
Difference And becoming in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*

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ABSTRACT: Today's Postmodern world finds itself in a crisis of how to address its diversity as we move forward in our fight for gender and racial equality. Alice Walker is an African American writer whose fiction is very illuminating in terms of embracing the differences within each and every one of us. Her characters represent an invitation for people to look outside of the realm of their familiar, to experiment with the unfamiliar and to absorb and cherish the differences in us by immersing in processes of becoming and growth. Walker's transgressive characters project a variety of experiences that speak against the homogenizing nature of essentialism. They embody the postmodern philosophy of becoming, multiplicity, fluidity and creativity which I intend to unravel through a pluralistic analysis that aims to overcome the dangers of fixed identities by relying on Process philosophy and Deleuzian ontology of difference.

KEYWORDS: Alice Walker, Diversity, Process, becoming, post-structuralism

INTRODUCTION

The concept of difference might have not been looked at intensely in the history of Philosophy until the 20th century with a number of poststructuralist thinkers mainly Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze which was considered "the epoch of difference". But it comes as no surprise that difference has always been prominent in the discussion of metaphysics. Both Derrida and Deleuze have developed their ontology of difference under the influence of philosophers like Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Baruch Spinoza. Worth mentioning is that the ongoing debate on difference and identity was present since the philosophy of the Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers namely Heraclitus and Parmenides as well as in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. Hence, we can say that the problem of difference is as old as philosophy itself.

Deleuze is known to be the philosopher of new possibilities; he argues that we are limited by our habitual and familiar ways of thinking; one must think things differently and to think anew because it is difference that creates room/a possibility for newness. Moreover, individuals need to break free from the chains of rigid identities and to engage in a process of becoming by allowing an immanent experimentation with the self and the other; one must embrace difference. Moreover, Both Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are against an ontology that is based on the study of what there is; an unchanging essence because it creates certain constraints on human behavior which people feel the need to conform to. Deleuze embraces ontology in the sense that he introduces one which is based on creation rather than the discovery of an ontological stable order, the universe's essential entities and the identity of what there is. Deleuze is more concerned with creating an ontology that addresses the question of how might one live to new vistas rather than conform to a politically and historically charged order and its societal limits. A big part of Deleuzian philosophy of life is constantly challenging the presupposed traditions of thinking and never changing modes of living, he remains critical of what stops us from always creating new desires, values and ways of what it is to think or be. Instead of adopting a universal reasoning method in his works, Deleuze embraces the power of creativity, novelty and multiplicity.

Deleuze writes about literature because he believes that every literary work represents moments of life that transcend both 'lived and livable'; "Style, in a great writer is always a style of life as well, not at all something personal, but the invention of a possibility of life, a way of existing" (Smith 192). Yet, every good piece of writing attempts to free life and create something that is more than just personal. Writers are primarily inspired by their lived experiences but do not produce their works based on the personal. Alice Walker's fiction is an encouraging example of how individuals might experiment with a number of virtual possibilities to form a life that is composed of divergences. This is why Deleuze argues that literature manages to free the virtual¹ from its actualization

¹ The realm where intensities and connections happen is an internal genesis defined by Deleuze as the virtual realm; it is a space of existence that gets actualized by undergoing differentiation which therefore produces difference. This

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and it 'allows it to assume validity on its own' in the way that all possible singularities can be explored. Alice Walker uses her fiction to liberate the virtual in a way that she uses a plot that is built upon a variety of possible options that challenge reality and normality. Liberating the virtual goes beyond lived experiences and defies the chains of normality. Deleuze believes that a world in which the virtual is free is "that by which thought and art are real, and disturb the reality, morality, and economy of the world" (Smith 202). Thus, it is through art and literature that we can explore all the possibilities that lie within the virtual realm; it allows us to limitlessly experiment with the immanent virtual power by actualizing all the possible ever created singularities and intensities rather than remaining loyal to the rigid and stable norms that are culturally, socially, sexually, linguistically and historically enforced upon individuals.

BEING MULTIPLE AND DIFFERENT

The self decenters as it opens itself to the infinity of the possible singularities; "Each 'thing' is open to the infinity of singularities through which it passes, and at the same time it loses its center, that is to say its identity as a concept and as a self" (Ibid). Deleuze believes that the identity of an individual dissolves and passes into the disjunctions of the virtual realm. He calls the process 'Schizophrenization'. Being schizophrenic for Deleuze means shifting quickly between singularities and all the possibilities it encompasses:

...they (Guattari and Deleuze) argued that life was an open and creative whole of proliferating connections. They celebrate the 'schizo' against paranoid 'man'. Their 'schizo' is not a psychological type (not a schizophrenic), but a way of thinking a life not governed by any fixed norm or image of self – a self in flux and becoming, rather than a self that has submitted to law...they argued that schizoanalysis would create new connections, open experience up to new beginnings, and allow us to think differently. (Colebrook 4).

