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ALICE WALKER'IN ESERLERİNDE KİMLİK ARAYIŞI VE
TRAVMA YANSIMALARI

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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DANIŞMAN

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**THE REFLECTION OF TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN ALICE
WALKER'S WORKS**

M.A THESIS

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Shwana Qadir Perot

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**ALICE WALKER'IN ÇALIŞMALARINDA TRAVMA VE KİMLİK
YANSIMALARI**

ÖZET

Afro-Amerikan yazarların edebi eserleri, topluluklarının mutsuzluğunu yansıtır. Alice Walker, Siyah topluluğun devam etmekte olan problemlerini gösterme gayreti içinde olan, üretken siyah çağdaş yazarlardan birisidir. Edebi eserleri, travma ve kimlik arayışı da dahil olmak üzere Siyah topluluğun bitmeyen sorunları ile doludur. Alice Walker'ın *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* ve *The Color Purple* adlı eserleri travmatize olmuş iki siyah ailenin acılarını anlatmaktadır. Yaşamları şiddet, baskı ve hayal kırıklığı ile doludur. Hikâyelerde, Walker, karakterlerin yaşamındaki bu sefaleti karakterler üzerinden çözmeye çalışmaktadır. Walker karakterlerin ruh dünyalarına girer ve günlük yaşamlarının travmatik deneyimini anlatmaktadır. Romanlarında Amerikan sosyopolitik yapısının sertliğinden ötürü erkek karakterler güçsüz ve yetersiz gösterilmektedir. Kendilerine uygulanan çeşitli baskılarla başa çıkamayan çocuklar ve kadınlar öfke ve hüsrانlarını yaşarlar. Walker ırk ve cinsiyetin bu baskıların ardındaki iki itici güç olduğu tespitinde bulunur. Bir bireyin ırkının ve cinsiyetinin, çeşitli travmalar yaşama konusunda nasıl bir katalizör olarak hareket edebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, bu travmaların ruh ve karakterlerin kimlik oluşumunu nasıl etkilediğini göstermektedir. Bu tez, Alice Walker'ın bahsettiği romanlarda travma ve kimlik arayışının yansımalarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Her romanda travma kaynağını ve travma sonrası karakterlerin yaşamlarını ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır.

Dahası, travmanın karakterlerin kimlik oluşumunu ve metamorfoz yolculuklarını nasıl etkilediğini açıklıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kara edebiyat, Alice Walker, baskı, metamorfoz, travma, kimlik.

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**THE REFLECTION OF TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN ALICE
WALKER'S WORKS**

ABSTRACT

The literary works of Afro-American writers reflect the miseries of their community. Alice Walker, as a black writer, is preoccupied with demonstrating the ongoing predicaments of her community. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker articulates the agony of two traumatized black families in the south of the United States. The characters go through a plethora of abuses and oppressions. The writer reveals how racial oppression and violence puncture the lives of the characters and distort their identities. In the novels, the male characters are depicted as victims and victimizers. They are victims of racial oppression of the white hegemony and victimizers of their women and children. Unable to cope with their oppression, the characters take their rage and frustration on their families. Thus, women and children become victims of black men's powerlessness and anguish. Walker outlines race and gender as two driving forces behind these repressions. She exposes how an individual's race and gender can act as a catalyst for experiencing a diverse range of traumas. Besides, she displays how trauma affects the psyche and identity formation of the characters. This thesis seeks to explore the reflection of trauma and identity in Alice Walker's afore-mentioned novels. It endeavors to reveal the source of the trauma in each novel and its aftermath on the characters' psyche and identity. Moreover, it elucidates the characters' healing process and their metamorphosis journey towards self-actualization.

Keywords: Black literature, Alice Walker, Oppression, Metamorphosis, Trauma, and Identity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	Descriptions
PTSD	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
PTSS	Posttraumatic Slave Syndrome
AAVE	African American Vernacular Language



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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This section acquaints the reader with some brief information about African American literature. Firstly, it starts with a synopsis of Black literature. Then, it gives an overview of slave narratives as the first literary oeuvre of Black literature. Consecutively, the study sheds light upon the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement as two significant movements in Black literature.

Moreover, this chapter sheds light upon the notions of trauma and identity as theoretical frameworks of the study. The chapter concludes by presenting the biography of Alice Walker. It mentions her major works and elucidates her contributions to Black literature.

