



Research Paper

# From Victim to Tyrant: How Racial Oppression Reproduces Domestic Terror in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* as an ethical narrative that questions the interconnectedness between racial oppression, domestic violence, and moral accountability in the American South marked by structural racism and sexism. Existing research has emphasized Black womanhood, gender and socio-economic injustice, but less attention has been paid to Walker's representation of responsibility and redemption within conditions of structural violence. The study addresses how Walker explains violence through historical oppression without excluding individual accountability. The article employs a qualitative close-reading approach guided by structural violence theory, double consciousness and Black feminist ethics. The findings reveal that Walker represents racial oppression as a condition leading to victimized subjectivities, yet she strongly rejects moral nihilism. Ultimately, the article argues that Walker offers a compelling moral vision in which ethical agency prevails even under structural injustice.

**Keywords:** Ethical reckoning, Redemption, Racial Oppression, Moral Accountability, Structural Violence.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker's first and groundbreaking novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), can be considered one of the bleakest and crude literary exploration of how racial oppression dehumanizes and strip Black family of common sense in Jim Crow-dominated South. This novel has long been examined and studied through the lenses of gender violence, Black womanhood and womanism. Thus, not that much attention has been directed to the ethical trajectory that bridges racial victimization, domestic terror, and moral accountability. As a matter of fact, this article contends that Walker does not merely depict violence as a social symptom. She demonstrates that it arises from a rigorous moral inquiry, develops into domestic oppression, then it is reproduced, and, most importantly reckoned with.

It appears that scholars have conducted a great deal of research on Walker's portrayal of Black women's oppression and resistance where they have centered emblematic characters like Margaret, Mem, and Ruth. Walker's sharp representation of patriarchal violence has been scrutinized by feminist critics while sociological readings have foregrounded the horrific effects of poverty, sharecropping, and racial capitalism on Black families. However, these approaches are likely to neglect or exclude domestic violence from its broader ethical implications which can transform individual responsibility into structural causation. Walker tries genuinely in this novel to draw a parallel between structural violence and personal accountability, rejecting both moral nihilism and sentimental redemption. And it is this very aspect that has been under-explored.

This article aims at bridging that gap by analyzing *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* as a three-stage ethical narrative: first, how Black men are victimized; second, how racial oppression turns into domestic terror; and last but not least, how they reckon with past violence, take responsibilities for it and seek redemption.

Walker contends that violence should not be excused and attributed any other cause. She reckons that historical oppression has shaped Black people, but this should not justify domestic terror.

The problem, this article aims to tackle, is to understand how Alice Walker, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, foregrounds the ethical consequences of racial oppression, how she holds individual morally accountable, and how she delineates the limits of redemption in the aftermath of violence. The study looks at the novel not only as a social critique but also as a coherent moral narrative about accountability and how violence can sometimes be irreversible.

This study is guided by three main theoretical lenses which are: Structural Violence Theory, Double Consciousness and Racialized Subjectivity, and Black Feminist Criticism. These theories will help analyze how *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* interconnect racial oppression, domestic violence, and moral accountability. Structural Violence Theory, pioneered by Johan Galtung, considers violence as harm “built into the structure” of society and manifested in “unequal life chances” rather than caused by individual (1969, p. 171). This framework is utilized to interpret Jim Crow racism, sharecropping, and economic dispossession in Walker’s novel as a cause of the different forms of violence that influence characters’ lives before individual consciousness takes place.

As for subjectivity, W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness, described as the experience of seeing oneself “through the eyes of others” (1996, pp. 2–3), breaks down the psychic fragmentation and internalized shame that are at the root of Grange and Brownfield Copeland’s strong will to express agency using violent domination.

bell hooks and Alice Walker herself, staunch advocates of Black Feminism, contend that gendered violence has a terrible cost and there is no healing without reckoning (hooks, 2000, p. 207). These frameworks work together to allow a reading that explains structural violence, ethical responsibility, reckoning and the limits of redemption.

Exploring *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* with this framework, the article sheds light on the fact that Walker offers an in-depth social diagnosis of racial and gendered violence. She also offers an undeniable moral vision which claims that accountability remains quite possible and even necessary under conditions of extreme social injustice.

