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**Female Individuality and Gender Role in
Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923) and Alice
Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)
A Comparative Study**

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I dedicate this work, to:
My dear parents and grandparents,
My beloved sisters and brothers,
All my nephews and nieces,
All my best friends, and
All my teachers.

Malika ALLAM

This work is lovingly dedicated to:

My lovely mother and father,

My sister Ouissam and brother Amar,

My dearest husband,

My parents in law,

MY sister in law Lisa and

My best friends Sarah and Dihia.

Thank you for being by my side.

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Contents

Acknowledgment	I
Dedication	II
Table of Contents	III
Abstract	IV
General Introduction	1
Review of the Literature	2
Issue and Working hypothesis.....	5
Methodological Outline	6
Endnotes	7
Methods and Materials.....	8
1-Methods	8
Summary of the theories.....	8
a-Summary of Bell Hooks' <i>Feminist Theory from Margin to Center</i> (1984.....	8
b-Summary of Alice Walker's <i>Womanism</i> (1983.....	10
2-Materials.....	12
A-Biography of the Authors.....	12
a-Alice Walker.....	12
b-Willa Cather.....	13

B-Summary of the novels.....	14
a-Alice Walker’s <i>The Color Purple</i> (1982	14
b-Willa Cather’s <i>A Lost Lady</i> (1923.....	15
Endnotes	18
Results	20
Discussion.....	22
Chapter One: Female Individuality and Personal autonomy	22
Female Individuality and Personal Autonomy in <i>The Color Purple</i> and <i>A Lost Lady</i>.....	22
a- Social Independence	23
b- Sexual Independence	28
c- Financial Independence.....	33
Endnotes	36
Chapter two: Gender Roles and Inequality	39
Gender and Inequality in <i>The Color Purple</i> and <i>A Lost Lady</i>	39
Endnotes	49
Conclusion.....	51
Bibliography.....	54

Abstract

*This dissertation is a comparative study between two literary works which are the American and African-American novels respectively, Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*(1923) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*(1982). It examines Female Individuality and Gender Role in both works. This dissertation aims to show the issues of women in a patriarchal society and their struggle against sexism and injustice to gain their freedom. This comparative analysis is based on Bell Hooks' *Feminists Theory from Margin to Center*(1984), and Alice Walker's *Womanism* developed in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist prose*(1983). The present research paper is divided into two chapters, the first chapter deals with Female individuality and studies the issue of freedom and personal autonomy of the main characters Celie and Mrs. Forrester in Walker's and Cather's novels, respectively. The second chapter explores gender role and sheds light on the oppression inflicted by the patriarchal system on women, black and white alike. Throughout this study, we have concluded that both writers share similar concerns as far as women are concerned. Both denounce the oppressive rules and claim equality and justice for women in society.*

Keywords: *Female individuality, Feminism, Freedom, Gender role, Male domination, Resistance, Struggle, Womanism,*

General Introduction

Women all over the world were considered as a subject of oppression and discrimination, they have a long way of struggle against feminine subalternity and inequality. The patriarchal system, race, gender, and color represent obstacles against women's movement towards liberation. Women have been deprived of their rights and forced to live in antagonistic worlds which push them to protest.

The feminist movement started in the nineteenth century, it arose in response to Western traditions that restricted the rights of women. It grew up and became popular through time. Until now, women still ask for their liberation, for instance feminist literature defend equal rights for both genders. Indeed, many literary works deal with the subject of women's oppression and rebellion. This paper is concerned with the study of female individuality and gender role in the United States of America represented in two novels written by Alice Walker and Willa Cather, these are *The Color Purple* (1982) and *A Lost Lady* (1923). We are going to show how the two authors portray the American and Afro-American women's resistance in patriarchal communities and how they achieved their individuality, freedom, and equality.

The selection of the two authors in this study is due to their great influence on the feminist movement. Willa Cather is among the first feminist writers who participated in the emergence of the new image of American women to claim for female sexual and social liberation. Her novel *A Lost Lady* 1923 she deals with women's sexual and spiritual liberation. The author transmits a message that women should express their needs and desires to be equal to men in all spheres. Alice Walker is also one of the most prominent African American

novelist, who not only defends women in general but also African-American women (black women) to accomplish their emancipation.

The selection of *The Color Purple* (1982) and *A Lost Lady* (1923) is largely due to the similar themes dealt within both novels. Indeed, the two works deal with women's identity, self-realization, and struggle for empowerment. Even though both novels are written in two different periods, they share many similarities in the sense that the heroines want to achieve equality with men. This affinity between the two works allows us to discuss women's issues as far as female individuality and gender role are concerned.

The main aim of this research paper is to focus on the ways American and Afro-American women reclaim their rights against traditions and societal restrictions in order to assert their individuality. Through the two female protagonists of both novels Celie and Marian Forrester, the two authors portray women's revolt in patriarchal societies to obtain their social, sexual, and economic freedom.

Review of the Literature

Alice Walker's and Willa Cather's novels have been largely criticized. *The Color Purple* (1982) is one of the most studied novels that attracted a great attention in literature. The criticism of *The Color Purple* was even stronger, Walker showed a picture of black males that is far from flattery. In her essay Franziska Bottcher, "RE-reading the Color Purple: Alice Walker's Extended Critique of Racial Integration in the Novel" (2007) describes an experience at a woman scholar's symposium that has probably massively influenced her outlook on gender relations especially in the African American community. She asserts:

We were treated to a lecture on the black woman's responsibilities to the black man. I will never forget my sense of horror and betrayal when one of the panelists said to me (...): 'the responsibility of the black woman is to support the black man; whatever he does.'¹

In sense that, the black women are born to support the males and give them strength and this are their only responsibility in life.

In his article Pratt L.H., "Alice Walker's: Men Profiles in Quest for Love and Personal Values." (1989) states that many literary critics have anticipated Alice Walker's work with skepticism. He explores the relationship between men and women and argues that Alice Walker's negative representation for men continues to emerge. The injustices of men led her to create an artistic stance in her novel which is basically critical to men. He contends:

One of the major short-comings in Walker's fiction is that her black male characters emerge either as tranquil men whose existence must be validated and filtered through the consciousness of her women, or they are presented as weak, self-centered, turbulent men whose humanity is placed in jeopardy by their inability to develop loving relationships with their wives and children.²

Pratt concludes that men are in need for restitution from the oppressions of racism as well as the stereotyped images of culture and literature.

Alice Walker has been highly praised by feminist critics for portraying the brutality that women have faced throughout years, but some of them argued that the novel's happy ending makes light of the offenses suffered by the female protagonist and runs contrary to reality. Barbara Christian argues: "Walker's peculiar sound, the specific mode through which her deepening of self-knowledge and self-love comes, seems to have much to do with her contrariness, her willingness at all turns to challenge the fashionable belief of the day."³ As the quotation shows that Alice Walker gives a positive energy at the end of her novel as she turns the events and make a happy ending even though it is contrary to reality.

Similarly to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923) has received wide criticism. Willa Cather, as a novelist, is well known for her advocacy for women's rights and social dignity, so it is obvious that her works are mostly viewed through a feminist approach. Cather was largely criticized for her unconventional presentation of the

heroines in her novels and her style of writing. Doris Grumbach, in "Foreword: my Antonia" (1988), examines the presentation of heroines in Cather's novel. She argues:

She has created heroines who are larger than life and stronger than the men around them, her male character seen to be weak and ineffectual in contrast...The women in her women-centered novels are the heroes of new kind with new life history having right to exercise full power and strength.⁴

By the presentation of the female protagonist as an autonomous character, Willa Cather changes the tradition of the early twentieth century heroism.

Obviously, in *A Lost Lady* the critics have taken sides regarding the female character Marian Forrester and her role. Burch. B sees her as an autonomous character. She writes:

The freed Mrs. Forrester like the wounded woodpecker, find her way to home to California where she eventually marries wealthy with Mr. Collin, who as she says: cares for her well; at least he provides her material comfort and access to society once again.⁵

Cather is frequently praised for her style and unattached "clarity, beauty and simplicity", as well, Critics mainly identify each of her novels as an experiment in literary technique. For example Middleton. J.A in "Willa Cather Modernism" (1990) calls both *A Lost Lady* and *One of Ours* "technical masterpieces that resolve the issue of point of view."⁶ She also gives a great attention to the details Cather leaves out of her narratives calling this *gabs*, in the text or "vacuoles" which Scientists define as empty spaces. Middleton demonstrate how these seeming gaps in Cather's writing actually support and hold the structure of her work and allow for a far more complex and full story than should be possible .

