

# UNDOING THE BODY: REWRITING THE SELF IN ALICE WALKER'S *MERIDIAN*

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## Abstract

A fictional autobiography, Alice Walker's *Meridian* is a narrative in the feminine. It shows the courage and strength of African- American women into the struggle for Blacks' Civil Rights. This paper highlights women's consciousness through the reconstruction of their agency; a radical process in opposition with traditional and stereotypical representations of womanhood in fiction. Going against stereotypes that objectified the female body, Walker's *Meridian* redefines the female self and posits it as a locus of agency.

**Key Words:** *Meridian*, consciousness, female body, resistance, agency.

## Résumé

*Meridian*, le roman d'Alice Walker, est un récit autobiographique centré sur les personnages féminins noirs. C'est un récit qui dépeint le courage et la force de ses personnages féminins dans la lutte pour les Droits Civiques. La présente étude met en lumière leur prise de conscience comme point de départ de la reconstruction de l'agentivité féminine ; un processus de résistance en opposition avec les représentations traditionnelles et stéréotypées de la femme dans la fiction. En effet, ils s'engagent dans un processus de résistance pour bouleverser toutes les idéologies et stéréotypes qui font du corps féminin un objet. Le corps féminin est l'expression de l'agentivité et de l'identité féminine pour une réécriture du soi.

**Mots clés :** *Meridian*, prise de conscience, corps féminin, résistance, agentivité

## Introduction

Walker's *Meridian* dramatizes the Civil Right Movements. In addition, the novel places much emphasis on women's contribution to the Civil Right Movements that gives rise to debate because of their gender. The fact of the matter is that, they are expected to keep silent as women and, stoically accept their role in the home, not outside in the streets. And, pregnancy serves as a means of keeping them away from any political arenas.

Especially, the issue of pregnancy finds expression in Walker's novel through the female figure such as Meridian Hill, one of the female militants of the Civil Right struggles, whose own experience serves as a catalyst for women's enforced motherhood and the consciousness she raises about abortion as catalyst in the liberation of the female body. The discussion about Meridian Hill's pregnancy and abortion as it is painted by Walker in *Meridian* (A. Walker, 1976) is indeed seen as a trope of the female subject's undoing her body in order to reclaim her selfhood.

In A. Walker's *Meridian*, "The Happy Mother" (A. Walker, 1976, pp 63, 67), "True Ladyhood" (A. Walker, p.28), "bitch" (A. Walker, p.130) are what P.H. Collins calls "controlling images" or else, "negative images" (P.H. Collins, 2000, p.69; B. Hooks, 1982, p.55) in her analysis of "existing symbols" that function to control, objectify or else to materialize Black womanhood. In A. Walker's novel, these controlling images find expression through the control of the body of the female protagonist of Meridian Hill. The image of "The Happy Mother", for instance, connotes the maternal role Meridian Hill is expected to fulfill.

In Walker's novelistic world, the politics of "The Happy Mother" and "True Ladyhood" highlight the regulation of women's bodies. For J. Butler "regulation" is defined, "the institutionalization of the process by which persons are made regular ... those concrete laws, rules, and policies that constitute the legal instruments through which persons are made regular" (J. Butler, 2004, p.40).

Therefore, Walker depicts Meridian's body which, is regulated in a way to meet all the obligations required by the True Ladyhood which designs White women as the genuine role models of ladyhood and also, by 'The Happy Mother' that emphasizes women's true value through childbearing. By choosing not to subjugate her body to the code of biological reproduction and to remain childless, Walker's protagonist therefore rewrites her selfhood. However, how are 'The Happy Mother' and 'True Ladyhood' enacted in Walker's *Meridian*? How do they define "doing" of the female body? How are they resisted?

In the same perspective, dealing with the concept of “doing”, we examine how the society has posited the female body as a simple object for reproduction. We shall ground this study on J. Butler’s concept of “undoing” that bears *Undoing Gender*, published in 2004. Butler’s book indeed highlights gender which is produced as result of prevailed social and cultural norms and, the attempt to challenge or subvert these norms. Furthermore, Butler does not lose sight on the issues of ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ in the performance and the subversion of gender.

Through J. Butler’s “undoing”, Walker elaborates the project of deconstructing all the norms that control the woman’s body. For instance, the depiction of childbearing as a disastrous occurrence to the woman’s body and the practices of abortion and sterilization to free women’s bodies are crucial in the novelist’s project of reversing the control over the woman’s body.