The methodology draws on a qualitative research approach informed by close content analysis of the text as its core analytical method. Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, which constitutes our primary data, serves as our corpus. It is meticulously explored through detailed textual analysis of selected scenes, characters’ developments, and key excerpts. Secondary sources heavily rely on critical studies on Walker’s fiction, which can be books, articles or historical records. They are also guided by theoretical studies on structural violence, double consciousness, racialized subjectivity and Black feminist thought. The paper proceeded through inductive analysis focusing on the novel’s language, imagery and narrative style to better interpret and illuminate the reading.

The article is broken down into three key sections: The first looks at how racial oppression victimizes Black men through economic exploitation, psychological emasculation, and inherited fear. The second examines how this victimization turns into domestic terror, insofar as violence falls back on women and children. The final section analyzes Walker’s most compelling stance where she foregrounds reckoning, responsibility, and the ethical limits of redemption.

## **SECTION I: THE TRAUMATIC WITNESS—MEM'S MURDER AND THE FRACTURE OF INNOCENCE**

Racial oppression in the rural Jim Crow South is neither incidental nor episodic, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. It is structural and has a pervasive, and formative effect on the Black people. Walker delineates racism as an external force that hampers Black mobility, as a deeply entrenched system that shapes emotional life, impacts intimacy, and transforms Black male selfhood from the inside. Grange and Brownfield Copeland, two antagonistic figures in the novel, help understand how economic exploitation, racially oppressive system, and institutionalized dependency yield a form of psychological and material victimhood. This convergence of circumstances will later on lead to acute domestic terror.

The novel reveals that oppression passed down from generation to generation will systematically affect Black woman. When one looks more closely at Brownfield’s response to his father, one can deduce that fear becomes embodied knowledge. Walker writes:

His pale blue eyes struggled to convey kindness and largesse. Brownfield slid down from the truck knowing his face was the mask his father’s had been. Because this frightened him and because he did not know why he should have inherited this fear, he studiously brushed imaginary dust from the shoulders of a worn black suit Shipley had given him. (p. 30)

From this passage it is obvious that fear is neither explained nor chosen. It is unconsciously inherited and established as something normal. Grange appears as if wearing a “mask,” which can be explained as a defensive stance caused by years of racial surveillance and humiliation. Brownfield is seen to be quite familiar with this mask which infers that racism teaches Black men how to control and discipline themselves before trying to figure out how racism works. Their sense of self is then fashioned by constraint and constant pressure from white authority.

Father and son cannot feel confident or free because of this transmitted fear that erode any form of selfhood. Grange endeavors and struggles to express affection but fails. This points out a state of emotional exhaustion. Racism drastically impedes his social and economic possibilities blurring his horizon with no promising outlook. Furthermore, it inhibits his capacity for emotional gentleness, producing a state of constantly being on guard and self-restraining, which serves as strategies of survival. Sharecropping, a new form of enslavement and economic exploitation underlie this psychic state, which Walker names a modern extension of slavery. During one of his lucid moments, Brownfield comes to understand the gravity of that situation. Walker narrates:

She breathed with difficulty through the deadly smell. At the end of the day she trembled and vomited and looked beaten down like a tiny, asthmatic old lady; but she did not complain to her father, as afraid of him as she was of the white boss who occasionally deigned to drive by with friends to watch the lone little pickaninny, so tired she barely saw them, poisoning his cotton. That pickaninny was Brownfield’s oldest child, Daphne, and that year of awakening roused him not from sleep but from hope that someday she would be a fine lady and carry parasols and wear light silks. That was the year he first saw how his own life was becoming a repetition of his father’s. He could not save his children from slavery; they did not even belong to him. (p. 78).

This coming to awareness on Brownfield’s part shatters the aspiration to generational progress. The emancipation that was glimpsed though freedom appears to be an illusion. The passage “they did not even belong to him” is full of sense and plain. Brownfield realized that Jim Crow is a smooth extension of slavery that continues to exert its dehumanizing and oppressive logic in a more or covert fashion. Therefore, Black men were deprived of authority, protective power and bright prospect. This excruciating system entrapped the children in advance nipping in the bud any parental aspirations.