Thus, Deleuze strongly believes that individuals must be open to all the intensities and multiplicities within them, he argues that experimentation must be our only identity. The purpose of Deleuze's ontological framework of difference and multiplicity is to direct philosophy and political thinking towards a more inclusive approach of difference.

People, plants, trees and all living organisms experience constant change. This change is a fusion of external, internal, conscious and unconscious factors and behaviors. These factors themselves also experience all kinds of elements of causality and undertake constant processes of change. Hence, everything is changing or as you like becoming. Heraclitus of Ephesus was a pre-Socratic philosopher from Greece during the sixth century BC. His claim that nothing is constant and certain in this world except for change is what initiated the philosophy of becoming or process philosophy. He declares that the ever-changing nature of the cosmos is what qualifies something to become a certain identity and undertakes other processes of becoming. The constant flow of the water in the river is what qualifies a certain type of water as a river. Therefore, diversity creates causality for identity; all things flow fluidly and it is change that constitutes what a thing is; "No man ever steps in the same river twice. For it's not the same river and he's not the same man." Heraclitus.

An immense influence that Heraclitus's philosophy of flux has created is process philosophy. Initiated by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), process philosophy is a theory of a dynamic and organic nature. Process philosophers believe that everything is a process of becoming; beginnings and endings do not exist, they are not absolute frameworks but rather ongoing processes whose meaning folds and unfolds in the middle of things; every ending is the beginning of something else and vice versa. Nothing is pre-given; everything prospers and becomes; everything which is assumed to have an identity has had its becoming and will contribute to another process of becoming anew. Moreover, causal relations do not have any initial conditions; everything exists in a cycle of becoming. In addition, process philosophy argues against a preestablished, fixed and rigid identity and rather argues for a process of becoming and difference which presupposes Being and identity. Simultaneously, process philosophy is a theory of interconnectedness; the ontological principle of process states that actual entities form together an interwoven system, interfering in each other's constitution and each entity is felt by some other entity; "For you cannot abstract the universe from any entity, actual or non-actual, so as to consider that entity in complete isolation. Whenever we think of some entity, we are asking, what is it fit for here? In a sense, every entity pervades the whole world" (Whitehead 28). All in all, this philosophy of organism, as Whitehead calls it is his attempt to describe the universe as a process of the becoming of actual entities. Process philosophers believe that it is crucial for individuals and communities to realize and consciously apprehend the relatedness of our reality because everyone acts upon what they think and process. Whitehead's philosophy does indeed encourage us to see ourselves as natural instances of the world around us; we are made of this world and are part of this world. Moreover, our experiences in the world and that of every single existing atom are what composes the world as it is; it is dynamic, becoming and flowing.

Tabula rasa is a theory initiated by the English philosopher John Locke which means that all human beings are born a blank page. As we are pulled out of our mothers' wombs and take our first breath in this world, we step into a specific environment that is already established (however constantly changing) culturally, socially, religiously, environmentally and sexually. Then, the blank

dynamic realm of virtuality is structured by the principles of multiple-dimensionality, continuous manifolds and multiplicity.

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page makes encounters with people that carry beliefs and thoughts and leave their print on the blank page so that it is no longer blank. This leaves us with no option but to argue that we are socially/culturally and environmentally constructed, our experiences are constructed and shaped by all of these factors which are constantly changing. Hence, we are composed of the becoming and flowing of our moments of relational experiences and causal relationships; each moment of experience arising from the previous moment which in itself leads to another, hence the cycle of becoming: the world as a life of process. And this is what Whitehead calls experience in the mode of causal efficacy "Whitehead argued that we believe in causation because we experience ourselves in each moment as arising causally out of the preceding moments. We believe in causation because we experience ourselves as part of a causal web" (Mesle 59). In every moment of our experiences something new always emerges; the objects of the past intermingle together to give birth to the present which also joins the web and together create the objects of our future experiences. Our thoughts are also socially and culturally shaped by our surrounding environment; our thoughts keep unfolding as a result of other past thoughts, encounters and experiences. Hence, as Whitehead argues, our thoughts are processes of our existence in the world, even the language or symbols used to express these thoughts are culturally constructed. So, how can we comprehend ourselves and our existence as separate from this cosmos of change and becoming? How can we assume an identity without acknowledging all the ever-changing factors affecting who we are everyday? As individuals we must seek the new; possibilities that emerge from the processes in action surrounding us and we must acknowledge that every new selection we make is to give rise to new possibilities and options. Our life is certainly not one of certainty and static being but one of process and becoming.

