition as slaves, cope with their deplorable situation without any effort to change or overcome it and do not adhere at all to the revolutionaries; instead they despise them, call them “savages” and hold them responsible for all their misfortunes. Indeed, they both represent the very image of submission and traditional African female slave role, and are the embodiment of the Afro-Caribbean woman’s habitus.

In the question of gender difference and the social relationship between the sexes, Bourdieu perceives an almost exclusive male domination<sup>47</sup> [Translation ours]. This male domination which imposes a certain conception of the sharing of sexual roles and the binary opposition between men and women create tensions between the two sexes. Feminists and womanists have responded to these patriarchal forms of power, their use and abuse, and have expressed the need to revise and rethink them in order to play an emancipatory role in the lives of women. By their very nature, feminism and womanism have attacked the politics and practice of male power abuse, and also the issue of gender equality.

### **1.3. Womanism in *Tropiques amers*:**

The male-dominated institutions and male-oriented values and beliefs have been so universal that they have become almost standard beliefs. Feminism and feminists have responded to these patriarchal forms of power and discourse, and have expressed the need to revise and rethink them in order to play an emancipatory role in the lives of women. They came to counteract the patriarchal argument and call for the rights and equality of women. Not identifying with feminism because it was seen as a white women’s movement, Alice Walker’s womanism intervenes to make an important contribution to the experiences of

women of color. With this concept, Walker wanted to discuss how both racism and sexism work together to disgrace black women's role and existence in order to maintain the masculine power.

Alice Walker asserts that a womanist is an empowered black feminist or feminist of color who is confronted not only with class and gender struggles, like feminists, but also faces race struggle.<sup>48</sup> In her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker attributes to a womanist some characteristics that challenge the moral, cultural and societal conditions of black women. In *Tropiques Amers*, the characteristics of a womanist are illustrated through the character of Adèle. She is undoubtedly depicted as an individual with empowering personality traits who manages to stay a strong and confident black woman despite social and cultural marginalization.

Walker argues that a womanist loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, and that this love transcends boundaries to reach out to all of humanity, wanting all people to survive and thrive.<sup>49</sup> Adèle's love is shown in the resilience with which she helps her female friends survive sometimes life and death situations. At the beginning of the novel, Adèle had to consent to a forced and unwanted sexual relationship with her master, Théophile, in order to save her mother, Manon, from being sold. Indeed, her love for her mother is such that she has sacrificed herself to save her. Adèle also tried to save Rosalie from hanging by trying to convince Théophile to take her back after he had handed her over to the judge, because Théophile had caught him aborting his daughter Constance, who was carrying Ambroise Jones' child. Adèle had done everything in her power to save her, but unfortunately she had not succeeded. Moreover, the other woman whom Adèle was able to help to blossom was Constance. Adèle took her under her wing after her mother's death and her father's affluence, and accompanied her throughout her life as a woman, especially in the preparations for her marriage to Sainte-Colombe.

Furthermore, Alice Walker argues that womanists are collectivist and community-oriented in the sense that the goal of womanism extends beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire peoples and communities, and then to humanity as a whole.<sup>50</sup> Adèle's collectivism is apparent in her solidarity with the men of her life. Adèle did her best to save her father, Amédée, from being hanged after he betrayed his master during the insurrection. Amédée had to have his left hand amputated but was able to survive thanks to his daughter's help. Adèle also helped her son Jean-Baptiste escape from Martinique after the authorities discovered his revolutionary writings. She handed her son over to his father, Koyaba, so that he would escape with him to Haiti and not be murdered for his ideas and political commitment.

Alice Walker asserts that a womanist strong personality is evident in the way she speaks confidently and in the linguistic elements she uses.<sup>51</sup> Adèle's confidence can be shown in her bold manner of speaking and in her use of specific linguistic elements to empower herself and challenge Théophile. When the latter has discovered that she was planning to run away with Koyaba, Adèle says to him: "What if it's true? What if I wanted to run away and be free? What would you do to stop me? Would you lock me up? Would you kill me like you did with your wife?"<sup>52</sup>.

Adèle's womanist personality is also evident in the way she talks to those around her and tells them clearly what she thinks of them. In a scene that took place in the kitchen of the house, Adèle listened attentively to a conversation between the trio: Amédée, Rosalie and Man Josèph, where they talked about their master:

- He [Théophile] knows I'm the one making him money. But now, I do like the others, I say "yes, master, *pani* pwoblèm" and I don't care about his plantation and his sugar... He can die! [said Amédée]
- You're acting mad, but if the master died for good, you'd be sold. It's better to be here, said Man Josèph.
- It's true. At *Geule ferdée's* plantation, the slaves are treated much worse... Rosalie added.<sup>53</sup>

Adèle was stunned by what she had just heard and “seemed embarrassed in front of the trio at the table. She finally stood up, tears in her eyes”<sup>54</sup>:

- Life is sweet because you are in the master’s kitchen! You fill your pudding, and you think you are happy! My mother killed herself to leave this place!  
And she went out of the kitchen...  
Her cry of revolt made them uncomfortable. She was throwing their own shame back in their faces, their submission and their full bellies.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, Adèle rejected her master’s advances several times and made this known not only through her words, where she said “I don’t want to be his whore!”<sup>56</sup>, but also through her body language during the moments when Théophile had tried to get close to her.

Moreover, Alice Walker asserts that a womanist’s strong personality is shown not only through her way of speaking but also through her body language.<sup>57</sup> When Manon’s ghost had appeared to Théophile, the latter was frightened and asked Adèle to bring him a knife in order to defend himself. “When Adèle handed him the knife, he took the opportunity to caress her hand [but] she suddenly withdrew it and stepped back, looking at him with a look of disgust.”<sup>58</sup> In another passage where Théophile caught Adèle bathing, he realized that she was pregnant and thought that the child was his. He tried to caress her, but Adèle did not let him:

- You’re pregnant! Look at you! Even your belly is getting bigger! ... he looked at Adèle and caressed her cheek. You’re not like the others; I’ve always known that...  
Adèle stepped back, picked up the dress and quickly put it on, grabbed her basket and left.<sup>69</sup>

According to Walker, the behavior of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength and capacity.<sup>60</sup> From the beginning, Adèle has consistently behaved in a way that demonstrates her strength and ability to cope with the difficult moments and various obstacles she encounters in her daily life. Indeed, after the death of her mother, Adèle decided to shave her head as a sign of mourning, and when Théophile saw her, he was furious, but she did not hesitate for a second to defy him and stand up to him:

Théophile jumped up as he discovered Adèle’s shaved head and the ash marks traced on her cheeks. He came and grabbed her so violently by the arm that she dropped the tureen, which broke on the floor ...