Walker went a step further by giving a dramatic picture of Daphne, Brownfield’s eldest daughter, in the fields “poisoning his cotton,” exhausted, sick, dejected on the brink of collapse. The white boss who “deigns to drive by with friends” to check on them and watch them condescendingly suffering illustrates racial domination as spectacle. Brownfield’s child is thus invisible as human and hyper-visible as laboring subject. Racism operates atrociously, for its effects are violent, naturalized and routinized.

The effects of economic exploitation are numerous among which we have poverty. It also produces intense despair and distress by colonizing the thought, the faith and affection. One of these excruciating effects of the economic exploitation is poignantly captured by this searing passage:

His indebtedness depressed him. Year after year the amount he owed continued to climb. He thought of suicide and never forgot it, even in Mem’s arms. He prayed for help, for a caring President, for a listening Jesus. He prayed for a decent job in Mem’s arms. But like all prayers sent up from there, it turned into another mouth to feed, another body to enslave to pay his debts. He felt himself destined to become no more than overseer, on the white man’s plantation, of his own children. (p. 78).

In this moving passage, debt is not perceived as solely financial. It carries a strong existential connotation that crushes Brownfield’s spirit and annihilates his sense of future. He finds himself imprisoned in a cycle where hope turns into burden. He prays for political help, divine intervention but to no avail. On the contrary, these prayers seem to exacerbate his bondage, because from his depressive situation, he only finds alleviation in Mem’s arms. The more children he has, the more he contributes to strengthen this exploitative system by providing more “healthy arms.” The most striking passage is when Brownfield sees himself becoming an “overseer” of his own children which confirms his participation to the very system that enslaves them.

The bleak consequences of racial and economic domination are vividly depicted by Walker. In the novel, she correlates Brownfield’s material deprivation to the annihilation of his most personal aspirations. He cannot own land, earn a living wage, “set his woman up in style” which shows how white supremacist system

strips Black men of dignity and self-hood. It is clear in the novel that, this deprivation is not fortuitous. It is systematic, structural and goes even beyond labor and turns into sexual exploitation:

Others who were always within their rights to pay him practically nothing for his labor. He was never able to do more than exist on air; he was never able to build on it, and was never to have any land of his own; and was never able to set his woman up in style, which more than anything else he wanted to do. It was as if the white men said his woman needed no style, deserved no style, and therefore would get no style, and that they would always reserve the right to work the life out of him and to f\*\*\* her. (P.79)

In this passage, racial capitalism dictates its cruel rules to Brownfield. It deprives him not only from economic stability but also from emotional authority and tenderness within his own family. This dramatic phrase highlighting the right of white men to “work the life out of him and to f\*\*\* her” underscores exploitation and sexual threat, thus shattering the boundary between the economic domination and the marital sphere. So, constant humiliation and dehumanization are used to dismantle his sense of manhood which triggers a seething rage that will be wrongly vented on Mem.

As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear how Walker demonstrates the impact of prolonged racial domination on Black men. It reshapes their inner life rendering them resigned and fatalist. Brownfield comes to grips with white authority and realizes that he cannot escape his destiny. Therefore, he refuses to escape and cowardly accept the racial order. Walker sharply showcases this psychological acceptance of oppression in the following passage:

For Brownfield, moving about at the whim of a white boss was just another example of the fact that his life, as it was destined, had "gone haywire," and he could do nothing about it. He jumped when the crackers said jump, and left his welfare up to them. He no longer had, as his father had maintained, even the desire to run away from them. He had no faith that any other place would be better. He fitted himself to the slot in which he found himself; for fun he poured oil into streams to kill the fish and tickled his vanity by drowning cats. (P. 85)

The excerpt illustrates a pessimistic and disillusioned man who is convinced that there are no longer alternatives to his condition. All hope gone, obedience rules his life, and weirdly enough his frustration is absurdly redirected against vulnerable creatures. Such violence can be interpreted as a futile attempt to assert and express agency in a world where he is literally devoid of power and selfhood. This phenomenon lays bare how structural domination distorts morality and paves the way for further brutality and meanness.

This section has demonstrated that racism is represented in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* as a structural and generational system that profoundly shapes Black subjectivity from within. Through Grange and Brownfield, one can see economic exploitation, racial oppression and institutionalized dependency causing fear, emotional numbness and a devastated sense of self. Sharecropping and debt have taken on a new form of bondage that dissipate all hope, strip fatherhood of authority, and entrap children in advance. The internalization of white power is responsible for resignation, displaced rage, and moral dismantling, turning victims into tyrants. Walker subtly puts forth how racial domination erodes bodies, emotions, and intimate relations which prepares the fertile ground on which domestic terror will later unfold.