Thus, in elaborating the process of undoing the body and rewriting the self in A. Walker’s *Meridian*, the focus is on the regulation or fixity of the woman’s body as “a doing”, that is to say all the rules that define the woman’s body according to those traditional views: ‘The Happy Mother’, ‘True Ladyhood’ and ‘bitch.’ Then, the next axis of our concern is the way the novelist sheds light on *Meridian*’s subversion of ‘The Happy Mother.’ Finally, the appraisal of the woman’s body is put in the fore: the cross –gendering and heroic representation of the female agent.

### **1. The Female Body Fixed**

In her book entitled *The Female Body and The Law*, Z. R. Eisenstein (1988, p.2) writes: “the female body is engendered with difference.” This “difference”, it must be said, evidences the woman’s body which is subjected to regulation as discussed in Walker’s novel. To quote from J. Butler, women’s “bodies are [controlled as *emphasis mine*] simple objects” (J. Butler, 1993, p.ix). Thus, to the theorist, the female body fixed is defined solely in its function of producing pleasure and of, forming a human being as product of sexual intercourses with the man.

By the same token, the woman’s body is most often explicitly assumed to be fixed when “binaries”, to quote from P.H. Collins, are involved. P.H. Collins (2000, p. 70) argues that the binaries male/female, mind/body are “inherently opposed” and, defined as “fundamentally different entities related only through their definition as opposites” (P.H. Collins, p.70). This passage clearly conveys that the representation of the body in question in the binary is about

the female<sup>1</sup>. Looking at the binary and the politics of difference set in place, the female body is targeted to be used as an object. This brings light to L. Irigaray's stance according to which the woman is "this sex which is not one"<sup>2</sup> (L.Irigaray, 1985).

The question of the female as the body dominates Walker's narrative. The writer thinks that patriarchy undervalues the female body and consequently is viewed as the channel for reproduction. Walker's *Meridian* highlights the female body that is posited as the medium for reproduction. Mrs Gertrude Hill, who plays the role of Meridian's mother, speaks on behalf of women believing that they must take full responsibility in their primary role, that is, in maternity. For example, talking to Meridian, she makes her understand that the attribute of "The Happy Mother" in the eyes of the community encompasses having children and being devoted to their education: "well, it can't be moral, that I know. It can't be right to give away your own child...if the good Lord gives you a child he means for you to take care of it" (A. Walker, 1976, p.83).

As if Mrs Hill is conscious of her own duty as a mother, she poses as someone who leads the fight for the preservation of procreation and childrearing in the conscience of Meridian Hill and also in that of other young ladies. Advocating procreation and childrearing, she plays the same part which patriarchal religion plays, that of maintaining women in their maternal obligations. While Meridian views motherhood as something that robs her of the unique chance of being schooled in Saxon College, one of the Whites' institution in charge of young ladies' education, Mrs Hill replies that nothing can replace being a mother. She asks her "do you know how many women have thought that and had to have God make a way? You surprised me...I always thought you were a good girl. And all the time, you were fast" (A. Walker, 1976, p. 84).

For Mrs Gertrude Hill, motherhood is "the sacred calling" (A. Rich, 1986). A. Rich coins "the sacred calling", that is, "woman's highest and holiest mission" (A. Rich, p.42). As for Mrs Hill, maternal abilities cannot be achieved if God's contribution is ignored. This supports her assumption of God as a person who endows women with the power of conceiving the baby in their womb and feeding it with their breasts.

In addition to "The Happy Mother", the woman's body in Walker's novel is regulated via the institution of "True Ladyhood." The "True Ladyhood", it must be said, is institutionalized in order to prepare young ladies into what H. V. Carby (1987, p.6) calls "the dominant domestic ideologies and...conventions of womanhood." In reality, the dominant

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<sup>1</sup> The female is culturally endowed with feminine qualities, having thoughts and feelings that make easy expression of her feminine nature.

<sup>2</sup> L. Irigaray, "This Sex which is Not One."

domestic ideologies and the conventions of womanhood demand that the young women meet the requirements in order to become the model of housewives, spouses and mothers. As the narrator reveals, the Saxon College institutes the politics of true ladyhood to teach the young ladies how to “make French food, English tea and German music” (A. Walker, 1976, p. 28).

