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Carla Denise Grüdtner

SEWING AND QUILTING IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE* AND "EVERYDAY USE": CONNECTION, DISCONNECTION, AND EMANCIPATION

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Orientador: Prof.ª, Dr.ª Susana Bornéo Funck

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Carla Denise Grüdtner

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Esta Dissertação foi julgada adequada para obtenção do Título de Mestra em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários, e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

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____

Prof.ª, Dr.ª Viviane Maria Heberle
Coordenadora do Curso

Banca Examinadora:

____

Prof.ª Dr.ª Susana Bornéo Funck
Orientadora
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

____

Prof.ª Dr.ª Eliane Terezinha do Amaral Campello
Universidade Católica de Pelotas

____

Prof.ª Dr.ª Claudia Junqueira de Lima Costa
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

____

Prof.ª Dr.ª Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

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Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends,
gonna try with a little help from my friends.
Oh, I get high with a little help from my friends,
Yes, I get by with a little help from my friends,
With a little help from my friends.

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Sewing mends the soul.
(Author Unknown)

RESUMO

Mulheres e escravos não tinham acesso à educação formal nos Estados Unidos no século XIX. Por outro lado, costurar era uma atividade obrigatória até mesmo para meninas da mais tenra infância. O exercício da costura proporcionava também resultados subjetivos, sendo prescrito para acalmar as mulheres quando se irritavam com os deveres domésticos. No entanto, as mulheres transformaram o peso das obrigações em oportunidade. Enquanto se encontravam para fazer quilts, elas se fortaleciam como grupo, discutindo tanto assuntos domésticos quanto públicos, como a confecção de uma colcha de núpcias ou o direito das mulheres ao voto. Assim, elas encontraram nas agulhas o meio de expressão negado na leitura e na escrita. À época do bicentenário da independência dos Estados Unidos, os quilts foram redescobertos pelos historiadores e pelo mundo da arte, e adquiriram o status de arte. O passo seguinte foi a descoberta da relação entre quilts e a escrita feminina, bem como a aplicabilidade dos quilts como metáfora da textualidade. Na segunda metade do século XX, o movimento feminista foi criticado por não contemplar as necessidades de todas as mulheres, mas dirigir-se a um grupo específico: mulheres brancas, da classe média e com educação formal. Em resposta, surgiu o conceito de interseccionalidade. Com relação à arte, Alice Walker tem abordado a questão da criatividade das mulheres negras nas gerações anteriores ao indagar como elas mantiveram viva a criatividade sem ler e escrever, e sem ter consciência da própria criatividade. As narrativas de Walker analisadas neste trabalho, *The Color Purple* e “Everyday Use”, tratam a costura e o fazer quilts principalmente como atividades favoráveis ao fortalecimento dos relacionamentos interpessoais. Além disso, considera-se que essas atividades constituem instrumentos de expressão que contribuem para a descoberta da criatividade, das subjetividades e das identidades das personagens, e consequentemente, de seus respectivos processos de emancipação.

Palavras-chave: Alice Walker, quilts, costurar, gênero, raça, classe, feminismo, feminismo negro, interseccionalidade.

ABSTRACT

Women and slaves had no access to writing or reading in the United States in the nineteenth century. However, sewing was a mandatory activity even for very young girls. More than bedcovers, sewing also provided subjective results, being prescribed to compose women when they got irritated with their duties in domestic life. However, women turned the burden of duty into opportunity. While they met to quilt, they grew stronger as a group. They discussed domestic as well as public issues, ranging from the confection of a bridal quilt to women's suffrage. Then, they found in their needles the medium for the expression they lacked in writing and reading. At the event of the Independence Bicentennial, quilts were rediscovered by historians and the art world, and acquired status of art. The next step was the discovery of the relationship between quilting and women's writing, as well as its applicability as a metaphor for textuality. Together with the rediscovery of quilts, the feminist movement in the second half of the twentieth century was criticized for not addressing all women's needs, being directed to a specific group: white, middle class, educated women. As a response, the concept of intersectionality emerged. Concerning art, Alice Walker has approached the issue of creativity of black women in the previous generations by asking how they could keep alive their creativity, once they could not read or write. Walker also states that these black women were not aware of their own creativity. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and "Everyday Use" analyzed in this research deal mainly with sewing and quilting as a favorable circumstance for the strengthening of interpersonal relationships. Also sewing and quilting act as instruments for the discovery and expression of the characters' own creativity and identity, and consequently, for their emancipation.

Keywords: Alice Walker, quilts, sewing, gender, race, class, feminism, black feminism, intersectionality.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The increasing interest in women’s history has led historians to other ways of documentation than the written medium (Hedges ii). African culture, for example, encompasses different kinds of iconography, like talking drums and oral tradition, which presents the figure of the storyteller. The etymology of the word ‘storyteller’ (German word ‘märchenerzähler’ = ‘märchen – fairy story + ‘erzähler’ – narrator, storyteller, talker) implies the oral feature of literature that crosses the boundaries of the written mode, an important new analytical category, since for a long time women and slaves were forbidden to read or write. Among other devices used to keep the culture of a people, some authors include textiles, while others go even further by recognizing a direct relation between narrative and craft, giving the status of craftsman to the narrator.

The general context of this research is the meaning of sewing and quilting for women and slaves in the nineteenth and twentieth century in the United States. Women and slaves were denied an education in the nineteenth century, meaning that they had no access to writing or reading. On the other hand, very young girls started learning to sew at the age of two or three, and at five they were already expected to have produced their first quilt, when the whole community celebrated this achievement (Hedges 18).

More specifically, this research deals with women, black people, sewing, and quilts in two works written by Alice Walker, namely, the novel *The Color Purple* and the short story “Everyday Use”. As a black woman writer, Walker is very much aware of the problems faced by minorities in securing a place and expressing themselves in a white androcentric cultural environment. Resorting to specific tropes and artifacts, she seeks to rescue the experience of black women from the silence to which it has been relegated.

Still speaking of women’s education and emancipation, and more specifically about the recognition of black women and their artistry, an important figure to be taken into account is Sojourner Truth. Even being part of a minority group for being poor, illiterate, and black, she became an emblematic figure in the struggle for human rights, the freeing of black people, as well as the fight for women's suffrage in the United States. Sojourner Truth’s importance for black feminism will be later discussed in chapter 2.

Even not achieving the notable status of Sojourner Truth and other historical figures such as Susan B. Anthony or Elizabeth Cady

Stanton, women have joined together through many activities considered unimportant, in order to support themselves. As stated by Catherine E. Lewis, from Susan Glaspell's short story "A Jury of Her Peers" (1917) to the movie How to Make an American Quilt (1995), women have been portrayed "working, making, caring, fighting, loving, arguing, and cherishing one another as they sew, quilt, weave, knit, and create" (236). In her comparative analysis between Walker's novel *The Color Purple* and Peng Xiaolian's film "A Women's Story", Lewis argues that in both works women strengthen one another in reaction to the contempt of the patriarchal society for their demands.

Based on the topics discussed, the objective of this research is to analyze the instances in which sewing and quilting are used in *The Color Purple* and "Everyday Use" and the role they play in the plot and the construction of the characters. The initial hypothesis of this investigation is that Alice Walker uses sewing and quilting both as a metaphorical pattern for writing (such as the use of multiple narrators), and as an alternative collective language that allows black people, especially women, to establish meaningful connections. This alternative language provided a form of communication other than writing to black people and women, who were illiterate in the nineteenth century, helping these groups to achieve voice and emancipation and thus playing a social and political role.

The corpus of this investigation consists of the novel *The Color Purple* and the short story "Everyday Use". The novel was published in 1982, portraying the development of its main character in rural Georgia from the 1910's to 1940's. It depicts this character's growth from several kinds of abuse to a victorious career as a seamstress. As for the short story "Everyday Use", it is part of the book named *In Love and Trouble*, which was published in 1973. It was a time of the emergence of feminism, the fight for equality of rights between black and white people, the popularization of the Islamic religion, and a national quilt revival in the United States. All these facts are represented in the story that takes place in the 1960's. For both works, sewing and quilting constitute a cornerstone for the development of their main characters from oppressed and submissive to emancipated women, with a voice of their own. Thus, such domestic activities surpass their primary objective purposes, constituting means of resistance and contributing to those women's buildup.

This research has both an institutional and a personal significance. Although two other dissertations in the PGI program have worked with *The Color Purple*, "The Construction of Identity in Alice

Walker's *The Color Purple"* and Zora Neale Hurton's *Their Eyes Were Watching God", by* Janice Inês Nodari in 2002, and "Representations of Women in the Movies *The Color Purple* and *Monster:* Questions about Sexuality and Identity", by Raphael Albuquerque de Boer in 2008, neither of them focused on quilts and sewing as personal and political instruments of emancipation.

As for the personal significance, quilts have always caught my attention since my childhood. I used to go to my neighbor's house and there I recognized, in the handmade bedcovers and rugs, strips of cloth my mother passed on. They were familiar because they had been part of my own home atmosphere in the bed sheets and table cloths, for instance. Later, they were recycled by the neighbors and transformed into new pieces of household linen. The history and the colors of those new objects amazed my child eyes and I used to spend time wondering about the meaning of the patterns and trying to read their histories and the stories they told. Also, both of my grandmothers made a living out of sewing in very difficult circumstances. For them, sewing worked as a survival tool for their physical and emotional lives. My mother also found in the needlework a source of self-fulfillment. Eventually, quilts fascinate me because they join, somehow, my background as an architect—aesthetics and science, beauty and geometry--and my passion for writing. Carrying out this research has been an experience somehow parallel with the making of a quilt: scraps of memories, pieces of new and old information, and new meanings construed from the assembling of information, being unfortunately sewn in shredded time.

2 FROM FABRIC TO PATCHWORK[1]

This chapter establishes the theoretical ground for the analysis of Walker's short story and novel by examining how feminist criticism moved from a concern with women as an unproblematic category to the recent awareness of the intersections of gender with race, class, and other axes of difference. In other words, feminist criticism has grown from a favored perspective (fabric) into a complex and multiple one (patchwork).

2.1 FEMINIST CRITICISM

Feminism as an organized political movement arising in the second half of the twentieth century has a long history, with Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and John Stuart Mill (1869), as two of its most important predecessors. Wollstonecraft denounces as tyrannical the belief that men's and women's endeavors to achieve virtue are different in nature. More than that, she denounces the assumption that "women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue". Here, the condition of women is not of lack of "strength of mind", but the condition of the ones who "should . . . be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence", that is to say, be kept apart in the achievement of virtues (23). Instead, women are taught to be soft, cunning, graceful and obedient, in exchange for the protection of men.

Connected to women's position in society, Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) discusses the servile condition of women within marriage in the nineteenth century. Mill regards marriage as "the only actual bondage known to our law", since Negro slavery had been abolished by then (296). He abets the dispensation of the same rights to citizenship for both men and women, regarding the access to worthy working positions and the needed education to achieve such positions. In the subject of education, Wollstonecraft admits that she might be considered arrogant, but she really trusts that what had been written concerning education for women concurred for the construction of women as "more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society" (26).

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[1] I am indebted to Prof. Claudia de Lima Costa for having called my attention to the quiltlike nature of Intersectionality in feminist criticism.

The inclusion of women would bring benefits for mankind, according both authors. Wollstonecraft advocates that it would become wiser and more virtuous (42). Going further, Mill lists the advantages of equality between men and women. The first advantage is that the capital and original inequality in mankind--the unequal relationship between men and women--would be nipped in the bud, since all the other relationships would be ruled from this original justice. This equality would debunk the "lord and vassal" model of relationship legitimated by marriage. The inequality is based on the assumption that men are inherently superior to women, just due the fact that they were born male (297).

The second advantage of not depriving women from "the free choice of their employments, and opening to them the same field of occupation and the same prizes and encouragements as to other human beings, would be that of doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity" (298). In other words, humankind would profit from women abilities if their "mental faculties" were not imprisoned and undervalued by the presupposition of men's superiority and applied only in the domestic sphere. The doorway to this waste of the "intellectual power" would be "through the better and more complete intellectual education of women" (299), an education for the "understanding" instead of the education for the "sentiments" (304). Mill adds a third contribution that would be the stronger influence of values regarded as feminine, like "moral . . . softening" influence to mankind (300).

In spite of such early universal appeals, with their emphases on education and intellectual ability, the feminist movement that surfaced in the second half of the twentieth century (generally known as Second Wave Feminism) has been blamed for not addressing all women's needs, being directed to a specific group of women: white, middle class, educated ones. Groups of black, working-class, third-world women, among others, raised their voices against such monolithic view of womanhood, giving rise to the contemporary focus on the differences among women and the need to consider race, class, sexuality along with gender, a theoretical (and political) position known as Intersectionality.

Although this concept will be defined in the next section, it can be already said that even before black feminist criticism came into being in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the relation of gender to race and class was already articulated by Sojourner Truth. Born in 1797 in New York State, Isabella Van Wagenen, as she was named, was a slave to a Dutch-speaking family. Sold from her family at the age of nine, she endured

physical and sexual abuse from her several masters. Living in isolation, like most slaves in the North of the United States, Isabella used to have conversations with God in the woods. She drew on her faith to gather strength to survive and fight the injustice against black people and women (This Far by Faith). She was poor, illiterate, black in a predominantly white society, and pressed to keep passive as women were at that time. Even so, she became an emblematic figure in the struggle for human rights, the freeing of black people, as well women's rights. Isabella was legally freed on July 4th, 1827, together with all the black people who were still slaves in New York State. After being freed, she changed her name to Sojourner Truth (Mabee 16).