## **Section II: From External Oppression to Domestic Terror: Violence Turned Inward**

Walker unflinchingly portrays, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, violence shifting from the cotton field to private sphere, meaning the Black household. First, this violence takes on the form of economic deprivation, racial oppression and social ostracization under Jim Crow. Later on, it mutates and becomes destructive. Black men like Grange and his son Brownfield were stripped of agency, dignity and selfhood. As a result, they redirect the violence they cannot face to their families. Domestic terror then cannot be considered as moral failure but rather as the direct consequence of structural racial and oppressive system.

The tragedy that is taking place with The Copeland's household is the reflection of a violence already seated long before Grange or Brownfield start with their bullying. As Johan Galtung contends, structural violence is “built into the structure and shows up as unequal life chances” (1969, p. 171), which is clearly captured by Walker in her description of the stifled futures of Black men in the rural South. This mutation is also explored by W. E. B. Du Bois who famously described it as living “through the eyes of others” (1996, pp. 2–3), a psychic fragmentation that helps explain why domination becomes Brownfield's most accessible illusion of selfhood.

As the narrative evolves, we realize that despair and violence are tragically entangled. Grange's marriage to Margaret gives a mournful picture of a household where lack of emotion and tenderness transform into violent physical confrontation. This reveals that under conditions of extreme deprivation, violent conflict becomes one of the few remaining proofs of a semblance of masculinity. Walker observes,

Depression always gave way to fighting, as if fighting preserved some part of the feeling of being alive. It was confusing to realize but not hard to know that they loved each other. And even when Margaret found relief from her cares in the arms of her fellow bait-pullers and church members, or with the man who drove the truck and who turned her husband to stone, there was a deference in her eyes that spoke of her love for Grange. (P.27)

This poignant passage shows the transformation of emotional despair into domestic violence which instills in them a sense of being alive. They find an outlet in fighting in a context where life is drained by hardships. Here, moral judgement is put to test by Walker. She contends that love and violence coexist, not because they go together or are interconnected, but because structural racial oppression have withered emotional expression. Margaret is still prone to show respect and love which demonstrates that loyalty and affection prevail even within atrocious conditions. This traces the tragic degradation of intimacy under structural racial oppression.

The household fails to offer Black women a protective shelter that will shield them from this devastating oppressive force. Instead, it serves as a crucible where oppression is reproduced in a more brutal and deadly fashion. In fact, this oppression does not involve the couple alone. Unfortunately, the children, namely those of Brownfield, appear to be the innocent victims and silent witness of this lingering drama. Brownfield confesses bitterly that his parents' struggle for survival renders him invisible. Walker says: "What Brownfield could not forgive was that in the drama of their lives his father and mother forgot they were not alone" (p. 27). Brownfield has been neglected and given very little attention. But this neglect or lack of care is not casual, it is rather structural. His parents were emotionally exhausted and entrapped in a system that would not set them free. Therefore, they had no time or affection to lavish on the poor Brownfield, who later grew up to reproduce the same pattern. Surprisingly enough, Brownfield will appear to be an exaggerated and crueler image of his father.

Brownfield reproduces with terrifying and excruciating precision what his father imperfectly does. Walker names this repetition as a generational inheritance of violence passed down from father to son. This inherited violence without any form of ambiguity, is transformed into ritual. Over time, Brownfield by his doings, turns his marriage to Mem as a site of horrific abuse and violence. Walker recounts:

Over the years they reached, what they would have called when they were married, an impossible, and unbelievable decline. Brownfield beat his once lovely wife now, regularly, because it made him feel, briefly, good. Every Saturday night he beat her, trying to pin the blame for his failure on her by imprinting it on her face; and she, inevitably, repaid him by becoming a haggard automatous witch, beside whom even Josie looked well-preserved. The tender woman he married he set out to destroy. And before he destroyed her he was determined to change her. And change her he did. He was her Pygmalion in reverse. (P. 80)

In this breathtaking passage, the core notion of violence turning inward crystallizes. It becomes a form of compensation. Brownfield is powerless, so he is unable to grapple with the racial and economic structures that stifles his existence. In this excerpt, he converts his own powerlessness into physical violence. The ritualization of this horrid violent practice "every Saturday night" confirms that tyranny becomes normalized and accepted. Brownfield has turned the body of the candid and righteous Mem into a site where he attempts to reacquire his long-lost worth.