The domestic chores consist in the education of Saxon College ladies, (B. Friedan 1963, p.11) is keen on acknowledging that “[women] role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers.” In this sense, Friedan refers to home services to uncover the main purpose concerning the education of Saxon’s ladies. Undoubtedly, the feminist critic gives voice to the standpoint of H. V. Carby (1987, p.26) who writes that, “within the discourse of the cult of true womanhood, wifehood and motherhood were glorified as the purpose of a woman’s being ; the home was the sphere of all a woman’s actions.” Moreover, as G. Lerner (1993, p.119) notes, “wifehood and motherhood were the experiences most females had in common with other females.” The idea of commonality around the experiences of wifehood and motherhood define the role, the duty and the identity of each woman.

The concept of “true womanhood” is bound to the woman’s duties as a wife and mother reflected in the promotion of “the feminine mystique”. The concept of “the feminine mystique” and how it encourages women to be “truly feminine” also echoes the feminist view mentioned by B. Friedan (1963, p.11) that runs as follows: “[women] were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents”. In Walker’s *Meridian*, the feminine mystique is carried out through the following names: “Obedient Daughter”, “Devoted Wife”, “Adoring Mother” (A. Walker, 1976, p.5).

In reality, these names represent Marilene O’Shay in her various occupations as well as the personality she is expected to incarnate. Again, the fourth name “Gone Wrong” (A. Walker, 1976, p. 5) indicates the tragedy involved when O’Shay challenges the institutions of “true womanhood” and “feminine mystique.” As result, the quotation "over the fourth a vertical line of progressively flickering light bulbs moved continually downward like a perpetually cascading tear” (A.Walker, 1976, p. 5) is germane in the understanding of O’Shay status as a victimized subject and casts light on the process of women’s victimization by the patriarchal standard of their community.

In another way forward, the image of the “true” lady that emerges from the magazines Sepia, Tan, True Confessions, Real Romances and Jet depicted in Walker’s fiction is that of the “mindless body, a sex creature, something to hang false hair and nails on” (A. Walker, 1976, P. 65). “The Dead of Women”, another female character who also plays the role of the house mother, exemplifies proper behavior of the “true” lady: “whose own hair was long, processed

and lavender” (A. Walker, 1976, p. 28). Lynn Pifer (1992, pp. 77, 88) writes that the ideology of the “true” lady is an important step in order “to follow a notion of proper behavior” as it is taught by the ideology of the Saxon College.

Initially, the “True” lady is expected to follow what H. V. Carby (1987, p. 26) coins as “qualities” which consist in being “timid, imitative, bright enough but never daring” (A. Walker, 1976, p.28). These qualities are displayed through the hanging of false hair and nails, wearing long hair and lavender. From this, it is clear that Walker goes along with B. Hooks (2015, p.12) who writes that “ Black girls continue to be judged by sociological and political standards that are first and foremost informed by perceptions of white girls...” In other words, from the standards that define white ladyhood, therefore “it was assumed that Saxon young [black] ladies were, by definition, virgins. They were treated always as if they were thirteen years old” (A. Walker, 1976, p.90).

In addition to “True ladyhood”, the “bitch” (A. Walker, 1976, p. 130) in A. Walker’s fictional world helps justify the objectification and the materiality of the female body. Indeed, the myth of the “bitch” is constructed to devaluate the woman’s sexuality. For instance, in the chapter “English Walnuts” of the novel, A. Walker (1976, p. 57) makes Eddie voice to Meridian: “And tonight, please, open your legs all the way... I have to fight to get your legs open; you know that as well as I do. They’re like somebody starched them shut.” By reminding Meridian to service his sexual need while at the same moment denying her own pleasure, what Eddie says plays into the reconfirmation of his phallus. J. Butler’s interpretation of the “phallus” is summarized as follows, “... the desire of the Other” (1990, p. 56). Undoubtedly, the phallus depicted by Walker in her novel aims at bringing to the fore a male character who seek to reconfirm male subjectivity through his genitals.

Undoubtedly, the novelist holds the politics of phallus to be responsible of the image of the “bitch” that makes Meridian’s body to service the sexual needs of Eddie, Truman Held, George Dexter and “The Assistant”. However, Meridian challenges the controlling images of “The Happy Mother”, “True Ladyhood” and “bitch”. By so doing, she is not bound for womanhood. Rather, she acts in a way to avoid pregnancy in order to have control over her body.