In 1828, Isabella moved to New York City and became a preacher. During her preaching she made contact with abolitionists and women's rights campaigners. Truth became then an eloquent speaker and lecturer on such issues. Her speech became more political with the start of the Civil War, including the fight for women's right to vote. Also, she fought in favor of the reestablishment of freed slaves. Her famous speech *Ain't I a Woman*, delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, on May 29, 1851, is regarded as an emblem for the fight of women's rights. According to Carleton Mabee, "though some women were reluctant to admit it, the women's rights movement to a considerable degree was an outgrowth of the movement to abolish slavery" (72). When fighting for women's suffrage Sojourner Truth made friends with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, even though she did not agree with them on many issues. She kept fighting for women's suffrage throughout her life. However, she withdrew herself from the racist discourse of women's groups (This Far by Faith).

According to Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix in the article "Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality", feminism has come across an always important question: "what it means to be a woman under different historical circumstances" (75). The concept of 'global sisterhood' was attacked in the decades of 1970s and 1980s for not taking into consideration the power relations that divided the 'sisters'. The conflicts between anti-slavery and women's suffrage activists in the nineteenth century already predicted these differences among feminists, since "the interrelationships between racism, gender, sexuality, and social class were at the heart of these contestations"(75). Sojourner Truth and women suffragists' disagreement is one example of these conflicts. In her book *Ain't I a Woman* (1990) bell hooks explains the black women's dilemma at the time of fight for women's vote:

> [They] were placed in a double bind; to support women's suffrage would imply that they were allying themselves with white women activists who had publicly revealed their racism, but to support only black male suffrage was to endorse a patriarchal social order that would grant them no political voice. The more radical black women activists demanded that black men and all women be given the vote. (13)

It signals black women's need of finding their own identity, not by mingling with a group or another to lose their own claims, but by finding their own voices.

The political speech "Ain't I a Woman?" delivered by Sojourner Truth in the nineteenth century is regarded by Brah and Phoenix as defying "all ahistoric or essentialist notions of 'woman'--it neatly captures all the main elements of the debate on 'intersectionality'," which is for them defined

> … as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation--economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential--intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands. (76)

The idea that women's concerns can be approached on a basis that is common and essential to all of them is thus confronted by the intersectional concept. On the contrary, "economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential" aspects produce multiple results when performed in distinct and particular historical environments. Such social complexity cannot be reduced to or represented by single—and supposedly essential--facets.

This essentialist idea that "a particular category of woman is essentially this or essentially that (women are necessarily weaker than men or that enslaved black women were not real women, for instance) has already been defied by Sojourner Truth (77). Still fighting the concept of essentialism and showing the need of an intersectional (complex and historically situated) approach to women's concerns, Brah and Phoenix explain that

> [t]here are millions of women today who remain marginalized, treated as a ‘problem’, or construed as the focal point of a moral panic – women suffering poverty, disease, lack of water, proper sanitation; women who themselves or their households are scattered across the globe as economic migrants, undocumented workers, as refugees and asylum seekers; women whose bodies and sexualities are commodified, fetishised, criminalized, racialised, disciplined and regulated through a myriad of representational regimes and social practices. So many of us, indeed, perhaps, all of us one way or another, continue to be ‘hailed’ as subjects within Sojourner Truth’s diasporic imagination with its massive potential for un-doing the hegemonic moves of social orders confronting us today. She enacts dispersal and dissemination both in terms of being members of a historical diaspora but equally, in the sense of disarticulating, rupturing and de-centring the precariously sutured complacency and self-importance of certain feminisms. (77-78)

Speaking of “certain feminisms”, Brah and Phoenix reinforce that, despite the fact that the first women’s antislavery society was formed in 1832 by black women in Salem, Massachusetts in the USA, black women were absent at the Seneca Falls Anti-Slavery

Convention of 1848. There, the discussion about women’s suffrage was held by “middle class white delegates” and with no black women’s voices. Even so, women like Sojourner Truth would not bend to slavery or imposed silence. Her famous speech in 1851 went beyond her personal struggle, since it “very well demonstrates the historical power of a political subject who challenges imperatives of subordination and thereby creates new visions”, and thus, articulates a political position (76). For Sojourner Truth, identity is relational, built in relation to “white women and all men”, and such “’identities’ are not objects but processes constituted in and through power relations” (77).

However, a number of feminists saw the need to revise the concept of ‘intersectionality’ since Sojourner Truth put it into words, according to Brah and Phoenix. For feminist analysis, the “‘decentring’ of the ‘normative subject’ of feminism” is a core aspect of

intersectionality that was strengthened late in the twentieth century by the social movements of that time (anti-colonial movements for independence, Civil Rights and the Black Power movements, the Peace movement, student protests and the Workers' movements, the Women's Movement or the Gay and Lesbian Movement). Not only a centering form of feminism, but any kind of hegemony was criticized (78). Specifically in the 1980s, the relationship between gender, race, class and sexuality was subject of contest, but the authors highlight the relevance of the input brought by feminism concerning gender and class, being improved with the alteration of the focus which encloses other contents (79). An example of an intersection between race and class is provided by autobiographical accounts, like bell hooks's experience. She narrates how differently black people related to her in the Yale University neighborhood: in spite of belonging to the same race, working class black people used to greet her on the street, albeit she was ignored by middle class black people (81).

Bell hooks states, in the book *Ain't I a Woman*, that both racism and sexism comprehend equally powerful forces in the black female slave life in the United States. She also denounces that patriarchy—the "institutionalized sexism"—joins "racial imperialism" to form the base of the American social structure (15), thus victimizing black women in a double manner. When the women's movement shed some light on the dual victimization of black women, white feminists' perception was a romanticized one. The focus was on how black women endured oppression, and not on how they changed their reality. Instead, black women's hardship received a new label: "black female glory". However, such 'glory' served a specific purpose:

> When the women's movement was at its peak and white women were rejecting the role of breeder, burden bearer, and sex object, black women were celebrated for their unique devotion to the task of mothering; for their "innate'' ability to bear tremendous burdens; and for their ever-increasing availability as sex object. We appeared to have been unanimously elected to take up where white women were leaving off. . . Black women were told that we should find our dignity not in liberation from sexist oppression but in how well we could adjust, adapt, and cope. We had been asked to stand up and be congratulated for being "good little women" and then told to sit down and

> shut up. No one bothered to discuss the way in which sexism operates both independently of and simultaneously with racism to oppress us. (6-7)

Rather than liberation, black women obtained a new label, and a displacement from being subservient to black men to become also subservient to white women. Then, besides being oppressed by black men's sexism, black women were also convinced by the convenient racist discourse to take white women's place concerning raising children, doing housework and becoming sex objects.

Another issue brought by hooks concerns black women's individualism, which is important for the analysis of Alice Walker's works in the next chapter. After the abolition of slavery, in contemporary times, black women still did not associate to struggle for their rights for a reason: "[they] did not see "womanhood" as an important aspect of [their] identity" (2). The author denounces that, scholars, whom she calls "sexist historians and sociologists", have given priority to the consequences of slavery on the black male, arguing that they were the "real victims". Such victimization, scholars said, relies on the emasculation of male slaves, for they were forbidden to perform their role as patriarchs. The outcome would be effeminate men, "reduced" to women's position (20). However, hooks argues that, even though black males did not have patriarchal roles, they were not deprived of their masculinity. On the contrary, white slavers aimed for the "strength, virility, vigor, and physical prowess" of black male slaves (21). Yet, women had unwillingly to "assume a 'masculine' role" by working in the fields just like black men did. So, hooks claims, it would be more proper if scholars investigated the masculinization of the black female, instead of the de-masculinization of the black male, to understand how sexism and racism worked intertwiningly for oppression. More than that, black women were exploited in more ways than one: "The black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields; the black female was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male assault". (22)

Concerning the "cult of womanhood" in the nineteenth century, hooks says that it had a negative impact on black females. They did not appreciate being able to work as much as men in the fields and wanted to look more feminine. Slavers noticed that and exploited them in exchange for "a new dress, a hair ribbon, or a parasol—anything that emphasized their femininity". The urge for a womanly presentation even

led slave women to choose to work in the fields wearing dresses instead of trousers. Dresses were non-practical, but at least they were not masculine clothes (48). More than appearance, black females wanted to be considered "women", as the white women were, according to the social code back then. They should have "[m]odesty, sexual purity, innocence, and a submissive manner", characteristics that were not feasible for them given the circumstances they lived in. Thus, instead of fighting for equality of rights with men, they had a bitter attitude towards the gap between their status and that of white women (49). Hooks blames the sexual exploitation of black women in slavery for the weakening of black womanhood, a condition that has not changed over hundreds of years (53).

In the chapter named "The Imperialism of Patriarchy", hooks criticizes the absence of discussion about the consequences of sexism on the social position of black women in the beginning of the contemporary feminism movement. More than that, hooks states that "patriarchal power, the power men use to dominate women, is not just the privilege of upper and middle class white men, but the privilege of all men in our society, regardless of their class or race . . . lower-class men are as able to oppress and brutalize women as any other group of men in American Society" (87). Both in slavery time or after that, black people who wanted to engage in leadership positions were more prone to be male. Brave black women like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman were exceptions in the fight for freedom (89). However, hooks also looks at men's condition, concluding that they are also victims of patriarchy, which coerces them to act as monsters, rapists, and deprives them of emotional essence, what would humanize them (114).

About the black movement in the 1960s, hooks says it guaranteed a number of social and economic benefits. However, an anti-woman discourse also surfaced at that time. The 60s movement was simultaneously a resistance to racism and a medium for patriarchal affirmation. Both black and white males found a common ground in sexism, the idea of the "inherent inferiority" of woman and of male preeminence. Besides, they agreed on violence as a fundamental practice to guarantee power (98, 99). Sexism is also seen in the Black Muslim movement in the sixties and seventies, since black men appropriated the pattern of women as subaltern, while giving prominence to manhood (109). To sum up, hooks says that *"[r]acism* has always been a divisive force *separating* black men and white men, and *sexism* has been a force that *unites* the two groups" (99, emphasis added).

According to hooks, men of all races in America believe that a patriarchal system is the only possible ground for society. More than that, patriarchy serves the *status quo* in political regimes in the world ruled by men, inside and outside the United States (99). For hooks, "capitalist patriarchy" has more to do with the changes in women's social position than feminism itself, since it has forced women to work in order to help to provide for the family, once the father's earning is not enough anymore. Besides, "feminism has been used as a psychological tool to make women think that work they might otherwise see as boring, tedious, and time consuming is liberating" (105).

Hooks continues her criticism of the women's movement in the United States, arguing that even though feminism has its value as political ideology, women's movements have been built on racist grounds, with no exception. In fact, feminism echoes the racial segregation of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. She also rebukes the first white women's rights defenders by saying that "[they] were never seeking social equality for all women; they were seeking social equality for white women. Because many 19th century white women's rights advocates were also active in the abolitionist movement, it is often assumed they were anti-racist" (124). A clear example is Elizabeth Cady Stanton's attitude, who demonstrated exasperation toward the possibility of black people, including and especially black women, being granted the right to vote, albeit "superior" white women would not have the same right (127). Even writers like Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*), Barbara Berg (*The Remembered Gate*), Zillah Eisenstein (*Capitalist Patriarchy, The Case for Socialist Feminism*) are considered by hooks as supporters and continuers of racist ideology (137).

As a result, hooks points out the insolvability of such conflicts, once contemporary approaches have been weakened by the existence of competing sects, like race groups. Moreover, the author affirms that the concept of liberation held by both black and white women is grounded on "a slave's idea of freedom". In other words, being free means having the master's archetypal way of life. Concerning racism and both black and white women's emancipatory movements, hooks says that the shared concept of liberation relies upon seeking the white men's status of power. Thus, while such concept rules, no approach that contemplates both groups is designed, since "that power [white men's power] denies unity, denies common connections, and is inherently divisive". Then, the solution for feminist revolution would be Sisterhood, a "political bonding between women" (156). Sisterhood, for hooks, goes beyond

discourse. It is a process which women would start by refusing myths, stereotypes, and false assumptions, in order to realize the aspects that are common in human life, overcoming the voids provided by racism, sexism, and classism (157).

However, despite hooks's criticism to feminism, she considers the movement as unfinished, and expresses the hope of a reinterpretation of feminism when more women from distinct races and classes take part in feminist enterprises. She also does not discard the term 'feminism', but re-appropriates it in the sense of emancipation for everybody—male or female—from "sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression" (195). She reinforces that this reinterpretation of feminism would lead to a "radical reconstruction of feminist ideology and the launching of a new movement that would more adequately address the concerns of both women and men" (190, 194).

Hooks's arguments were anchored in a larger context, known as Black Feminism, which developed in the final decades of the twentieth century. In 1977, Barbara Smith published her pioneer essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", preparing the ground for black feminism to turn into a plural and interdisciplinary area of study. Since then, black feminist criticism has been addressed by black women, like Barbara Smith, Deborah McDowell, Hortense Spillers, and Valerie Smith; by black men, like Michael Awkward, Houston A. Baker, Elliot Butler-Evans, and Henry Louis Gates Jr.; and by white women, like Susan Willis, Missy Dehn Kubitschek, and Gay Wilentz (Splawn 819).

