Essay: Postcolonialism theory and The Color Purple

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Abstract

This paper is based on the study of postcolonialism theory in order to analyze and explain Racism, by applying it to Alice Walker’s novel, ‘The Color Purple’. This Racism between Afro-Americans is applied to the analysis of Alice Walker’s narrative. The conclusions show that no culture remains as it is and the only constant thing is the continual changing.

In my paper I am going to apply the theory of postcolonialism Racism in the novel ‘The Color Purple’ which is written by the American author Alice Walker in 1982 that won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction. The successful novel was later adapted into a film and musical.

The postcolonialism theory is a type of cultural criticism, postcolonial criticism usually involves the analysis of
literary texts produced in countries and cultures that have come under the control of European colonial powers at some point in their history.

Postcolonial criticism has been influenced by Marxist thought, by the work of Michel Foucault (whose theories about the power of discourses have influenced the new historicism), and by deconstruction, which has challenged not only hierarchical, binary oppositions such as West/East and North/South but also the notions of superiority associated with the first term of each opposition.

Post-colonialism is an intellectual direction (sometimes also called an ‘era’ or the ‘post-colonial theory’) that exists since around the middle of the 20th century. It developed from and mainly refers to the time after colonialism.

Racism is one of the elements of post colonialism which is a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. Racism involves physical, psychological, spiritual, and social control, exploitation and subjection of one race by another race. It is the social institutionalization of the psychological concept of White/white supremacy (a man-made ideology of white/White superiority and black/Black inferiority). This means that racial discrimination and injustice are established, perpetuated and promoted throughout every institution of society – economics, education, entertainment, family, labor, law, politics, religion, science and war. Racism is also used as an abuse excuse to rationalize violent behavior and inhumane policies toward “people of color”. The writer of the book “The Color Purple”, Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in the small rural town of Eatonton, Georgia. She was the daughter of Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Tallulah Grant, two sharecroppers. She had seven older siblings. Her parents’ experiences with the oppressive sharecropping system and the racism of the American South were the inspiration for her writing. Later in Atlanta, she became active in the African-American civil rights movement. Walker herself is an example of someone who tries to improve the situation for black people. She struggled throughout her life with depression and she was a subject to racism. But by binding together with other women who wanted to change the situation for black people in America she made a change. She wrote books and inspired more than thousand people across the world. In her book she tries to create a character, Celie who is in many ways similar to herself. They both struggled in the beginning with their feelings and expressing them, they wanted to make a change but didn’t know how until they both were surrounded by the right people who inspired them. They could change their situation by binding together.

Among The reason for choosing the novel “The Color Purple” By Alice walker and applying it to the theory of postcolonialism because Purple is the color of good judgment. It is the color of people seeking spiritual fulfillment. It is said if you surround yourself with purple you will have peace of mind. Also I had a course of history of literature, which I thought was very challenging. Then I had a course in the modern novel which I loved. In the end I had a course criticism, which I thought was very useful, and this all led me to choose this theory and this novel for my research.

Considering ‘post’ is a prefix meaning after, we need to first discuss the history behind colonialism and the colonialism is an extension of a nations rule over territory beyond its borders and a population that is subjected to the political domination of another population.

The post colonialism theory is a set of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine the culture, literature, politics, and history of former colonies which deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries, or literature written in colonizing countries which deals with colonization or colonized peoples.

Post colonialism is a theory focuses on the question of race with in colonialism and shows how the optic of race enables the colonial powers to represent, refract and make visible native cultures in inferior ways. It begins with the assumption that colonial writings, arts, legal system, science and other socio cultural practices are always racialized and unequal where the colonial does the representation and the native is represented. Post colonialism addresses itself to the historical, political, cultural and textual ramification of the encounter between the East and west.

A decolonized people develop a postcolonialism identity from the cultural interactions among the types of people’s identity (cultural, national, ethnic) and between the differences relations of sex, class, and caste; determined by the gender and the color of the colonized person; and the racism inherent to the structures of a colonial society. In postcolonial literature, the anti-conquest narrative analyses the identity politics that are
the social and cultural perspectives of the subaltern colonial subject their creative resistance to the culture of the colonizer; how such cultural resistance complicated the establishment of a colonial society; how the colonizers developed their postcolonial identity; and how neocolonialism actively employs the Us-and-Them binary social relation to view the non-Western world as inhabited by The Other.

The neocolonial discourse of geopolitical homogeneity conflates the decolonized peoples, their cultures, and their countries, into an imaginary place, such as “the Third World”, an over-inclusive term that usually comprises continents and seas, i.e., Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania. The postcolonial critique analyses the self-justifying discourse of neocolonialism and the functions (philosophic and political) of its over-inclusive terms, to establish the factual and cultural inaccuracy of homogeneous concepts, such as “the Arabs” and “the First World”, “Christendom” and “the Islamic World”, actually comprise heterogeneous peoples, cultures, and geography, and that realistic descriptions of the world’s peoples, places, and things require nuanced and accurate terms.