Alice Walker: An artist of embracing change and becoming

Alice Walker, born on the 2nd of February 1944 in Georgia is a 78-year-old writer, poet and activist. She was born in a poor family and she was the youngest of eight siblings. Walker got interested in reading and writing when she was eight after an injury to her eye caused by her brother firing a BB gun. Her first book of poems entitled *Once* was inspired by her experience as a first-year college student who got pregnant and undergone abortion which also triggered suicidal thoughts in young Walker. She is a political activist whose activism derived from her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and her early work for National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and The Friends of the Children of Mississippi Head Start program. The young Alice Walker grew up to be a revolutionary artist who takes her mission as an activist seriously. She decided early on in her youth that her mission is to bring an end to the segregated south that sought her humiliation. She saw everything to be wrong with a system that differentiated and discriminated against groups of people simply because they were of a different color, sex or class. Her most celebrated work is *The Color Purple* which was published in 1982 and won her a Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1983. The novel has inspired and touched so many people then adopted into a movie and a Broadway musical. Her life and work are a celebration of how to immerse one's self in joy regardless of life's obstacles. She is an inspiration to all of us who believe in deriving power from within and allowing it to guide us through all the struggles of life.

Walker is an advocate of freedom and speaking her truth. Moreover, she was one to never be 'tamed' or obligated to follow what people called the norms; especially one that is based on discrimination and segregation; "Walker was not interested in conforming to the status quo. An idealist whose personal and social philosophy continued to evolve, she was not inclined to cooperate with individuals or institutions that would, in any way, undermine her sense of self and her freedom to be self-expressed in the world" (Plant 35). Neither was she conforming in terms of her writing; she wanted to project the truth through her prose and poems; her stories and characters start from her personal reflections as a Black African-American woman. Therefore, she derives power from her writing; it is an unlimited realm of creativity and speaking her truth. She always believed in universality rather than exclusivity and she believes that black writing must become universal and inclusive of all people. Henceforth, Walker believes that diversity, exploration and appreciations in art are a necessity because art has the means to transform people and change the world. As Albert Camus said "To create today is to create dangerously" (Camus 3). The task of the artist is to say and the unthinkable; to engage the world in a reality it has never seen before.

Art gives us new vistas of thinking and large perspectives to consider; it provides new connections and possibilities that weren't thought of before. It is a unifying home to a world of diversity, creativity and fearlessness. And that is what our society needs to appreciate in art rather than placing judgments of narrow mindedness. As a result, Walker asserts that it is the task of an artist to project their geniuses into their work and if thrown away and not appreciated, they must commit to recollecting and reproducing it for the sake of future generations by staying true to who they are and what art must represent – diversity and newness. In difference we find creativity and newness; life is never dull and no two people's experiences are never the same. Hence the plurality in Walker's stories; she tells her stories from a multitude of diverse perspectives. For example, *The Temple of my Familiar*, is a story of the history of three main women characters told by different people from different perspectives. Throughout reading this novel, the reader is repeatedly shocked at how everything is interwoven together but narrated differently and beautifully.

I speak to my parents and to my most distant ancestors about what I myself have found as an Earthling growing naturally out of the Universe. I create characters who sometimes speak in the language of immediate ancestors, characters who are not passive but active in the discovery of what is vital and real in this world. Characters who explore what it would feel like not to be imprisoned by the

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hatred of women, the love of violence, and the destructiveness of greed taught to human beings as the “religion” by which they must guide their lives. (Walker, AWLCBS 4).

Walker believes that the future of women writings and creativity will bring forth new possibilities. She urges other women writers to establish values by and for women; “a system of authentic emotional relations and interconnected beliefs drawn from lived experiences that will develop the force of social myth, and thus explain the workings of the world and direct appropriate behavior” (Janeway 376). In addition, she asserts that an openness to exploring the unfamiliar, the exotic and the mysteries of the world which are so different to our familiars and comfort zones is what gives room for newness to merge; “in my life and my fiction is an awareness of and openness to mystery, which, to me, is deeper than any politics, race, or geographical location” (Walker, ISOOMG 250). We must travel ourselves to where we have never imagined to be; take risks and leap into the diversity of this world. Here is to loving difference and daring to be different.

Alice Walker is a preacher of becoming; she believes that one never remains the same, we are constantly changing; hence our thoughts, ideas and feelings are changing with us. Therefore, one can never claim to remain the same. Walker always says that she is a changing woman, changing over and over again and she can never claim a fixed identity when always in the process of becoming, she maintains a philosophy of growth, connectivity and diversity as we are part of this ever-changing planet. Just like Alfred North Whitehead, Walker believes that we are part of the world as we make an interwoven web of connections with nature and all its elements; human nature is one with non-human organisms. She has always felt connected to the world, the earth, her emotions and her sufferings. Therefore, Walker displays this ontology of difference in her writing; she projects a world that is so diverse yet united, a world of connectivity and joyfulness. She argues that we must immerse ourselves in our suffering as well as it is part of happiness, hence one should submerge in what's immanent to their becoming in order to connect with the world and bring forth their creativity. To be free, and dare to be different; to be a womanist.