Before writing "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", Barbara Smith co-founded a community-based black feminist group in Boston, named Combahee River Collective, in 1974. The group was named after a military action that freed more than 750 slaves in South Carolina. It was organized and conducted by Harriet Tubman in 1863, the only woman that accomplished such task in the American history. The agenda of Combahee River Collective was to fight oppression of black women regarding sexual, racial and class oppression. Smith defended that one kind of oppression does not exclude the other kinds. (answers.com)

In the book *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* edited by Smith, the group introduces itself, presents its goals and its view on black feminism, in the Combahee River Collective Statement, dated April 1977, as follows:

> We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. During that

> time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (264)

The Statement is consistent with the concept of intersectionality, defined by Brah and Phoenix in section 2.1: Black women's fight encompasses varied and intertwined issues, like "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression", that affect black women's lives.

The discontentment with liberation movements like feminism at that time, Civil Rights, Black Nationalism, and Black Panthers led the group to create their own politics. Such politics would fight at first both racism--contrarily to white women feminism, and sexism—opposite to black and white men's movements. Later, the group also contemplated heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism in their struggles, investigating "the multilayered texture of Black women's lives" (268).

The group aimed at fighting for the autonomy of black women as the agents of their own politics and acknowledgement of their elemental value. Also, the group focused on providing a movement whose prerogative was the specificities of oppression suffered by black women. They even affirmed that: "[i]n our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women's revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex" (268). Later, in 1983, Alice Walker agreed with such affirmation, by coining the term 'womanism', to be presented at the end of this section.

However, black feminism has faced intern obstacles as well. For the Combahee River group, the main problem in strengthening the black

feminist movement is the fact that oppression comes from wide-ranging inequalities. Besides, black women cannot count on any kind of privilege be it racial, sexual, heterosexual, or of class (269). Also, according to the Statement, feminism sounds intimidating to the most part of Black people, once it challenges the notion that sex constitutes a premise for power relations. Lack of economic power prevents black women from fighting against racism and sexism even though they are aware of such oppression, for living in a bad but known condition is still a source of safety for them. Furthermore, black feminism is blamed for splitting the black movement between men and women, for black men are afraid of losing women's contribution and having to change the sexist way they relate to women (271). Finally, the group had internal disagreements related to heteronormativity, class, and political divergences. As a smaller group, they decided then to become a group of study in 1976, who worked politically together with other groups for the promotion of black feminism through writing, printing and publishing (272).

Bell hooks, as has been pointed out, is another writer who argues that feminism must go beyond white, middle-class and educated women's interests. Her book *Ain't I a Woman*, published in 1981, a hundred and thirty years after Sojourners Truth's speech, is considered by Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Maria K. Mootry Ikerionwu an echo of Truth's historical talk. For the author, the book is a long awaited analysis of "black womanhood". From black women's viewpoint, it is invigorating, since black women have been construed through the eyes of people who did not belong to their reality. Also, Guy-Shetfall and Ikerionwu provide a definition for black feminism: "[v]ery simply, a black feminist perspective is characterized by sensitivity to the peculiar conditions under which black women live because of racial, sexual, and class oppression" (84).

For Guy-Sheftall, the book constitutes an effort to give voice to black women and trespass the hegemony in feminist discourse held by white women. According to her, hooks advocates that the vanguard position should be occupied by black women referring to feminist issues. For hooks, "black women have a special' and unique vision. I think we have developed survival skills that will be useful to the world at large . . . we have a special view of reality that comes from being . . . in enclosures. I think we have to begin to see those views as a form of power" (84). The analysis in the next chapter will provide some examples of such power as portrayed in Alice Walker's works.

Again, one of the main features of hook's study is the outlining of the consequences of sexism for black women, the examination of the underestimation of black womanhood in historical and contemporary contexts, the consideration of the repeated presence of racism inside the women's movement, and a thoughtfully depiction of black women's engagement in the fights for equality for women, despite the hindrances placed by several both black and white groups. Nevertheless, in Guy-Sheftall's opinion, hooks's main bestowal to Black Studies and Women's Studies is the grant of a theoretical framework for "what it has meant to be a black woman in America" (84).

In her book *Feminist Theory – from Margin to Center,* hooks develops her ideas on what feminism should be like and the issues it should tackle. In her opinion, since feminist theorists are usually advantaged women, such feminist theories come from a centered point of view, leaving aside men and women from the margin. As a result, feminist theory "lacks wholeness". Thus, the most ambitious feminism would surface from people who have expertise in center as well in margin (Introduction). Moreover, hooks sustains that black women's marginal background provides them with a prominent position in this case, for they are able not only to criticize racism, classism, sexism hegemony, but also to propose a "counter-hegemony" (15).

Such counter-hegemony encompasses matters such like changes in perspective of power. Consumption is one example of power employed by women, and thus, it can be used in favor of them. Boycotts, for educational or even economical results, could be used against TV programs or products to challenge representation of violence against women on TV, for instance. Also, organization as a group and awareness of the manipulation by male groups in consumerism would make a difference. Unfortunately, due to lack of political education women are unaware of the power they bear. Acknowledgement of such power is necessary for women's emancipation (92).

One more concern is the education of women. Hooks exposes the link between women education and sexist exploitation. She criticizes the early feminists' assumption that all women are equally educated. So, an important proposal would be to fight for education, "including basic reading and writing skills" (107). Such illiteracy would have prevented women of some classes and groups to engage in feminist enterprises, once they cannot read the material in the written mode. Feminist concepts could be spanned by word of mouth, since many women are not able to read and write. Also, due to the lack of familiarity with the specific literature, "[t]he ability to 'translate' ideas to an audience that

varies in age, sex, ethnicity, degree of literacy is a skill feminist educators need to develop" (111). Hooks still quotes Paulo Freire and calls education "the practice of freedom", a major project for feminism, in which an educational approach would focus on the demands of all women, and inspire them to fight for intellectual growth (114, 115). `

Patricia Hills Collins agrees with bell hooks about the need of education. She quotes Maria W. Stewart's claim made in 1831: "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talent beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?" (1). Such claim refers to the denial of education to black women, who were enslaved and forced to serve as domestic workers, despite their intellectual and artistic abilities. In accordance with the notion of intersectionality, Stewart had already claimed in the nineteenth century that black women's poverty is the result of gender, race and class oppression. More than identifying the causes of oppression of black women, Stewart instigated black women to leave the position of passive disadvantaged women and fight for their own interests (Richardson, qtd in Collins 1).

For Stewart, mothering constituted a compelling political tool, since mothers had the duty of creating the urge for knowledge in their children, boys and girls. Because she realized the utility of education as a form of activism, she exhorted: "Turn your attention to knowledge and improvement, for knowledge is power". (Richardson, qtd in Collins 2) However, black women's knowledge has been made invisible in favor of dominant groups, in order to maintain social disparities, for "[b]lack women engaged in reclaiming and constructing Black women's knowledges often point out to the politics of suppression that affects their [dominant groups] projects" (3). Notwithstanding the hindrance of black women's intellectual production, many of them have been able to work and communicate their issues. Women like Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary McLeod Bethune, Toni Morrison, and Barbara Smith among others have succeeded in their endeavors. For Collins the contention between the attempt of silencing black women's voices and the intellectual activism that reacts toward such attempt "constitutes the politics of U.S. Black Feminist thought" (3).

Concerning bell hooks's memoirs, it should be pointed out that they are intertwined with sewing and quilting. Her grandmother, Baba, was a skilled quiltmaker named Sara Hooks Oldham. Bell hooks's great-grandmother, Bell Blair Hooks, was equally a quiltmaker, whose name bell hooks took as her pen name. Registering their names is for hooks a strategy for fighting the anonymity of black women. For Baba,

quiltmaking was more than a process of sewing--she compared quilting to meditation that freed the inner self. She had learned from her mother that quilting reinvigorated the spirit (Belonging 153). Therefore, hooks also highlights the power of quilting:

> For the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination that was aroused and is aroused by quiltmaking, by this fusion of the practical with the artistic, stirs the imagination in ways that almost always lead to emotional awareness and emotional growth. That spirit of self-reliance often creates the social context that made survival possible, that made it is possible *[sic]* for there to be moments of triumph and possibility. (166)

Women's creativity was boosted by the joining of pragmatism and ingenuity, and the act of quilting encouraged women's to develop their inner strength. Such inner strength afforded resources for women to survive the hardships of life.

At last, Alice Walker herself has worked as a political activist concerning women issues, besides being a fiction writer. She coined the term "womanist" and described the concept in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose,* published in 1983. There it follows concept:

> WOMANIST
> 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.
> 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes

> loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans.: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”
> 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.
> 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.
> (xi-xii)

Walker outlines a response to the lack of fullness and complexity of previous feminist debates, as claimed by black feminists, like bell hooks and Barbara Smith. For Walker, black women should commit bravely to their own interests, focus on people as a whole no matter their gender, fight for freedom, and live boldly to the fullest. Finally, Walker compares womanism to the color of lavender, meaning that womanism surpasses feminism in its issues, and adds its vibrancy and singleness to feminism, just as the color purple gives vibrancy and singleness to lavender.

We could then say that the concerns of black women have been instrumental in breaking with the hegemonic nature of contemporary feminism, contributing with the creation of a multifaceted and variegated pattern for analysis, very much in the way that women turn assorted pieces of fabric into quilts.

2.2 SEWING AND QUILTING

As previously said in the Introduction, women and slaves had no access to writing or reading in the United States in the nineteenth century. However, sewing was a mandatory activity for very young girls, who were already expected to have produced their first quilt by the age of five (Hedges ii). More than a mere material object, sewing

provided other subjective results, being prescribed to ‘put women in their place” when they showed some discontentment with their duties in domestic life. According to Eliane T. A. Campello, quilting constituted a very successful activity for softening women’s irritation, since women exercised *“paciência, atenção e aceitação da repetição e rotina”* while they quilted. Women had to redirect the impetus of their uneasiness to the patience, attention, and acceptance of repetition needed for quilting. Also, Campello describes women’s routine of seclusion:

> *Reclusas, confinadas ao espaço doméstico, sem acesso à palavra e à educação, silenciadas e silenciosas, às mulheres era permitido sair dos domínios do lar apenas para reuniões religiosas ou para encontros com outras mulheres com a finalidade de realizar uma tarefa. (222)*

As stated in the quote above, women’s lives were reduced to the domestic sphere, with no right to voice and education. Leaving the house was allowed only for religious meetings or for accomplishing tasks--which included quilting. However, bonded as they were to sewing and quilting as literature of that time reports, women turned the burden of duty into opportunity. While they met to quilt, they grew stronger as a group, where they found room for domestic discussions as well as public issues, ranging from the confection of a bridal quilt to the participation of women as actors in “major social, economic and political developments of their times. “Through quilts women became, in fact, not only witnesses to, but active agents in important historical change”. (Hedges ii) They found in their needles the medium for expression they lacked in writing and reading. About the novel *How to Make an American Quilt,* Campello affirms that *“um* quilting bee *é uma zona selvagem . . . é o lugar da diferença, o lugar da linguagem revolucionária” (225).* Quilting bees (a gathering to make quilts) provided a wild--non-male ruled--place for women to speak their own language, a revolutionary one.

Quilting, which is a type of handicraft made of strips of fabric assembled in an artistic manner for domestic use, stands for both the silence and the scarcity that characterized the lives of women. As Campello says, fabric supplies used to be rare in the seventeenth and eighteen century in the United States. Being imported from Europe, they were expensive and hardly available. So, not even the old pieces of clothing or leftovers could be wasted (222). A simple strip of fabric had

to be kept to be transformed into something useful, when stitched together with other strips. But the usefulness did not prevent black women from being creative, and this transformation became the means for aesthetic expression, providing them with grounds for voice and emancipation, issues that will be considered in the present analysis of Alice Walker's works.

Three aspects must be considered before analyzing the novels: the connection between storytelling and handicraft, the condition of women concerning education and emancipation, and Alice Walker's views on texts and textiles. For the first leading aspect, Walter Benjamin states in his work *The Storyteller - Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov* that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end". In his understanding, "the ability to exchange experiences" is disappearing (1). Being composed of tellers and listeners, storytelling consists of telling the same stories repeatedly, which happens in a state of relaxation that has become rare in both cities and country. Listeners have become scarce and in this way the stories are not received and passed on, causing the disappearance of the storytelling, affirms Benjamin (5).

Curiously, the author claims that "[i]t is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to" (5). He explains that the more the listeners engage in the act of listening with complete attention to that, the more the story is inculcated in their memories, which happens simultaneously with "weaving and spinning", referring to the manual work that accompanies the storytelling.

Benjamin goes even further by developing the relationship between craft and storytelling as follows:

> The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban—is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. (5)

Here, Benjamin gives to the narrator the status of a craftsman. He also points out the closeness of the relationship between artisan and craft, where both leave and get impressions from one another in the process of crafting. The message carried out in the storytelling is not

only impersonal information, but also part of the narrator's experience and, by delivering the message, the narrator is changed too.

