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**A Subaltern Voice against Patriarchy and Racial Oppression in  
The Color Purple**

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines the character of Sofia in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* through a postcolonial feminist lens, highlighting her resistance against patriarchy, racial oppression, and imposed identities. As a subaltern figure, Sofia challenges both hegemonic masculinity and white supremacy, refusing to conform to the roles assigned to Black women in a patriarchal and racist society. Her defiance against her husband Harpo reflects a rejection of gendered subjugation, while her refusal to work as a maid for the mayor's wife symbolizes a resistance to colonial mimicry. The paper also explores how Sofia's forced servitude aligns with the historical oppression of Black women, examining her role through the concepts of motherism, hybridity, and queer resistance. Her rejection of Eleanor Jane's expectations challenges the romanticized narrative of Black women as caregivers for white families. At the same time, her ability to navigate oppression without losing her dignity aligns with Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity. Furthermore, Sofia's relationship with Celie underscores the role of sisterhood in feminist resistance. Ultimately, Sofia emerges as a postcolonial feminist symbol, illustrating how Black women resist intersecting systems of oppression. Her story represents the ongoing struggle for identity, agency, and justice, making her a powerful figure in postcolonial literature.

**Keywords:** Motherism, hybridity, patriarchy, racial oppression, subaltern voice.

**Introduction:**

**Objectives**

1. To examine how Sofia represents a subaltern voice in *The Color Purple*, resisting both racial and patriarchal oppression in a society that seeks to silence her.
2. To investigate Sofia's defiance against traditional gender roles, particularly in her marriage with Harpo, and how her actions challenge patriarchal expectations.
3. To explore how Sofia's refusal to conform to white societal expectations, especially in her encounter with Miss Millie, reflects a larger postcolonial critique of racial oppression.

4. To discuss the role of motherism, hybridity, and queer resistance in shaping Sofia's identity.
5. To highlight the significance of sisterhood and collective resistance.

### **Sofia's Marriage with Harpo and Patriarchal Oppression**

Sofia's marriage with Harpo initially reflects a union based on love, but it soon becomes a battleground where patriarchal expectations seek to dictate her role. Harpo, conditioned by hegemonic masculinity, expects Sofia to conform to the submissive role of a wife. His attempt to impose authority through violence is a mimicry of the patriarchal control historically exercised by white men over Black bodies. However, Sofia subverts these expectations by fighting back, rejecting the hegemonic masculinity that seeks to control her. Unlike Celie, who initially embodies the subaltern silence of oppressed women, Sofia's resistance destabilizes the notion of gendered power structures.

Sofia's assertion of equality within marriage challenges the patriarchal notion that women must remain subordinate. She insists that she and Harpo share domestic responsibilities equally. This resistance to traditional gender roles aligns with postcolonial feminism, which critiques the intersection of race and gender in maintaining social hierarchies. Sofia's defiance illustrates how Black women are doubly marginalized—not only by white supremacy but also by the patriarchy within their communities.

### **Sofia as a Subaltern Representation in a Racist Society**

Sofia's encounter with the mayor and his wife reflects the historical oppression of Black women under white supremacy. When Miss Millie assumes Sofia would be honored to work as her maid, it exemplifies colonial mimicry—white society's expectation that Black individuals should internalize and perform their assigned inferior roles. Sofia's rejection of this assumption—her firm "Hell, no!"—is a direct refusal to participate in this imposed mimicry. However, her defiance leads to brutal punishment, reinforcing the silencing of subaltern voices within racist power dynamics. Her imprisonment and forced labor in the mayor's house parallel the historical enslavement of Black people, illustrating the cycle of racist subjugation.

The treatment of Sofia by the white power structure is emblematic of how postcolonial societies continue to function within a racial hierarchy. Her physical punishment serves as a metaphor for the systemic violence used to maintain control over Black bodies. Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern resonates deeply with Sofia's situation—she is a woman whose voice is systematically silenced by the dominant forces of race, gender, and class oppression.