## **2. Resisting the Pregnant Body**

In *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural*, B. Hooks asks the following question: “How do we create an oppositional worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables

creative, expansive self –actualization?” (1990, p.15). The answer to this opposition is resistance. The opposition and resistance in Walker’s *Meridian* is well perceived in Meridian Hill’s attitude towards the standard of “The Happy Mother.” The opposition and resistance expressed by Meridian is further developed in Walker’s fiction with a particular focus on the notion “deviate” (A. Walker, 1976, p.28) The term “deviate” echoes Meridian’s ambivalent attitude towards sex and also, the fact of becoming mother.

Meridian’s early initiation to sex is seen as a deviation. As she grows up, she is naturally attracted to sex like any adolescent of her age. Gertrude Hill, her mother, and all the other kin do everything to maintain her on the right track. Gertrude Hill, in particular, guesses that all her teachings are enough to preserve Meridian from falling in sexual immorality. She monitors her everyday movements and escapade but, does not succeed keeping her off sexual deviation. When Meridian tries sex with a boy Edward nicknamed Eddie, to tell her she must not lay with him, Gertrude only warns: “be sweet” (A. Walker, 1976, p.53). Unfortunately, unlike Gertrude, Meridian thinks that sex at her age is worth “enjoying” (A. Walker, 1976, p.53) a great deal. So, she “had had sex as often as her lover wanted it, sometimes every single night” (A. Walker, 1976, p. 53).

Meridian finally becomes pregnant as result of sexual intercourses with Eddie. The narrator interprets Meridian’s feeling at the discovery of the pregnancy along with this passage: “her pregnancy came as a total shock” (A. Walker, 1976, p. 53). From the point of view of the narrator, even when Meridian finds pleasure in having sexual intercourses with a man, she is not prepared to become a mother. In her innermost, she has not chosen to bear a child, to be mother.

While stoically undergoing all the modification that occurs in her body due to the pregnancy, Meridian is unhappy of having a child. In the following extract, Walker portrays Meridian who experiences solitude and guiltiness of not making the necessary arrangements to avoid what B. Hooks (2000, p.25) denotes “unwanted pregnancy:

And through it all, she [Meridian] sat in the small house not a mile from the school and never thought about the baby at all –unless her mother-in law called and mentioned it, or something to do with it. She knew she did not want it. But even this was blurred. How could she not want something she was not even sure she was having? Yet she was having it, of course. She grew and grew and grew, as pregnant women will. Her skin, always smooth as velvet, became blotchy, her features blunted; her face looked bloated, tight (A. Walker, 1976, p.56)

Considering Meridian’s sentiment in the above excerpt, there is no doubt that she is less interested in pregnancy. Pregnancy indeed is introduced in the aforementioned passage as a

threat to Meridian's body: "she grew and grew and grew...her skin, always smooth as velvet, became blotchy, her features blunted; her face looked bloated, tight."

In Walker's fictional world, pregnancy is a serious threat to the body of Nelda Henderson's mother. She is forced to endure repeated pregnancy without any care, without any health assistance. Consequently, she "has lost her hair, bit by bit, during each pregnancy." (A. Walker, 1976, p. 85). Similarly, pregnancy affecting the body of Nelda's mother is one major incident observed by the author who states: "she was a large... woman with massive breasts" (A. Walker, 1976, p. 85). The experience of Nelda's mother is just an indication that pregnancy exposes the woman's body to deformation. The deformation of her body is made known through Walker's depiction of the negative side effects of pregnancy. For instance, her feature is distorted, body contorted into strange and bizarre posture that makes her appear monstrous. The loss of hair and the "massive breasts" are important factors of monstrosity. Undoubtedly, the scarcity of hair on her head and the huge size of breasts as result of pregnancy certainly make her unattractive.

The monstrosity of the body can also be used to explain the fact that Nelda's mother does not display any norm of beauty. Rather, her physical traits expose her to the traditional and stereotypical assumptions over Black women. Needless to say, pregnancy is a serious obstacle to her body. Through the deformed grotesque body of the mother of Nelda Henderson caused by many childbearings, it can be admitted that Walker draws out motherhood as an "institution" (A. Rich, 1986), imposed in its many variations on all women. Motherhood is also seen as the source of Nelda Henderson's failure in the society. Going to school would have helped her playing important roles in her community. Unfortunately, she gets pregnant and has a baby at age fourteen and, never finishes high school.