- [Théophile] Your hair! He shouted. What have you done to your hair?  
Adèle looked him straight in the eyes without answering ...  
- [Théophile]... The result is that it looks awful!  
The caress of Théophile ended in a light tap on her skull; however, Adèle did not lower her eyes...  
-Get out of here; said Théophile to Adèle, I don't want to see you anymore!  
She turned on her heels with her head held high, picking up the pieces of faïence that she placed on the table.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, when Rosalie had brought to light Adèle's affair with her beloved Koyaba, Théophile was furious and "could not bear the idea that Adèle had given herself to the Manding of her own free will"<sup>62</sup>. The latter reserved a punishment for the slave who had the audacity to raise his hand on his mistress, Olympe, but decided to save his favorite slave because he didn't want her to be damaged. While watching her lover being whipped by Jacquier, Adèle remained strong, ignored her furious master, did not hesitate to exchange glances with her lover who was being whipped and did not deprive herself from showing her joy at his escape:

... Facing him [Koyaba], Adèle, also in the position of the accused, was also holding her head high...  
- You're not going to have her whipped too? [Said Olympe]  
- Certainly not! I don't want her to be damaged! [Théophile replied]  
... Olympe looked at Adèle, who had not deigned to look at Théophile when he had announced that he was sparing her, and who did not take her eyes off the man who was receiving the whip without complaining...  
Koyaba ... did not lower his eyes, continuing to look at Adèle who was not weakening either. It did not matter that the audience was impressed by their endurance and their looks... Adèle smiled in the midst of the general confusion while all eyes followed the man who was running away between the huts... Amédée looked at his daughter who had bright eyes...<sup>63</sup>

When it comes to her son, Jean-Baptiste, Adèle can be extremely powerful, determined and fierce. In a scene where she had to defend him from the clutches of her master, Théophile, Adèle did not hesitate for a second:

Théophile was already raising his arm to strike the second blow, when another shrill cry tore the silence.  
- [Adèle] Stop it!  
... She stood in front of him ... out of breath, she seemed ready to tear out the eyes of the first one who would have the audacity to approach... then looked Théophile straight in his eyes.  
-Don't you dare touch him!<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, after facing Théophile, she had the audacity to reveal to him and to all those present that the man who was being whipped was her son, the child whose execution he ordered 20 years ago:

... she had a confession to make and it was Théophile whom she challenged with her eyes, announcing to the crowd:

-He is my son!

Théophile looked at her, incredulous.

-You don't have a son! He said with assurance that conjured up the unthinkable.

- *Ou pa ka songé*. The one you wanted to kill...<sup>65</sup>

The other person with whom Adèle has behaved in a way that demonstrates empowerment, strength and capacity is Olympe. Indeed when Olympe got into debt with La Rivière and had no money to pay him back, she decided to sell him some of her slaves, including her worst enemy, Adèle. When the latter realized that she was going to be sold, she immediately tried to escape and then to devise a plan to be released but unfortunately without success:

When she saw Olympe pointing at her, Jacquier coming towards her [Adèle] and Amédée lowering his head, she understood. Her face took on an expression of horror, and then she turned towards the *rue Cases-Nègres*. She had let go of Constance's hand, and jumped the steps of the veranda without realizing it. She was running at full speed. She had to run... She heard the tramp of boots and felt a man behind her quickly catching up. It was Jacquier, who was girding her to bring her back.

-Please, let me go!

-I can't. Sorry!

It was then that she had an idea - the only way out:

-Take my jewels from under the cross. Redeem me from *Gueule fardée*!<sup>66</sup>

Once Adèle realized that they were going straight to St. Pierre to be sold, "she felt like shouting her hatred. [But] what good would it do? She raised her head; her pride had not yet left her"<sup>67</sup>. Upon arrival at the auction block, Adèle and the other slaves were put on a wooden platform to introduce them to the passing customers. Unlike the others, Adèle was tied up because they were afraid of her escape. Unlike Adèle,

everyone had a deadened or fearful look. In contrast, she wore a proud face, and defied the assembly with her eyes. Everybody noticed it ...

Adèle looked at them with disdain and spat on the ground in their [the planters] direction

...

Adèle looked at them, more enraged than ever, while the other slaves, downcast, feared that her openly combative attitude was working against them.<sup>68</sup>

After Théophile had saved her from the clutches of the planters, Adèle had the audacity to say to her master's wife: "I'm going to kill you"<sup>69</sup> as she passed by to enter the *Grande Case*. In revenge, Adèle did not hesitate to behave in an odious and defiant way with her. In a scene that took place in the living room of the *Grande Case* where Olympe, Rosalie and Constance were,

Adèle had just made her entrance, which from then on always froze the atmosphere. She had just carefully put a triumphant look on her face, and she walked nonchalantly, with her head held high, rustling her skirts. For some time now, her presence had been feared, and she had been obnoxious as if in a spirit of domination ...

Ostensibly ignoring the three women, Adèle went to the large sideboard ... She opened it, grabbed a white earthenware plate ...

- [Olympe] Close the buffet! There's nothing in there for you! ...

- Get out of here! These dishes are part of my dowry. As long as I'm alive, no one will touch them...

- [Adèle] Go ahead, she said in a suave voice. Don't let me take it...

Adèle took the opportunity ... to open the sideboard again, this time to take a plate of entremets ...

She had won: Olympe screamed, snatched the plates from her hands and threw them on the floor... Adèle burst into a mocking laugh...

- [Constance] Go away! Leave her alone!

Adèle stiffened and pushed her away with brutality...

Adèle could leave, satisfied. She walked to the door yawning ostentatiously, began to hum, took one last look behind her before leaving the room.<sup>70</sup>

Adèle not only stood up to Théophile and his wife but also to all those around her, including her father. The way she behaved towards Amédée clearly demonstrates a strong power and an enormous capacity. Indeed, before discovering the truth about her son, Jean Baptiste, Adèle thought he was executed and held her father responsible for this abominable act as much as Théophile because he submitted to his master's order to kill the newborn child. One day, after having been assigned to work in the fields, Amédée had brought water for the slaves to hydrate themselves. He distributed some water to each of them, one by one and "when it was Adèle's turn, she grabbed the calabash with indifference, without even looking at her father, as if she didn't know him"<sup>71</sup>. Amédée discreetly pulled a banana from his pocket to give it to her "but Adèle, who had not spoken to him since the day he took her child, took the fruit, threw it ostensibly on the ground and then spat on her father's feet before passing the calabash to her neighbor."<sup>72</sup> To be able to act like she did in those situations takes a great deal

of courage and most certainly a willful behavior, all the characteristics of a womanist listed by Alice Walker.

Finally, Alice Walker describes womanists' agency as courageous, audacious and willful.<sup>73</sup> Adèle's womanist agency is demonstrated by her courage, boldness and willingness to make her own decisions and free choices. Towards the end of the novel, Adèle makes the decision to go to Saint-Pierre to start her own business and earn enough money to buy her son's freedom. She begins by working as a manager of the cabaret she has set up in Théophile's holiday home. Adèle's other choice, which demonstrates her womanist agency, is her decision to marry Théophile rather than run away with Koyaba, because she felt that she had more to gain by marrying a white man who would offer her freedom than by running away with a black man and living with him as fugitives.

It is clear that Adèle's womanist personality pushes her to make her own choices, to determine her own rules and to challenge the 18th century Martinican patriarchal society with its norms and ideas in order to achieve gender equality. However, the embodiment of eighteenth-century patriarchal ideology in the lives of men and women does not mean that all men are successful patriarchs or that all women are submissive victims. In *Tropiques Amers*, Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias carnivalize gender hierarchies with the character of Adèle who occupies a space where patriarchal norms are suspended, acting in ways that transgress gender and sex boundaries and gaining the power to dethrone the authoritarian Théophile Bonaventure.

#### **1.4. Hegel's master slave dialectic in *Tropiques amers*:**

Carnivalized literature or carnivalization is Mikhail Bakhtin's term for the presence of a Carnavalesque sense of the world in literary works. According to him, the Carnavalesque is a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos<sup>74</sup>. The Carnavalesque often serves in literature, for Bakhtin, as a

rebellion of the social order against hierarchical authority. It is thus a rebellion against the body or institute that claims ultimate traditional legitimacy<sup>75</sup>. Based on the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, we will attempt to show how carnivalization takes place and the stages through which the slave passes to overthrow the hierarchical order and become the master.