Alice Walker has talked about the term womanist in her essay coming apart in which she mentioned that a womanist is a feminist who is aware of her roles in society and value but doesn't bring her concerns forth or voice it up as actively as a feminist would. She chose the term because she was not comfortable with the term feminist because it denotes whiteness and does not speak for other women. While the term womanist is significant to the African American women liberation movement as it is used to distinguish the black women struggle from that of the middle-class white woman, it is also a term that signifies freedom, liberation, diversity and becoming. However, solidarity and sense of community is also an important theme in Walker's activism and writing. Womanism seeks not only including other women in the fight towards equality, but also the belief that humans must connect with each other and with nature in order to enrich our lives and be whole. Therefore, she believes that everyone has the power within to change the world and be changed “If you bring forth what is within you, what is within you will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what is within you will destroy you” —Jesus, *The Gnostic Gospels*.

“All womens not alike, Tobias’, she say. ‘Believe it or not’. / ‘Oh, I believe it’, he say. ‘Just can’t prove it to the world’” (55). This statement from Walker in *The Color Purple* is striking in two ways: First, in the sense that in the 20th Century southern black African community, women were not allowed to be different, they were obliged to have homogeneous characteristics and constantly perform the same tasks being feeding, cooking, cleaning and working in the fields. Second, in the sense that Tobias admits the fact that women are different but also realizes that it is almost impossible to make the world believe it or prove it. This dialogue shows how people are imprisoned in the chackles of patriarchal communities which even men cannot escape. Born into a society that inaugurates oppressive gender roles for generations to come and establishes fixed and rigid identities to be the norm. However, *The Color Purple* is the book that breaks all of these stereotypes and deconstructs the patriarchy. Hence, the women characters in the novel are not characterized with a stable identity and essential traits, rather, they have fluid identities and are independent in terms of choosing their emotions, desires and language; “the main characters, as Kristeva holds, do not bear a solid and stable identity. In Julia Kristeva's view, the speaking subject does not have fixed identity but s/he is in the process of being. The speaking subject's identity is shaped through using language and interaction with other people” (Talif and Sedhibe 425). Therefore, the narrative rejects the concept of a static essence; an established centered being and opts for the idea of a diverse character in process; a relational, multiple and fluid self in a process of becoming.

Being different and accepting difference in a society that preaches traditional norms and sameness is scary; even the subject in process resists and fights to fit in. In *The Temple of my Familiar*, the character Lissie is a woman of different characters; her husband Hall says that she is ‘a lot of women’. Before she allowed this diversity to flourish, she was confused and frightened;

“‘And I only came to understand myself at first it frightened me to see myself as so many different people! —after years of memory excavation and exploration, years of understanding I’m not like most other people, years of anger and confusion over this, years of fighting everyone! But finally, it dawned on me that my memory and the photographs corroborated each other exactly. I had been those people, and they were still somewhere inside of me’” (Walker, TTOMF 103).

Lissie always refers to herself as “myselfes”; she is the women that embraced a continuous process of becoming: she had her picture taken every year, and in every picture, she looked different: different hairstyles, body shape, outfits and attitudes but most importantly they were all her; a woman that is willing to be different and completely emerge in that process of self exploration and exotic transformations. In addition to this, when talking about her past which is portrayed in the novel as dream memories, she

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speaks of also taking different shapes even non-human. Lissie was of different sexes, races and a lion at one point; in these dream memories, she has been in lifetimes spanning thousands of years. Since she was a child, Lissie was rebellious and flamboyant; troublesome and always started fights when felt oppressed. Therefore, through a fluidity of appearance and rebellious behavior, Walker creates a revolutionary character who violates the cultural norms and symbolic codes and embodies a liberating spirit:

With her gesture towards fluidity and multiplicity, Walker deconstructs the Western, masculine impulse towards unity and wholeness of textual voice, because, to represent the dividing and incompatible forces of her existence, the black woman(ist) artist must assume her own division. In Barbara Johnson's phrase, "the sign of an authentic voice is thus not self-identity but self-difference. (Juncker 40).