Furthermore, Walker explores Meridian's inner feelings as she seeks the suitable means to free her body from what Z. S. Eisenstein (1988, p.1) points out as "the pregnant body", that is, the woman's body having the capacity of forming a human being. As the narrative goes: "she[Meridian] was disgusted with the fecundity of her body that got pregnant on less screwing than anybody's she had ever heard of. It seemed doubly unfair that after all her sexual 'experience' and after one baby and one abortion she had not once been completely fulfilled by sex" (A. Walker, 1976, p.112). It is evident that the disgust Meridian expresses for her pregnant body accelerates her desire of aborting her unborn baby. In *Feminism Is For Everybody: Passionate Politics*, B. Hooks (2000, p. 27) articulates the politics of abortion against traditional beliefs that support women's procreation as she writes "[abortion] directly challenged the notion that a woman's reason for existence was to bear children."

Through abortion, Meridian chooses “autonomy”, that means “choosing one’s own body ...navigating among norms that are laid out in advance and prior to one’s choice...” (J. Butler, 2004, p.7). Abortion in A. Walker’s depiction of Meridian’s construction of selfhood echoes the idea developed by E. Sizoo (2003, p. 27) that is “return to the body.” Also, E. Sizoo asserts that the woman must “find a new way to live her body as a woman” (2003, p. 28).

While the practice of abortion is relevant for the woman to take control over her body, Walker deals with sterilization in her novel as another preventive means against pregnancy. For instance, Meridian decides to undergo the pain of the operation. She decides to get rid of the perfectly normative woman’s status, and therefore take control of her body: “later, as the doctor tore into her body without giving her anesthesia ...she saw stars because of the pain” (A.Walker, 1976, p.112). The resistance to the pain left on her body is preliminary to Meridian’s construction of agency, an outstanding clue for her struggle towards cross –gendering and heroic representation.

### **3. In a Different Body: Cross-gendering and Heroic Representation Construction of Female Agency**

“In a Different body” discussed in A. Walker’s *Meridian* illustrates Meridian’s challenging sexist thinking about the woman’s body. Taking back her body is an important moment of freeing herself from the traditional and stereotypical roles: The Happy Mother, True Ladyhood, and bitch. Aside from having a control over her own body, Meridian’s commitment in the struggles for Blacks’ Civil Rights is an important phase in the process of emerging “in a different body.” Moreover, Walker’s fiction addresses cross –gendering. The cross –gendering representation in the narrative performance stages Black female heroism, a narrative in which Meridian is portrayed as an active agent capable of effecting change between Blacks and Whites in the segregated town of Chicokema. The heroic representation of Meridian is conjoined with empowering young male characters. Together, they engage in the struggles for Blacks’ Civil Rights and also, resist the politics of racial domination as well.

In her essay on “The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was it?”, A. Walker (1983, p. 121) argues that her adherence to Civil Rights Movement is central in her understanding of Blacks’ condition: “if knowledge of my condition is all the freedom I get from a freedom movement, it is better than unawareness, forgottenness, and hopelessness, the existence that is like the existence of a beast.” In the context of the African –American males and females represented by Walker in her novel, the Civil Rights Movement operates to inculcate a sense of

awareness, knowledge and freedom. Indeed, Meridian is the one who enacts the awakening among the guano plant workers' children, incapable of seeing the circus wagon blocked by the "army tank" (A. Walker, 1976, p. 4). The army tank is depicted by Walker as the structure of racial hegemony which is also, the symbolic boundary that constitutes the segregation between the Whites and the Blacks.

The awareness of the "army tank" generates reactions among the children who, "were on the opposite side of the square from the circus wagon, the army tank partially blocking their view of it. They were dressed in black and yellow school uniforms and surrounded somebody or something like so many bees. Talking and gesticulating all at once, they raised a busy, humming sound" (A. Walker, 1976, p. 6). Any rage against Whites is supposed to always remain repressed, and as B. Hooks puts it, the sound of Blacks' rage must be "contained in the realm of the unspeakable," (B. Hooks, 1990) a sort of psychic prison. But, in the movement from object to subject, the turning point of the young scholars' resistance against white annihilating power is their coming back to "talking and gesticulating" which, are moments of shattering or releasing from that psychic prison.