In *Tropiques amers*, the struggle between Théophile Bonaventure and Adèle unfolds in the same way as the dynamics of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Hegel argues that initially the 'master-self-consciousness' is self-sufficient and free and the 'slave-self-consciousness' is dependent and that the former enslaves the latter under the threat of death.<sup>76</sup> The novel initially presents Théophile Bonaventure as the heir to the role of 'master' in the master-slave relationship while Adèle is his 'slave'. Théophile is a member of the master class, a rich white man who owns a sugar plantation, while Adèle is relegated to object status. In addition to being his property as a slave, Adèle is Théophile's sex slave. He constantly threatens to sell, torture or kill her family members if she does not want to sleep with him, and to kill her lover if he discovers that she is having an affair with someone else.

Hegel argues that through the slave's work, the slave has learnt that he has some control over the master and thus regains his consciousness<sup>77</sup>. Adèle began to regain her consciousness from the moment she realized that she could use her sex appeal to direct Théophile while manipulating him to get what she wanted. She uses sex as a weapon to make him fall in love with her so that she has an even better chance of controlling him. By combining sexual and emotional control, Adèle was able to save her father from death and move to Saint-Pierre to be near her son Jean-Baptiste.

However, when forced to manipulate nature to create goods for the master, the slave experiences creativity while the master "experiences stagnation by living off the slave's labor."<sup>78</sup> Adèle had to be creative to find a way to earn money for her master, who was ruined after the court sentence. He was fined a million pounds for his betrayal of the French nation

and his alliance with the English. She proposes to him to let her settle in Saint-Pierre to set up a business and uses her charm to convince him. Once settled in the city, Adèle transformed her master's second home into a gambling house, then into a sewing workshop, and ran the business with great profit. Living off Adèle's work, Théophile stagnates because his financial stability depends on her.

According to Hegel, through the slave's work and the awakening of his consciousness, the slave is gradually transformed into a true independent consciousness, which represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master.<sup>79</sup> Aware of the power (sexual, emotional and financial) that she holds over Théophile, Adèle begins to take control of her own life, which marks the beginning of her rebellion. This rebellion manifests itself in two distinct events. On the one hand, she forbids her master to touch her son when she finds him torturing and beating him, and on the other hand, she provokes him when he surprises her with her lover in his second home.

When Théophile surprises Adèle with Koyaba under his own roof, she tells him that she wants to run away with him because the man with whom she had a child promises her freedom:

-What does he have that I don't? What did he promise you? ...  
-Freedom. ...  
- Freedom! That's the only word you Blacks have in your mouths! ...  
Adèle became fierce.  
- What if it were true? What if I wanted to run away to be free? What would you do to stop me? Would you lock me up? Would you kill me like your wife?  
...  
-You think I'm not capable of that?  
- You are capable of anything!  
...  
-And if I set you free, will you still follow him? ...  
- You'll never do it. You're too afraid! You can't live without me. ...  
-Ah, but I won't let you go! If I set you free, I'll marry you! You would go from *Code Noir* to *Code Napoleon*, my dear "doudou"...  
-I don't believe you. You won't marry a black woman. ...  
-As you said so well, I am capable of anything... Think about it. Marrying a white man, not bad, right? Better than following a clown in general disguise!<sup>80</sup>

By arousing his jealousy, making him feel as if he is losing her forever, and defying him, Adèle has achieved what many black women who lived during the time of slavery have not been able to do, which is to emancipate themselves. She knows exactly how to manipulate the master to obtain the opportunity to emancipate herself. Indeed, by agreeing to free her and marry her, Théophile offers Adèle the opportunity to be recognized as a woman, not as a slave, in society. This marriage does not please the white supremacists who, outraged by such an act, decide to destroy Théophile's *purgerie*. Théophile, furious at having been the victim of such an act, decides to confront them, which results in his death.

Hegel states that the two conflicting consciousnesses want the 'death' of the other.<sup>81</sup> Adèle achieves the 'death' of Théophile, not only the death of his independence and consciousness, but also his physical death. Adèle eventually wins the interdependent interaction and Théophile is defeated. Here, Adèle is the master or lord and Théophile is the slave or slaver. She has succeeded in reversing the gender order, in making it Carnavalesque.

In this chapter we have described the image of black women in *Tropiques Amers* and we have come to the conclusion that both writers, Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, portray women who face the obstacle of the white patriarchy that legitimized its power and cruelty at the time of slavery in the 18th century. They provide the reader with three types of women: the submissive women who represent the gender habitus, those who fight for gender equality to improve their lives and fit Alice Walker's definition of the womanist, and finally, those who subvert the established gender order and carnivalize it.

This chapter also allows us to conclude that, because white male domination is embedded in gender rituals and practices, some black women accept the role that white patriarchy has imposed on them, even if it means perpetuating the identity that has been imposed on them. Convinced of their inferiority to white men, these women thus participate in the maintenance of white patriarchy. Other black women, on the other hand, warn us that this domination is

only cultural, not natural as white men claim, and therefore struggle and resist this white supremacy in order to achieve equality with their male counterparts. Some of them even go beyond this and manage to regain power over white men and dominate them in turn by becoming matrimonial figures. While Rosalie and Man Josèph accept and endorse the gender order determined by the white patriarchy, thus representing the very image of the Afro-Caribbean women's habitus, Adèle fights against this established order and manages to regain power over the white man and to subvert and carnivalize the gender order imposed by this patriarchy.

### **Endnotes:**

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<sup>2</sup> H. Aram Veaser, *The New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), *ix*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Giuseppe Patisso and Fausto E. Carbone, "Slavery and Slave Codes in Overseas Empires," *IntechOpen*, March 3, 2020, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/71313>.

<sup>5</sup> Graziella Bertocchi, "The Legacies of Slavery in and out of Africa," *IZA Discussion Paper*, 2015, accessed May 31, 2021, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/the%20legacies%20of%20slavery.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Bernard B., R. Espersen and Ch. White, "Martinique" in B.A. Reid and R.G. Gilmore III (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Archaeology*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 132-134, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/Martinique.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth G. Kelly, "Historical Archaeology in the French Caribbean: An Introduction to a Special Volume of the *Journal of Caribbean Archaeology*," *Florida Museum*, 2004, accessed May 31, 2021, <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/44/2017/04/kellyintro.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Benoit Bernard et al, "Martinique," in *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Archaeology* 2014, ed. Basil A. Reid and R. Grant Gilmore III (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 132-134.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Sulastrri Manurung and Mutia I. Sari, “Analysis Racial Discrimination and Social Stratification in 12 Years a Slave,” *ANGLO-SAXON* 8, no. 2 (2017): 221, accessed June 1, 2021, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/1222-3010-1-SM.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Richard R. Verdugo, “Racial Stratification, Social Consciousness, and the Education of Mexican Americans in Faben, Texas: A Socio-Historical Case Study,” *Spaces for Difference: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no 2 (2008) accessed June 1, 2021, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt3bk1q2dq/qt3bk1q2dq.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> M.G.Smith, *Racial Problems and Social Stratification in the Caribbean (U.S.A, CIFAS, 1968)*, 13-15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Louis Donnadiou, “Dans la colonie esclavagiste française de Saint-Domingue au XVIIIe siècle : une ségrégation complexe,” *Bulletin de la Société d’Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 2013, ed. Société d’Histoire de la Guadeloupe (Montréal, Erudith, 2021), 59.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Penguin books, 1993),123.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Louis Donnadiou, “Dans la colonie esclavagiste française de Saint-Domingue au XVIIIe siècle : une ségrégation complexe,” *Bulletin de la Société d’Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 2013, ed. Société d’Histoire de la Guadeloupe (Montréal, Erudith, 2021), 71.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Bourdieu Translated by Richard Nice, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001), 42.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Clare Chambers, “Masculine Domination, Radical Feminism and Change,” *Feminist Theory* 6, no. 3 (2005): 327, accessed July 18, 2021, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/1464700105057367.pdf>.