The women in *The Temple of my Familiar* are multi-vocal and constitute a liberating radical female creativity which deconstructs the phallogocentric order: they are all artists in their own way; weavers, musicians, healers and painters who use art as a tool to finding their agency and subjectivity. This feminine creativity is foreign to the patriarchal system hence repressed; Lissie, the most artistic of all the characters, demonstrates female creativity as existent outside of the patriarchal order and discourse of norms and oppression and more like magic; she calls herself a 'witch doctor'. Another example is Carlotta's mom who establishes her creative business of making feathers and capes distinctively from this repressive sphere by working as a seamstress within the masculine system during the day and seeks asylum at home by night to indulge in her exotic art. In addition, her mother, Zede the elder, worked on the same business from outside of her village;

The foreignness of feminine creativity, which in the words of Helene Cixous "returns from afar, from always: from 'without,' from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond 'culture.'" (Cixous, the laugh of the medusa 247)" ... This feminine "chaosmos" functions as a joyous subversion of masculine logic and order. The feathered artwork of the two Zede for example, surfaces at festivals and parades as disrespectful, bold signs of carnivalesque topsy-turvey, a phantasmatic discourse that breaks through grammatical-semantic and social-moral codes. (Juncker 38-39)

The Temple of my Familiar is a vision for restoring humanism on the basis of compassion and accepting difference. It is also a portrayal of women artists who seek breaking the restraining chains of oppression through embracing art, diversity and nature. Walker paints an image of women artists who live in patriarchal societies but embark on a process of finding their true self by creating an alien feminine space of novelty and creativity which allows them to reinvent their diverse identities. After Carlotta has undergone this process and left behind all the high heels and tight clothes, Suwelo remarks that she doesn't look like a woman anymore. However, she answers by saying: "'Obviously,'" Carlotta laughs, "this is how a woman looks" (Walker, TTOMF 399). This affirms that Carlotta has achieved her process of becoming by confirming to an image that is different than the norm and fluid femininity which is indifferent to the patriarchal representation of women. Hence, these women artists although marginalized and repressed weave a magical and artistic space which has the power to challenge and revolt against social codes and the symbolic order.

From the very first beginning of *The Color Purple*, even before we see her, Shug Avery strikes us as a woman that is everything but the norm in a patriarchal society. When Celie describes her, she is portrayed as different than a normal southern woman. In *The Color Purple*'s setting, a good woman is one that keeps a clean house, be good with kids, cooks decent food and takes care of her husband's needs. However, Shug is nothing like that; first, she has a band and she travels around with them performing her music. Second, unlike the other women whose husbands will not pay for daring colored dresses because they would look too happy, Shug wears colorful dresses and daredevil clothes; "Say she wearing dresses all up her leg and headpieces with little balls and tassles hanging down, look like window dressing" (Walker, TCP 21). Moreover, she is portrayed as a free woman who is indifferent to the world's judgments and opinions of her. She wears what she wants and enjoys what she does; "Shug Avery standing upside a piano, elbow crook, hand on her hip. She wearing a hat like Indian chiefs. Her mouth open showing all her teeth and don't nothing seem to be troubling her mind. Come one, come all, it say. The Queen Honeybee is back in town" (Walker, TCP 26). But why is Shug Avery worshiped by the public when everything she does is against the rules of being a good woman in 20th century rural Georgia? Shug Avery is the character that decided to break free and allow her differences, creativity and talent to lead her way rather than remain stuck in the chains of a society which tends to create a homogeneous outlook on women so as to keep them under the control of a phallogocentric society. Hence, she is worshiped by men because they are scared of her, they realize that she cannot be tamed, she broke all of the conventions because she allowed her individuality to come forth. Therefore, she is also admired by men because she is a woman that dares to become but not conform to a fixed identity. However, the women claim to hate her because she represents something they unconsciously wish they were but realize they can't be because they are rooted so deep in the patriarchal tradition and it would take courage to break through.

She singing all over the country these days. Everybody know her name. She know everybody, too. Know Sophie Tucker, know Duke Ellington, know folks I ain't never heard of. And money. She make so much money she don't know what to do with it. She got a fine house in Memphis, another car. She got one hundred pretty dresses. A room full of shoes. She buy Grady anything he think he want. (Walker, TCP 101).

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From a little town sweetheart to a famous singer and performer, Shug Avery became so famous and rich. Therefore, she is the character which serves as an example to the others that if you embrace your diversity, be brave to explore what the world has to offer, you shall become and prosper, be successful and content. Shug is in the process of allowing her curiosity and passion about the world to guide her through it. She mentions in her Gospel those who are self-aware of their individuality, those who are not afraid to be who they are, to embrace it proudly and explore it unconditionally;

HELPED are those who those who are content to be themselves; they will never lack mystery in their lives and the joys of self-discovery will be constant. HELPED are those who love the entire cosmos rather than their own tiny country, city, or farm, for to them will be shown the unbroken web of life and the meaning of infinity...HELPED are those who love and actively support the diversity of life; they shall be secure in their differentness. (Walker, TTOMF 311-313).

This is a passage from Shug's Gospel. later in her life, which is mostly depicted in *The Temple of my Familiar*, she starts her own church based on her own Gospel: a few lines of wholeness, love, acceptance, diversity and forgiveness inspired by her life long process of existing and becoming with the world.