Similarly, Kathryn Sullivan Kruger stresses the importance of crafting. She establishes the relation between textiles and meaning-making, by saying that

> [w]hether decorating floors, walls or bodies, cloth was woven with attention to *intention*, communicating not only cultural meaning, but also bestowing (or preserving) power. . . textiles, like a sheet of paper convey meaning, their language consisting of a grammar of fiber, design and dye. (11)

Moreover, the author relies on fields like "history, anthropology, and Kristeva's studies on psychology, myth, and literature to support her claim that text and textiles compose a distinct form of literature" (16). In a sort of dialogue with Benjamin, Kruger relates the act of weaving to the act of creating, be it a piece of cloth, a story, a plot, or even a world. In other words, the weaver is metaphorically the Creator (23).

The author not only establishes a link between weaving and meaning-making but also rescues the bond between textile production and linguistic development from literary history: Athena of ancient Greece is both the goddess of weavers and the patron of literary arts. Again, Kruger communicates with Benjamin's thoughts about craft and storytelling. According to her, literature about the ancient Greek culture frequently "illustrates how a woven object embodies the psychology of its weaver, and how weaving in itself becomes a metaphor for a woman's thought process". In this sense, Klytemnestra and Penelope are two of the many examples of women who weave both clothing and plots (53).

In spite of such ingenious activities, experiences common to women, like domestic and manual labor, have been regarded as menial work, according to Catherine E. Lewis. Yet, such experiences can be used to capsize the ideologies that have regarded them as non-important and turned them into a burden (243).

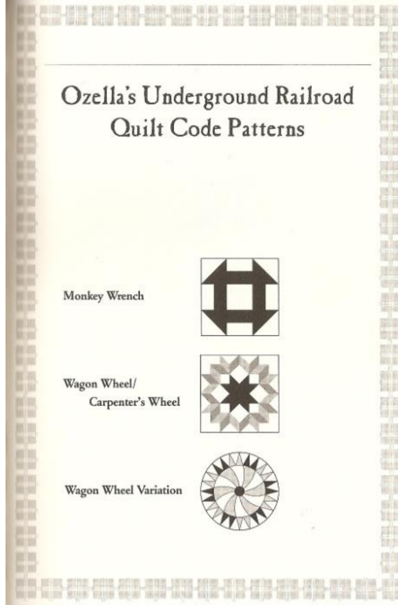
Of particular interest for this research is this burden of the so called menial work turned into an overturning feature for women. Specifically, textiles have played an essential role for women's self-expression. Judy Elsley's *Quilts as Text(iles): The Semiotics of Quilting* affirms in the very first lines that "[a] quilt is a text. It speaks its maker's

desires and beliefs, hopes and fears, sometimes in a language any reader can understand, but often in an obscure language available only to the initiated. Quilts and texts are inseparable”. (1) Such affirmation confirms what quilters have known since settlement time in the United States: quilts convey messages, just like books. Using a distinct and very specific language, quilts have given voice to black people and women, illiterate by that time. Thus, because quilts are texts, they can be examined from a Semiotics perspective, conveying a message of resistance.

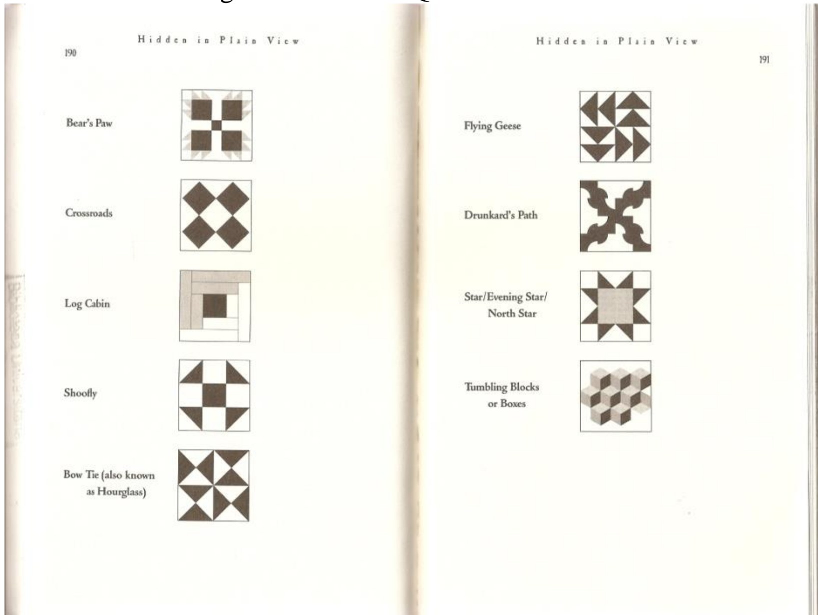
Also, quilts have political attributes. While Kruger states that “. . . in ancient Greece weaving comprised a tool for female signification” (55), Elsley states in *Quilting Culture: Tracing the Pattern* that besides being a useful object quilts represent “class and gender relations, aesthetic theories, readings of democracy” (6). The author also informs that the interest in quilts was renewed in the event of a second wave of the women’s movement in the late 1960s, with women’s studies, feminism criticism and the attraction of the art world for quilting (2). Besides working for “female signification”, quilts involve another political aspect to be considered next, namely quilts role in fighting slavery in the United States.

Similarly to white women, slaves had no access to education, meaning that they were forbidden to read or write. However, African culture encompasses other kinds of iconography, like talking drums and oral tradition, which is the “essence of African and African American history”, according to Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard (27). Being forced out from their countries, slaves made efforts to keep their culture by transposing it to the media they had access, such as quilts, “one of many media used to encode cultural knowledge” (8). Since the masters did not know the codes recorded in quilts, they became a strong element of communication for African Americans, constituting a secret language: the Underground Railroad Quilt Code, as named by Jaqueline Tobin (21). It was “a mystery- laden, secret communication system of employing quiltmaking terminology as a message map for black slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad” towards North (3). Furthermore, the need of secrecy for escaping slavery required that nothing could be recorded by writing, but by word of mouth and memorized by codes (64).

Picture 1 a – Underground Railroad Quilt Code



Picture 1 b – Underground Railroad Quilt Code



Picture 1 c - Underground Railroad Quilt Code

An example of the messages conveyed by quilts is the use of the Monkey Wrench pattern. When put on the fence to be aired, it warned slaves to get ready for escape by gathering what would be necessary for the journey (83). Another pattern, the Wagon Wheel, called slaves' attention for packing supplies for the trip (84). Also, the reverse of quilt tied with knots at a regular distance worked as the scale of a map, forming a grid that helped slaves to outline locations and distances during the escape (93). Such messages were not comprehensible by the slave holders, since "[m]essages can be skilfully passed on through objects that are seen so often that they become invisible" (77). Finally,

quilts' political role worked also after slavery time, for "during the Depression and really hard time, people often paid their debts with quilts, and sometimes their tithe to the church too", as stated by Patricia Cooper and Norma Allen (105).

After being rediscovered by the art world and by historians, the next step was the discovery of the relationship between quilting and women's writing, as well as its "usefulness of the quilt as a metaphor for textuality" (Elsley 3). The literary critic Elaine Showalter notices the association between quilting and writing:

> [t]he process of making a patchwork quilt involves three separate stages of artistic composition, with analogies to language use first on the level of the sentence, then in terms of the structure of a story or novel, and finally the images, motifs, or symbols – "the figure in the carpet" – that unify a fictional work. (Piecing 223)

The correlation between parts of a sentence and the patterns of a quilt is only one aspect of the textuality of quilts.

The third aspect to be taken into account is Alice Walker's views on texts and textiles. For a start, it is important for the objectives of this research to mention some curious facts in Alice Walker's biography. As a child, Walker was injured in the eye by one of her brothers when playing cowboys and Indians. This injury causes her to isolate herself, (Matthew Kane 2001) but, on the other hand, it awarded her the scholarship for handicapped students in the state of Georgia. So, at the age of seventeen, Walker left home to study at Spellman College, a black institution for African-American women, carrying three powerfully symbolic items: "a sewing machine . . . for her to be self-sufficient and independent, . . . an exquisite suitcase, [a] permission to travel the world . . . [and] a typewriter which communicated to her the need to write down her mother's and her own stories". (Danielle)

These items seem to have made all the difference both in Alice Walker's personal life and in her career as a writer. She traveled to Africa three years after entering college, in a quest for her roots--she used the suitcase. She wrote her first published short story, "To Hell with Dying" and her first collection of poems *Once: Poems*--she used the typewriter, figuratively or not. As for the sewing machine, it made her "self-sufficient and independent" by providing important symbols

for her writing, since sewing and quilting are present in many of her plots, as tools of liberation for the oppressed characters.

However, Walker aims at doing more than releasing her characters from oppression. According to Barbara T. Christian, the writer endeavors to provoke changes in the world through her writings, in the same way many other black women writers have done. Walker's works are not simply fiction, but fictional realities that are related to the world: "[h]er forms, themes, imagery, critiques are marked by her belief in a coherent yet developing philosophy of life (an ideology in other words)" (421). Christian also sustains that Walker focuses on black women and their freedom as a measure for the health of society as a whole. Such focus may seem a plain issue, but if considered within the context of American society it must be seen under the combined perspective of sexism, racism and poverty, comprising a complex matter (422). For Walker, Christian says, black women have to "achieve [a sense of the oneness of creation] for themselves and each other", in order to defeat such inequalities (426).

Still about Walker's writing, Mary Helen Washington states that the writer's main concern has been "the souls of black women". This can be seen through her entire work, be it as poet, novelist, short story writer, critic, essayist, or apologist for black women. Her characters have ranged from "the slave woman to a revolutionary woman of the sixties" (85). Walker's characters can be found "[r]aising an ax, crying out in childbirth or abortion, surrendering to a man who is oblivious to her real name" (89). For Walker, black women are those who suffer the hardest oppression in the world (86). The critic also quotes W.E.B. Du Bois's words to affirm that Walker knows what Du Bois means by double consciousness, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, or measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (86-87). Such double consciousness disfigures the lives of black women, whose spirit and body are both mutilated by oppression. So, Walker's characters have indeed dealt with external issues such as poverty, exploitation and discrimination. But they also have struggled for inner achievements. Specifically about Walker's *In Love and Trouble* stories, Washington sees a clear attempt "to explore the imaginings, dreams, and rituals of the subconscious of black women which contains their accumulated collective reality" (87). Walker herself listened to the stories her mother told in her childhood. So, in order to portray this collective reality, Walker has relied on oral tradition as the ground for a good part of her writings.

Walker still approaches the issue of creativity of black women in the previous generations. Her essay *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* discusses the issue by posing the question: "How was the creativity of the black women kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write? And the freedom to paint, to sculpt, to expand the mind with action did not exist" (403). The author affirms that these black women were not aware of their own creativity. Even so, they moved "to music not yet written. And they waited" (402). They were summoned by their talents and acted upon them, even not knowing that. The waiting refers to the acknowledgement in the future of their talents. However, they also knew secretly that when this acknowledgement would finally come it would be too late for them, for "they would be long dead" (402).

Opposed to these unaware and unauthorized talents is the art of singing. Because it was not forbidden by law, the voices of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack and Aretha Franklin, to name a few, were not silenced and their talents were acknowledged and appreciated. "Poets, Novelists, Essayists, and Short-Stories Writers" did not have the same fortune though, and their talents remained buried within the gifted black women, be it in life or death (403).

However, while wondering about black women's "far-reaching" world, Walker found out that the answer to an essential quest can be within reach. So, she thought of her mother and how "she made all the clothes [they] wore, even [her] brothers' overalls. She made all the towels and sheets [they] used. She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover all [their] beds" (406). All such labor did not prevent Walker's mother and many other mothers and grandmothers from nurturing the "creative spirit". Going back to the question of how black women's creativity survived, the writer provides the answer by saying that instead of looking for art outside, it could be found everywhere, as close as the garden of their house in Georgia. Also, she refers to her mother as "the woman who literally covered the holes in our walls with sunflowers" (408). Here, she refers to her mother's ability of turning life's unfavorable circumstances into artistic manifestation. Moreover, Walker celebrates the outcome of her quest, by saying that while "in search of [her] mother's garden, [she] found [her] own" (409).

Besides gardening, art could be found in the quilts made by black women. In spite of that, Walker regrets the anonymity of these women.

Quiltmaking is another form of art that preserved and stirred black women's creativity:

> . . . in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., there hangs a quilt unlike any other in the world. In fanciful, inspired, and yet simple and identifiable figures, it portrays the story of the Crucifixion. It is considered rare, beyond price. Though it follows no known pattern of quiltmaking, and though it is made of bits and pieces of worthless rags, it is obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling. Below this quilt I saw a note that says it was made by "an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago."
> If we could locate this "anonymous" Black woman, she would turn out to be one of our grandmothers - an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use. (407)

Had these quilts not been "muzzled" through anonymity, black women quiltmakers would have been acknowledged and appreciated as artists, just like black women singers have been.

In her criticism of *The Color Purple,* Shanyn Fiske refers to it as an epistolary novel that challenges the power of a single narrator. It gives voice to the characters themselves, voices that are at the same time independent and intertwined, very much like the patterns that are put together to form a quilt. This form of narrative "emphasizes that an individual cannot be considered apart from the matrix of his or her relationships and that it is through integration into a collective identity that he or she defines the boundaries of his or her own being". The author also states that from its beginning the novel makes a connection between "the struggle for self-preservation with an instinct for storytelling that indicates the healing potential of communicating one's suffering to others" (151). Such exchange of voices in this narrative form confirms the intensity of every woman's private experience, and by doing so, strengthens their bonds of friendship and mutual healing (152), just like the path followed by the main characters in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and "Everyday Use".