Responses to Willa Cather's *A Lost lady* have consistently acknowledged both enigmatic qualities of the novel and richness and variety of Cather's sources of inspiration. Several critics have pointed to the timeness of the novel, Whipple. T.K states: "Miss Forester's career would have been different in details only, not in essential in another setting under the

ancient regime or ancient Rome.”⁷Whipple.T.K also praises Cather for the perfection of her writing as he argues: “With *A Lost Lady*, Miss Cather arrived at what can only be called perfection in her art and Joseph Wood Krutch termed it nearly perfect.”⁸

In short, Alice Walker’s and Willa Cather’s literary creativity occupies a good position in English literature. They have received a bulk of criticism from different critical perspectives; their works are examined mainly through feminist eyes.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

It appears from the review of literature that Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) and Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* (1923) have received a great deal of criticism. Until now and as far as we are informed no research comparing these two works has already been conducted. Our purpose in this dissertation is thus to join the two American and Afro-American literary works in a comparative study which sheds light on the themes of “Female Individuality” and “Gender Role” in both novels. In other words, the focus of the present research is on the issue of women who try to find out the truth about themselves and live in suffering through different circumstances and different cultures. Both Alice Walker and Willa Cather depict female characters who struggle to achieve their freedom in the patriarchal society.

In order to prove the relevance of our issue and fulfill our study we rely on two different theories which are Bell Hooks’ *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984), and Alice Walker’s womanism in her collection of essays *In Search of our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983). The two theories call for the emancipation of women and focus on the ways American and Afro-American women vindicate their rights to liberty and equality. We are going to resort to the two key figures known for their vindication of women’s rights, these are Bell Hooks and Alice Walker.

Methodological Outline

At the methodological level, in the first section we have started with a general introduction in which we gave first a general overview of our topic. Moving to the choice of the authors and the novels, then followed by the purpose of the study then we deal with the review of the two works *The Color Purple* and *A Lost Lady*.

The second section will be devoted to Methods and Materials. In the methods section, we will provide an overview of Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory from the Margin to Center* (1984); and Willa Cather's *In Search of our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983). In the materials section, we will deal with a short biography of the authors, and a short summary of the novels.

The discussion section contains two chapters, the first chapter will analyze the theme of Female Individuality (Freedom and Personal Autonomy) in both novels. The second chapter will be devoted to analyze Gender Role and Inequality. Ultimately, in the Results section we will stress on our findings, then at the end we will deal with the conclusion where we are going to summarize our research.

End Notes:

¹Bottcher Franziska, “*Re-Reading The Color Purple: Alice Walker’s Extended Critique of Racial Integration in the Novel.*” Grin Verlag (2007), 13.

²Pratt.L.H.“Alice Walker’s men: Profiles in the Quest for Love and Personnel Values.” Popular culture association in the south (1989), 10.

³Christian.B “In Spite of It All: A Reading of Alice Walker’s “Every Use.” Indiana state University.Vol34, no. 3 (autumn,2000), 124.

⁴Gumbach Doris,“Foreword: My Antonia.” Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company(1988), 14.

⁵Burch Beth, “Willa Cather’s A Lost Lady:The Woodpecker and Marian Forrester.” Notes on Contemporary Literature (1981), 09.

⁶Middleton Jo Anne,“Willa Cather’s Modernism: A Study of Style and Technique.” Fairleigh Dickenson university press (1990), 41.

⁷Whipple.T.K “Literary Relationship of Sarah Orne Jewett and Willa Sibert Cather” The New England Quarterly. Vol 29, no. 4 (1956), 01.

⁸Ibid., 01.

Methods and Materials

1-Methods

This section aims to highlight the theoretical concepts of our research. This comparative study between the two literary works, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923) discusses the issue of female individuality and gender role in two different periods in United States. To achieve our goal we will rely on two feminist theories, Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center* (1984), and Alice Walker's *Womanism* theory as expounded in her essay "*In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist prose*"(1983).

Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* is an essay in which Hooks deals with different themes like gender, race, class, and women's liberation in United States. She portrays the marginalized and oppressed women within the patriarchal system. "Womanism" is a black feminist theory established by Alice Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*. It deals with experiences of black women and their miserable conditions. In this work Walker also attacks racism, sexism, and poverty.

A- Summary of the Theories

a- Bell Hook's "*Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center*"(1984)

Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center is a 1984 essay on feminist theory written by the American social activist and feminist thinker Bell Hooks. She is known for her writings that cover different topics such as gender, race, class, and education. This essay confirms Walker's importance as a leader in radical feminist thought. In her book, Hooks deals with

women's issues within the patriarchal society, she also criticizes the feminist thought that existed before and theorized a new way to end women's oppression. Bell Hooks argues that the early feminist movement was dominated by the white middle class women who neglected the black women. These classes separated the racial and class struggle, and by doing so, women of color were pushed to the margin. She claims, "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body."¹In fact, Hooks relies in her writings on her own experience in life, as well as other black women experiences who were victims of social system, which propagates an ideology she describes as "The white supremacist capitalist patriarchy."²

Moreover, Bell Hooks defines feminism as "a struggle to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression."³The feminist struggle against domination is considered as a way and a tool for women to have the ability to control their own bodies. Hooks disagrees with those who think that women's freedom is limited only to her sexual choice or by accepting abortion. In fact, she rejects the Christian thought that "God has created women only to be obedient and subservient to men."⁴

In addition, Bell Hooks gives a great importance to the black women. She argues that Afro-American women suffer from both sexism and racism. Hooks calls for solidarity between women and to accept and respect the differences of cultures and colors. She also asserts, "Women must acknowledge that even though they all suffer in some way, black women are seen as doubly oppressed."⁵in sense that the black women were twice oppressed first for being black then for being women.

According to Bell Hooks, the feminist movement comes with the claim of civil rights and the sexual liberation which seeks for free love , that means having as much sex as one wanted with whomever one desired . Women suffer from forced marriages and unwanted pregnancies and seek for safe contraceptives and the right to a legal abortion. Hooks insists on

men's inclusion in the feminist movement. In fact, she states that "men are not exploited or oppressed by sexism, but there are ways in which they suffer as a result of it."⁶

Feminism, according to Bell Hooks is a movement that aims to make an end for gender exploitation, racism, and oppression in all its forms. According to her, feminism is an appeal to end the harsh reality and the stereotype that women are just properties, objects in the hands of men. It is then a way for liberating women from discrimination.

b- Alice Walker's Theory "Womanism" (1983)

In her collection of essays *In Search of our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983), the African-American author Alice Walker established a new theory of feminism called "Womanism". This theory takes into consideration black women's conditions and experiences in America. Alice Walker defines a womanist as a "Black Feminist or feminist of color". The term "Womanism" is derived from the word "womanish"⁷ that is used in black culture by the mothers to refer to responsible girls with grow up behavior. Walker claims "you acting womanish"⁸ In other words, "you trying to be grown"⁹. The womanish girl exhibits willful, courageous, and outrageous behavior. Alice Walker also defines a "womanist" as:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility [...] Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit [...] Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless.¹⁰

From this quotation, it is clear that Alice Walker shows the common features between women including: their culture, emotions, strength, sisterhood, and friendship. She portrays women's love to music, dance, and also the moon as a symbol to show women's femininity. Beside, Walker employs lesbianism (the exaggerated love between women and the relationship of women adoring other women sexually) in order to support women's liberation and make an end to sexism.

In fact, “Womanism” denounces oppression towards women of color who are neglected and doubly marginalized first, for being women then for being black. In addition, it is interested in women’s emancipation and struggle to survive within an oppressive society and to assert their identity. Alice Walker argues: “I have fought harder for my life and for a chance to myself to be something more than a shadow, than I have never done in my life.”¹¹

Eventually, “Womanism” seemingly supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking men. Walker explicitly expresses the non-separatist attitude when she said, “A womanist is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health.”¹²In this statement, Alice Walker makes clear that black Womanism is not opposing the male as it seeks to the survival of both genders. She also adds that “womanists are traditionally Universalist.”¹³In her essay *In Search of our Mother’s Garden*, Alice Walker has well illustrated women’s equality with men by using a metaphor of the garden, where flowers bloom equally. According to Walker, women and men of different colors coexist like flowers in a garden. She argues: “Mama, why we are brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black? Mama answers: “well, you know the colored race is like a flower garden, with every color, flower represented.”¹⁴In such way, Alice Walker offers a new philosophy that is useful not only for black women, but also for the whole humankind.