The wound inflicted on Grange by years of racial oppression and economic exploitation have turned into hatred leading to Grange's inability to express tenderness. Even in private and under the cover of darkness, Grange is unable to touch his own son to show a little of tenderness. Walker explains: "... And he most hated him because even in private and in the dark and with Brownfield presumably asleep, Grange could not bear to touch his son with his hand." (p. 28). Grange's inability to touch is the signal that parental affection has been damaged by racial oppression. The system hardened him with endurance while depriving him of tenderness. This lack of love and affection, and not overt brutality, have cultivated Brownfield's hatred. In Walker view, lack of affection reproduces trauma and paves the way for later domestic aggression. Violence, first, takes on the form of emotional deprivation and then becomes physical domination.

Over time, this horrible and unrelenting abuse has devastating consequences on Mem. The annihilation and erasure of Mem's inner self is painfully depicted in these words by Walker, stating she becomes "a woman walking through a dream," until "her mildness became stupor; then her stupor became horror, desolation and, at last, hatred" (p. 85). Domestic terror starts by gnawing away all form of affection before consuming the body for good. As for walker, hatred cannot be painted as cruelty here, but rather as the final residue of selfhood. Walker offers us an explicit and an elaborated description of Brownfield who, subjected to racial oppression, unleashes his rage on Mem's body and silence. Accusations, sexual violence and racist language intertwine in the novel to reveal the internalization of white supremacy within the household:

That was the year he accused Mem of being unfaithful to him, of being used by white men, his oppressors; a charge she tearfully and truthfully denied. And when he took her in his drunkenness and in the midst of his own foul accusations she wilted and accepted him in total passivity and blankness, like a church. She was too pure to know how sanctified was his soul by her silence. He determined at such times to treat her like a nigger and a whore, which he knew she was not, and if she made no complaint, to find her guilty. Soft words could not turn away his wrath, they could only condone it. (PP. 78-79)

In these lines, Walker shows how perniciously racial oppression devastates marriage and transforms affection into violence. Brownfield accuses his wife claiming that she has been "used by white men" reflects wounded masculinity cowardly and unfairly accusing for things he knows she did not do. Since he cannot face white power, he has no other choice but to turn his fury on his wife. Mem is passively silent, "like a church," which is mistaken for guilt and moral permission. So, Brownfield goes on treating her "like a nigger and a whore," illustrating how racist language becomes part and parcel of domestic abuse.

Walker is adamant about the fact that this situation must be read within its historical context. In the afterword of the book, she made it clear that ethical tension lies at the heart of the novel:

I had to look at, and name, and speak up about violence among black people in the black community at the same time that all black people... were enduring massive psychological and physical violence from white supremacists in the southern states" (p. 342).

This statement confirms that the novel does not seek pretenses to excuse or isolates Black violence. On the contrary, it lays bare domestic terror as a tragic transformation of structural racial injustice into intimate devastation.

Ultimately, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* conveys the message that when oppression is relentless and rampant, it then unleashes on people around. Characters like Grange and Brownfield are visibly not able to overwhelm the racial and oppressive structures that imprison them. Therefore, domination is redirected inward, meaning within the family circle. The home which is supposed to offer tranquility, protection, affection and love, becomes the crucible where violence leaves indelible scars. Walker strongly condemns this violence without excusing or justifying it, which reveals how systems of domination annihilate not only lives, but also love itself.

### **SECTION III: RECKONING, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE LIMITS OF REDEMPTION**

In this last section, the decisive stance taken by Walker in the novel is explored. She questions the ethic and the moral that emerge from the brutal and cruel behaviors of Black men against their wives and children. After an in-depth analysis of how structural racial oppression is turned into domestic violence, Walker tackles a more complex question head-on: what are the potential consequences of violence without providing justification for them? She refuses to take moral decline and easy forgiveness as an answer to this fateful question. She emphasizes the necessity of reckoning, arguing that it is more than necessary to name one's own harm. She went even further contending that responsibility remains possible even under unrelenting systemic oppression.