3 QUILTING AS A LITERARY DEVICE

The present chapter analyses two interrelated aspects in Alice Walker's works: sewing and quilting as a metafictional device, and sewing and quilting as metaphors for both the development of the main characters and their relationships with others. Both aspects constitute instruments of resistance. The analysis of *The Color Purple* focuses on both the epistolary format of the novel as a metafictional device and on the relational aspects of sewing and quilting, while "Everyday Use" accounts mainly for quilting as a relational resistance.

3.1 QUILTING AS A METAFICTIONAL DEVICE IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Ann Futterman Collier points out the pervasiveness of textiles in idioms, similes and metaphors in our speech in her book *Using Textile Arts and Handcrafts in Therapy with Women: Weaving Lives Back*. She does so specifically in the chapter "Threads of Time – Women and Textile Making". Some examples are: "'the worldwide web', 'spinning a tale', 'a thread of discourse', 'a network of ideas', 'threads of time', 'she has come unraveled', 'unveiling the techniques', 'interwoven lives', 'loosening the thread of her waiting', 'crafting humanity', 'of the deepest dye', 'hanging by a thread', 'on pins and needles', 'wear and tear', 'at loose ends', 'no idle hands', 'the thread that binds', and 'a coat of many colors'"(18).

The author states that it is possible that such literary references can be used as metaphors in art therapy, the main issue of her book. She also lists some symbolic meanings that relate to fabric crafts: basketry, beadwork, cloth and fabric, dyeing, felt, knitting and crocheting, kumihimo, braiding, and knotting, lacework, needlecrafts, recycling textiles, spinning, weaving, and quilting. Both aspects of textile arts — literary metaphors and handicraft-- having a subjective power for women enhancement are to be considered in this analysis, with a focus on quilting, which Collier thus defines:

> [It] refers to the process of stitching through two layers of fabric, sandwiched between a filling of wool, feathers, or down, so as to create a warm, protective covering for sleep or clothing. The fabric is pieced together and sewn (historically cross-stitched) in a decorative design. The word

> quilt comes from the Latin word *culcita*, meaning mattress. It eventually evolved from a mattress, which you lay on, to a cover that you lay under. One expression, "piecing for cover", implies making something serviceable, for everyday use. (28)

This definition focuses on the functional contribution of quilts, like their palpable purpose as objects made to be a "protective covering for sleep or clothing . . . for everyday use" as originally conceived. However, as previously explained in the Chapter 2, quilts outdid such trait and acquired a subjective value. This immaterial contribution of quilts will be analyzed in the next paragraphs, first in *The Color Purple* and later in "Everyday Use".

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Judy Elsley's *Quilts as Text(iles): The Semiotics of Quilting* provides important theoretical support concerning the textuality of quilts. It brings in the very first lines a statement about the relation between quilts and texts: "[A] quilt is a text. It speaks its maker's desires and beliefs, hopes and fears, sometimes in a language any reader can understand, but often in an obscure language available only to the initiated. Quilts and texts are inseparable". (1) In other words, quilts convey messages, just like books. Black people and women, who were illiterate once, used quilts as their means of expression, their voices.

Another element that links texts and quilts is the figure of the *griot.* Jaqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard explain how some groups transmitted culture and history in the past and even in the present. They present the *griot* figure:

> Griot: African term for community storyteller and keeper of cultural heritage, history and stories . . . The griots learned and taught via an oral tradition, based on memory, aided by the use of specially designed mnemonic devices. Encoded staffs, stools, memory boards, sculpture, and *textiles* chronicled the history of a people. But only the griots and the diviners were able to read them. (199, 37, emphasis added)

This definition agrees with Elsley's claim about the relationship between quilts and texts: they are "inseparable". Sometimes, quilts can be read by anyone. Other times, their message is intelligible only to the

"initiated". In both cases, quilts can be read, just like a text. They are textile texts.

Elsley also informs that the second wave of the women's movement in the late 1960s brought a renewed interest in quilts, together with women's studies, feminist criticism and the attraction of the art world for quilting (2). Following the rediscovery of quilts by the art world and by historians, the relationship between quilting and women's writing, as well as its "usefulness of the quilt as a metaphor for textuality" was the next discovery (3). Elaine Showalter notices the association between quilting and writing, as already pointed out in section 2, where the author makes a direct correlation between the novel and a quilt. Thus, the correlation between the structure of the novel and the patterns (blocks) of a quilt can be seen in *The Color Purple*, in which the letters exchanged among the characters may be said to correspond to the blocks in a quilt. According to Barbara Christian, "Walker is drawn to the integral and economical process of quilt making as a model for her own craft". (128) The quilt pattern, therefore, works as metafictional device in which the form of the novel carries meaning for the story as much as the plot itself. Alice Walker published *The Color Purple* in 1982. Later, in 1996, Margaret Atwood also used the quilt motif in the writing of the novel *Alias Grace*, whose chapters are named after quilt patterns. Sharon Rose Wilson wrote an article about the relation of writing and quilting in *Alias Grace*, which provides groundwork for the analysis of quilting as a metafictional device in *The Color Purple,* to be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Wilson states in her article *Quilting as Narrative Art: Metafictional Construction in Alias Grace* that feminist metafiction is an instrument of the feminist critique that defies the ideological discourses in traditional tales. For that, Wilson quotes Gayle Greene to claim that "feminist metafiction can reveal the conventionality of the codes of fiction, how they have been constructed, and how they can be changed". Such changes can be seen as a having a "metanarrative function", that is to say that besides the story being told, the way it is told plays a role in the deconstruction of established concepts. Wilson illustrates these changes in Margaret's Atwood's *Alias Grace*, where matters like "class, sexual politics, and other political issues, including those of the postcolonial condition" are approached through "self-reflexiveness and intertextuality" to criticize the attitudes towards these matters (80). Similarly, as previously stated in the Introduction, Alice Walker uses sewing and quilting both as a metaphorical pattern for writing--such as the use of multiple narrators in *The Color Purple* as a quilt of letters--

and as an alternative collective language that allows black people, especially women, to establish meaningful connections, in *The Color Purple* and "Everyday Use". In terms of the "subversive potential" (84) of quilting, Wilson states:

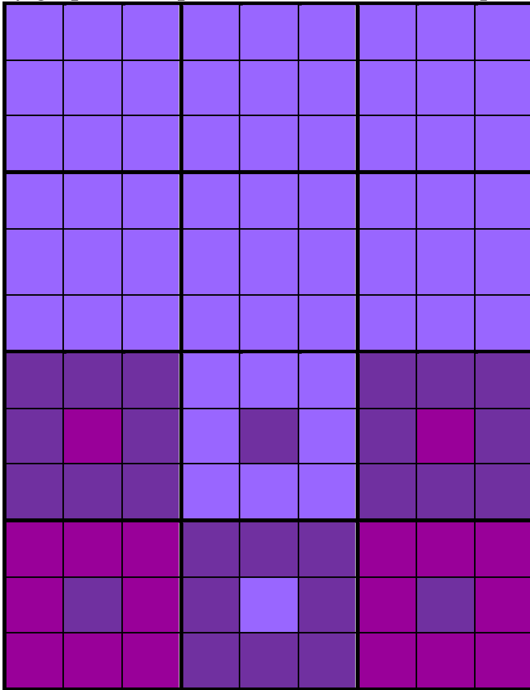
> [Q]uilts are pieces of women's lives and expressions of women's feelings. In addition, quilting has usually been a *social activity*, a means for women to be with other women in a socially approved activity and a means for them to exchange family stories and vent anger or frustration with the "male world" from which women have been excluded . . . quilting has been *a vehicle for breaking silence and speaking* . . . [it] helped establish and maintain a separate women's culture with its own codes of language and manners prevalent in both the United States and Canada in the nineteenth century. (83, emphasis added)

Thus, historically, sewing and quilting afforded women voice and emancipation, and play a social and political role in development of Walker's protagonists. Specifically about the process of writing *The Color Purple*, Elsley informs that Walker moved to the hills and worked both on writing and quilting as she fabricated the texture of the characters (picture 2). For Elsley, "[q]uiltmaking, self-fashioning, and the construction of a women's text are all part of the same process, not only in Walker's life, but also in her text" (Fragmentation 4).

Picture 2 – Alice Walker and quilts

Speaking of the texture of the novel, it could have the visible feature of a twelve-block quilt for instance, in my own interpretation (Picture 3). It alludes to the bedcovers Celie and Sofia quilt together, and the two other ones that have belonged to Mama's family. The shades of purple represent the general sequence in which the letters are written from Celie to both God and Nettie, and from Nettie to Celie. Also, the picture shows the proportion of the authors of the letters. More than half of the letters are written by Celie to God and take almost the first half of the novel. Less frequent, are the letters form Nettie to Celie--around one fourth. The remaining less than one fifth composes Celie's letters to Nettie. Thus, Celie's character is composed firstly by her voice addressed to God in her letters. Later, Celie and Nettie exchange letters giving account of the changes they go through in their lives. It is through Celie's letters to Nettie that Celie, as the main character, gives testimony of her process of emancipation. In the final letter, Celie displays a fearless and liberated attitude, by addressing not only God, but the stars, threes, the sky, peoples, Everything— in capital letter, and God again.

Picture 3 – My graphic interpretation of the novel in a quilt



LETTERS:

Celie to God - 59,5%

Nettie to Celie -24%

Celie to Nettie – 16,5%

PAGES:

1-130 – Celie to God
131-149 –Nettie to Celie
150 – 154 – Celie to God
154 – 182 - Nettie to Celie
183 - Celie to God
184 – 189 - Celie to Nettie
190 – 198 -Nettie to Celie
199 – 231 - Celie to Nettie
232 – 249 - Nettie to Celie
250 - 262-- Celie to Nettie
263 – 265 -Nettie to Celie
266 – 283 - Celie to Nettie
284 – 286 - Nettie to Celie
287 – 291 - Celie to Nettie
292 – 295 – Celie to God, to the stars, to threes, to the sky, to peoples,
to Everything, to God.

Celie's language is particular of her character, an illiterate and naïve girl who tells her struggle to survive in a world of violence and abuse, first at home with her father, and later, as Mr. __________'s wife. Nettie, on the other hand, is literate, and has a different chance. She was chosen by Mr. __________ to be his wife, but her father forces Celie to take Nettie's place. Nettie addresses Mr. __________ by his first name, Albert, in her first letter to Celie, warning her about Mr. __________'s villainess. Also, she tells Celie how she escaped Mr. __________ assault after his proposal was rejected by the girl's father. Celie, on her turn, did not have the chance to escape. Later, Nettie's letters are written for the most part from her trip to Africa, and have a much different content from Celie's letters. They tell Celie about Africa from an inside perspective and how her life has been privileged, if compared to Celie's.

Still concerning language, Waugh sustains that it is an important instrument in the construction and maintenance of the status quo in the perception of 'reality'. Language is not detached from choices. Thus, metafiction plays a role in the deconstruction of naturalized notions by bringing language to a focus:

> The present increased awareness of 'meta' levels of discourse and experience is partly a consequence of an increased social and cultural self-consciousness. Beyond this, however, it also it also reflects a greater awareness within contemporary culture of the *function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday 'reality'.* The simple notion that language *passively* reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable. *Language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own 'meanings'* . . . *'Meta' terms* therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. *In fiction they are required in order to explore the relationship between the world of the fiction and the world outside the fiction.* (3, emphasis added)

Thus, the language used by Celie is another metafictional feature of *The Color Purple*. She speaks a pattern of English that is considered

ungrammatical for the educated standards. It was not gratuitous, though. Celie's speech is true to Waugh's remark that "[l]anguage is independent, self-contained *system which generates its own 'meanings'*" emphasis added). In this case, Celie's illiterate and even naive prose is not neutral, but conveys a specific meaning. It explores both the education Celie did not have to opportunity obtain, and more than that, it reveals the cruelty of Celie's reality told in her own words. Also, it "explore[s] the relationship between the world of the fiction and the world outside the fiction". In other words, Celie speaks a language in the novel that confronts the reader with the reality of black women.

Form in *The Color Purple* can, therefore, be taken as a metafictional device, with the quilting pattern serving as its blueprint for composition. Its narrative arrangements, by drawing attention to quilting, illustrate what Patricia Waugh points out in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. . . (2, emphasis added)

Following this definition, Alice Walker does question the regular structure of fiction in *The Color Purple* by choosing to assemble the events of the novel in an epistolary fashion. The letters written by Celie and Nettie compose the novel, just like blocks of fabric compose a quilt. Thus, Walker calls attention to the writing process itself, by making the plot, that is, the arrangement of events resemble a handiwork that is historically connected to black culture. By doing so, the writer not only questions the "possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text", but she also calls attention to the status of black women at the intersection of racism, gender, sexuality, and social class in the history of the United States.