Finally, Alice Walker claims that both “Feminism” and “Womanism” have common features, both of them fight against the patriarchal system in United States. The two movements criticize men’s supremacy and oppression over women. Walker argues: “Womanist is to Feminist as Purple to lavender.”¹⁵She adds, “Feminism is a component of the

wider ideological umbrella of Womanism.”¹⁶ With this statements, Walker indicates that both movements have things in common, but in the end they are undeniably different.

2. Materials

A- Biographies of the Authors

a- Alice Walker’s Biography

Multiple award-winning author and activist, Alice Malsenior Walker was born in a small community outside Eatonton in Wards Chapel Putnam County, GA. on February 9, 1944. Walker was the eighth child of African American share croppers. While growing up, she was accidentally blinded in one eye and her mother gave her a type writer, allowing her to write instead of doing chores. She received a scholarship to attend Spelman College, where she studied for two years before transferring to Sarah Lawrence College. After graduating in 1965, Walker moved to Mississippi and became involved in the civil rights movements. She also began teaching and publishing short stories and essays.

Walker wrote the poems that would culminate in her first book poetry, Entitled *once*(1986)while she was a student in east Africa in 1968. Walker showed her talents for storytelling in her debut work *The Third of Grange Copeland* (1970). She continued to explore writing in all of its forms. In 1973, she published the poetry collection *Revolutionary Petunias* and the short story collection *In Love and Trouble*, which included the highly acclaimed “Everyday Use”. After moving to New York, Walker completed *Meridian* (1976), a novel describing the coming of age of several civil rights workers in the 1960. Walker later moved to California where her most popular novel was published, *The Color Purple* (1982) an epistolary novel.

Alice Walker is the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1982 which was awarded for her novel *The Color Purple*. She is still alive and she has 78 Years old.

b- Willa Cather's Biography

Willa Cather was born on December 7, 1873 at her maternal grand-mother's house in the village of back Greek valley, Virginia; and she died on April 24, 1947, New York City. Her father Charles Cather was an Irish descent gentleman of Virginia and her mother Mary Virginia Cather was an Altaic. Willa Cather got no opportunity to go to school at her early age, it may be either by her mother's poor health or father's financial difficulty or not having schooling facility in Virginia. Thus, she was prevented from her formal primary education in school.

Willa Cather and her family moved from Virginia to Webster country, Nebraska when she was nine years old, she later settled in the town of Red Cloud. In 1890, at the age of sixteen. Cather graduated from high school, shortly after graduating from the University of Nebraska –Lincoln, she moved to Pittsburgh for ten years supporting herself as a magazine editor and high school English teacher.

In 1903, she wrote her first book *April Twilights*, a collection of poems, and two years later *The Troll Garden*, a collection of stories appeared in print. In 1912, she wrote her first novel under the title *Alexander's Bridge*, from that she devoted her full time to writing. Over the years, she completed more than eleven novels including: *O'Pioneers!* (1913), *My Antonia* (1918), *The Professor's house and Death comes for the Archbishop* (1927), *A Lost Lady* (1923), *My moral Enemy* (1926), *Sapphira and Slave girl* (1940).

Willa Cather received honorary degrees from Columbia, Yale, the University of California, the University of Michigan ,and Princeton (she was the first woman ever to receive an honorary degree from Princeton).She won the gold medal of American Academy of Art and Letters, and her novel entitled *One of Ours* won the Pulitzer prize (1923).

B- Summaries of the Novels

a- The Summary of *The Color Purple* (1982)

The Color Purple (1982) is an epistolary work written by Alice Walker. It is narrated by two female characters: the protagonist Celie and her sister Nettie. In her first letters, Celie, a fourteen years old black girl, writes to God telling about her living hardships which conduct her life. At an early age, she was raped by her step father Alphonso (Pa) who deprived her from her two children. She offered him her body so as not to approach her young sister Nettie. Later on, he forced her to marry Mr_Albert, so she enters a loveless marriage with a slow death by experiencing a wide range of exploitation and persecution. Her husband considers her as a sexual object and her role is restricted to households and raising Albert's children. Nettie runs away from Alphonso and takes refuge at Celie's house. The advantage that she has over her sister is her intellectual background. So, she takes profit to offer Celie knowledge. Mr_Albert in his turn approaches her, so she flees for her own safety. From here, Celie had never heard about her sister again and thought she is dead. As she is separated from the only person she has in the world, her life gets worse and worse.

Many years later, Albert's eldest son Harpo married Sofia, an outspoken and independent woman. She is strong and fights back all attempts of domination and subjugation

Ultimately, Sofia leaves Harpo when he tried to follow Celie's advice on beating her and considers it as a betrayal from Celie. The latter continues her life alone under her ruthless

husband's control until she met Shug Avery the blues singer woman who is already in love with Albert.

Shug falls ill and he takes her to his house. Celie nurses and nurtures her back to health. In return, she brings the outside world into Celie's closed-off environment, the two women become friends. Shug teaches Celie about love, self-esteem and how to stand up for herself and promised to protect her from Albert's abuse. Their friendship, hence, transformed into asexual one.

The silenced woman Celie, becomes radiant towards Albert when she discovered with Shug that her sister is still alive and that he has been hiding all of Nettie's letters in his locked trunk. By reading the letters, she realizes that her sister became a missionary in Africa surrounded by her two nephews (Celie's children). During all the past years, she did not stop writing and sending letters. She wrote about her everyday life, about Africa and everything. Celie feels betrayed and decides to leave Mr_Albert and move to Memphis with Shug where she becomes a good designer of pants and succeeds to turn the work into business by the help of Shug. Many other events took place and Celie more and more becomes empowered and emancipated. The novel ends up with the return of Nettie, her husband Samuel and the two children who grew far from their mother to America.

b- The Summary of *A Lost Lady* (1923)

A Lost Lady is a novel written by the American author Willa Sibert Cather, published in 1923, it is set at the end of the nineteenth century. The novel chronicles Marian Forrester's life and her husband captain Daniel Forrester who live in western town of sweet water along the transcontinental railroad. The story is narrated through the eyes of young boy called Niel Herbert.

Niel initially describes Mrs. Forrester as being beautiful, gracious, and indomitable wife of an industrial magnate and western pioneer as the personification of a lady-like

propriety. Captain Daniel shows his admiration to his wife from the very beginning of the novel as well as Niel Herbert who sees her as an ideal wife. One day Forrester family invites business men and friends to their home for dinner, Niel and his uncle Judge Pommeroy are among them. At the meal, Niel meets Ellinger, whom he later learns is Mrs. Forrester's lover.

One day a telegram arrives informing Captain Forrester that a small bank of which he is the president has declared a bankruptcy. He leaves home with his lawyer Judge Pommeroy to solve the problem. During his absence, Marian Forrester commits an adultery with Ellinger and Niel accidentally see them, a scene that destroys his image about her. When Captain Daniel returns home, he declares his financial crisis. He soon suffers a stroke, but survives, and Niel leaves to go to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he meant to study architecture.

Two years later, Niel comes back to the town, and he visits the Forresters. The Captain became an old man who sits and watches sun-dial all day long, while Mrs. Forrester is still young and beautiful. Soon, Mr. Forrester suffers another stroke and Mrs. Forrester is unable to take care of him, and this offended Niel, and he decided to take off a year from school to help the Forresters.

Few month later, Mr. Forrester died. After his death, Niel finally determine, that he is angry with Mrs. Forrester for her determination to live and go on with her life despite the death of her husband, while people of the town are talking about her because of her habit of inviting young men to her house for dinner. When Niel returns school, he goes to say good bye to Mrs. Forrester, but he catch her flirting with Ivy Peter, and he leaves without talking to her. Few years later, Niel meets an old friend who inform him that Mrs. Forrester moved to California and married an English men, and he also told him that she is died three years earlier.

End Notes

¹Bell Hooks, “Preface”, in *Feminist theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 01.

²Ibid, “The Significance of Feminist Movement”,in *Feminist theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 38.

³Ibid, “Feminism: To End Sexist Oppression”,in *Feminist theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 17.

⁴Ibid,.18.

⁵Bell Hooks, “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory”,in *Feminist theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 04.

⁶Ibid, “Men: Comrades in Struggles”, in *Feminist theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 72.

⁷Walker Alice, *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1983), 14.

⁸Ibid,. 13.

⁹Ibid,. 14.

¹⁰Ibid,. 15.