Another very important female character in *The Color Purple* is Sofia. She is portrayed as a strong woman who is ready to fight back both verbally and physically. Sophia mentions to Celie that she grew up in a family where everything her dad says goes and her mom, who Celie reminds her of, dares not to speak back to her husband or to even have an opinion, hence barely existent. However, Sophia and her sisters are big, strong and stand together against the order of the house. Therefore, she fought against this discrimination and struggled through it since she was a little girl. The process of becoming-woman isn't easy in a world where you are taught that you cannot have anything your way.

"She say, 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". (Walker, TCP 39).

Also, being oppressed by her dad but supported by her sisters taught Sophia that solidarity can stand against oppression thus the outrage and betrayal she felt when Celie advised Harpo to beat her when she talks back or doesn't listen to him.

"You told Harpo to beat me, she said.

No I didn't, I said.

Don't lie, she said.

I didn't mean it, I said.

Then what you say it for? she ast.

She standing there looking me straight in the eye. She look tired and her jaws full of air.

I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't.

What that? she say.

Fight. I say" (Walker, TCP 38-39)

Although Shug Avery is the first woman that Celie admires, I think it is Sophia that initially ignites the rebellious light in Celie because she is the first woman Celie meets who is willing to fight against oppression and free herself. The readers admire Sophia because she stands by Celie even when she has done her wrong and they both share a sense of solidarity against the patriarchal order of their communities.

"Well, sometime Mr. _____ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk to Old Maker. But he my husband. I shrug my shoulders. This life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways.

You ought to bash Mr. _____ head open, she say. Think bout heaven later.

Not much funny to me. That funny. I laugh. She laugh. Then us both laugh so hard us flop down on the step." (Walker, TCP 40-41).

Ultimately, Sophia is a woman that had no other choice but to be different; she saw how unjust the world is to women and realized she does not want to be the victim of an abusive and oppressive community of men. Therefore, she is a fighter who ignited the rebellious fire in Celie and taught her that women can be different and they can fight for themselves against patriarchy. Hence, Alice Walker's writing is characterized with multiplicity and inclusivity of the self and the other, infinity and process. It also emphasizes the importance of reaching outside of the comfort zones of our familiar and acting on our spontaneous ideas which bring novelty and difference forth. Alice's fiction falls within the Deleuzian and Whiteheadian philosophy of becoming and process; the reader accompanies her characters as they achieve agency and fluid subjectivity through embracing change and immersing in the process of becoming rebellious hence different.

In *The Temple of my Familiar* Lissie is a woman who embraces the process of becoming par excellence. She is so many things in one body; she undergoes numerous becomings and establishes a self that is many and diverse. Since she was a child, she was firm, strong, resilient, bright and spoke up when she needed to "she'd stick out her bony chest and bare her big white teeth and she could blow like the best and baldest of the boys, even if they was twice her size. It just didn't faze her. She never showed fear". (Walker,

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TTOMF 53). In addition, at the end of the novel, Mr Hall gives Suwelo self-portraits which he and Lissie painted; it portrays a hallow human shape surrounded by the things they like in nature such as trees and flowers. This for Lissie and Mr Hal explains how no one is born with a fixed and unchanged identity, but rather born an empty blank page and then later constructed by all the experiences and interactions with the world and its creatures, we are what we like and what we see surrounding us, we are part of this beautiful, magnifying universe and we are one but we are also many and each one is special in their own way. "...these outlines surrounded blue, infinite space, painted with such intensity, depth, and longing that it was as luminous and as inviting as the sky" (ibid). And as long as we exist in this diverse web of conscious and unconscious interactions we will remain within a process of constant change and becoming. Another worth mentioning character in this novel is Fanny, who is Olivia's daughter (Olivia is Celie's granddaughter). She is a woman who is in the process of reconciling with her past and becoming who she wants to be. She wants to be a woman with no fears, no anger and no hatred. Fanny recognizes that she has a lot of hate and anger inside her especially for people who oppressed generations of black people and practiced discrimination throughout history. She is a woman who is open to everything and anything but limited by her anger and afraid it will take her to an end from which she can never come back. Suwelo, her husband sees her as an innocent child who embraces everything around her but her tolerance is unfortunately not universal enough to help her overcome the racism she feels against white people. However, Fanny is well aware of her feelings, hence she seeks help in therapy and delving into her past. Thus, she is a conscious character in the process of becoming different.

The theory of difference, becoming, immanence, being one with nature and novelty are Shug Avery's religion. She believes that God is within each and every one of us, that he isn't a white old man who we must obey and be enslaved by. She says that every time we suffer and struggle, we must seek what is within to heal; there is no happiness without suffering:

"Here's the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks, I think. Sorrow, lord. Feeling like shit" (Walker, TCP 176).