### **Motherism and Sofia's Association with Eleanor Jane**

Despite her resistance, Sofia is unwillingly placed into a role that aligns with mothers—a concept where Black women are expected to provide care and emotional labor for white families. She raises Eleanor Jane with kindness, but when the young woman expects gratitude and love in return, Sofia rejects the emotional labor forced upon her. She refuses to assimilate into the imaginary homeland of white benevolence, where former oppressors seek validation for their kindness while ignoring systemic injustice. Sofia's

refusal to embrace Eleanor Jane's child as her own is a crucial act of reclaiming agency, challenging the romanticized narrative of Black women as nurturing figures for white children.

Sofia's rejection of Eleanor Jane's child is an assertion of her humanity. It challenges the historical expectation that Black women should prioritize the emotional needs of white people over their pain and suffering. Her actions reflect postcolonial critiques of how former colonizers attempt to rewrite history, portraying themselves as benevolent figures while failing to acknowledge the ongoing consequences of oppression.

### **New Identities and Hybridity in *The Color Purple***

By the novel's end, Sofia reclaims her autonomy and identity, embodying hybridity—the merging of resistance and survival in a postcolonial setting. Unlike Celie, who finds empowerment in forging a new independent life, Sofia represents the woman who has navigated both racial and gendered oppression while retaining her spirit. Her experiences shape a new identity that defies simplistic categorization—she is neither fully assimilated into the dominant culture nor completely outside of it. This hybridity allows her to exist beyond the binaries of oppression and freedom, shaping a narrative of resilience and transformation.

Sofia's hybridity is also reflected in her ability to adapt while maintaining her dignity. Even in the mayor's house, where she is forced into servitude, she never fully submits. Instead, she develops a strategy of survival, embodying Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which allows the colonized subject to resist through subtle forms of defiance while navigating oppressive structures. Sofia's story illustrates how identity in postcolonial societies is not fixed but constantly negotiated.

### **Queer Resistance (Challenging Societal Norms)**

Although *The Color Purple* explicitly explores queer relationships through Celie and Shug, Sofia also represents a form of queer resistance—not in terms of sexuality, but in her rejection of gender norms. She refuses to perform traditional femininity, challenging the heteronormative expectations imposed upon women. Her physical strength, her defiance of male authority, and her unwillingness to conform to domestic roles position her as a figure of gender nonconformity.

Sofia's resistance to traditional gender norms aligns with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. By refusing to "perform" the role of the submissive wife, she disrupts the societal expectations of Black women. In a postcolonial context, her defiance represents the broader struggle against imposed identities, where individuals must constantly negotiate their place within dominant structures.

### **Sisterhood and Collective Empowerment**

One of the most significant aspects of Sofia's journey is her role in empowering other women, particularly Celie. Initially, Celie is trapped in a cycle of oppression, accepting male domination as an inevitable part of life. However, Sofia's strength serves as a catalyst for

Celie's transformation. Through their bond, Walker highlights the importance of sisterhood in resisting oppression. Sofia's relationship with Celie represents a form of collective resistance. It underscores the feminist notion that individual liberation is deeply connected to communal support. By witnessing Sofia's refusal to submit, Celie gains the courage to break free from her abusive marriage, illustrating how solidarity among women can dismantle patriarchal control.

### **Conclusion**

Sofia's journey in *The Color Purple* exemplifies the complexities of postcolonial gendered resistance. She challenges patriarchy, racial subjugation, and imposed identities, refusing to conform to the roles prescribed by hegemonic power structures. Through her defiance, Sofia disrupts the colonial and patriarchal narratives that seek to silence subaltern voices. Her story is not just one of suffering but of resilience, a testimony to the continuous fight for identity, agency, and justice in a postcolonial world.

Sofia's refusal to accept oppression makes her a revolutionary figure within the novel. She embodies the struggle of Black women who navigate multiple layers of marginalization, standing as a powerful representation of postcolonial feminist resistance. By asserting her voice and agency, Sofia challenges the structures that seek to confine her, making her one of the most compelling characters in *The Color Purple* and an enduring symbol of strength in postcolonial literature.

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