¹¹Ibid,. 21.

¹²Walker Alice, *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1983), 15.

¹³Ibid,. 15.

¹⁴Ibid., 11.

¹⁵Ibid., 23.

¹⁶Ibid., 22 .

Results

Our research is a comparative study between *The Color Purple* (1982) by the Afro-American writer Alice Walker and *A Lost Lady* (1923) by the American writer Willa Cather. It deals with the theme of Female Individuality and Gender Role in both novels. Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984) and Alice Walker's *Womanism* (1983) are the two theories we have relied on in our study. The two theories deal with women's status and role in the patriarchal society which gives males higher position and relegate women to an inferior status.

The first chapter is devoted to analyze the theme of female individuality, freedom and personal autonomy in both novels. Indeed both writers inscribed their novels in the female struggle in the American and Afro-American societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wherein women started to vindicate and claim their rights. We have reached the conclusion that both Alice Walker and Willa Cather use the main female characters in their novels to denounce the suffering and oppression inflicted by the patriarchal rigid rules on women. Being feminists and womanists, both writers want to instill justice and equality and encourage women to take their destiny in their hands through their works .

In the second chapter, we have analyzed gender role and inequality "gender and sexual division" in the novels. We have concluded that both authors use their main female characters Celie and Marian Forrester to fight against the male centered conventions of the American society, and to show that women should no longer be considered as properties, but rather as being self-asserted and independent human beings.

Throughout this comparative study, we have also noticed that a serious concern about women's issues are dealt with by both Alice Walker and Willa Cather. In fact, both writers are similar in the way they denounce women's subjugation and oppression in a society which

denied their natural rights. The presentation of the heroines, Celie and Marian Forrester accounts for the engagement of the writers in the struggle for women's emancipation.

Discussion

Chapter One: Female Individuality, Freedom and Personal Autonomy

In this part of our work, we will shed light on female individuality in both *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker and *A Lost Lady* (1923) by Willa Cather. In fact we will try to compare between the main female characters of both novels, Celie in Alice Walker's novel and Marian Forrester in Willa Cather's novel. We will deal with the way they fight against the male domination within African-American and American communities. In Cather's novel, the white society oppresses the white women, while in Walker's novel women are doubly oppressed first as being women then as being black. Therefore, we will substantiate the extent to which they revolt to assert themselves within the patriarchal society and to assert their individuality. In order to better explain this, we rely on Bell Hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) and Alice Walker's theory "Womanism" (1983).

1-Freedom and Personal Autonomy in *The Color Purple* and *A Lost lady*

The Afro-American writer Alice Walker and the American writer Willa Cather deal with the life of the oppressed women in the different societies White and Black. They focus on the way the main female characters suffer and fight to achieve individuality and self-autonomy within the patriarchal society where women are considered as being inferior and dependent on men. In both works, the authors explore how women struggle against male domination and reject social norms to free themselves socially, sexually, economically.

a-Social Independence:

The main female characters in both novels Celie in *the Color Purple* and Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* struggle to gain their independence and autonomy from the evils of patriarchy. The two protagonists want to follow their dreams without caring about what society aspires from them. Bell Hooks, in *The Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) asserts in this regard:

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that woman's essential worth stems from her common humanity and does not depend on the other relationship of her life.¹

The above cited quotation deals with the fact that feminism advocates that women are free to make decisions about their lives and stand as free individuals in society. It also insists that women can express their thoughts fully and act freely without being dependent on men.

Alice Walker is one of the representative authors of black women, she deals with their experiences and suffering in society. Walker helps black women in defying males' abusive forms of authority. Through her various novels, she portrays black female living in patriarchal societies and suffering from being both female and black and their revolt to achieve self-fulfillment. In his "Critical Essays on Alice Walker" (1999) Dieke Ikenna argues:

walking into peril is exactly what most of Walker's characters and personae are doing as each seek to navigate their own path of fulfillment, a crooked path of travail with dangers, possibilities, changes, personal adventures, triumphs –big and small- and, of course, occasional setbacks.²

Accordingly, in *The Color Purple*'s protagonist Celie moves from a state of subordination and male dominance to a state of defiance and self-control. Celie is a woman who lived submissively for years under the shade and under the dominance of her step-father and

later of her husband, but gradually she learns how to accept and celebrate her existence by breaking down the chains of male authority and imposing her own rules.

The turning point of *The Color Purple* occurs when Celie asserts her freedom and individuality from her husband and proclaims her right to exist. Celie at the beginning of the novel starts writing letters to record her painful experiences which she could not talk about. As we understand through one of Nettie's letters:

I remember one time you said your life made feel so ashamed you couldn't even to talk about it to Go, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read your letters or no, I you will go on writing them.³

From writing letters, Celie expresses her terrible situation and torment which she undergoes. She uses writing as a means to relieve herself from the harsh realities she suffers from. In this context, Elizabeth Fifer in "Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick" (1985) asserts: "Celie participates in the creation of meaning for herself through language. Without language, silence would have ensured madness or, as in her mother's case an early death."⁴

In addition, through the help of women around her sister Nettie, her daughter's in law Sofia and Shug Avery, Celie develops into a mature and a confident woman. Shug is described as a bold and a powerful woman who rejects the patriarchal rules. Shug's personality corresponds to Alice Walker's traits of a womanistsuch as "outrageous, audacious, courageous, willful behavior."⁵ Shug encourages Celie to have a look, and became careless about what people think about her. Celie says: "... what I care? I ast. I'm happy."⁶ Nettie also gives strength to Celie when she rejects male dominance and freed herself first from her father as she escapes home, then from Mr. Albert who obliged her to leave the village after she refused him. This strong and close female relationship gives Celie the power and strength to get her personal autonomy and frees herself from the oppressive society.

Indeed, the two writer Willa Cather asserts and deals with female individuality in their works. Cather is one of the most distinguished novelists of the early twentieth century American who has raised her voice against men's supremacy and endeavored to place women in the position of men. In most of her novels, women are given a heroic character with an autonomous power to strengthen female in the patriarchal society. For instance, in *A Lost Lady*(1923) Cather uses the protagonist Marian Forrester as a representative of new woman who fights for her freedom and existence. Eventually, during the period which referred to us as "The Roaring Twenties", new women or flappers emerged and made the change in popular culture, they established a new way of living and they enjoyed more rights than their ancestors. Women rejected the conventional role and they became more responsible and freer than they were as it is represented by Willa Cather through the main character Mrs. Forrester. In her review "A lost Lady. Rambling: Books Please" (2009, Margaret Biblibo says: "The practicality of Mrs. Forrester against patriarchy seems so courageous, it shows she must be a complex character."⁷

Cather represents Marian Forrester as a strong and an independent woman. In the opening chapter of the novel, we find Mrs. Forrester being described as a bold, a powerful, and a confident woman as it is depicted in the following quotation:

Mrs. Forrester comes on the porch to greet them [visitors]. Even the hardest and the coldest of his friends, a certain narrow-faced Lincoln, become animated when he took her hand, tried to meet the gay challenge in her eyes and reply devilry to the droll words of greeting on her lips.⁸

Marian Forrester from the beginning of the novel refuses the submissive role of women dictated by the patriarchal system. Mrs. Forrester is a lady with different attitudes and behaviors, she does not care about society and she intends to free herself from the social boundaries. Unlike Celie who initially accepts the male dominance, Mrs. Forrester does

whatever she likes, she is a revolutionary woman who aims to establish an autonomous personality. The novelist asserts:

She was always there, just outside the door, to welcome their visitors, having been warned of their approach by sound of hoofs and the rumble of wheels on the wooden - bridge. If she happened to be in the kitchen, helping her Bohemian cook. She came out in her apron, waving a buttery iron spoon, or shook cherry-stained fingers at the new arrival.⁹

From the above quotation, one can notice that Mrs. Forrester challenges society by welcoming the male visitors who come to her home while this was considered unacceptable and indecent for married a woman. In “The Case against Willa Cather” (1979), Granville Hicks says: “Mrs. Forrester is the symbol of corruption that overtaken the age.”¹⁰ He considers Marian Forrester as symbol of corruption because she establishes a new way of living and she rejects the societal norms, she refuses to be a lady-like.