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<sup>33</sup> Clare Chambers, "Masculine Domination, Radical Feminism and Change," *Feminist Theory* 6, no. 3 (2005): 333, accessed July 18, 2021, <file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/1464700105057367.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Bourdieu Translated by Richard Nice, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001), 35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, *Tropiques amers* (France: Michel Lafon, 2007), 19-20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu Translated by Richard Nice, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001), 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 255.

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Bourdieu Translated by Richard Nice, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001), 39.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 39-40.

<sup>43</sup> Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, *Tropiques amers* (France: Michel Lafon, 2007), 124.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 270.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 271.

<sup>47</sup> Thierry Vincent, *L'indifférence des Sexes : Critique Psychanalytique de Bourdieu et de l'idée de domination masculine* (Strasbourg : érès, 2002), 116.

<sup>48</sup> Thema B. Davis and Lillian C. Diaz, "Introduction: Womanist and Mujerista Psychology," *The American Psychological Association*, 2016, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/Womanist-and-Mujerista-Psychologies-Intro-Sample.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), §2, [file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20\(z-lib.org\)%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20(z-lib.org)%20(1).pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Anna Janusiewicz, *A Product of Womanism: Shug Avery in Alice Walker's The Color Purple* (Gävle, Högskolan i Gävle University, 2014), 11.

<sup>52</sup> Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, *Tropiques amers* (France: Michel Lafon, 2007), 459.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 150.

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<sup>58</sup> Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, *Tropiques amers* (France: Michel Lafon, 2007), 127.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>60</sup> Thema B. Davis and Lillian C. Diaz, "Introduction: Womanist and Mujerista Psychology," *The American Psychological Association*, 2016, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/Womanist-and-Mujerista-Psychologies-Intro-Sample.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, *Tropiques amers* (France: Michel Lafon, 2007), 116-117.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 134-136.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 405.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 327.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 333-334.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 338.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 343-344.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search for Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), §1, [file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20\(z-lib.org\)%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rep%20Tech/Downloads/In%20Search%20of%20Our%20Mothers%20Gardens%20Womanist%20Prose%20by%20Walker,%20Alice%20(z-lib.org)%20(1).pdf).

<sup>74</sup> Victoria Bilge Yilmaz, *Carnivalisation of Gender Hierarchies and the Body in Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (Ankara, Middle East Technical University, 2016), 64.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 115.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>78</sup> David C. Shishido, "Apotheosis Now: A Hegelian Dialectical Analysis of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*," *Berkley Undergraduate Journal* 24, no 3 (2011):113, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5pg2n9f8/qt5pg2n9f8.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 117.

<sup>80</sup> Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, *Tropiques amers* (France: Michel Lafon, 2007), 458-460.

<sup>81</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 113.

## **2. Chapter Two: Gender Relations in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)**

This chapter deals with Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Its purpose is to present the interaction of this text with Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, Alice Walker's womanism and Hegel's master-slave dialectic. These three theories identified very important themes and concepts about the struggle of black women in the segregated rural American South in the early 20th century in terms of gender relations. The discussion first provides a brief historical context for *The Color Purple* and then focuses on the discrimination of some of its black female characters, their struggles to achieve gender equality as well as their success in the carnivalization of gender roles.

### **2.1. Historical Background to *The Color Purple*:**

The 246 years of slavery in the United States, from the settlement of the first British colonists in Virginia in the early seventeenth century (1619) to the adoption of the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1865, had a profound impact on American society and on the African-American community.<sup>1</sup> Both groups obviously share the legacy of slavery, the Civil War (1861-1865) and Reconstruction (1865-1877)<sup>2</sup>. However, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the major difference between the North and the South was the adoption by the former Confederate states (South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas) of segregation laws that officially condemned blacks to an inferior status<sup>3</sup>.

While at the national level racism and discriminatory practices affected all blacks on a daily basis, white supremacy was institutionalized in the Southern states, chastising any deviation from the racial order imposed by law<sup>4</sup> [Translation ours]. In reality, life after slavery was not very different from life during slavery for African Americans under the black codes. These codes were purposely designed because slavery was a multi-billion dollar business and

the former Confederate states were looking for a way to continue this system of enslavement<sup>5</sup> [Translation ours]. The denial of voting rights to blacks in the South prevented political participation, which only strengthened the Southern supremacist system.

After the enactment of black codes throughout the South in 1865, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 to give more rights to African Americans, albeit to a limited extent. The Act allowed blacks to rent or own property, enter into contracts and sue other African Americans<sup>6</sup>. Later, the implementation of the 14<sup>th</sup> (1868) and 15<sup>th</sup> (1870) amendments gave African Americans some hope for the future. While the 14th Amendment granted citizenship and “equal protection of the laws” to blacks, the 15th Amendment prohibited states from disenfranchising citizens on the basis of race<sup>7</sup>. While the Black Codes were eventually repealed in the South, the repeal of these restrictions did not significantly improve the lives of African Americans.

Black codes may be over, but African Americans continued to face a series of regulations that reduced them to second-class citizens well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the passage of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, the Southern states passed Jim Crow laws, which were a kind of perpetuation of the black codes<sup>8</sup>. Contrary to the claims of the Jim Crow states, black Americans were not ‘separate but equal’, but rather had fewer resources than white communities and were subject to the terror of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.

Jim Crow laws regulated social, economic and political relations between whites and African Americans<sup>9</sup>. The most widespread legislation imposed racial segregation in schools and public accommodations such as hospitals, restaurants, parks, railways and many others. Often these segregation laws replaced the customary or legal exclusion of African Americans from all services. It took the activism of civil rights leaders and the Civil Rights Act of 1964

to repeal this legislation. This period, known as the Jim Crow era, lasted officially until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965<sup>10</sup>.

Black liberation in the United States was preceded by a decades-long campaign by African Americans and their allies to end institutionalized racial discrimination, voting rights and racial segregation. Although there have been many different movements for black liberation; the civil rights movement, black nationalism, the Black Panthers, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and others; black women have faced constant sexism in their midst<sup>11</sup>. Although ostensibly aimed at the liberation of the black race, these movements were, in word and deed, aimed at the liberation of the black man. Race was strongly sexualized in their discourse. Freedom was equated with manhood and black freedom with the redemption of black masculinity<sup>12</sup>.

Sexism and racism are at work in the discernment of black men and are expressed through the black liberation movements, which believe that men and women are inherently unequal<sup>13</sup>. According to them, not only are men and women different, but there is no reciprocity in their relationship<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, the two do not submit to each other, but rather it is the woman who submits to her black man. Gender discrimination against women in the Black liberation movements was not only manifested in misogynistic writings but was also part of everyday life.

Since a crime against a white woman carries more weight in the justice system, the black man considers violence against a black woman to be less serious than violence against a white woman. In addition, many black men in the movement also wanted to control their families and monitor the sexuality of black women by prohibiting them from having sex with white men, while allowing black men to have sex with white women. It should be noted that it was not only men, but also many women in the black liberation movements who imposed strict gender roles on black women<sup>15</sup>. Just as women in mainstream society do not resist sexism but

rather encourage it, black women have fallen prey to the perpetuation of patriarchy within the black community.

In August 1920, women across America celebrated the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which was the culmination of decades of work to ratify the Woman Suffrage Amendment. With the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment added to the Constitution, black and white women stand side by side, more equal than ever before<sup>16</sup>. However, the meaning of equality depended on where you were in a nation divided by Jim Crow. In the North and West, black women were allowed to vote in 1920, and voted alongside their husbands, fathers and sons for the first time, while officials in southern states did not even allow black women to register to vote. Southern state officials confronted black women with inequality, hostility and outright refusal. For black women, August 1920 was not the end of a movement<sup>17</sup>. It marked the beginning of a new struggle.