Shug believes in being open to the world and embracing nature, to immerse in joy and happiness and to explore the world. That the world is joyful when you are happy; you must appreciate beauty and take it all in! To never limit yourself and to be diverse, versatile and become with the world. Moreover, thanks to Shug's ontology of difference and becoming, Celie becomes more aware of her inherited narrow-mindedness and tries to break free from the old white man tradition but she realizes that becoming is a long process: "Now that my eyes opening, I feels like a fool. Next to any little scrub of a bush in my yard, Mr. ___'s evil sort of shrink. But not altogether. Still, it is like Shug say, You have to git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything a'tall" (Walker, TCP 177).

Unlike Shug Avery who always had a voice of her own and knew its power, *The Color Purple* is mainly Celie's journey to finding her voice and agency, breaking the silence and discovering her desire. She is an alienated and abused heroine who struggles to achieve linguistic consciousness in a world of patriarchal signs. But she eventually achieves subjectivity through her fight against oppression and verbalizes her voice in her letters to God and eventually to Nettie which proves that Celie found her own unique voice and later becomes conscious that she must use it to assert her existence. Therefore, it is Celie's ultimate goal to find her voice and develop the courage to speak her truth. It is a journey of self-discovery; an assertion of existence and becoming in the face of oppression and attempts to silencing women.

The whole novel is constructed in such a way that the development of Celie's ability to speak is foregrounded. The first letters are short, terse, full of suppressed pain. The later ones are long, articulate, full of feelings, descriptions, and chat. The contrast of Nettie's letters with Celie's emphasises the issue of voice. For the voice Celie has--and develops—is undeniably hers. It has not been smoothed out, corrected and standardised as, through her education and environment, Nettie's has. (Pears 123-124).

Celie's liberation, freedom and becoming started when she first saw and met Shug Avery. A burning flame started within her which pushed her with great force towards change and creativity. Looking at a woman figure who feared nothing and embraces who she is gave Celie hope in her own becoming. The first time she sews pants, it was Shug's idea; she argued that hard times require creativity, difference and novelty. Hence, Celie and Mary Agnes both decide to leave the town and their husbands and go with Shug to Memphis. Mr and Harpo were not very delighted to hear the news and threatened them to stay but both of them stood up for themselves and were finally able to assume their agency, have a voice and finally speak up for themselves. These women decide to break free and follow their dreams and Shug Avery has been a big part of their liberation and freedom. The dinner scene in which they disclose that they will be leaving is very powerful in the sense that we see Celie stand up for herself for the first time and we also witness these women becoming well aware individuals of what the world has to offer beyond a life in a town where they can never dream to be anything but slaves to their husbands. As Mr shouts at Celie when she was leaving "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddamn, he say, you nothing at all" (Walker, TCP 187) she responds "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (Ibid). This is where Celie assumes her identity; acknowledges who she is but also realizes who she can become; that her presence and existence is already her introduction towards prosperity and becoming. Acknowledging the fact that you can break free and run your own life is the first step towards deconstructing the norm and becoming who you want to become.

Difference And becoming in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*

With Shug Avery's help and resources Celie builds her pants making business from scratch, she thinks of every client individually, what they like and what they need and design a special pair of pants. Her business booms in no time and she starts making a living out of it. Therefore, Celie becomes a financially independent black woman who is no longer poor or dependent on any man. Eventually, Celie achieves financial independence and returns to living in her parents' house which she inherited. She also reconciles with her husband knowing that peace is achieved through forgiveness, and realizes that her children are still alive, living in Africa and soon to be home with her sister Nettie and husband Simon, she feels whole and joyful: "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you be alive and home soon. With our children" (Walker, TCP 131). Celie now sees herself differently and communicates her identity as an independent and confident self. Her voice still echoes in her letters "Dear God. Dear stars; dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (Ibid) which she no longer writes to the father but to the universe. "... she engraves in herself several paradigms in relation to her body and her capacity to "see" beyond the restrictive world that surrounds her. This cathartic process demonstrates how the protagonist moves from the paralysis of being an object to the plenitude of being a subject" (Calderón 49).

Community and interconnectedness are also important themes in Alice Walker's fiction. People who share a sense of community have great influences on each other. Therefore, they achieve healing through relying on each other and helping one another. For example, the characters in *The Temple of my Familiar* support and encourage each other to tell their own stories and rewrite their identities. Noteworthy is that these interwoven relationships exist regardless of race, gender or even class. This novel is also a proof of how interconnected people are; everyone is part of another person's life without being fully conscious of the impact they have on each other: "'I'd no idea a white person, especially a white woman, would touch upon my own life so-meaningfully". "We all touch upon each other's lives in ways we can't begin to imagine," Miss B said dryly" (Walker, TCP 381). At the beginning of *The Color Purple*, we feel a sense of community. Few months after Shug has arrived at Mr and Celie's house, the three of them almost feel like a team against the judgmental community in which they live. People see Shug as a sin and Mr as a sinner and they pity Celie for living in such conditions. Hence, all three of them feeling judged and watched by people form an unconscious solidarity against the world with both Celie and Mr admiring Shug and looking up to her and Shug admiring them both each in their own way. But the focus later shifts to women as a community.