Postcolonialism study of effects of the colonialism on different societies and cultures. It is concerned with both how European nations treated and controlled “Third World” cultures and how these groups have accepted and resisted those encroachments. Post-colonialism, as both a body of theory and a study of political and cultural change, has gone and continues to go through three broad stages: the first stage is an initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a colonized state. The second stage is the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy, and finally a growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity. Racism is one of the important key terms and elements of postcolonial, Racism is when someone is treated differently or unfairly because of the race or culture. Also people can be mistreated because of their nationality and religion. Of course it is illegal to treat people unfairly because of the race and nobody has the right to make them feel bad or abuse.

In the past 1000 years, racism between western powers and non-Westerners had a far more significant impact on history than any other form of racism (such as racism between Western groups to the Easterners, such as Asians, Africans, and Arab. The most example of racism at that time by the West has been slavery, particularly the enslavement of Africans in the New World (slavery itself dates back thousands of years). This enslavement was accomplished because of the racist belief that Black Africans were less fully human than white Europeans and their descendants.

Edward said was the one of Postcolonial Theorist who is the most influential and widely read Post-Colonial critic in (1935 ‘ 2003) he was was born in Jerusalem and died in exile in America, he Was also very influential in third world universities (esp. in India). In his book (Orientalism) was published in 1978 and is probably the often utilized structural analysis of Post-Colonial theory. Said’s approach is the first fully developed analysis of Post-Colonialism that is impersonal, intellectual, and yet in the tradition of engaged scholarship. A generation after that of Albert Memmi and Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon, Said was more of a New Yorker than a colonized individual and belongs to the postmodern phenomenon of the global diaspora. In the privileged precincts of Columbia University, Said joined the ‘cultural turn,’ in which literary theory and Foucauldian discourse became methodological tools through which to view culture. privileged precincts of Columbia University, Said joined the ‘cultural turn,’ in which literary theory and Foucauldian discourse became methodological tools through which to view culture. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (born February 24, 1942) is an Indian literary critic and theorist. In establishing the Postcolonial definition of the term Subaltern, the philosopher and theoretician Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautioned against assigning an over-broad connotation; that: Engaging the voice of the Subaltern: the philosopher and theoretician Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, at Goldsmith College.

Spivak also introduced the terms essentialism and strategic essentialism to describe the social functions of postcolonialism. The term essentialism denotes the perceptual dangers inherent to reviving subaltern voices in ways that might (over) simplify the cultural identity of heterogeneous social groups, and, thereby, create stereotyped representations of the different identities of the people who compose a given social group. The term strategic essentialism denotes a temporary, essential group-identity used in the praxis of discourse among peoples. Furthermore, essentialism can occasionally be applied by the so-described people to facilitate the subaltern’s communication in being heeded, heard, and understood, because a strategic essentialism (a
fixed and established subaltern identity) is more readily grasped, and accepted, by the popular majority, in
the course of inter-group discourse. The important distinction, between the terms, is that strategic
essentialism does not ignore the diversity of identities (cultural and ethnic) in a social group, but that, in its
practical function, strategic essentialism temporarily minimizes inter-group diversity to pragmatically support
the essential group-identity.

Spivak applied Foucault's term (epistemic violence) to describe the destruction of non-Western ways of
perceiving the world, and the resultant dominance of the Western ways of perceiving the world. Conceptually,
epistemic violence specifically relates to female, whereby the female must be caught in translation, not able
to express herself, because the colonial power's destruction of her culture pushed to the social margins her
non-Western ways of perceiving, understanding, and knowing the world.

Alice Malsenior Walker (born February 9, 1944) is an American writer and activist. She wrote several works one
of them was The Color Purple which published 1992.
The novel deals with many issues such as feminism both in Africa and America, women should gain their
recognition as individuals who deserve fair and equal treatment. Male came first before them in both
countries. 'As Albert says ‘Men s’pose to wear the pants’(278).

. Also Physical violence struggle also is common in the novel, even in relationships which are quite loving, like
that between Harpo and his wife Sofia. He strikes her because ‘the woman s’pose to mind.’ (65).
Racism has always been a major issue in our society especially in the 19th and 20th century slavery occurred
racism increased in the United States of America.

Because of the increasing globalization, people from Africa were getting moved to America to work for them
on their farms and in their homes to gain their own money. This was known as an era of slavery and
suppression.