The Black feminist movement grew out of the needs of Black women who felt racially oppressed by the women's movement and sexually oppressed by the Black liberation movement<sup>18</sup>. The term "Black" was too often equated with Black men and the term "woman" with white women<sup>19</sup>. As a result, Black women were an invisible group whose very existence and needs were ignored. The goal of the movement was to develop a theory that would adequately address how race, gender, and class were interconnected in their lives and to act to end racist, gender, and class discrimination<sup>20</sup>.

*The Color Purple* (1982) shows how, in the early twentieth century, racism and sexism combined to dishonor the role and existence of women in order to maintain male dominance. This work is a perfect mirror of the rural South at the time of segregation, highlighting the way black women were treated by their black counterparts. Undoubtedly, black patriarchy affects the patterns of black womanhood by embodying them in women's ways of thinking

and inscribing them in their routines of action. For Bourdieu, this phenomenon is called the gender habitus.

## **2.2. Gender Habitus in *The Color Purple*:**

As mentioned in the first chapter, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus in his book *Masculine Domination* (1998) shows how the male-dominated reign influences people's moral, societal and cultural values in ways that particularly marginalize women, and how these unwritten laws and values are obeyed<sup>21</sup>. In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker embodies the habitus of the African-American woman in the character of Celie, the protagonist, who is portrayed as a passive person who adheres to the patriarchal norms of the early twentieth century, endorses gender roles and participates in the symbolic violence to which she is subjected.

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of gendered habitus refers to the adoption of gendered norms in bodily practices, that is, in the very way of thinking, feeling and reacting to others<sup>22</sup>. At the beginning of the novel, Celie is a fourteen-year-old girl who dares not confide in anyone and prefers to express her bitterness only to God. Thus, her letters are her only outlet and her only means of expression. The novel consists of numerous letters written by Celie, beginning with 'Dear God', which show that Celie dares not speak to anyone but God about the countless injustices she suffers in her daily life. Her stepfather's warning -"*You better not never tell nobody but god. It'd kill your mammy.*"<sup>23</sup>- at the very beginning of the novel upsets her, silences her and makes her participate in the symbolic violence she suffers at the hands of men.

Bourdieu defines habitus as a principle that generates behavior according to tastes acquired throughout life, so that each individual develops a regular and coherent behavior that seems natural to him, but is in fact the product of all his past social experiences and which guides his

future experiences<sup>24</sup>. Scared of men and determined not to tell anyone but God about the violence she suffers at the hands of men, Celie convinces herself that the best way to survive is to remain silent and invisible: "... I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Celie does nothing to fight the men and reacts passively to their demands. She totally submits to their desires (her stepfather, Alphonso, and her husband, Mr\_\_\_) accepting to be treated as a sexual object, allowing herself to be raped on several occasions - "... First he [Alphonso] put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it."<sup>26</sup> , "... He [Mr\_\_\_] git up on [me], heist [my] nightgown round [my] waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference ... Just do his business, get off, go to sleep."<sup>27</sup> - and accepting being physically abused and beaten like an animal - "[Alphonso] beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church."<sup>28</sup> , " ... He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway."<sup>29</sup> , "[Mr\_\_\_] beat me like he beat the children... It all I can do not to cry..."<sup>30</sup>. Because of her fear of men, she develops insensitivity to oppression and violence in all its forms: "I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man."<sup>31</sup>

Celie's silence increases her participation in the symbolic violence she faces, including the lowering of her self-esteem. In addition to the sexual and physical violence in which Celie participates, there is also moral and psychological violence. Such violence is manifested in the way Alphonso and Mr\_\_\_ belittle Celie by making remarks about her appearance and constantly reminding her of how ugly she is: " ...You ugly [say Mr\_\_\_]. You skinny. You shape funny..."<sup>32</sup>

Albert thinks twice about marrying Celie, only to find a mother for his children, a woman who can do the heavy housework and field work for him. Standing outside the door on the day Mr\_\_\_ comes to examine her to make his decision on whether or not to marry her, she is ordered by her stepfather to turn to the right or left so that Mr\_\_\_ can see clearly, Celie carries out the orders and clearly this context is reminiscent of selling a slave:

He [Albert] say, let me see her again.  
Pa call me. *Celie*, he say. Like it wasn't nothing. Mr\_\_\_ want another look at you.  
I go stand in the door ... He look me up and down.  
... Move up, he won't bite, he say.  
I go close to the steps ...  
Turn round, Pa say.  
I turn round...<sup>33</sup>

Celie surrenders to the fate Mr\_\_\_ wanted for her, which is to be sexually available to him at all times, to take care of the children, to keep the house clean, and to work as a field slave while he does nothing to help her - except to sit on the porch and watch her: "... after... I... cook diner... I start trying to untangle hair... [The girls] cry. They scream. They cuse me of murder. By ten o'clock I'm done. They cry themselves to sleep. But I don't cry. I lay there... while [Mr\_\_\_] on top of me..."<sup>34</sup>

He wake up while I'm in the field. I been chopping cotton three hours by time he come... Mr\_\_\_ Pick up a hoe and start to chop. He chop bout three chops then he don't chop again. He drop the hoe in the furrow, turn right back on his heel, walk back to the house, go git him a cool drink of water, git his pipe, sit on the porch and stare. I follow cause I think he sick. Then he say, You better git back to the field. Don't wait for me. <sup>35</sup>

In addition, Celie tries to oppress another woman; who is none other than Sofia, the wife of her stepson, Harpo, to make her as submissive as she is; out of jealousy of Sofia's rebellious nature and the happy life she leads. She therefore advises her stepson to beat his wife until she submits to him:

You ever hit her? Mr\_\_\_ ast.  
Harpo look down at his hands. Naw suh, he say low, embarrass.  
Well how you specs to make her mind? 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.  
He puff on his pipe.  
Sofia think too much of herself anyway, he say, she need to be taken down a peg.

I like Sofia, but she don't act like me at all. If she talking when Harpo and Mr \_\_\_\_\_ come in the room, she keep right on. If they ast her where something at she say she don't know. Keep talking.  
I think bout this when Harpo ast me what he ought to do to her to make her mind ...  
Beat her. I say.<sup>36</sup>

The role of submissive wife is also assumed by Celie when her husband cheats on her with another woman and brings her to live with them under their own roof. Against all odds, she welcomes her husband's mistress, Shug Avery, with joy, cares for her meticulously, treats her illness, and then considers her a friend and confidante.

Clearly, Celie's life and the social sphere in which she grows up develop in her what Pierre Bourdieu calls a gender habitus. This woman has lived in a dysfunctional family, has been oppressed by men, and has been raped, beaten and forced to marry a tyrannical widower. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Celie does not remain a submissive woman and, with the help of Shug and Nettie, she begins to change her mindset and demand her rights in order to achieve gender equality. She is exposed to a major change in her personality and situation, which eventually leads her to independence and financial, emotional and spiritual freedom, which Alice Walker calls womanism.

### **2.3. Womanism in *The Color Purple*:**

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) fully expresses the ideological connotation and vivid depiction of the struggle of black women for liberation and equality<sup>37</sup>. It is a representative announcement of womanism as it focuses on the brutality of men within the black community. By attributing certain characteristics to womanists, Alice Walker allows us to recognize a womanist in any work. In *The Color Purple*, these characteristics are exemplified by three different characters: Celie, Nettie and Shug Avery.