Contrary to Mrs. Forrester, Celie in the beginning of *The Color Purple* appears as being weak and lacking self-confidence. She is represented doubly oppressed first by her step-father, then by her husband who treats her like a sexual object without mercy. Celie says: “He beat me today because he says I winked at boy in church. I may have got somethin in my eye but I didn’t wink.”¹¹ However, she finds the strength within herself to break this fear and become an independent woman. She learned to fight, and to raise her voice within an oppressive society and stand up for herself. As she says: “I’m poor, I’m black, I may be ugly, and can’t cook ... but I’m here.”¹² Celie started after a period of time to understand that she must fight for her existence as a woman in order to assert herself. She finally realizes herself as a colorful, beautiful, and proud human being.

Shug and Sofia helped Celie to find her self-autonomy and female individuality within the patriarchal society, they teach her how to survive with the hard realities and to express herself without fear. With their guidance and love, Celie matured into a full, solid, modern twentieth-century woman.

In fact, society wants both Mrs. Forrester and Celie to be ideal wives and devote their lives to their husbands Daniel Forrester and Mr. Albert respectively, as it assumes that this is women's destiny. Marian Forrester refuses this submissive role because she is aware that this threatens her freedom therefore, she neglects her responsibilities as a wife, she says: "I can't stand this house a moment longer."¹³ She does not accept losing her individuality and sense of selfhood because of society. In this regard, Hooks argues: "Many white women's liberationist were saying: we are tired of the home tired of relating only to children and husband emotionally and economically depend."¹⁴

In *The Color Purple*, Celie is severely oppressed compared to Mrs. Forrester in *A Lost Lady*. The patriarchal society made of her a woman without a voice, she had no control over her life. She had been manipulated for a so long time by her father and husband. Later on, after she realizes self-awareness, she decided to live for herself, and to face the injustice inflicted upon her. Celie makes a decision to leave her husband, and starts a new life without oppression.

Eventually, Cather presents Mrs. Forrester as an autonomous female character which is able to make decisions about her life without thinking about societal norms and values. She challenges the patriarchal community, she enjoys parties, drinking wine, dancing, and even making flirtation with young men. Mrs Forrester says: "I have always danced with winter, there's plenty of dancing in Colorado, springs, you wouldn't believe how I miss it . I shall dance till I'm eight ... I will be the waltzing grandmother! it's good for me , I need it."¹⁵ From the quotation, we notice that Marian Forrester is a woman who enjoys and lives her life freely regardless of what society aspires, as she loves music and dancing. In the same context, Alice Walker in her theory of "Womanism" (1983), declares, "Woman loves music, loves dance, loves the moon, loves the spirit, loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle, loves the folk, loves herself regardless."¹⁶

Accordingly, *The Color Purple* and *A Lost Lady* anticipate the progressive era's of the New Woman who would successfully dismantle male authority. The two authors attack the idea that women are to be secondary to men. As feminists, they raise their voice and want to establish women's autonomy and individuality in society.

b-Sexual Independence

Physical and sexual freedom are important features and components for individuality and personal autonomy. These features play an important role in women's progression and liberation for feminism. According to Bell Hooks and Alice Walker, many feminist writers deal with the theme of sexuality in their works, as it is the case in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*.

The relation between *The Color Purple* and *A Lost Lady* is that both main female characters achieved their sexual freedom but in different ways. Celie enters a lesbian relationship with Shug which allows her to express herself and enjoy sex freely whereas Marian Forrester gets involved in multiple sexual relations with other men. So, both of them reject the sexual taboo and succeed to assert their individuality and independence as women through sex.

Actually, Celie in *The Color Purple* has been a subject of beating by her husband Mr. Albert; therefore, she has no desire to know her body. The only concept that Celie has of her own body is that she is ugly. To protect herself, she has had to construct her body as well as her soul, however, in order to emancipate for their rights, a woman should know herself not only emotionally but also physically.

With Shug's encouragement, Celie views her own sexual organ in a mirror for the first time and shouts: "it mine" it was the first time that she develops an interest in her body and enjoys

its beauty. Alice Walker in her social theory “Womanism” states that:

Woman who loves other women and/or men sexually and/or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers woman’s culture, woman’s emotional flexibility (value tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and woman’s strength.”¹⁷

This quotation deals with the various relationships that occur between women. It can be a friendship or a love relationship. Women appreciate each other sexually or non-sexually spontaneously when they find out common traits which join them. This is what happened between Celie and Shug.

Celie has given birth to two children, but in reality she has never experienced sexual orgasm. On the contrary, Shug is an active sexual character who enjoys sex freely. Shug initiates Celie to the pleasures of sex, and after lovemaking, Celie feels true love for the first time. When Celie wakes up after a love making night, she feels transformed; it is the first time that she is loved. She says: “It feel like heaven is that it feel like, not like sleeping with Mr__ at all.”¹⁸ After this lesbian relationship with Shug, Celie becomes aware of her sexuality and her body.,

Similarly, Marian Forrester, in *A Lost Lady* is also suffered from the patriarchal rules. She enters in a loveless marriage without joy, with a man who is twenty five years older than her, she feels sexually oppressed and limited. As the Captain’s wife, Marian has financial security while her husband has a beautiful woman to care of him in his old age. Captain Forrester sees his wife as one of his possessions, he shows his affection to her by giving her expensive jewelry. But what Mrs. Forrester really needs is affection and man’s admiration, therefore, she betrays her husband and refuses the submissive role of being a sexual object and her husband’s ownership. In the same context, in her essay “In Search of Our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose” (1983), Alice walker reports Jean Toom the American poet’s

words, she says “He [Toom] saw them enter loveless marriages, without joy and become prostitutes, without resistance, and become mothers of children without fulfilment.”¹⁹

In addition, the lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug appears not to be indecent but natural and affectionate. Celie has never been loved by any man. At best, she has been only tormented and abused. For Shug, since Celie never experienced the real pleasures of sex, this relation is considered as an ultimate gift of love for her. For Celie, lovemaking and being loved complete her spiritual journey to selfhood. This is the first time Celie feels secure and loved. At this stage, Shug’s initiation of Celie to her body is one of the main steps that helps her to emancipate. By discovering and then accepting her own body, Celie is able to initiate and follow her desire for self-assertion and self-fulfillment. Seeing her own body in the mirror opens the door for Celie to accept herself with her newfound identity. Celie is able to break free from male domination and join the community of women for support.

By listening to Celie’s problems and stories, Shug enabled Celie to open up emotionally and release the pressure and pain that had muted her throughout both childhood and adulthood. As she writes in one of her letters she says: “My life sto when I left home, I think. But then I think again. It stop with Mr,___ maybe, but start up again with Shug.”²⁰ Her friendship with Shug becomes a lifetime union and accompanies Celie throughout her struggles with both Mr,___ as well as with the memories of her childhood hardships.

When Shug returns to Mr___’s house with her new husband Grady, Shug and Celie develop a more stabilizing, intimate bond. Because she is cold sleeping alone in the absent Grady’s bed, Shug sleeps with Celie, and like two school girls, they talk about their sexual experiences. Shug is shocked by Celie’s history of sexual abuse. Like a mother, Shug envelops Celie in her arms, trying to comfort her, to make up for her past. For the first time in the novel, Celie is uninhibited enough to respond naturally through tears. As she tells her

awful tale , she confides that no one ever loved her, but Shug reassures Celie that “I (Shug) love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth.”²¹

Indeed, Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* refuses to look after her husband and rejects the role of being men’s object. She disregards the social norms and values as she betrays her husband by making love with other men (Ivy Peters, Niel Herbert, Frank Ellinger). By doing so, Mrs. Forrester frees herself as a woman, she becomes aware of her sexual independence and she expresses her desire for sex without shame. This is well demonstrated by Cather:

He [Ellinger] put his arm through hers and settled himself low in the sleigh “you ought to look at me better than that. It been a devil of a long while since I have sowed you.” “Perhaps it’s been too long” she murmured. The mocking spark in her eyes softened perceptibly under the long pressure of his arm. “Yes it’s been long “, she admitted lightly.²²

Like Celie, Marian Forrester also abandons her husband in order to fulfill her physical needs and desires, since she can no longer fulfill them with him. Through her sexual relations, Marian Forrester becomes aware of her feelings and emotions, she expresses herself through sex. In this context, Hooks asserts that sexual freedom is the starting point of women’s liberation. She says: “many women choose to be heterosexual because they enjoy sex in genital contact with individual men.”²³ She adds, “They urged women to initiate sexually advances to enjoy sex, to experiment with relationship to be sexually free.”²⁴ Furthermore, Hook maintains:

Sexual liberation is a part of the cult of individuality which only demands legitimation of the expression of individuals needs what appear to be harrow impulse life, against the demands of society without considering a political reordering of social order itself. The achievement of the conditions necessary to female autonomy is a precondition for authentic sexual liberation.²⁵

Therefore, Bell Hooks claims that sexuality and by implication sexual freedom is a relevant issue of feminist politics.