When Grange stops explaining his actions whiningly and starts critically judging and analyzing them, that is when reckoning really starts. Grange is progressively awakening from a long and lethargic numbness which marks his enlightenment induced by painful recognition of guilt. In his philosophical discussion with his tender granddaughter Ruth, he declares: "*A man what'd do what I just did don't deserve to live. When you do something like that you give up your claim.*" (p. 339) In these lines, Grange is self-assessing himself and ends up offering a moral which is one has to own one's actions and take full responsibility. One should not seek sympathy or forgiveness but rather accept that suffering does not excuse one's actions. Walker explains that accepting the truth has nothing to do with self-pity, but it is rather means taking full responsibility for one's

moral choices. In this sense, her position resonates with Hannah Arendt's warning that "Where all are guilty, no one is" (Arendt, 2003, p. 147). when guilt is equated with circumstance, moral judgment fades.

Walker keeps on deepening her ethical reflection and stance through Grange's confrontation with Brownfield. In a heated conversation between father and son, where two opposite thoughts collide without reaching a compromise. Speaking directly to his son, Grange refuses to let history take all the blame:

"One day I had to look back on my life and see where I went wrong... I found out your ma'd be alive today if I hadn't just as good as shot her to death, same as you done your wife. We guilty, Brownfield, and neither one of us is going to move a step in the right direction until we admit it." (p. 290)

Here, Grange does not use euphemism to describe harm he caused and underwent. He infers that neglect and refusing to admit guilt can lead to murder as was his case. Margaret's death is largely attributable to him. He also points out that failure to righten one's wrong or actions can be as destructive as direct violence. More importantly, he maintains that progress cannot be attained without reckoning. This moment illustrates James Baldwin's assertion that "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" (1963, p. 95). In the same vein, Walker states that reckoning cannot forcibly guarantee redemption but it is crucial and decisive in setting ethical principle in motion.

For Walker, responsibility must prevail even under conditions of extreme racial violence. Grange's awakening has helped him understand this, that is why he warns against the danger of blaming everything on the oppressive racial system. Reckoning, once again is the fundamental step in taking full responsibility. In one of the conversations involving Grange himself, Brownfield, Ruth and Josie, Grange turns to Ruth and says:

..... But when he became a man himself, with his own opportunity to righten the wrong I done him by being good to his own children, he had a chance to become a real man, a daddy in his own right. That was the time he should of just forgot about what I done to him—and to his ma. But he messed up with his children, his wife and his home, and never yet blamed hisself. And never blaming hisself done made him weak. He no longer have to think beyond me and the white folks to get to the root of all his problems. (P. 287)

This passage sheds light on Walker's unambiguous position on responsibility. Grange supposes that Brownfield is adult and responsible enough, which means that he should have common sense to break the cycle of violence by tenderly caring for his own family. Unfortunately, Brownfield fails to own up his actions because of his past horrid suffering. He also fails reassessment, which lead him to constantly putting the blame on his father and the racial structure. For Walker, such stance erodes moral agency and impedes radical change.

Walker rejects moral nihilism, but still fully acknowledges structural injustice. She believes that if reckoning is about naming harm and responsibility, then redemption should appear under strict limits. In the novel, Grange is denied a redemptive religious closure. When he was about to die, he vainly attempts to pray: "*He opened his mouth wide in a determined attempt to pray... He could not pray, therefore he did not.*" (p. 340) This refusal is worth analyzing. Prayer means seeking forgiveness or absolution, but Walker deems it not enough. Redemption cannot be granted through faith or confession. Instead, it requires actions and profound change in one's behavior like Grange's care for Ruth. Grange final words to Ruth, "Oh, you poor thing, you poor thing" (p. 340), do not erase his past but they predict another's vulnerability meaning a huge danger is still hovering over Ruth's head.

Paul Ricoeur's (2004) claim that "Forgiveness does not erase the fault; it keeps it present" ( p. 478) echoes walker hostility to easy redemption. In the novel, memory cannot fade, but rather carries on because healing does not emerge from forgetting, but from moving forward. Redemption can only be possible if it is directed to the future, not back to the past.