#### **2.3.1. Celie in *The Color Purple*:**

As noted in the previous section, Celie's feminine consciousness is raised to a higher level and becomes active through the influence of Shug Avery and her sister, Nettie. Alice Walker

states that the behavior of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength, ability and independence.<sup>38</sup> After meeting Shug, Celie begins to show some signs of resistance. Indeed, when Albert's father comes to criticize Shug, Celie silently rebels by spitting in the man's water because of her anger at people who mistreat her relatives. The spitting in the man's water shows a kind of empowerment: "I drop little spit in Old Mr \_\_\_ water ... I twerl the spit round with my finger ... Next time he come I put a little Shug Avery pee in his glass. See how he like that."<sup>39</sup>

Alice Walker goes on to say that the strong personality of a womanist is evident in the way she speaks and the language she uses.<sup>40</sup> During a scene in the house of Harpo's wife's sister Odessa, where everyone was invited to a dinner party, Shug announces that she is going back north and that Celie is going with her. Albert starts to threaten and insult his wife, but she doesn't give in, lists all the wrongs he and his children have done to her and remains determined to leave the hell she has been living in at all costs. Once Celie has regained the self-esteem she lacked before, Albert's insults no longer have any power over her. Celie uses words to empower herself to end Albert's oppression and take back her life:

You a 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 I need. ...  
You took my sister Nettie away from me, I say. And she was the only person love me in the world. ...  
But Nettie and my children coming home soon, I say. And when she do, all us together gon whup your ass. ...  
I got children, I say... better than the fools you didn't even try to raise. ...  
You was all rotten children, I say [talking to Harpo]. You made my life a hell on earth. And your daddy here ain't dead horse's shit.  
... I never ast you for nothing. Not even for your sorry hand in marriage.[talking to Albert] ...  
I curse you, I say. ...  
... Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble ...  
Until you do right by me, I say, everything you ever dream about will fail ...  
Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice, I say. Then I say, You better stop talking...  
The jail you plan for me is the one in which you will rot, I say. ...  
I pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook ... But I'm here.<sup>41</sup>

Celie becomes a self-employed woman and manages to make a living from her passion, sewing, and earns a lot of money from her comfortable trousers. Later, after the death of her

stepfather, she inherited her biological father's fortune, his house and his shop, which she adapted to sell her trousers. She succeeds in asserting her independence by becoming the owner of a house, land and a flourishing business.

Womanists, according to Walker, love themselves and other women, sexually or otherwise, and this love transcends borders to reach all of humanity, wishing for all people to survive and thrive.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that the relationship between Shug and Celie is more than just a friendship. Indeed, from their first meeting, Celie begins to feel a physical and sexual attraction to Shug, which gradually leads to the discovery of her homosexuality: "All the men got they eyes glued to Shug's bosom. I got my eyes glued there too. I feel my nipples harder under my dress. My little button sort of perk up too. Shug, I say to her in my mind, Girl, you looks like a real good time, the Good Lord knows you do."<sup>43</sup>

When Celie confides to Shug that she has been systematically sexually abused, that she has been forcibly abducted, that she feels nothing when she sleeps with Albert and that, most surprisingly, she has never reached orgasm, Shug is outraged and sets out to teach her about her own sexuality. She teaches her about her clitoris, asks her to look in a mirror and exfoliate her sexual organs and breasts, and introduces her to oral sex and masturbation. From this point on, Celie began to develop self-esteem and self-love and to feel comfortable with her body, which she had previously despised.

Celie's lesbian relationship with Shug is an opportunity for her to awaken her latent sexual desire and to verbalize it openly, thus making her a feminist. During a sex scene that clearly demonstrates Celie's lesbianism, we can see that she is not afraid to talk about the pleasure she gets from having sex with Shug:

She say, I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth.  
*Um*, she say, like she surprise. I kiss her back, say, *um*, too. Us kiss and kiss till us can't hardly kiss no more. Then us touch each other...  
Then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth.  
Way after while, I act like a little lost baby too.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3.2. Nettie in *The Color Purple*:

Nettie is undeniably depicted as an empowered woman of color who fits the descriptions and characteristics of Alice Walker's womanism. Walker states that a womanist is a thinking subject who is always searching for knowledge, "wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one"<sup>45</sup>. Thus challenging the epistemological exclusions she experiences in intellectual life in general and in feminist research in particular.<sup>46</sup> Nettie is portrayed as a very intellectual person who recognizes the value of education from an early age. She learns a lot and is always willing to share her new knowledge with her sister. When Nettie was a young girl, she tried to teach Celie everything she could after Celie was taken out of school by her stepfather for getting pregnant: "... All day she read, she study, she practice her handwriting, and try to git us to think."<sup>47</sup>

In Nettie's letters to Celie, she uses her experiences to expand Celie's worldview. By linking her stories to Africa, gender politics and religion, Nettie is the main source of information that gives Celie pride in her African heritage and knowledge of the world outside the rural American South. Her letters, which relate the problems she encounters in Africa, demonstrate that oppression; of women by men, of blacks by whites and even of blacks by blacks; is universal. The imperial, racial and cultural conflicts and oppression that Nettie encounters in Africa parallel the smaller scale abuses and difficulties that she and Celie experienced in Georgia:

There is a way that the men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen just long enough to issue instructions. 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 at man's face' as they say. To 'look in a man's face' is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our behavior around Pa.<sup>48</sup>

According to Walker, the behavior of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength, capacity and independence.<sup>49</sup> Nettie always resisted men who wanted to rape her, refused to

be their sexual object and did not hesitate for a second to run away or kick them. She ran away from her stepfather, Alphonso, and later from her sister's husband, Albert, who both wanted her to give herself to them without resistance:

When I left you all's house, walking, he [Albert] followed me on his horse... After a while I had to rest, and that's when he got down from his horse and started to try to kiss me, and drag me back in the woods. Well, I started to fight him, and with God's help, I hurt him bad enough to make him let me alone.<sup>50</sup>

Nettie appears in *The Color Purple* as a fairly autonomous and independent woman. As a single black woman for most of the novel, she never considers her self-worth in relation to men and feels satisfied with her life. Instead of seeking personal value and meaning through marriage, Nettie only marries Samuel when she feels she is a complete human being.

According to Alice Walker, womanists are collectivist and community-oriented in that the goal of womanism extends beyond individual well-being to the well-being of entire peoples and communities, and then to humanity as a whole.<sup>51</sup> Nettie is a black intellectual who travels the world seeking to improve the condition of black people everywhere. As a missionary, she not only promotes a spiritual faith, but also has tasks that involve social work in the Olinka village, such as feeding the poor, working as a caregiver, building a school and teaching. For her, doing good works is a manifestation of her faith and a proof of God's love for the human family.

### **2.3.3. Shug Avery in *The Color Purple*:**

Shug Avery is undeniably presented as a person with the personality traits of a feminist that Alice Walker has listed. As Walker notes, womanists celebrate life to the fullest, through the arts, such as music and dance, as well as through the spirit.<sup>52</sup> In *The Color Purple*, the character of Shug is presented as a beautiful, vivacious and flamboyant blues singer. Her artistic soul gives her life meaning and helps her to understand the world around her. It also helps her to better understand her emotions, to increase her self-awareness and to open herself

up to new ideas and experiences. Music and dance influence her mood in a positive way, making her happier and calmer. She is constantly creating and seeking inspiration in her daily life, which led her to write a song for Celie. She also celebrates life through the spirit of God and, rather than fearing his patriarchal white male image, she sees him as the spirit that inhabits all aspects of earthly life.