By alternating narrators, Walker refuses, furthermore, to project the narrative from a single point of view, which, according to Waugh, allows the novelist to question and reject the forms that correspond to this ordered reality (the well-made plot, chronological sequence, *the*

authoritative omniscient author, the rational connection between what characters 'do' and what they 'are', the causal connection between 'surface' details and the 'deep', 'scientific laws' of existence). (7) Celie and Nettie alternate discourses and language in the development of the plot. In other words, they alternate voices. The same happens when distinct women gather to quilt and every woman is responsible for piecing and stitching a block. (picture 4)

Picture 4 – Women gathering to make quilts

The movie *How to Make an American Quilt* illustrates this multi hand work. Every woman portrays in the block a part of her (hi)story using her own creativity and language. (picture 5)

As M. Teresa Tavormina states in her article "Dressing the Spirit: Clothworking and Language in *The Color Purple*": "[f]rom individual pieces of clothing and individual letters to quilts and life-time correspondence, the creative human spirit fashions meaning from the otherwise scattered elements of life" (226). In other words, blocks are sewn together to form the big picture in the quilt while letters are disposed in order to create meaning. The story in *The Color Purple* is told by distinct voices in distinct letters, in the same way that a quilt is made by distinct hands.

Picture 5 – A quilt with many (hi)stories

3.2 QUILTING AND SEWING – CONNECTION AND EMANCIPATION IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*

As previously stated in Chapter 2, women and slaves could not attain formal education in the United States in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, very young girls were obliged to sew, and had to make their first quilt by the age of five. Sewing served then both objective and subjective purposes, since sewing resulted in a material piece of cloth with a physical usefulness and was also useful for repressing women's discontentment with their duties in domestic life, since it was common that women were put to sew when they showed some kind of rebellion against house chores. However, as also previously mentioned, women changed the activity of quilting from a burden to an opportunity, once they used quilting to connect with other women and become strong as a group. During the quilting meetings women discussed domestic issues, made bridal quilts, for instance, and participated as actors in "major social, economic and political developments of their times. Through quilts women became, in fact, not only witnesses to, but active agents in important historical change". (Hedges ii) In this way, women used needles to express themselves, what they could not do by writing and reading. Bearing in mind such connective feature of quilting, the next paragraphs discuss the

relationships in *The Color Purple,* and the role sewing plays in the building of those relationships, as well as in Celie's emancipation in the plot.

As Houston A. Baker Jr. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker affirm in the article "Patches: Quilts and Community in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'", quilting constitutes a "response to" "chaos" and "dispersal":

> Weaving, shaping, sculpting, or *quilting* in order to create a kaleidoscopic and momentary array is tantamount to providing an improvisational *response to chaos*. Such activity represents a *nonce response to ceaseless scattering*; it constitutes *survival strategy and motion in the face of dispersal*. A *patchwork quilt*, laboriously and affectionately crafted from bits of worn overalls, shredded uniforms, tattered petticoats and outgrown dresses stands as *a signal instance of a patterned wholeness* in the African diaspora. (149,156, emphasis added)

In other words, the patterns and colors in craft arts, including quilting, functions as a counteraction to turmoil and dispersal. Craft arts constitute then a "survival strategy", a significant representation of the wholeness African people lacked after being separated from their own people, place, and culture. Similarly, in referring to *The Color Purple*, Tavormina affirms that

> [S]ewing and designing clothes becomes Celie's refuge and then her work. The meaning of these ubiquitous references [to cloth, clothing, and clothworking] goes beyond a realistic description of a common female interest or activity, however. By the end of the novel, Walker's clothing and clothworking images have reinforced several major themes: the nature of self-definition, the creative power of the human spirit, and the growth of familial and societal bonds out of shared life and history. (221)

For Tavormina, clothworking in *The Color Purple* means labor, harbor, a way for self-discovery, expression for creativity, and development of human relations, as shall be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Celie and Sofia develop a relationship out of envy at the beginning. Sofia is a strong woman who does not accept to be beaten by Harpo, her husband. In fact, she is the one who beats her husband in self-defense. Celie, in her turn, is beaten by Mr. __________ constantly and wishes she could be self-assured like Sofia. However, as Celie does not have Sofia's strength, she gets envious and urges Harpo to beat Sofia, but she cannot sleep out of guilt. Sofia finds it out and gets offended. She confronts Celie and questions the way Celie deals with anger and her submissive attitude toward her husband: "You ought to bash Mr. __________ head open, she say. Think bout heaven later." They both laugh at Sofia's suggestion and are reconciled by quilting together: "Let's make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains, she [Sofia] say. And I run git my pattern book. I sleeps like a baby now." (43-44) Celie and Sofia make peace and make quilt pieces to celebrate the beginning of a strong and supporting relationship. As Elsley claims, "self-definition through connection rather than separation is her way to salvation" (Fragmentation 6), what can be seen throughout the novel in Celie's relationship with other characters as well. Their relationship illustrates Wilson's view of quilting as "a social activity", as a means for women to be together, to tell about themselves and to voice their anger against the male world from which they have been excluded (83)

Celie and Sofia continue to work on the quilt while they talk about Harpo's weird eating habits, that is to say they "exchange family stories and vent anger or frustration with the 'male world'". They make scraps out of an old yellow dress Shug gives them, following the pattern curiously called Sister's Choice. (Pictures 6a, 6b)

Picture 6 a - Sister's Choice pattern

Picture 6 b - Sister’s Choice pattern

Celie makes plans for the quilt while she works: “If the quilt turn out perfect, maybe I give it to her [Sofia], if not perfect, maybe I keep. I want it for myself, just for the little yellow pieces, look like stars, but not”. (61) Again, both Celie and Sofia quilt as “a survival strategy”, as Baker Jr. and Pierce-Baker state (149). After a childhood of abuse, violence, and disregard, Celie faces once again this reality as Mr. __________’s wife and stepmother of his children. She has not found herself yet as an individual. Quilting provides her with a response to her past and present. Celie tries to put herself together and make sense of her life like the scraps of fabric make a new figure. She was not Mr. __________’s first choice when he proposed to marry her. He had asked for Nettie’s hand instead, but Celie’s father offered her hand to Mr. __________ by telling him that “[s]he ugly”, [s]he ain’t smart either. . . [b]ut she can work like a man”, and “she clean” (9). Celie’s father describes her as lose scraps of fabric that make no beautiful figure. She is not described as a woman, but as a product to be sold. While she quilts she looks at the blocks and thinks of the stars. She escapes for a while to a different reality.

Sofia, in her turn, talks to Celie as they quilt to try to understand why Harpo has eaten so much. Celie realizes that Harpo does so because he wants to get as big as Sofia, so that he will be able to beat her. When

Sofia learns from Celie about Harpo's motivation, she decides to leave him to live with her sisters and take their kids with her. Sofia leaves and takes with her the quilt she had been quilting with Celie: "At the last minute I decide to give Sofia the quilt. I don't know what her sister place be like, but we been having right smart cold weather long in now. For all I know, she and the children have to sleep on the floor."(71) Now, the name Sister's Choice for the quilt pattern starts making sense, since choices are anticipated as Celie and Sofia quilt. They choose to be connected despite the bad start. Because of this connection Sofia encourages Celie to be an individual, a choice that takes the whole novel to be accomplished. Sofia decides to put an end to her violent relationship with Harpo.

M. Teresa Tavormina says that another choice Celie makes is electing "creation rather than destruction", referring to Celie's decision to sew instead of killing Mr. __________ (222). So, besides producing quilts and pants, sewing has another effect on Celie. "A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think", says Celie to herself while she meets Shug to read Nettie letters and sew (153). Later, when Celie is already living in Memphis, she comes back to Mr. __________'s house for a while, and he inquires her about the way she makes her living. Celie answers: "Making pants, I say. He say, I notice everybody in the family just about wearing pants you made. But you mean you turned it into a business? That's right, I say. But I really started it right here in your house to keep from killing you" (261). Here, Celie declares that sewing was her strategy to cope with her anger against him without using violence. Again, as mentioned in Chapter 2, women used needles to express themselves. Even though Celie is able to read and write, sewing is the way she chooses to give vent to her anger. Eventually, Celie decides that the quilt they worked on belongs to Sofia, as a comfort for the hard time she may have to face in her new life with the kids, right in cold weather. Furthermore, the quilt also represents the warmth of their friendship that was pieced together as they quilted, and Celie chooses not to keep it in favor of Sofia. Ultimately, and in a broader perspective, quilting itself is a matter of choice, as presented by Patricia Cooper and Norma Buferd:

> You're given just so much to work with in a life and you have to do the best you can with what you got. That's what piecing is. The materials passed on to you or is all you can afford to buy...that's just what's given to you. Your fate. But the way you put them together is your business.

> You can put them in any order you like. Piecing is orderly. (20)

Doom is out of reach. Like received leftovers of fabric, it cannot be chosen. On the other hand, what quilters make out of the scraps they receive is unrestricted. Random scraps can be pieced together in a planned fashion and stitched as it pleases the quilter. Choices are made on the scraps disposition in a similar manner choices are made on attitudes towards life circumstances.

Another quilting-related connection is the love triangle Celie – Shug Avery – Mr. __________. Celie is affectionate about Shug, her husband's mistress. Thus, Shug is the vertex of this triangle. After a short and harsh conversation between Mr. __________ and his brother Tobias about Shug, Celie narrates: "Then I see myself sitting there quilting tween Shug Avery and Mr. __________. Us three set together gainst Tobias and his fly speck box of chocolate. For the first time in my life, I feel just right" (60). A love triangle is like a non-patterned kind of quilt, whose blocks do not follow pre-established and paired standards. While Celie and Sofia quilt the Sister's Choice pattern, here Celie may well be quilting a Crazy Quilt arrangement. According to the Webster's New World Dictionary, a "crazy quilt" is "a quilt made of pieces of cloth of various colors and irregular shapes and sizes." It opposes regular patchwork, which assembles the pieces of fabric into a foreordained design. The outcome may be an asymmetrical design. Similarly, the love triangle in the plot is an asymmetrical love relationship, like the asymmetrical design in a crazy quilt.

The relationship between Celie and Shug also encompassed reading and sewing. Shug finds out where Mr. __________ hides the letters Nettie has sent Celie. They read the letters on a daily basis and sew as well. Shug suggests they could make pants for Celie to work the land instead of wearing a dress, to what she reacts saying: "What I need pants for? I say. I ain't no man". As mentioned in Chapter 2, slave women disliked having to work in the fields in the same way men did, and wanted to look like more feminine. They chose to work in the fields wearing dresses instead of trousers, despite being non-practical. Celie's initial refusal reproduces such attitude. However, Celie ends up agreeing and they decide to make pants with the fabric used in army uniforms: "That good strong material and free" (153).

Another feature of quilts emerges in the relationship between Nettie and Corrine in Africa. As Tavormina points out, the relationship

between letters and quilts sets the ground for the preservation of family history, making individuals aware of their identity:

> Letters, like quilts, transcend time's boundaries. Scraps from childhood shirts border on bits of maternity smocks, patches from kitchen curtains lie alongside faded pieces of a Civil War uniform. . . Yet quilts and correspondence, besides transcending time, record its parts. They create histories for us, remembering the past so as to bring it into the present. To fully understand our place in and relationship to our history, we need to see all its parts. (226)

Thus, a quilt works as the letter that puts Corrine's mind at rest. She is ill and has strong uncertainty about her adoptive children's parenthood. She suspects that her husband is their biological father and the adoption has been maneuvered to conceal his relationship with Nettie and keep the children with him. In fact, they are Celie's children and because of it they look like Nettie, what increases Corrine's suspicions. Nettie has a hard time trying to convince Corrine that the children are Celie's and not hers. That is when Nettie uses the quilts Corrine made in Africa "using the clothes the children had outgrown and some of her [Corrine] old dresses" to trigger Corrine's memory (193). Nettie wants Corrine to recall the day Celie, Corrine and Nettie met at the store back in Georgia, and Corrine bought the fabric she later used in the quilts she made in Africa.

> I went to her trunk and started hauling out quilts . . . Aha, I said, when I found what was looking for, and laid the quilt across the bed. Do you remember buying this cloth? I asked, pointing to a flowered square. And what about this checkered bird? She traced the patterns with her finger, and slowly her eyes filled with tears. She was so much like Olivia! She said. I was afraid she'd want her back. So I forgot her as soon as I could . . . But, Celie, in the middle of the night she woke up, turned to Samuel and said: I believe. And died anyway. (193-194)

Here, the quilt works as a mnemonic device to bring back Corrine's subconscious memories about her children's origin. Nettie, in

her turn, acted as the griot, the "community storyteller and keeper of cultural heritage, history and stories" (Tobin & Dobard 199), who reads the quilt blocks and tells Corrine the history of her own family. As Tavormina affirms, "Corrine's quilt is an icon dense with history—personal, familial, artistic, national, racial, human—and with union and reunion" (227). The family history that had been beclouded is eventually clarified upon the memory of the cloths. Corrine acknowledges having seen Celie at the store and noticed her resemblance to Olivia. Corrine's mind is finally in peace and she dies upon the acceptance of the fact that Celie is her children's biological mother and not Nettie. Ultimately, the quilt allows Corrine to be sure that her husband had no cheated on her--the quilt promotes "union and reunion".

Besides helping Celie to cope with anger, building relationships, preserving family history, and awakening identities, sewing fosters Celie's creativity. She describes with vividness her activities in Memphis while living with Shug Avery:

> I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants now in every color and size under the sun. Since us started making pants down home, I ain't been able to stop. I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants Shug tease me . . . Then finally one day I made the perfect pair of pants. For my sugar, naturally . . . I sit here thinking bout how to make a living and before I know I'm off on another pair pants . . . I dream and dream and dream over Jack's pants. And cut and sew. And finish them. And send them off. (218, 219, 220)

This is a clear contrast to the time Celie got to Mr. __________'s house, when she describes herself as an apathetic figure: "But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive . . . If I was buried, I wouldn't have to work" (18). Now, Celie is concerned about how she could make enough money to support herself. Sewing can be a possibility, but before Celie realizes that, she finds herself in full expression of her ingenuity by making pants. She even dreams of pants and masters such art to the extent that she makes "the perfect pair of pants" (219).