1.1. African American Literature

African American literature is the body of literature produced by black writers. It reflects the hardships of the black community in the south. It emerged in response to the disfranchisement of the black community in the south of the United States (Warren, 2010: 739). Moreover, Melvin Burke Donalson in *An Anthology of African American Literature* (1996) claims that Black literature includes literary texts by writers “who share both a black African heritage and a unique American experience that defines and celebrates black history and culture” (1996: xiii).

In addition, Gene Andrew Jarrett states; “people tend to call literary texts African American or black whenever they feature African American main characters alongside certain historical themes, cultural geographies, political discourses or perspectives defined by race” (2007: 1). According to Jarrett, texts are Afro-Americans when they depict black characters, and include cultural and political motifs defined by race. Besides, he argues; “black literary texts are deemed authentic when their authors identify themselves or are identified by others as black” (Jarrett, 2007: 1).

On the other hand, there is an ongoing argument over whether the works of white writers, which reflect the dilemmas of the black community, should be considered as black literature. In this regard, Bess Montgomery, who is a professor in Afro-American literature, postulates that the white writers write from a white-sensibility, and they “lack the experience needed to write about black characters” (qtd. Greve, 2011: 4). Conversely, Vinyard claims that it is possible to account the works of non-white writers as part of black literature if they depict the dilemmas of black society (2007: 5).

It is worth noting that over time, scholars and critics have given different names to African literature. Some scholars call it Negro literature, Black literature, Colored literature, or Afro-American literature. On one hand, these diverse names reflect the harsh life and the adversities of black people. On the other hand, these names unearth the hybrid identity of African Americans, as they endured a plethora of hardships.

Overall, the black literature is the body of literature that reflects the history, struggle, and culture of black community. Its core themes, on one hand, are about the hardships and predicaments of the black people such as slavery, racism, oppression, and so forth. On the other hand, it also reflects heroic struggles of the black community against their long-lasting predicaments, and their metamorphosis journey.

1.1.1. Slave Narratives

The late 18th century marked the beginning of African American literature. Slave narratives are the first forms of expression in black literature (Dixon, 1987:11). During the 18th century, the books of Black writers came to publication. In addition to written literature, oral tradition had its contribution to the birth of black literature; it included sermons, storytelling, blues, music, and spiritual (Kaniselvi, 2016: 93). When African slaves came to America, they had their heritage, history, and tradition. Through oral tradition, the slaves kept their culture and heritage alive. Thus, oral tradition was of great importance to black literature, because it reflected the predicaments of black people. Eventually, it contributed to the birth of African American written literature.

In the beginning, the white people doubted about the educational capabilities of the slaves. They assumed that the slaves could not read and write or produce literary works (Schur, 2018: 3). Nonetheless, the slaves wrote about the agony of their slavery period, and literature became a significant channel for them as it depicted their miseries. Through literature, black writers raised global consciousness about their disastrous experience of slavery and racism. They called for equality and justice for black community. Moreover, they took part in the world forums and threw light upon the problems of black people. As a result, writing became an enormous part of cultural revisionism. It became a significant channel of expression for the black community (Abraham & Misrahi-Bara 2015: v). Overall, literature became an effective and powerful outlet for the African Americans.

Consequently, slave narrative, as a genre of writing, reflects the social, political, and economic conditions of the slaves during their slavery or fugitive period. During the time, the slave-owners considered their slaves as materials or properties; they deprived them of their basic rights. These slave narratives are “written by former, sometimes fugitive slaves, present individual and group history as well as arguments about slavery itself” (Dixon, 1987: 11). It is worth mentioning that with the birth of slave narratives the voice of the slaves reached the world. As Pumla D. Gqola asserts; “we place the slave at the center of modernity and produce our histories and philosophies from that vantage point, relocating the figure of slave from silent victim to eloquent critic” (2012: 56).

The birth of slave narratives marked a crucial watershed in the history of black literature. For the abolitionists, these slave narratives were significant tools; they used them as evidence and encouragement for eradicating the slavery system. Furthermore, for the slaves, these narratives were crucial as well; through these narratives, they could express their miseries to the world. Overall, the slave narratives were an enormous step that contributed to putting an end to the slave trade, colonial slavery, and slavery in the United States (Lahure, 2013: 10).