When the young men are forbidden the visit to the mummified woman Marilene O'Shay, yet, Meridian Hill plays a very important heroic role. She is the one who mediates the actions of these young men in the direction of the circus wagon and the tank. The position she occupies goes along with what B. Robnett (1997, p. 19) pinpoints "bridge leaders." B. Robnett (1997, p. 19) states in the following:

African –American women as bridge leaders in the civil rights movement...who utilized frame bridging, amplification, extension and transformation to foster ties between the social movement and the community ; and between prefigurative strategies aimed at individual change, identity and consciousness and political strategies aimed at organizational tactics designed to challenge existing relationships with the state and other societal institutions.

Meridian's role as a bridge leader is highlighted through her "standing with the children, directly opposite both the circus wagon and the tank" (A. Walker, 1976, p. 7). Furthermore, the activities of bridge leaders in the Civil Right Movements as "organizers" and "mobilizers" (B. Robnett, 1997, p.20) are put into evidence.

As for Meridian, the activity she is engaged in as a bridge leader is well described by A. Walker (1976, p.7): "she started to round up every one of the po' kids she could get her hands on." By doing so, her purpose is "to prepare the next generation of young males by teaching them a virtue that she is exceptionally fitted to inculcate and embody exactly because she is more a transcending witness to history than a participatory agent shaping its course directly" (M. Ross, 2006, p.6). Another instance of Meridian's performance of bridge

leadership is shown in the following excerpt: “Meridian waited for [the children] to get themselves nicely arranged. When the two were in the tank and swinging its muzzle in her direction, and the others were making a line across the front of the wagon, she raised her hand once and marched off the curb. The children fell into line behind her, their heads held high and their feet scraping the pavement” (A. Walker, 1976, p. 7). In carrying this mission of being at the head of the young demonstrators, Meridian Hill performs bridge leadership, this heroic act that consists in raising young militants into future leadership, preparing them and laying the ground for them to break through the segregation law in the small southern town of Chicokema.

The ultimate act of bridge leadership, however, is the exposure of Meridian Hill’s body to the violence of the military men and their tank. As A. Walker (1976, p. 8) writes:

Meridian did not look to the right or to the left. She passed the people watching her as if she didn’t know it was on her account they were there. As she approached the tank the blast of its engine starting sent a cloud of pigeons fluttering, with the sound of rapid, distant shelling, through the air, and the muzzle of the tank swung tantalizing side to side –as if to tease her – before it settled directly toward her chest. As she drew nearer the tank, it seemed to grow larger and whiter than ever and she seemed smaller and blacker than ever. And then, when she reached the tank she stepped lightly, deliberately, right in front of it, rapped smartly on its carapace –as if knocking on a door –then raised her arm again. The children pressed onward, through the ranks of the arrayed riflemen and up to the circus car door. The silence, as Meridian kicked open the door, exploded in a mass exhalation of breaths, and the men who were in the tank crawled sheepishly out again to stare.

As long as Meridian marches at the head of the young demonstrators, she is absolutely insensitive to the eyes of the people. What matters the most for her is that her young protégé cross the tank in order to reach the circus wagon. Notwithstanding the danger, she is ready to break with the long period of subjection imposed on Blacks. Thus, the novel produces in Meridian an image of the Black woman in her role of an agent capable of enacting awareness and resistance in the black community against the politics of White segregation. In addition to her leading of the young demonstrators she is a bridge leader, a mediator who passes on the heroic tradition from one generation to another.

## **Conclusion**

American society and segregation have constructed the woman’s body as a mere instrument, an object for domestic service, sexuality and procreation. A. Walker has described in her work of fiction in which the woman’s body is fixed according to the stereotypical images of The Happy Mother, True Ladyhood and bitch. These images operate with reference to the normative woman’s status and therefore to control women’s bodies.

Crucial to this argument is J. Butler's concept of "undoing", a concept that is concerned with the reversal of these controlling images such as: The Happy Mother, True Ladyhood and bitch and more specifically, women's conquest of their own bodies. This is illustrated in Walker's narration of the character of Meridian Hill who opts for abortion and sterilization to free her body from unwanted pregnancies. Finally, the study has revealed that the woman's body can objectively be conceived as a tool for racial reforms. In the context of Walker's representation of Black female heroism and agency, the woman's body operates as a process of cross-gendering that is obviously represented in the struggle for equality between African – American males and females.

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