Celie decides then to make some pants for Nettie to wear in Africa, taking into account the climate and Nettie's activities there. She plans to stitch the pants manually as a sign of love: "Every stitch I sew will be a kiss". Now, besides making a living, Celie sews out of art and love. She finishes the letter to Nettie by signing her name as an entrepreneur: "Your Sister, Celie, Folkspants, Unlimited. Sugar Avery Drive, Memphis, Tenessee" (221). From that apathetic, hopeless and oppressed figure, Celie has developed into a whole new identity: "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time" (222). Now, she is a happy, self-ruling, creative individual, and a businesswoman. Elsley states that now Celie is the owner of her business, both literally and metaphorically. The store represents self-possession, since now she buys and sells products other than herself, as happened when she was a product traded between her father and Mr. __________. Now she is a person and not a "commodity" (Fragmentation 5). There are records of women slaves who bought their freedom by using their sewing skills. Elizabeth Keckley, for instance, not only became a free woman through her needlework, but also supported seventeen people, among who were the bankrupt members of her former owner family. Keckley even worked for Mary Todd Lincoln-- Abraham Lincoln's wife--as her seamstress (Hedges 45). In like manner, Celie achieved self-possession through her sewing artistry.

However, concerning the relationships in the novel, the highest point is the shift in Celie's relation with Mr. __________. The love triangle was formed by the love both Celie and Mr. __________ have for Shug. Now that Shug is gone, they are left behind with their previous history. Amid a conversation about men wearing dresses and sewing in Africa, Celie confronts Mr. __________ by saying that "[t]hey not so backward as mens here". He reacts remembering his childhood when he liked trying to sew with his mother and was laughed at for this, and Celie encourages him to try again, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

> Well, nobody gon laugh at you now, I said. Here, help me stitch in these pockets. But I don't know how, he say. I'll show you, I said. And I did. Now us sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes. (279) . . . Took me long enough to notice you such good company, he [Mr. __________] say. And he laugh. He ain't Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to. (283) . . . Mr. __________

> done ast me to marry him again, this time in the spirit as well as in the flesh, and just after I say Naw, I still don't like frogs, but let's us be friends. (290)

Now, there is a collaborative association, when Mr. __________ helps Celie and thinks of shirts that match the pants she makes. It is a change of remarkable relevance in the violent and abusive way Mr. __________ used to treat Celie. Differently from when Celie was offered to Mr. __________ by her father, now she has the power of choice over his proposal. She not only acknowledges that she has such power, but she also uses it to refuse to marry Mr. __________ a second time. However, similarly to the bad start with Sofia, the relationship is transformed into friendship. Once again, sewing is present in the shift of a troubled relationship to redemption. Celie and Mr. __________ sew and smoke, as if they are smoking the pipes of peace. Celie is an emancipated and business woman who speaks equally to Mr. __________, whom finally, she addresses as Albert.

3.3 QUILTS--CONNECTION AND DISCONNECTION IN "EVERYDAY USE"

Similarly to what happens in *The Color Purple,* quilts are instruments for people's connection and expression in "Everyday Use". Moreover, in the short story, self-possession is another feature fostered by the testimony of quilts. However, it also portrays a family dissension. Two quilts are precisely the objects that symbolize both the closeness and conflict in the relationship between a mother and her two daughters. The story takes place in rural Georgia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time of emergence of feminism, popularization of Islamic religion, race riots, Black Power movement, and revival of quilts, events that had influence in the construction of the plot and characters. This section presents the way the three female characters relate to the quilts: Mrs. Johnson's/Mama, Maggie, and Dee/Wangero. Mrs. Johnson, the Mama, is an illiterate, strong woman, with "big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands", able to work "as a man" (24). Maggie, the youngest daughter, is described by her mom as "somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her" (34). Maggie's body is mutilated and scarred, and she is resigned with her fortune: "She knows she is not bright", Mama says (26). Dee is the oldest daughter and is described by Mama as being ambitious and bold, in contrast to Maggie.

During Dee/Wangero's visit, Maggie is most of the time silent and physically distant from her mother and sister, but she follows the conversations at some distance and reacts to them. Her future is already settled through an apparently arranged marriage, and two quilts, the most traditional, handmade ones, were promised by Mama to be part of her trousseau. At first, Maggie seems to want the quilts, but for utilitarian reasons. Putting the quilts on the bed seems very natural for her. However, being taught how to quilt directly by Grandma Dee and her aunt Big Dee, Maggie differs from Dee/Wangero regarding the relationship with the quilts. She is aware of their subjective significance: "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts". (34) Having the quilts means more than possessing a bedcover. For Maggie, they are a form of keeping alive the memory of Grandma Dee. Since she herself can quilt, she knows the process involved in piecing, stitching, talking, learning, relating. Though she is not aware of the value of the quilts as cultural and political inheritance, she acknowledges the quilts significance, both objectively and subjectively. However, in her resignation toward life, when confronted by Dee, Maggie is not able to react against her sister's impetus and gives her the quilts. Maggie needs Mama to take action on her behalf.

Dee, on the other hand, despises her roots in an attempt of rejecting the oppression black people have suffered. She lives in a time influenced by the social movements in the 1970s, like the African American Civil Rights, Black Power, changes in Feminism, the split of Black Muslim religion into different groups, bicentennial of independence, and revival of interest in quilts. She also has an opportunity Maggie does not have by going to college. There, she becomes aware of the social movements mentioned above and has the chance of seeing her own history and culture through a different perspective. Such new perspective includes a new interest in quilts, not as testimony of her family's history, but as fashionable decorative items.

Mrs. Johnson, despite being illiterate and performing heavy tasks usually done by men, is also an artist, who prepares the earthen floor yard with such talent that it becomes "an extended living room" (23). She also demonstrates artistic ability when she observes the dasher handle and the marks left by the hands that made butter so many times before: "thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood" (39). She intuitively knows what Walter Benjamin points out: the close relationship between artisan and craft, already mentioned in Chapter 2. Both the butter maker and the dasher handle left and got impressions from one another in the process of making butter.

A similar process happens with the family quilts. After taking the dasher, Dee/Wangero also requests the quilts, for “artistic” reasons. She wants to display them in her dorm at college for the appreciation of others, perhaps to display her genuine black origins. Mama gives up the dasher with certain hesitation, but the quilts really make her stop and think of all the meanings the two handmade quilts carry for her:

> They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War. (32)

The quilts were made by hands that belong to two distinct generations. Beyond the making of the quilts themselves, stitched by hand, hours of conversation must have accompanied the manual work. Family histories might have been told, everyday issues might have been discussed, and sewing knowledge was transmitted, since Big Dee and Mrs. Johnson quilted together with their mother, Grandma Dee. Now, looking at the quilts, more than fifty years back in the past are in the present, in the form of Grandma Dee’s dresses scraps. Also, Grandpa Jarrell’s and Great Grandpa Ezra’s clothes scraps bear witness of both ordinary events of everyday life, as well as those of social and political relevance, like the Civil War. Mrs. Johnson knows how the patterns are named. Artistry and expertise are required to make the Lone Star pattern, which is the one most recognized by Americans since only skilled and experienced quilters accomplish it. (Picture 7)

Picture 7 – Lone Star pattern

Walk Around the Mountain is a pattern not known in quilt books. It may be a variation of other patterns, like Trip Around the World, or it may be an exclusive pattern, that belonged to the family. Nonetheless, it also contained family history in its blocks made out of family clothes scraps. Definitely, for Mrs. Johnson those quilts mean more than "artistic" objects to be hung on the wall. They are part of her past, but also of her present. She asks herself how the future will be without the quilts. They are the artistic representation of the many parts of her identity. Thus, Dee/Wangero's attempt to seize the quilts is a threat to her whole framework as an individual. This moment encompasses all the tension between Mrs. Johnson and Dee. It resembles all the times Mama "fought off the temptation to shake" her (26).

Dee/Wangero, the oldest sister, is the most complex character and seeks a different reality for herself. She is also described as someone who hated their house that caught fire and who desired detachment from the way the family has lived. Being able to read was in the past a certificate of superiority for Dee over her mother and sister, despite the fact that she went to college with the money her mother raised with the church. However, by going to college and being exposed to the social movements of that time, Dee gained not only new perspectives but also new conflicts. The first sign of these conflicts can be seen in the

ambiguity of her double name. Dee has been a traditional name in Mrs. Johnson's family, but she introduces herself to her mother using her new name, as if they were two strangers.

Changing names was a common practice, like Malcom X and Cassius Clay did. Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, changed his name for religious and political reasons. Malcolm Little was successful at schools for mostly white students, and wanted to be a lawyer, but he was discouraged by a teacher who told him it was an unattainable goal for a "nigger". It increased his dissatisfaction about the authority of white over black people. After that, he quit school, and registered some criminal activities in his records. He went to a reformatory in Massachusetts and there, he became a follower of the Nation of Islam movement, also known as the Black Muslims. He joined the movement motivated by the racial indoctrination of the group, for whom white people were considered "devils". It was the beginning of a career as a well-known activist. In 1952, he became Minister Malcolm X, replacing the African last name he had received from his family, who had been slaves in the past. Later, he influenced Cassius Clay, a boxer, who also became a member of the Nation of Islam and changed his name to Muhammad Ali (American National Biography Online).

Similarly, new freed slaves changed their names in the past, as Booker T. Washington reported in *Up from Slavery*:

> After the coming of freedom there were two points upon which practically all the people on our place were agreed, and I find that this was generally true throughout the South: that they must change their names, and that they must leave the old plantation for at least a few days or weeks in order that they might really feel sure that they were free. (15)

Dee's change in the name signals her pursuit for a change in the reality of her people. She has accomplished these two tasks mentioned by Booker T. Washington—changing the name and leaving "the old plantation"--in her search for a new life. She changes her name and goes to college, which brought her new possibilities. However, this new self that Dee brings back home makes her an outsider to her own roots, even a folkloric figure. Black Power movement was in full force the late 1960s, with the agenda of raising black people's consciousness. Regarding physical appearance, young black people replaced their

names by African names and wore hairstyle that made clear it was a nonwhite style (encyclopedia.com). So does Dee. She changes her name to Wangero and gets home wearing an outfit that is described by Mrs. Johnson as inappropriate. Also, her hair causes strangeness to Mama: “A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun . . . [her] hair . . . stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears” (28).

Before kissing her mother, Dee takes several pictures of her, just as a tourist would have done. Her mother notices her “white heels through her sandals” when she turns to get the camera in the car (28). Dee’s new name, new clothes, and new perception of her former home inform Mama that her oldest daughter, who had always despised her origins, now seems to be proud of them.

But this pride does not come from a sharp consciousness of her family history. Instead, her “white heels” disclose mixed conceptions about her identity. She refused the “old quilts” her Mama wanted to give her when she left for college and changed her given name. But now she wants to take to college the churn, the dasher, and two handmade quilts, that have been in the family for generations. These objects are blended with the history of the family, but this is not what matters for Dee: “I can use the churn top as a center-piece for the alcove table . . . and I’ll think of something artistic to do with the dasher” (31). Unlike Maggie, Dee plans to hang the quilts on the wall, also for “artistic” purpose. Dee/Wangero’s “white heels” has transformed the “old quilts” into “priceless” ones. Dee had refused the same quilts because they were “old”. Now that she is in college, she regards them as “priceless”, under a perspective gained by the eyes of white people, similarly to what happened to quilts as object of art.

Quilts were considered objects of visual art only after Jonathan Holstein, a white male curator, promoted a quilt exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in July of 1971. This is considered the most important event in the elevation of quilts from the category of craft to art. For Holstein, the emphasis in the judgment of the importance of a quilt was looking at it as a visual phenomenon, a criterion that was necessary for its status as art, just like the quilts hung in the Smithsonian, that were considered “rare, beyond price”, but which had been made by an "an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago", as mentioned in Chapter 2. In other words, quilts became valuable only after being regarded as so by white people.

This is precisely what Dee is trying to do—she wants to have her own quilt exhibition at college. She wants the quilts not on her bed, but on the wall, once she has learned from a "white" perspective that they are art, visual art. That is why Mama says she has "white heels" now. Dee is not aware that her sudden awakening to the worth of quilts happened at the expense of an impoverishment of the quilts' worth as a whole. As Walker noticed in the Smithsonian Institute, the quilt hanging there "is obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling . . . an anonymous Black woman [who] would turn out to be one of our grandmothers -- an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use" (Search 407). Mama, Big Dee and Grandma Dee are about to become three of these women, silenced by their anonymity, if Dee succeeds in taking the quilts to college.