Olaudah Equiano is regarded as the founder of slave narratives. His work of autobiography profoundly contributed to this genre of writing. In this regard, Du Bois identifies Equiano's autobiographical masterpiece as the birth of this genre (2017: 14). In his autobiography, Equiano portrays the woes of slaves, and it is partially based on his personal life. Other eminent slave narratives include the works of Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, James Albert and Harriet Jacobs, to mention just a few. The works of these prolific figures became a pillar of African American literature. These works were also motivational for other Africans as they inspired them to write down their awful stories and voice their concerns.

As pointed out above, these slave narratives were mainly autobiographies. The attention was on the slave or writer's journey towards freedom. The slave epitomized his terrible experience of slavery and unearthed his journey toward freedom. Ultimately, slave narratives offered readers; "unique and valuable information about slavery as it was experienced by the slaves" (Foster, 1979: xx).

A vivid example of the slave narratives is Frederick Douglass's famous narrative entitled *the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by himself*. In his narrative, Douglass narrates his appalling life in the slavery era as follows:

I was broken, in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute. (Douglass, 2009: 70)

In this quotation, Douglass conjures an image of a man made into a slave. He demonstrates how his masters tortured and abused him. In the slavery era, the slave-owners considered their slaves as properties or materials. Therefore, they abandoned them of their basic rights. Douglass also points out how slavery affected his body, soul, and spirit. It left an indelible scar in his mind and spirit.

Overall, these slave narratives offered profound details about the abysmal life of former slaves. They provide the reader with a real sight of the slavery system. These

narratives are important sources of information for black literature and history. In addition to epitomizing the miserable facts about slavery, these narratives depicted the successful journey of the slaves towards freedom and emancipation.

1.1.2. The Harlem Renaissance

After centuries of slavery and denigration, African Americans needed to make changes; cultural, artistic, and intellectual changes. The Harlem Renaissance encompasses all these changes. It is a literary, artistic and intellectual movement, which began in Harlem, New York around the 1920s. Prior to the Renaissance, African Americans lived in the rural South. Due to the unbearable economic, social, political and educational backdrops, they migrated to the urban North. Consequently, these conditions initiated the birth of the movement that was originally named The New Negro Movement (Hutchinson, 1995: 6). Yolanda Williams defines the Harlem Renaissance as follows:

The Harlem Renaissance---also known as the Negro Movement-- was a cultural phenomenon that arose from specific historical and political events culminating in the self-definition and further development of African American through literature, music, and theater. The Harlem Renaissance was not limited to Harlem, New York, but much of the demonstrable outgrowth from the movement found there. (2011: 105-106)

According to Williams, the movement was a phenomenon that emerged in response to political and historical circumstances of its era. Prior to the movement, black people faced multiple issues such as segregation, humiliation, discrimination, and the harsh restrictions of the Jim Crow laws. The economic, political, and educational conditions continued to deteriorate. The Southerners were disenfranchised and deprived of their basic rights. Nevertheless, the movement brought a new spirit to the black people and gave them a sense of rebirth and a new identity. People from Southern areas migrated to Harlem, and Harlem became a home for self-realization and fulfillment.

The Great Migration “brought numerous African Americans to Harlem” (Amick, 2009: 2). And Harlem gave a free and unique atmosphere to the black authors, artists, musicians, and painters, sculptors, singers, and poets. It even inspired several other people from various parts of the Southern areas to experience a phenomenal period of productivity and self-actualization. Nathan Irvin Huggins eloquently describes the unique atmosphere of Harlem and its influence on African Americans:

It was just that sense of possibility and power that persuaded many black men and women to come to Harlem (...) Blacks who wanted to be where they could the widest audience—to organize and inspire blacks throughout the world, to cajole whites to reform. Those Negroes who had pretensions of talent and intellect wanted to be where, to greatest effect, they might convert their skills and minds into personal and racial success. (2007: 15)

The Great Migration took place owing to the influence of World War I, the intolerable laws imposed upon the Afro-Americans and unbearable social, economic, and educational conditions. Prior to the Renaissance, Harlem was a place where African American were neither welcomed nor respected. However, with the Great Migration and Renaissance, Harlem, for black people, became “a place of self-discovery, cultural awareness and political activism” (Bearden, 1976: 1). Over the years, people gave various names to the movement such as New Negro Renaissance, Black Renaissance, and Cullud Renaissance.