Through her behaviors, Mrs. Forrester aims to achieve equality with men and assert her individuality. She breaks down the patriarchal system which gives more to men rather than to women. She struggles to achieve her freedom and autonomy, and she imposes her existence as an individual. She says: “So that’s what I’m struggling for to get out this hole ... out of it, when I’m alone here for month together I plan a plot.”²⁶ Mrs. Forrester calls a Male clutch a ‘hole’, and she wants to be released from it. Marian Forrester struggles to be free even from her husband, she wants to be totally independent.

In addition to this, Mrs. Forrester’s personal autonomy and individuality become more vibrant when she breaks the boundaries that Neil (the model of patriarchy) wants to impose on her. For instance, when he finds her flirting with Ivy Peters, he tries to stop her from doing so, but she denies the boundary that Neil wants to put on her because she thinks that her sexual freedom and satisfaction is above everything else. Neil admonishes Marian Forrester by warning her about what people think about her and what society aspires from her, but she discards anyone’s thought because her only interest is to fulfill her sexual needs. She says:

I don’t bother about their talks. They have always talked about me always will, Mr. Peters is my lawyer and my tenant; I have to see him and I’m certainly not going to his office. I cannot sit in the house alone and every knit. If you came to see me oftener than you do that would make a talk.²⁷

From the above quotation, the reader can notice that Mrs. Forrester seems to be a very powerful and autonomous woman who only cares about her personal comfort. She wants to live her life freely as she likes not as others or society aspires.

Eventually, it is clear from the analyses that the main female characters of both novels have achieved their sexual independence, Celie with a lesbian relationship and Mrs. Forrester

with the multiple sexual relationships. Through the two novels both Alice Walker and Willa Cather seek to end sexism and support women's sexual liberation.

b- Economic Independence

Besides sexual freedom, economic freedom is an important component of personal autonomy and self-definition. It is the medium that enables a woman to do things according to her own will and it is a crucial condition for her emancipation. This is well demonstrated by the two authors Alice Walker and Willa Cather in their works.

Initially, in *The Color Purple*, Celie's poverty seems shocking. When she is a teenage girl, she is almost naked and she works day and night in the house and the fields. Celie says: "He says why don't you look decent? Put on something. But what I'm sposed to put on? I don't have nothing."²⁸ When she married, Celie and her step-son Harpo work in the fields, but the product belongs to the master of the family Mr--- Albert. When she announces her leaving, she is deprived of everything by her husband. Celie's poverty makes her stay in an inferior family position. She likes wearing her favorite color --- the purple or a little red in it, but she is forbidden to do so because her husband do not like to pay for her.

Fortunately, Celie, as a black woman without any formal education, has a talent in making pants. With the help of Shug, Celie leaves for Memphis and began to learn how to earn money by making pants. She accepts Shug's advice and opens her own clothing company, "Folks Pants Unlimited Company". Sofia also does not hesitate to help Celie in her new business.

When women obtain economic independence, they gain the freedom of thinking, because they do not depend on men any more. Celie's, manual labor becomes a creative artistic activity in which she discovers her wisdom and artistic beauty, and realizes her self-

confidence. As she sits on Shug's dining room floor, visualizing her self-made pants; she began to trust in her own creativity and her own existence as a vital, contributing member of society. This is considered as a central tenet of feminists, Bell Hooks maintains:

Work outside the home, feminist activist declared was the key to liberation. Work, they argued, would allow women to break the bonds of economic dependency on men, which would in turn enable them to resist sexist domination. When these women talked about work they were equating it with high paying careers; they were not referring to low paying jobs or so called menial labor.²⁹

Moreover, Celie asserts and affirms her existence within society through her art. She proves to the black community that women can live without dependence on men. Since she became an artist, she is then financially independent, and no longer under a men's dominance.

Celie's economic freedom is a turning point in her life. It strengthens her life's meaning and gives her a position within society. Moreover, her new business "Folks pants, Unlimited" provides her with the means to go out and discover the world on her own without waiting for others.

Like Celie, Marian Forrester enters the business field when her husband becomes sick on bed after a fall from his horse. In beginning of the novel, Marian Forrester was financially dependent on her husband and she does not understand in business till her husband's financial crisis. As it is mentioned in the novel, "Mrs. Forrester seemed unaware of any danger."³⁰ She quickly realizes the importance of money to live free and comfortable. Thus, she tries to solve the financial problem by hiring Ivy Peters and taking some important decisions. She says:

Don't tell your uncle, I have no doubt it's crooked, but the judge is like Mr. Forrester: his methods don't work nowadays. He will never get us out of the dept. Ivy Peters is terribly smart you know, he own half of the town already.³¹

Through the passage, Willa Cather shows Mrs. Forrester as an autonomous and authoritative woman as she takes decisions about her husband's business. She comes with a new method,

and she employs Ivy Peters as a lawyer instead of Judge Pommery who was employed by her husband.

According to Bell Hooks, white women claim their independence and liberation because they are tired of taking all the family's responsibilities at home, and being only homemakers, and housewives. They want to work and to be independent. By entering the business field, Marian Forrester breaks all the boundaries of the patriarchal system. She changes the fact that women are made for their families and house labor, she established a new status for women within the patriarchal society. In the same context, in her theory Hooks reports, "Betty Friedan phrase", she states: "I can no ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and children and house.' That more she define as careers."³² In the sense that women want to free themselves from the house labor, get access to professions, and equal rights with men in order to free themselves financially.

To conclude, through *The Color Purple* and *A Lost Lady*, Alice Walker and Willa Cather have established a new position for women in society. They reject social norms and values, both assert that women can control their lives and live in the way they desire. Walker and Cather assert the female individuality through their female main characters Celie and Marian Forrester. They portray them as bold and powerful women who seek to put an end to women's oppression in the patriarchal society. Both characters struggle to free themselves socially, sexually and economically in order to achieve their personal autonomy.

End Notes

¹Bell Hooks, "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression," in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 24.

²DiekeIkenne, "Critical Essays on Alice Walker," (Green Wood Press, 1999), 04

³Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982), 78.

⁴Elizabeth Fifer, "Fifer in Rainwater and Scheick," (1985), 156.

⁵Alice Walker, "*In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose*," (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1983), 13.

⁶Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982), 194.

⁷Margaret Bibliobio, "A Lost Lady. Rambling: Books Please," (2009), 48.

⁸Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady* (1923), 05.

⁹*Ibid.*, 09.

¹⁰Granville Hicks, "The Case against Willa Cather," (1997), 98.

¹¹Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982), 07.

¹²*Ibid.*, 187.

¹³Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady* (1923), 40.

¹⁴Bell Hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting," in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, 134.

¹⁵Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 64.

¹⁶Alice Walker, "*In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose*," (1983), 44.

¹⁷Ibid., 15.

¹⁸Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982), 98.

¹⁹Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose," (1983), 402.

²⁰Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982), 85.

²¹Ibid., 97.

²²Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 52.

²³Bell Hooks, "Black Women: Shaping Feminism," in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, 05.

²⁴Ibid., 06.

²⁵Bell Hooks, "Ending Female Sexual Oppression," in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, 148.

²⁶Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 10.

²⁷Ibid., 132.

²⁸Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 05.

²⁹Bell Hooks, "Rethinking the Nature of Work," in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, 95.

³⁰Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 43.

³¹Ibid., 105.

³²Bell Hooks, "Ending Female Sexual Oppression," in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, 148.

Chapter two: Gender Role and Inequality

This chapter studies Gender Role in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) It aims to demonstrate how both authors deal with the theme of Inequality between men and women within the patriarchal society. In fact, we will deal with the way the main female characters face male domination and the way they reject the traditional submissive female roles.

Gender Role and Inequality in *The Color Purple* (1982) and *A Lost Lady* (1923)

Gender role and inequality are among the most important themes introduced by many feminist authors. Women under the patriarchal society suffer from injustice, inequality, and oppression in both the Black and White communities. This is well illustrated in *The Color Purple* and *A Lost Lady*.