Even though the United Kingdom prohibited the trade of slaves in 1807 and slavery in 1833, there was still a
lot of illegal slavery. Black people still worked on the plantations or in rich, white people's houses. Because the
Africans had a black skin, there were always recognized for their inferior position and past.

Segregation and isolation became a huge problem in the United Stated. The black people were considered to
be less important and powerful in society. They had different rights and were separated from the white
people in public places. For example, they had different seats in the bus, different toilets, different seats in
theatres and movie theatres, different drinking fountains, they couldn’t attend the same schools or
universities, they didn’t have the right to vote and those are only a few examples.

Black people were inferior in a white person’s opinion and that was the way how should be treated, There
were some white people that disagreed with the situation, but they couldn’t stand up for the black people,
because people would look down on them and cast them off.

The Color Purple is a novel that begins with a fourteen years old girl crying and need help Celie has suffered
repeated rapes and brutal beatings by the man that she believes in , her father , Alphonso, who tells her , in t
opening line of the novel , ‘You better not never tell nobody but God. ’(1).

Cvie, the protagonist in the novel, she is a poor, untaught and very plain looking fourteen year old and living
in the South of America. The Color Purple has created the most known attention. Narrated through the voice
of Celie, The Color Purple is an epistolary novel a work structured through a series of letters. Celie writes
about the suffering of childhood incest, sexual assault, and isolation in her letters to God. After being
repeatedly raped by her stepfather, Celie is forced to marry a widowed farmer with three children. Yet, her
deepest hopes are realized with the help from her lovely community of women, including her husband’s
lover, Shug Avery, and Celie’s sister, Nettie. Celie little by little learns to see herself as a worthwhile woman, a
healthy and worthy part of the world.

The Color Purple shows the components of nineteenth-century slave autobiography and sentimental fiction
together with a confessional narrative of sexual awakening.

In Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple', the protagonist Celie go through a remarkable personal change, she
develops from being gloomy, acquiescent and abused by her stepfather and her husband to running her own
business, owning her own home and feeling younger than ever.

Cvie’s most noticeable change is in the ways she relates to conventional gender roles throughout the novel.
Walker argues that the American society is a racist, sexist and colorist capitalist community which works on
the basis of unnatural hierarchical distinctions. The persecution of Black women by their husbands, brothers,
The Color Purple became a argumentative novel because of its powerful accusation of the racism and sexism that victimized Afro-American women in the villages of south America.

Yet it is also the story of the up growth and development of the central character from an ignorant, abused youth to an skillful woman who has learned to stand up for herself and cope with her hostile surroundings. The theme is liberation, as brought about by Celie's wish to learn and to take a turn for the better to her life. The Color Purple is a novel of celebration of championship of black women who forces to escape from the slavery of forced identities that pushes them along ways that they have not chosen. The title itself signifies” a celebration of beauty, the pleasure of living and how that celebration is at the center of spiritual and personal growth. It also symbolizes the spirit of the black women, and her sexuality, bold and committed.

Although far, more sensitive to community to restricts and particularly those of race and class than the average white community, black critics, too, saw the subject-black or white-as essentially free and as an independent virtuous agent and able to override the restrictions enjoyed by time, place, and color. The connections between the white majority and black minority could be written interims of class relations, with the black minority protected subservient by ideology.” In The Color Purple, the heroine, who ends as successful entrepreneur, stays within an individualist, capitalist frame and is therefore not full liberated’. (Bertens, 2001, p 110).

There are a lot of examples throughout the novel about men who have a higher status in the Afro-American community. It’s not rare that women get hurt by the men members of their family or their husband. Also women are getting stereotyped as a person that should take care of the kids and the household. They have to be strong workers and good listeners to their husband and their husbands must respect them. These quotes are examples of a situation where the women are treated unequal:

‘Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr.___ say, Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn.’(22). In the African-American community the women get beaten and hurt by the male members of their family or husbands.

In the quotation above there is an irony: that it’s the male who act like children in Celie’s world: petulant, sulky, unhelpful, abusive.

None of the characters are Afro-American. Although, the only real white people who feature, the mayor and his family, are sketches of white prejudice and privilege and it is in their complex shades of grey that Walker excels at bringing them to life.

Postcolonial criticism has been influenced by Marxist thought, by the work of Michel Foucault (whose theories about the power of discourses have influenced the new historicism), and by deconstruction, which has challenged not only hierarchical, binary oppositions such as West/East and North/South but also the notions of superiority associated with the first term of each opposition. Racism is one of the elements of post colonialism which is a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. Alice walker is one of the afro Americans authors who write about racism and colonialism, she wrote books and inspired more than thousand people across the world. In her novel ‘the color purple’. She shows the women who wanted to change the situation for black people in America she made a big change in afro Americans live.

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