Alice Walker argues that the affect and behavior of a womanist demonstrates empowerment, strength, capacity and independence.<sup>53</sup> Shug is a black woman who is described as a free spirit who refuses any imposed definition of herself and does not allow anyone to control her. She has fashioned her identity from her many experiences, instead of subjecting her will to others. She is a woman of great strength of character, always ready to fight for what she believes in and is not afraid to face whatever life throws at her. She earns her living and takes care of herself. Rich and successful, she has earned enough money to build herself a big house in Memphis and buy a car. Through her art, she must be and appear liberated, and it is her liberation that gives her power.

Moreover, the affect of Shug Avery on Celie demonstrates empowerment, strength and independence. Through Shug, Celie becomes enabling to develop her personality. She helps to give her a sense of identity making her feel sexually, physically and emotionally at ease. With Shug's guidance and love, it made growing as a motivating force for Celie to pursue her passion for fashion and make a living from it.

According to Walker, a womanist strong personality is evident in the way she speaks confidently and in the linguistic elements she uses.<sup>54</sup> Shug Avery has a bold way of addressing those around her and expressing her thoughts that Celie qualifies as a mouth that is full of "claws" like a wild animal. She is not afraid to tell people what she thinks of them or to correct them when they cross the line with her, especially with Albert. Whenever he tries to

say that a woman or his wife has no right or should not do something, she is there to put him in his place:

... What will people say, you [Celie] running off to Memphis like you don't have a house to look after?

Shug say, Albert. Try to think like you god some sense. Why any woman give a shit what people think is a mystery to me.<sup>56</sup>

... Wives don't go to places like that, he [Albert] say... My wife can't do this. My wife can't do that. No wife of mines ... He go on and on.

Shug Avery finally say, Good thing I ain't your damn wife.<sup>57</sup>

Walker asserts that a womanist love herself and other women, sexually or non-sexually, and this love transcends boundaries to reach all humanity, wanting people to survive and thrive.<sup>58</sup> Shug is definitely a symbol of self-love. She is a woman who loves, who continues to love unceasingly and who allows herself the freedom to enjoy love when she finds it. She takes her bisexuality for granted and enjoys sleeping with Celie. She genuinely cares about Celie's well-being, teaches her about sexual pleasure and helps her discover her own sexuality and the pleasures her body can offer.

Shug's love also lies in her generous nature and her willingness to help other women around her. She helped Mary Agnes to make a career as a blues singer, but also Celie to overcome the obstacles she faced. She persuaded Albert to stop beating Celie and to try to be gentle with her instead of using her as a sex object. She also offered her a way out, taking her to Memphis and supporting her financially and emotionally until she was able to support herself. Shug thus represents for Celie the mother and sister she never had before.

Walker then highlights womanists' agency and describes it as courageous, audacious and willful.<sup>59</sup> In *The Color Purple*, Shug decided to leave her parents' home to make her own way in life, achieving independence at an early age. She abandoned the three children in her care, leaving her parents to raise them. She also decided to pursue a career in music and live an unusual lifestyle for black women in the early twentieth century.

By challenging this patriarchal rural South American society of the early 20th century, with its norms and ideas, Shug, Celie and Nettie are clearly the product of feminism, which aims to achieve gender equality. However, because gender relations are dialectical, some women manage to go beyond gender equality and disrupt this order and make it Carnavalesque. Of these three characters, only two succeed in carnivalizing this hierarchy and becoming the masters of their slaves. These two characters are, of course, Shug Avery and Celie.

#### **2.4. Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in *The Color Purple*:**

In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker carnivalizes gender hierarchies with the two characters: Shug Avery and Celie who both occupy a space where patriarchal norms are suspended, act in a way that transgresses gender and sex boundaries, and gain the power to dethrone Albert. This process of carnivalization goes through several stages which can be illustrated by Hegel's dialectic of master and slave. The struggle between Shug Avery and Albert as well as between Celie and Albert takes place in the same way as the dynamics of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The novel initially presents Albert as the heir to the role of 'master' in the master-slave relationship, while Shug and Celie are relegated to the status of 'slaves'.

##### **2.4.1. The relationship between Shug and Albert:**

The struggle between Shug Avery and Albert, in *the Color Purple* (1982), occurs in the same manner as does the dynamic of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Hegel states that, at the outset, the 'master-self-consciousness' is self-sufficient and free and the 'slave-self-consciousness' is dependent.<sup>60</sup> At the beginning of the relationship between Shug and Albert, it can be seen that Albert is an independent black man who supports himself and owns a house and property while Shug is a woman who is dependent on him, hoping to marry him because she loves him, but also to get out of her parents' house where she does not feel

welcome and to silence her parents and society since she had sex with him before marriage and had three children with him.

*The Color Purple* (1982) highlights two crucial events in Shug Avery's liberation: consciousness revival and working. The first step towards her liberation was the awakening of her consciousness. Indeed, Shug wanted to marry Albert, but her father did not think she was good enough and forced her to marry another woman, Annie Juliette. She then realizes that the man she loves is weak and only a submissive since he did not go against her father to marry her and did not fight for their love: "... he weak, she [Shug] say. His daddy told him I'm trash, my mama trash before me. His brother say the same ... One reason they give him for not marrying me is cause I have children."<sup>61</sup> After Annie Juliette's death, Albert again marries a woman other than Shug and this act only confirms what she thought of him. She compares him to a "weak little boy"<sup>62</sup> when, in her opinion, she needed a man.

The second pivotal event that changed Shug's life is working. According to Hegel, by working (manipulating nature), the slave realizes that he holds a certain power and is thus gradually transformed "into a truly independent consciousness"<sup>63</sup>. Shug is an independent black woman who has a career and makes money in a world where women are marginalized and largely dependent on a man for financial support. She has status in the arts and is admired by many, both men and women. Her financial freedom gives her a status similar to that of a man.

Hegel argues that the independent consciousness of the slave represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master.<sup>64</sup> It is clear that Shug Avery seems to resent Albert for his inability to fight for her and for his weakness. When Albert takes her home for treatment, Shug begins to reject Albert and lashes out at him without regard for his feelings. Her rebellion manifests itself in the language and choice of words she uses against him in order to dominate and control him. In choosing words to rebel, Shug makes a surprising and

risky choice as it requires and demands exceptional composure. This choice shows a huge confidence in herself, in her ability to construct a speech and to understand Albert with enough finesse to know how to talk to him.

Shug's rebellious and resilient spirit manifests itself in her sharp tongue. She knows that Albert wanted to marry her in the past and that he still loves her today, so she uses words strong enough to shut him up: "I don't need no weak little boy can't say no to his daddy hanging on me. I need me a man, she say. A man. She look at him and roll her eyes and laugh ..."<sup>65</sup>, "Good thing I ain't your damn wife. He hush then."<sup>66</sup>

According to Hegel, through the independent consciousness of the slave and his proximity to the Spirit, the slave becomes independent while the master becomes dependent.<sup>67</sup> Albert is totally dependent on Shug; he prefers her to all other women, including his two wives, and lets her come and go as she pleases without daring to question her choices, since he adores her completely and all his happiness depends on her. As he remains silent when she lectures him, Shug gets the better of Albert and overthrows him. She has the power to change him, to control him and to take over him. In this sense, Shug has succeeded in turning the gender order on its head and making it Carnavalesque.

In the dialectic between Shug Avery and Albert, Shug has succeeded in achieving the death of Albert's independence and self-consciousness. She eventually wins the fight and Albert is defeated. Here, Shug is the master or lord and Albert is the slave or bondsman.

#### **2.4.2. The relationship between Celie and Albert:**

The struggle between Celie and Albert in *The Color Purple* (1982) develops in the same way as the dynamics of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Hegel states that, at the outset, the 'master-slave-consciousness' is self sufficient and free and the 'slave-self-consciousness' is dependent.<sup>68</sup> At the beginning of the novel, Albert is presented as an heir to the role of

‘master’ and Celie to the role of ‘slave. Albert is an independent black man, owner of property who is looking for a wife whereas Celie is a woman whose life depends on men.