The theme of solidarity is apparent through the story of *The Color Purple* not just between Shug and Celie but also between Sophia, Celie and Mary Agnes. Women achieve unity and solidarity through helping each other with hard work. They all tend to support each other when needed and offer help to make life easier on each other. When Mary Agnes decided to go with Celie and Shug to Memphis to follow her dream of making a career out of singing, Sophia offered to look out after her daughter and Harpo until she is back. "'Go on sing, say Sofia, I'll look after this one till you come back' 'You will?' say Squeak. 'Yeah', say Sofia. 'And look after Harpo, too', say Squeak. 'Please ma'am'" (Walker, TCP 185). This woman bonding is at the heart of challenging the patriarchy. Therefore, kinship between women is of great importance in this novel. The quest of rediscovering their identities and allowing those identities to undergo process and becoming is enriched by this female bonding. Hence, most of Walker's fiction is a celebration of this solidarity and unity between her woman characters.

Relationships between women in the novel are more central to their emotional lives than their relationships with men. It is in these relationships that the real intimacy occurs, intimacy arising from sharing feelings and shared experiences, from making quilts together and from supporting one another in child-care and work. It is the women in this novel who nurture each other. They do not expect, nor do they get, nurturing from men. (Pears 131).

Celie is a young woman with unfortunate living circumstances; a victim of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. So how is an unlucky woman who is in the middle of class, racial and patriarchal struggle going to achieve becoming, freedom and growth? One major force is the women Celie got surrounded with after marrying Albert. She found in his house fierce and strong women who led her through her journey of escaping the degradation and abuse of her husband and making a life of her own; all these characters are members of an interwoven community. Celie achieves the process of becoming through her relationship with Shug Avery and her sister Nettie, as well as her friend Sophia. Celie develops agency and consciousness through her encounters and relationships with others which inevitably leads to finding the courage to verbalize her repressed desires and thoughts.

Overall, the characters in Walker's fiction do not have a fixed and rigid identities but rather fluid, multiple and mobile becomings. They are always in process which is shaped by the interaction they have with the other and the differences they experience in their journey towards self-realization and liberation from all the confines of society. In a sense, we can say that Walker adopts Julia Kristeva's philosophy of fluid subjectivity; "Kristeva is arguing for identity that is fluid, mobile and the opening for relations with others whose differences and interactions provide us with resources to renew/create our own identities through our symbolic reconstructions" (Rosli and Sedehib 231). Therefore, all the female characters experience selfhood through their interactions with people and forming a united community who depend on each other yet also rely on their individualism in a dialectic between the self and the other which leads to subjectivity and self-consciousness.

Difference And becoming in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*

CONCLUSION

Walker's prose is an important platform that seeks to raise awareness about the important issues of our modern world including the environment. She investigates the vital relationship between humans and nature; "She transcends binary oppositions and constructs a complex holistic triad of time, nature and self in which humans, animals and the whole ecological order co-exist in a unique dynamic of symbiosis" (Khan 2). Hence, *The Temple of my Familiar* is an example of a novel that dedicates great value to ecological awareness. For example, in one of her lifetimes, Lissie had animal cousins, who protected her and took good care of her, her husband and son when her family insisted that she and her son live separated from her husband. Lissie felt like she was embraced and cherished, she felt like she belonged and had so much love for each other. After telling Suwelo her story, he also reflected on the times where he felt like one with the members of the animal kingdom; "Her story about the animal cousins had moved him, and each day he found himself more conscious of his own nonhuman "relatives" in the world" (Walker, TTOMF 100).

As I randomly read a passage to my fiancé about Zede and Arveyda's love story from *The Temple of my Familiar*, he points out that it's not what he expected me to be reading for my PhD and that is when I realized exactly the reason why I chose Alice Walker; because of her courage to speak about everything and anything that matters, the diversity of her narratives and the heterogeneity of the stories of her speaking subjects. Stories about racism, classism, sexism, love, sex, animals, the environment and everything else this world entails. In this section, I will discuss in details the diversity in some of the characters in her two novels: *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of my Familiar* and how fluidity in character is essential in Walker's writing. Hence, reading her novels makes me feel love, openness to the world, peace and acceptance to everything and anything that exists the same as I do in this universe. Thank you, Alice, for opening my eyes to the beauty of this world, to bringing a calmness in me amidst the chaos of the world; a world today where everyone feels angry and demand everybody else to share their anger when all that matters is to work through your anger with love, acceptance and cherishing one's and others' becoming and flourishing in the world.

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