In fact, in the patriarchal society, men have an absolute priority contrary to women who are put in the inferior and secondary position. Society makes men superior to women and also makes gender differences. Indeed, black and white societies consider women as being subordinate to men, their only task is to raise children, take care of their husbands and do all other kinds of household chores. According to the male dominant system, women do not understand in any field except home and they are helpless. In her feminist theory "Womanism" (1983) Alice Walker claims:

I wanted to explore the relationship between men and women and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their masculinity. Why

are women so easy “tramps” and “traitors” when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity? ¹

From the quotation above, Alice Walker tends to explore the differences made by the patriarchal society between men and women. She discusses how they are treated as being secondary and inferior to men.

In *The Color Purple*, women are oppressed by men who take superior positions in the Black community, whereas women are seen as being powerless. Women, under the male dominant system, are deprived from their rights, they do not even have the right to make decisions about their own lives. Unlike women, men are the decision makers and they can do whatever they want. For instance, Celie is burdened with a lot of responsibilities. In the opening of the novel, Celie is described as being like all the other Black women who devote themselves to their families, and she accepts men’s orders without objection. Bell Hooks suggests, “A mark of their [black women] victimization is that they accept their lot in life without visible question, without organized protest without collective anger or rage.”² Celie’s father silences her and orders her to submit to his will prohibitions. He says: “you better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy.”³ From this quotation, we understand that Celie lives in hard conditions, and she does not even have the right to talk about her suffering because her father obliges her to remain silent. This is what made her write letters to God through which she expresses her concerns, she began writing when she was abused. She speaks in her letters about her suffering with her father then her husband, this was her only outlet.

Similarly, just As PA’s (Celie’s father) oppressed Celie, Niel also in *A Lost Lady* is shown as an authoritative character who believes that women should be always under men’s control, as the novelist declares: “Niel, who had been so content with the bachelors’ life, and who had made up his mind that he would never live in place that was under the control of

women.”⁴ In addition, Niel also tries to be dominant over Mrs. Forrester and he reminds her about social norms and how to be the ideal wife according to society. For instance, Niel tries to prevent Mrs. Forrester from seeing Ivy Peters, because society does not allow for married women to see other men. Cather argues: “At last Niel had a plain talk with Mrs. Forrester. He told her that people were gossiping about Ivy’s being there so much. He had heard comments even on the street.”⁵ From this quotation, it is clear that Neil tries to restrict Mrs. Forrester and warns her about her indecent behavior unlike Celie, Marian Forrester rejects Niel’s advice and throw him the social rules of a ‘good conduct of a women’. Mrs. Forrester is a women with a rebellious attitude who breaks the creole’s rules of the society and she do what ever she wants. She answers Neil: “I don’t bother about their talks.”⁶ From her answer, we understand that Marian denies Niel’s boundaries and she does not care about what people think of her.

Hooks asserts:

It is not just rich and powerful capitalist who inhabit and destroy life. Rapists murderers, lynchers, and ordinary bigots do too and exercise very real violent power because of this white male privilege.’ Implicit in this statement is the assumption that the act of committing violent crimes against a women is either gesture or an affirmation of privilege.⁷

In *The Color Purple* and *A Lost lady*, the male characters stand in opposition to women. To a great extent, Celie faces all kinds of abuse, physical and emotional. Mrs Forrester suffers from the society where she lives, this society denies her freedom of expression and action. In *The Color Purple*, Mr.... and Pa represent the evils of the patriarchal system. In *A Lost Lady*, Niel symbolizes the reasonable voice of society who advices women to be faithful to their husbands. Both women, in fact, are under the rules of patriarchal society, norms and traditions.

Celie in *The Color Purple* is placed in a predicament situation, she has no control over her life, and she is subordinate compared to male. Her step father is the first man who treated

her as an object to use then dispose, he treats her as a slave to satisfy his sexual desires no matter how. He makes Celie pregnant, then he sells her children (Adam and Olivia) to a family in Africa and he even convinced her that they are dead, but when Nettie goes in a missionary with a family to Africa she discovers that the children are still alive.

Celie's father stopped her commitment for development as he deprives her from the most crucial elements she loves such as education. She says: "The first time I got big, Pa took me out of school. He never care that I love it."⁸ He deprived her from access to formal education then being an independent woman. Bell Hooks states:

We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination .All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy, men dominate women a few men dominate the rest. All power situations throughout history have been male dominated and male-oriented. Men have controlled all political, economic, and cultural institutions and backed up this control with physical force. They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women.⁹

From the quotation above, it is clear that the belief that men are superior to women is adopted and maintained. Men have the supremacy and the power more than women, they are the dominant in all spheres. It is noticed also that men oppress women and they impose them their roles.

Women are being dominated and ill-treated according to the deep rooted patriarchal rules and regulations. Society has been formed by male-oriented ideology which has kept women in the inferior position. Men use the superiority given by society to dominate social, political, cultural, economic and religious domains. As Alice Walker says, "they [women] lay vacant and fallow as autumn field without fulfilment."¹⁰ Through their novels both Cather

and Walker denounce the miserable conditions of women under patriarchy and support the struggle against inequality and injustice.

The Color Purple shows us another image of women in a patriarchal society, where women are obliged to marry and submit to their husbands and children. Marriage is considered their only route in life, and pleasing their husbands is a major part of their job. Carrie, Mr. ___'s sister says: "When a woman get married, she pose to keep a decent house and a clean family"¹¹. As Celie, in the beginning of the novel, devoted herself to serve her abusive father, and later her husband who treated her as a sexual object.

The father of Celie arranges her marriage with a widower with four children Mr. Albert, without caring whether she wants to married to him or not. Pa says to Mr. Albert: "I can let you have Celie. She the oldest anyway. She ought to marry first. She ain't fresh tho, but I specs you know that."¹² Instead of being a source of confidence and protection, Pa treats Celie as an object.

Mr. Albert mistreats Celie verbally with diminishing comments and destroy her link with the outside world. Mr. ___ (Albrt) says: "You ugly. You skinny. You shape funny. You too scared to open your mouth to people."¹³ According to the norms of the patriarchal society, men have a power over their wives, they treat them as they want. In this context in her Womanist prose "In Search Of Our Mother's Garden" Alice Walker reports Jean Toomer's words and claims:

Black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held. They stumbled blindly through their lives: creatures so abused and mutilated in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, that they considered themselves unworthy even of hope. In the selfless abstractions their bodies became to the men who used them, they became more than 'sexual objects'¹⁴

The citation above reveals that many black women at the period were burdened with responsibilities of child care and also faced violence by men, they were deprived of their rights.

In contrast to Celie, Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* is shown as being a woman who defies the rules and regulation of the patriarchal society. From the very beginning of the novel, Marian denounces the role assigned to women by society. For instance, she welcomes any male visitor coming to her house, knowing that this was not allowed for women. As we can see in the opening part of the story, Mrs. Forrester has a contact with other males even though she is a married woman. She comes out to welcome a group of boys who have picnic in her grove, and says:

Good morning, boys. Off for picnic? A love day. How long has school been out? Don't miss it? I'm sure Niell does. Judge pommeroy tells me studious. Run a long, and be sure you don't leave the gate into pasture open. Mr. Forrester hates to have the cattle get in on his blue grass.¹⁵

From the passage above, one may understand that Marian Forrester denies the dominating rules of men as she comes out to speak with the boys, and by doing so she breaks the creole's norms. She is courageous enough and she does whatever she wants, unlike the other women who submit to the male domination such as Celie.

Conventionally, women were supposed to live within the confines of home. Society considers women as being made to stay home and look after their families, and be happy with their submissive roles. So society expects the same role from Marian Forrester, but it is not the case with her. She breaks the rules and does not care about social norms and values. Mrs. Forrester challenges the conventional role of women, by coming out and raising her voice among the males, and she even claim to have existence, and power among them. As it is mentioned in the novel, Cyrus Dalzell (Mr. Forrester's friend) declares: "We saw last winter that we couldn't do anything without our lady Forrester. Nothing came off out right without

her.”¹⁶ From the quotation, one may understand that Mrs. Forrester is a woman of power and has a considerable place in her environment.