Walker unflinchingly maintains that there is no absolution without accountability. She joins her voice to bell hooks contending that "Forgiveness without accountability is not healing" (2000, p. 207). Grange's transformation does not absolve his earlier violence; it simply prevents its repetition. Redemption, then, is limited to refusal, refusal to harm again. In the novel's final pages, Walker broadens this ethical stance into a philosophy of selfhood under oppression:

I believe in the soul. Furthermore, I believe it is prompt accountability for one's choices, a willing acceptance of responsibility for one's thoughts, behavior and actions, that makes it powerful. The white man's oppression of me will never excuse my oppression of you, whether you are man, woman, child, animal or tree, because the self

that I prize refuses to be owned by him. Or by anyone. (pp. 345–346)

Walker's ethical principle is centered with sharp precision in the above excerpt. She observes that one can believe in the soul, but soul is something abstract, which can be revived by accountability. She went on affirming healthy moral values emerge from accepting responsibility for one's choices rather than seek false pretenses under the cover of oppression when she says that white oppression can never justify harming others, she clearly draws a line between explanatory justification and excuse. The pursued selfhood must be defined by autonomy and moral agency at the expense of both domination and moral surrender. Toni Morrison's assertion, "You your best thing. You are" (1987, p. 322), strikingly captures a similar ethical aspiration foregrounding self-recognition after damage, not innocence restored.

In a nutshell, reckoning is about owning one's actions and taking full responsibility for them without putting forth excuses and pretenses. Extreme racial structural oppression cannot erode personal responsibility, for in any given condition, dire or not, one has to make a choice. This will determine the turn one's life is going to take later on. Redemption is not easily granted because it is fragile and limited. It should be determined more by accountability than by forgiveness. With regard to these analyzes, Walker portrays a more rational, honest neutral vision of moral, which can continue even after extreme violence.

## II. CONCLUSION

This study explores how Walker in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* analyzes the notion of the ethical relationship between racial oppression, domestic violence, and moral accountability. The core problem this study tackled is to analyze whether Alice Walker exposes Black male violence solely as a direct consequence of systemic racial oppression or as individual accountability even under conditions of extreme structural injustice. The paper utilizes close content reading to foregrounds that, in Walker's view, explanatory justifications of one's cruel actions cannot induce moral absolution. Instead, she advocates a more compelling ethical stance where oppression is inherently associated to agency, thus limiting the possibilities.

The findings of this study reveal that racial oppression in the Jim Crow South emerges as a form of structural violence that have severely impacted Black male subjectivity, and this has triggered atrocious acts of physical violence on their part. Grange and his son Brownfield have endured tragic ordeals such as economic exploitation taking on the form of sharecropping, dehumanization, and institutionalized dependency, which have caused emotional distress, humiliation, and psychic erosion. These conditions contribute to understand why violence is redirected inward, transforming the Black household into a crucible of domestic terror. However, Walker is adamant that structural oppression cannot dissolve moral responsibility whatsoever. She maintains that, through Grange's late reckoning and Brownfield inability to take responsibility, ethical responsibility should prevail even within oppressive system. The textual evidence analyzed across the three sections supports this claim consistently, particularly in Walker's language of guilt, refusal of excuse, and rejection of easy forgiveness.

One of the major contributions of this article lies in its ethical analysis of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. While previous research has intensely emphasized gender violence, Black womanhood, and socio-economic critique, this study has the particularity of centering Walker's moral stance linking victimization, violence, and accountability. By calling on Structural Violence Theory alongside concepts of racialized subjectivity and Black feminist ethics, the article lays bare how Walker links historical explanation and ethical judgment without collapsing one into the other. In doing so, the novel can be considered a social indictment of Jim Crow as well as a mediation on responsibility, reckoning and the limits of redemption. This analysis claims to position itself within the scholarly debates in African American Literary studies about agency, violence, and morality under oppression.

Nonetheless, this study is marked by some limitations. First, it focuses only on two characters which are Grange and Brownfield, which can lead to marginalizing other narrative perspectives. Second, the study relies on a close reading of one single corpus which could be enriched with Walker's later works or with other African American novels addressing similar ethical issues.

*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* appears as a novel that rejects both despair and forgiveness. By insisting that reckoning is essential, responsibility inescapable, and redemption limited, Walker offers a profound, strict and compelling moral vision. The novel urges readers not only to grasp violence, but also to question the unsettling ethical vision at play subsequent to violence.

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