Hegel asserts that the ‘master-self-consciousness’ enslaves the ‘slave-self-consciousness’ upon threat of death.<sup>69</sup> Albert married Celie only to find a mother for his children and a woman who could do the heavy housework for him. Just because she is his wife, Albert treats Celie as his property over which he has all rights, considers her as his slave and hits her for the slightest insignificant reason.

However, when forced to manipulate nature, as Hegel states, the slave experiences creativity while the master on the other hand “experiences stagnation living off the work of the slave”<sup>70</sup>. Relying on Celie for all the work that needs to be done around the house and in the fields, Albert becomes a fat slacker who spends his days sitting on the porch and smoking his pipe. Thus, Albert experiences stagnation with his laziness and reliance on Celie.

According to Hegel, through the work of the slave, the latter has learnt that he has a certain control over the master and thus regains his consciousness<sup>71</sup>. The awakening of Celie’s consciousness does not only take place through the work she sees as a power she holds over Albert, but through different phases. The female consciousness of Celie has undergone three phases: writing, sexual awakening and reading.

Celie’s first step towards her consciousness’s revival is writing. Celie’s letters to God are her only means of expression. By practicing writing, Celie expands her vocabulary and learns to manipulate words to express her thoughts. Scribbling words on a sheet of paper is an escape for her, and her letters have become a weapon to escape the harshness of her daily life and her loneliness.

The second step towards Celie's consciousness revival is her sexual awakening. By stocking her "button" and achieving sexual satisfaction, Celie empowers her own sexuality and crowds out Albert's in her sex life. She enjoys her autoeroticism without the violence and horror of an erect penis that she consistently associates with pain. Once Celie has rid herself of a threatening, always violent male sexuality and learns about her own body, her sexual desire was awakened by her sexual attraction to Shug. Celie's lesbian relationship with Shug makes her realize that there can be something more than the oppressed life she goes through.

By discovering Nettie's letters, Celie begins the third stage of her awakening of consciousness, which is reading. Nettie's letters strengthen Celie's sense of identity by informing her about her personal history. She gradually acquires the ability to synthesize her thoughts and feelings into a voice of her own. As a result, all these phases she goes through lead to Celie becoming a truly independent consciousness.

Hegel maintains that the independent consciousness of the slave represents a spirit of resistance and revolt against the master.<sup>72</sup> Celie started her rebellion by wishing to have a better life. When she discovered the letters from Nettie that Albert had been hiding from her, she became angry with Albert and took a stand by leaving him and going north with Shug.

Finally, Hegel claims that through the slave's creativity, his closeness to the Spirit, as well as the struggle under threat of death, the slave becomes independent while the master, defined only through the work of his slave, becomes dependent.<sup>73</sup> After Celie's departure,

... Mr\_\_\_ live like a pig. Shut up in the house so much it stunk. Wouldn't let nobody in ...  
He couldn't sleep... At night he thought he heard bats outside the door. Other things rattling in the chimney. But the worse part was having to listen to his own heart... soon as night come, it went crazy. Beating so loud it shook the room. Sound like drums.  
Mr\_\_\_ would be all cram up in a corner of the bed. Eyes clamp on different pieces of furniture, see if they move in his direction.<sup>74</sup>

Albert finds himself completely disoriented and lost without his wife and ends up a mentally fragile wreck.

Hegel states that the two conflicting consciousnesses want the ‘death’ of the other.<sup>75</sup> In the relationship between Shug and Albert, as well as in the relationship between Celie and Albert, we are not talking about Albert’s actual ‘death’, but the death of his self-consciousness. Shug and Celie have sought Albert’s death, not his physical death, but the death of his independence and self-consciousness. They eventually win the struggle for recognition and Albert is defeated. Here Shug and Celie are the masters or lords and Albert is the slave or bondsman. They have finally succeeded in reversing the gender order and carnivalizing it.

This chapter describes the image of black women in *The Color Purple* and concludes that African American novelist Alice Walker presents the reader with three types of women: the submissive woman who represents the gender habitus (Celie), those who fight for gender equality to improve their lives and fit Alice Walker’s definition of a womanist (Celie, Nettie and Shug Avery), and finally, those who subvert the established gender order and carnivalize it (Celie and Shug Avery). The three characters described in this chapter illustrate the instability of gender relations and the cunning with which black women act to claim their rights, achieve equality and, most importantly, regain power over black men. Celie is a perfect example of how black women’s survival under double oppression requires a quest for self and status.

We can also see in this chapter that Alice Walker manipulates the genre of the slavery narrative by writing from the point of view of African American female characters that are primarily oppressed by African American men, not by white slaveholders. Here the oppressors are black men and black women are brutalized, abused and effectively condemned to domestic and sexual slavery.

## **Endnotes:**

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## V. Conclusion:

Throughout this dissertation, we have come to conclude that Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, as well as Alice Walker share, in their respective works *Tropiques amers* (2007) and *The Color Purple* (1982), some aspects in terms of gender relations. Even though these two novels were written in two different time periods and in two different geographical locations, we have noted that both novels depict the lives and struggles of black women within the eras of slavery and post-slavery respectively.

Relying on Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus in his book *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique* (2000), Alice Walker's Womanism from her collection of essays "In Search for Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose" (1983) and Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in his book *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), we have tried to shed light on the way black women are portrayed in the two novels. While habitus shows how some black women participate in the maintenance of patriarchy, womanism illustrates the different ways in which they oppose this patriarchal system in order to achieve gender equality and the master-slave dialectic explains how black women reverse the gender order so as to become matriarchs.

From the first chapter of the dissertation that dealt with gender relations in Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias' *Tropiques amers* (2007), it has been deduced that during the 18th century when slavery was a legal practice, black women were subject to legal discrimination based on their gender and oppressed by a masculine-based society and by white men's domination. From the second chapter that discussed gender relation in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), it has been noticed that two centuries later, after the abolition of slavery, the condition of black women remained the same or even worsened, as they were confronted not only to white men's but also to black men's domination.

Our comparative study has examined how both the French island of Martinique and the American rural South are recognizable as significantly male-dominated societies. The two novels made public the violence perpetrated by both white and black men on black women. Therefore, Virginie Brac and Myriam Cottias, as well as Alice Walker engaged in their works the act of resisting traditional customs and patriarchal order. They have portrayed the harsh discrimination of black women, their struggles to achieve gender equality where we have seen all forms of rebellion and challenges, and their success in carnivalizing gender roles.

The gender analysis of this dissertation subverts the gender identity of black women and offers us new perspectives to break down the traditional binary opposition between white men and black women as well as between black men and black women. By comparing the two selected literary works, we can see that the survival of black women under double oppression requires not only a quest for self but also for status. Therefore, we can only realize that there is no fundamental difference between gender and class struggle and that gender relations are not only the product of the dialectic between two consciousnesses (Hegelian dialectic) but also between two social classes (Marxist dialectic).

We have indeed come to the conclusion that black women have come a long way since the time of slavery and have had to face additional difficulties compared to white women. They have faced not only the white patriarchy but also the black patriarchy. In order to be recognized as full-fledged beings and to succeed in climbing the ladder, black women have had to face the sexism of black and white men as well as the racism of white women. Nowadays, black women all over the world have achieved freedom in different areas of life by getting their rights and breaking the taboos that prevent them from achieving their goals in society, just like their male counterparts, but, we have realized that despite the huge and multiple efforts, black women still face a lot of racism in their daily lives. This may pave the way for future literary studies related to black women's struggles.

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