Through the character of Mrs. Forrester, Willa Cather represents a revolutionary model for women in society in order to help them attain social equality. She represents clearly the ways women undergo struggle also the power, hope and courage which cannot be taken from them, and this is the major aim of feminism as a liberation movement. This was known at the period of ‘The Roaring Twenties’, a decade of prosperity and dissipation. In her theory, Bell Hooks claims that “women interested in reforms that would lead to social equality with men wanted to obtain greater power in the existing system.”¹⁷ From the title of the novel *A Lost Lady*, one can understand that Willa Cather refers to the main female character Mrs. Forrester who is described as lost in regards to society. After Mr. Forrester’s death, Ivy Peters tries hard to have the Forrester’s prosperities, so he throws Marian Forrester away from the house. At that period, this was easy for people to do without caring about whether the way is right or wrong. Marian Forrester is lost in her society after her husband’s death and she is lost from the moral values, This is the meaning of the title of the novel ‘*A Lost Lady*’

Moreover, Marian Forrester is a lady with a feminist thought, she believes that women have an equal position with men. We notice this from her conversation with Neil regarding female equality with male. Marian Forrester says,

Tell me Niel, do women really smoke after dinner now with men. Nice women? It’s all very well for actresses, but women can’t be attractive if they do everything that men do. I think just now it’s the fashion for women to make themselves comfortable, before anything else.¹⁸

From the above quotation, it is clear that Marian Forrester believes that women should follow their needs and personal comfort and do whatever they want without regarding male parameters. According to her, the most important thing is to feel comfortable.

In *The Color Purple*, few characters challenge the rules of the patriarchal society. Like Mrs. Forrester in *A Lost Lady*, Sofia in Walker's novel comes over the norms made by society and challenges them. For instance, when Sofia get married with Harpo, he comes to realize that Sofia is not a usual woman. He realizes that she is different and she can make firm decisions in her life. Harpo says: "I tell her one thing, she do another. Never do what I say. Always backtalk"¹⁹ and this is not accepted in patriarchal society that is governed with patriarchal rules. Sofia says to Celie that no one can beat her and consider her as an object:

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. She let out her breath. I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me .²⁰

As the quotation discloses, Sofia is an independent woman; even if she loves Harpo, she cannot let him beat her. Sofia defies male domination and rejects the social conventional role just like Marian Forrester.

Certainly, Celie in the opening part of *The Color Purple* submits to the patriarchal rules, but later on with the help of the other female characters Shug and Sofia, Celie builds and develops herself. Celie becomes assertive and independent with Shug and Sofia's help. The two women are a symbol of defiance since they make their own decisions without the influence of a male figure in their lives. Shug and Sofia prove to Celie that women can avoid or escape the game of gender roles, they show her the way and the path to take towards liberation. Shug plays a critical role in showing Celie how to be empowered through her sexual identity and her sexuality. After realizing that Celie has no feelings towards men including Mr. Albert even when having sex, Shug takes it upon herself to teach Celie about her body, how to have pleasure on her own, and how to make pleasure to others. Throughout, this relationship between the three women, Alice Walker as a womanist tries to show the importance of women's solidarity in order to achieve their rights. Walker like many other

black women writers has dedicated herself to instilling in women a collective consciousness which would make them aware not only of sexism and racism in their lives, but also of the need of supporting each other in order to assert their claim on humanity.

The relationship between the female characters of the novel plays a significant role in the transformation of Celie's personality, as she becomes a confident and courageous woman like Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady*. We can notice that Celie learns that she can create her own thoughts and have her own feelings than develop her identity as a woman. The best illustration found in the novel is when Celie says to her husband Mr. Albert:

Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice, you better stop talking you aint coming just from me. Look like when I open my mouth the air rush in shape words .²¹

She also says: "I'm so happy, I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time, and you alive and be home soon with our children."²² these quotation clearly show that Celie becomes very confident and she does not accept her husband's brutality and hurtful words. She gains self-confidence and self-esteem. Bell Hooks asserts: "women have nurtured, helped, and supported others for too long- now we must fend for ourselves."²³

Eventually, both Celie in *The Color Purple* and Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* denounce the sexual oppression toward women within a male dominant society. Both Walker and Cather portray their main female characters defying the norm of being sexual objects to satisfy their husbands regardless their feelings. Bell Hooks claims:

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor ready-made identity or role one can step into. Diverting energy from feminist movement that aims to change society.²⁴

According to Hooks, feminism is the only solution to end the male dominance and transform society in order to achieve equality between the two sexes. She says, "Men are socialized to

act sexually women to not act (or to simply react to male sexual advances).”²⁷ Therefore, both Celie and Mrs. Forrester rejects the traditional female role, and they do not care about social norms and values.

Besides, in the beginning of *The Color Purple* and *A Lost Lady* the two main characters Celie and Marian Forrester are represented as being financially dependent on men, as well as all other women in the patriarchal society. Later on, they decline men’s idea that women are not able to handle outside jobs and they are always under men’s financial control. As it is noticed in the novels, both of them succeeded to secure their lives financially as they are engaged in business and stand up for themselves.

Through these comparative analyses of the twoworks *The Color Purple*(1982) and *A Lost Lady* (1923) as far as the theme of female individuality and gender role are concerned, one may notice that both the Afro-American and the American writers portray gender role and inequality between men and women under the patriarchal society. The two authors use their main female characters to emphasize the impact of men on women’s lives, as they [characters] are seen breaking down the walls of gender roles and the misconceptions about sexuality.

End notes:

¹Alice Walker, “Womanism” *In Search Of Our Mothers Garden*, 1972, 84.

²Bell Hooks, “ A Movement To End Sexist Oppression” *Feminist Theory From Margin To Center*, 1984, 41.

³Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 1983,03.

⁴Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 1923, 36.

⁵*Ibid.*, 83.

⁶*Ibid.*, 83.

⁷Bell Hooks, “Men Comrades in Struggle” *Feminist Theory From Margin To Center*, 1984,75.

⁸Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 1983, 89.

⁹Bell Hooks, “Men Comrades in Struggle” *Feminist Theory From Margin To Center*, 1984, 68.

¹⁰Alice Walker, “Womanism” *In Search Of Our Mothers Garden*, 1972, 403.

¹¹Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 1923, 20.

¹²Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 1983, 90.

¹³*Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁴Alice Walker, “Womanism” *In Search Of Our Mothers Garden*, 1972, 401.

¹⁵Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 1923, 04.

¹⁶Ibid., 50.

¹⁷Bell Hooks, “Men Comrades in Struggle” *Feminist Theory From Margin To Center*, 1984, 84.

¹⁸Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 1923, 59.

¹⁹Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 1983, 35.

²⁰Ibid., 39.

²¹Ibid., 187.

²²Ibid., 194.

²³Bell Hooks, “Men Comrades in Struggle” *Feminist Theory From Margin To Center*, 1984, 76.

²⁴Bell Hooks, “A Movement To End Sexist Oppression” *Feminist Theory From Margin To Center*, 1984, 26.

²⁵Ibid., 27.

General Conclusion

This dissertation is a comparative study of the African-American novel *The Color Purple* (1984) by Alice Walker and the American one *A Lost Lady* (1923) by Willa Cather. Our research has relied on Bell Hook's *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1983) and the theory of *Womanism* by Alice Walker in her collection of essays: *In Search of our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983). It has treated "Female Individuality" and "Gender Role" within the patriarchal society. This study shows that both authors explore women's oppression and discrimination in the patriarchal system.

In fact, the result that has been reached in this comparative study is that Alice Walker and Willa Cather reject the norms of the patriarchal system and the image given for women. Indeed, both writers show how the main female characters (Celie and Marian Forrester) struggle to gain their individuality and personal autonomy. The two authors use their works to explore the need of women to liberate themselves from the evils of patriarchy, and obtain freedom not only socially but also economically and sexually. This was the case of Celie and Marian Forrester, both characters succeeded to obtain their freedom from the patriarchal system.

Throughout *The Color Purple* and *A Lost Lady*, Alice Walker and Willa Cather as being feminist writers seek to raise the feminist voice and want to establish female gender equal to male within society. The heroines of the novels present not only the ways they undergo the struggle but also their power, hope, and courage that changed their lives. Both Celie and Marian Forrester have to fight against the social norms and gender roles to obtain

their rights. They neglected the role assigned to women in the patriarchal society, and they succeeded to impose themselves as being free individuals.

Indeed, both authors use their writing as a means of revolt to cultivate women's self-awareness and create a new woman with a strong and an autonomous personality. Both of them tried to break the female traditional role assigned for women in the patriarchal societies, each one with her perspective. Through the womanist perspective Alice Walker attempts to liberate black women who are doubly oppressed first for being women, then for being a black. On her turn, Willa Cather as a feminist tries to establish a new image for women with rebellious attitudes within the white community.

To conclude, our present research has not covered all the issues that can be tackled in the two selected novels. We believe this topic is still an interesting subject that needs further investigation. We hope that we have succeeded to bring some knowledge to our readers and giving them new insight for studying new issues in the American and the African-American literatures.

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