Similarly to Anna Neale, the leader of a quilting bee in the novel *How to Make an American Quilt,* those three women have learned to speak through quilting. Anna is aware of the power needles and thread have as a means of expression: *"Aprendi a falar com a agulha e a linha muito antes de a sociedade me 'dar' finalmente uma voz – como se a sociedade pudesse 'dar' uma voz a alguém; só pode tirar sua voz.* Anna is also aware that quilting is her genuine voice, not some voice that was 'given' to her by society, as long as society could only take one's voice. Dee is about to take Mama's voice now by taking the quilts from her. According to Campello, Anna is the leader of the group not only because she is the oldest one, but because she knows that quilts incorporate the history and culture of North American women, be they black or white (223-224). Anna has a broader understanding than Mama about quilts. However, Mama knows how much they mean for her own history, culture, and identity, and for this reason she wants to keep them for herself and Maggie.

Eventually, Mama looks at Dee/Wangero holding the quilts and reacts in a sudden way: "When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout." With this epiphany Mrs. Johnson takes an attitude that is new for her: she confronts Dee/Wangero. As previously mentioned in this section, the dispute for the quilts triggered all the tension in their relationship. But this time Mama is not willing to yield. She "snatche[s] the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dump[s] them into Maggie's lap" (34). It is not clear whether Dee/Wangero manages to take the churn and the dasher, but the quilts she does not take.

This is the moment of rupture between Mrs. Johnson and "Miss Wangero" due to their contrasting conceptions about quilts and, ultimately, about how life should be led. As signaled by bell hooks in *Ain't I a Woman*, black women need to find their own identity, not by mingling with a group or another to lose their own claims, but by finding their own voices. Dee/Wangero undoubtedly wants a "new day" for herself and Maggie. Mrs. Johnson, on the other hand and despite her illiteracy, is aware of the concept of Intersectionality, mentioned in Chapter 2. She knows that her "economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential" background has produced a complex identity that cannot be reduced to or represented by single—and supposedly essential—facets, as Dee/Wangero tries to do. Her daughter has reduced the complexity and subjectivity of quilts to decorative commodity.

Dee/Wangero has a legitimate desire for change, but it cannot be achieved by denying her position at the margin and moving to the center. On the contrary, as hooks states, "black women have a special and unique vision . . . survival skills that will be useful to the world at large . . . a special view of reality that comes from being . . . in enclosures . . . those views [are] . . . a form of power" (84). Dee has not acknowledged this form of power. Although she has embraced a political movement, she fails to acknowledge past connections and personal history. According to hooks, the most ambitious feminism would surface from people who have expertise in center as well in margin (*Theory* Introduction). Dee could embody such "expertise". Because she has accomplished going to college, she has access to education, a prerogative of the "center". However, her role would be not to move to the center and forsake the margin—her origins, but to propose a "counter-hegemony" using her knowledge of both margin and center (15).

Although sewing and quilting have served to connect people in both *The Color Purple* and "Everyday Use", concerning the relationship between Mrs. Johnson and Dee, the outcome is severance. Mrs. Johnson realizes the gap that exists between Dee and her since Dee's childhood. The dream about the reconciliation on a TV show expresses both the existence of the gap and the desire to fill it. However, the dispute for the quilts between them leads to such extreme tension that Mrs. Johnson takes an unprecedented attitude. Instead of indulging once again to Dee's outbreaks, she decides to keep the quilts and favor the daughter that has suffered the consequences of poverty on her body and in her mind. Her decision goes beyond keeping two bedcovers. She refuses

Dee's new concepts (or mis-concepts) of black womanhood, and keeps the quilts in order to remain connected with her own inheritance. She breaks with Dee's borrowed mainstream view and keeps the quilts in favor of her own wholeness, for she wants the quilts for their entire meaning.

4 CONCLUSION

"Sewing mends the soul", says the epigraph in the beginning of this thesis. Mending carries the idea of making whole and functional something that has been broken, worn, torn, or damaged. The trajectory of the main characters in *The Color Purple* and in "Everyday Use" displays changes at their hearts, which are closely associated with sewing and quilting. These characters have had shifts in their beliefs and attitudes through connections or disconnections among themselves, which have turned them from oppressed and submissive into whole and emancipated individuals. Similarly to the process of piecing, sewing, and quilting out of scraps of fabric, which results in a whole and functional asset, these characters have had their broken souls mended and their identity made into one piece.

In order to better understand the issues disclosed in the novel and in the short story, the present investigation has traced back the trajectory of women studies, starting from early feminism, developing into intersectionality, moving to the historical condition of black women in America, followed by the rise of black feminism, and finishing with the connection between sewing and quilting, and women. Specifically, in order to investigate the relationship between writing and quilting, and sewing/quilting and freeing of women, this investigation has analyzed quilting as a metafictional device in *The Color Purple*, the connections between characters through quilting and sewing in *The Color Purple,* as well as their development. Also, it has investigated how characters connect, disconnect, and get emancipated in "Everyday Use".

Analyzing, at first, the structural aspect of *The Color Purple*, it was possible to see that quilting works as a metafictional device for the formal construction of the novel. Quilting became an alternative way of conveying meaning due to the involuntary illiteracy of black people and women. The figure of the *griot* corroborates the feature of quilts as texts, since *griots* are the skilled readers of the messages represented in mnemonic devices that include quilts, which can be read, just like a text. Besides, a renewed interest in quilts from the end of the 1960s on led to the rediscovery of quilts as art and as a metaphor for textuality. Specifically in *The Color Purple,* the structure of the novel composed by letters exchanged among the characters may be said to correspond to the blocks of a quilt. Then, the quilting pattern has shown to serve as the blueprint for the composition of the novel: every letter stands for a block in a quilt.

The second aspect investigated was how quilting and sewing favored women's connection and emancipation in *The Color Purple*. Besides the formal correspondence with a quilt, I have concluded that the novel presents another feature related to sewing. The common thread that links the characters is that their relationships are always associated with quilting or sewing. Among the relationships related to quilting in the novel, the first one is between Celie and Sofia. As we have seen in the analysis, the two characters present different inner traits in the beginning, and the relationship between them starts with animosity. Sofia furiously rips off the curtains Celie had made for her house. However, instead of feeding enmity, they decide to make a quilt out of the ruined curtains. This is the start of a growing process for both of them. The activity of quilting becomes a survival strategy for Celie, who is encouraged by Sofia to grow as an individual and, an opportunity for Sofia to understand Harpo and their violent relationship as she quilts, and also to decide to finish it. Here, making the quilt represents the relationship made anew. Similarly to the rejected curtains that become a quilt with new visual and functional features, the relationship between Celie and Sofia is transformed from hostile into a strong and supporting one.

A second relationship associated with sewing and quilting is the one between Celie and Mr. __________. Celie says to herself that a needle in her hand is better than a razor, meaning that instead of killing her husband she decides to use the force of her anger for "creation [of quilts and pants] rather than destruction". Choice is the keyword here. Similarly, the process of quilting gives the quilter the opportunity of choice over the leftovers of fabric, which stitched together in a planned fashion, form a new figure as it pleases the quilter. Even though the scraps were frequently leftovers of fabric used in other more important projects, choices were made on the scraps disposition. Likewise, while Celie is subordinate to life contingencies, she is able to choose her attitude towards them.

The third relationship that makes references to quilting is the love triangle Celie – Shug Avery – Mr. __________. Opposing to the standard heterosexual couple, a love triangle is an asymmetric arrangement in terms of relationships. Correspondingly, a crazy quilt is a non-patterned kind of quilt, that does not follow pre-established standards, nor in the block type assembling, neither in the images, resulting in an authentic and authorial design. The figure in a crazy quilt depends on the scraps it is made of, and mostly, on the quilter's choices.

Similarly, the love triangle in the plot is a relationship that does not follow external rules. It has its own ones.

The fourth analyzed relationship is between Celie and Shug Avery, and it encompasses reading and sewing. They read the letters Nettie has sent to Celie but Mr. __________ has hidden from her. It is during one these secret meetings that Shug suggests they could make pants for Celie. Shug argues that it would be better to work the land wearing pants instead of wearing a dress. Celie refuses at first, but they decide to make pants with the fabric used in army uniforms, material that is resistant and is for free. Again, leftovers are used to create a new item with new visual and functional features. Here, there is the mending of a broken hope, when Celie gets to read the letters she was denied to. Also, because of Shug's insistence, Celie starts making pants and this is the embryo of her career as an entrepreneur, and her emancipation, both in personal and financial aspects.

The fifth relationship connected to quilts is the one between Nettie and Corrine, in Africa. Preservation of family history and awareness of one's identity are grounded by the relationship between letters and quilts, according to Tavormina. Here, like a letter that reveals family secrets, a quilt revives Corrine's memories and gives the peace of mind she lacked in relation to her husband's conjugal faithfulness. The quilts made by Corrine in Africa contained pieces of fabric that worked as a trigger for her recollection of having met Celie in a fabric store back in the United States, and seeing the resemblance between Celie and her daughter Olivia. Thus, the family history that had been blurred by time and fear is brought back thanks to the testimony of the cloths in the quilt.

The sixth relationship analyzed was between Celie and herself. Quilting had already helped Celie to cope with anger, when she decided to quilt instead of killing Mr. __________. However, sewing also stimulates Celie's creativity. There is a clear contrast in Celie's disposition by the time she arrived at Mr. __________'s house, when she describes herself as an apathetic figure. Now, after having discovered her talent for making pants, Celie fully expresses her creativity by sewing them and even dreams of making the perfect ones. The description of her sewing activities displays great joy: "I ain't been able to stop. I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants Shug tease me". Celie grew from the disconsolate Mr. __________'s wife to a creative and vivid seamstress, who is fulfilled with love, work, money, friends and time, as self-described.

Now, as a seamstress Celie decides to express her new self and the love for her sister Nettie. This is the seventh relationship intertwined with fabric and needles. Bearing in mind the climate in Africa and Nettie's labor, Celie plans tailor made pants. They will be stitched by hand, and every stitch stands for a kiss, as a sign of her love for Nettie. More than providing a suitable piece of clothing for Nettie's specific needs, Celie's sewing is inspired by art and love. At this point, Celie has already incorporated her new identity and she signs the letter as an entrepreneur: "Your Sister, Celie, Folkspants, Unlimited. Sugar Avery Drive, Memphis, Tenessee".

The most critical relationship in the novel, the one between Celie and Mr. __________, is also permeated by quilting and sewing. While she was married to Mr. __________, Celie quilted in order to vent her anger and not kill him. With her new identity, Celie changes the violent and abusive relationship with Mr. __________ into a collaborative association. Celie makes pants and Mr. __________ makes shirts that match the pants she makes. Similarly to the change in Celie and Sofia's relationship, sewing celebrates such change. Celie, an emancipated and business woman thanks to sewing, speaks equally to Mr. __________, finally addressing him as Albert. Similarly to a peace ceremony where people smoke pipes, they celebrate peace by solemnly smoking and sewing.

However, sewing and quilting is emblematic not only of the connection between the characters, but also of their disconnection in Walker's writings. Even though emancipation also comes through quilts in "Everyday Use", it is the disconnection between the characters that promotes emancipation, and this was the third and last aspect analyzed in this research. The dispute for two handmade quilts by Mrs. Johnson and Maggie against Dee mirrors the conflict between their conceptions about life and their identities. For Mrs. Johnson and Maggie, the quilts are the artistic representation of the many parts of their identities, in the same way that many pieces of fabric make of a quilt. Dee, on the other hand, sees the quilts only as adornment objects that would help her to feel in vogue at college. Such dispute triggers Mama's awareness of her own identity and she finally asserts her decision of keeping the quilts, despite Dee's insistence in taking them. This is precisely the moment of rupture between Mrs. Johnson and Dee. Keeping the quilts means for Mrs. Johnson that she would remain connected to her inheritance and have her own identity preserved. Thus, even though people have connected through sewing and quilting in both *The Color Purple* and

"Everyday Use", emancipation comes after severance in the relationship between Mrs. Johnson and Dee.

Concerning what could have been done differently in this research, I felt at a certain point that I could have chosen a different corpus. I realized that a great deal has been said about *The Color Purple* and its characters. So, to my disappointment, some of my findings had already been presented by other researchers in the area concerning clothing in the novel. On the other hand, specifically about quilts, it is hard to deny the importance they have for American women, be they black or white, and Alice Walker has shown to know the relevance of quilts, not to mention their connection with literature. Furthermore, as Fyodor Dostoevsky says, "there is no subject so old that something new cannot be said about it." Regarding feminism, on the contrary, it has been a constant enlightenment. It is not possible to measure how enriching it has been to study women's struggles, both for my academic and personal life. I was attracted at first by the colors and images in the short story, and found an even more colorful and complex world in the relation between sewing and quilting, and women.

I also would like to mention some changes on the objectives of this research. At first, it seemed that people only connected through quilting in Walker's writings. Nevertheless, as the investigation advanced, I focused on the characters' emancipation, that is always related to quilting and sewing, but not always resulting in connection between the characters, specifically in "Everyday Use". A large amount of research has been carried out about the corpus of this investigation, especially *The Color Purple.* However, further studies might investigate the role men play in both writings of this corpus. The absence of men in the family in "Everyday Use", and their secondary roles in *The Color Purple* may suggest the mirroring of black women's history and its probable meanings for black feminism.

At last, as the epigraph says in the beginning of this thesis, "sewing mends the soul". Besides using quilts as the blueprint for the composition of the novel, Alice Walker has also used sewing and quilting as the motif for the emancipation of characters in both *The Color Purple* and "Everyday Use". Their broken souls have been mended and their identities made whole, just as a quilt is made of scraps of fabric and results in an artistic one-piece object.

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