Literary critics and scholars regard the movement as a milestone in African American literature and culture. Nathan Irvin declares the movement as; “the point of change in Afro-American culture” (1976: 3). The literature, which produced in Harlem, is significant and crucial. Prior to the movement, only African Americans would read the works of Black writers. However, with the emergence of the Renaissance, black literature spread to mainstream American society. People across the United States became acquainted with the culture, heritage, and literature of black people.

Some leading pioneers of the Harlem Renaissance include W.E.B Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Jacob Lawrence,

Romare Bearden, Bessie Smith, and A. Philip Randolph (Bearden, 1976: 1). These writers, artists, musicians, and activists produced artistic works that gave literature, music, and other fields an immense richness. It is also important to point out that during the time Black writers produced protest literature that called for the eradication of the intolerable conditions imposed upon African Americans such as segregation, plantation, Jim Crow laws, and other forms of injustice. They movingly depicted these predicaments and called for equality and justice.

Eventually, Harlem became a venue that offered hope and pride to black people. In Harlem, black people celebrated their blackness. It gave them a self-discovery journey. It became a place for literary, cultural and social metamorphoses. It became a symbol of accomplishment for the black community. It gave artists an outstanding chance as they epitomized their works and explored their artistic oeuvre. It also gave an enormous chance to female writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and several others to flourish. More importantly, the Harlem Renaissance paved the path for the emergence of other movements such as The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts Movement.

1.1.3. The Civil Rights Movement

In the 1950s, the white people, in the South disfranchised the black people systematically. Economically, the persons of color received the lowest-paying wages and had hard jobs, which were unbearable for any humankind. The black people had tough jobs such as porters, machine operators, and janitors. By contrast, most of the whites had easy jobs and received high wages. The same system was imposed upon the black female workers; they were given domestic works with the lowest paying services. Through all these ways, the whites economically controlled black people. Furthermore, politically and personally the whites controlled the blacks as well. The black people were not permitted to go to schools, public places and use other facilities such as public transportations. Overall, whites were masters and blacks were servants, and the whites regarded blacks as inferior and unequal (Morris, 1984: 1).

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, Jill Karson identifies two incidents that had a remarkable influence on the birth of the movement. The first incident is the segregation of colored children in public schools. The second incident is the Alabama incident where a black woman, Rosa Park, refused to leave her seat to a white passenger (2005: 14-15). These conditions; in relation to what has been mentioned above, set the cornerstones for the emergence and growth of the Civil Rights Movement; a movement which fought against inequality, racial segregation, and injustice.

With the emergence of the movement, thousands of African Americans took part in the movement, in the hope of putting an end to the racial segregations and securing their citizenship rights. Through peaceful actions, marches, and protests black people demanded a decent and equal life. The movement endorsed non-violence acts and called for people to take part in the movement, regardless of race and gender. As a result, mass groups of students took part in the movement and became political activists. Moreover, black authors, males and females, took part in these peaceful actions and contributed to the development of the movement. In addition to their participation in protests and marches, black authors addressed the ongoing issues of their community and attempted to raise public consciousness, through their writings. Some renowned black authors who took part in the movement include Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Paule Marshal.

In 1963, the movement reached the climax. This happened when an estimated quarter-million, whites and blacks, from different states gathered at the Washington Momentum. The Civil Rights activists and leaders delivered their speech. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the Civil Rights leaders who delivered his eminent speech entitled I Have a Dream. In his speech, Luther called for an end to racial segregation:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama (...) will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls

will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. (qtd. Karson, 2005: 18)

The above context epitomizes the tough reality of African Americans. Luther's famous speech was in response to the racial segregation of black students in public schools. He called for equal rights for colored children. Day after day, boycotts, marches, and demonstrations continued to increase. Consequently, these nonviolent actions generated high hopes for change in the lives of African Americans and left remarkable impacts American community (Karson, 2005: 20).

Even though the movement did not achieve its full social, political, and economic goals, it left a legacy. To some extent, it decreased racial segregation, violence, and injustice. One can see that nowadays the blacks have their right to vote, and they are qualified to be elected to public offices. Overall, the movement was a vital watershed in the social and political arena in American society. By the end of 1960, some renowned leaders of the movement were assassinated including John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. Subsequently, in 1968 the movement gave rise to the birth of other movements including the Black Power Movement. These movements had a remarkable impact on art, culture, and literature.

1.2. Trauma and Identity as Theoretical Frameworks

This section presents definitions of trauma and identity. It sheds light upon their portrayals in literature as a whole, and particularly in Afro-American literature. The purpose of this section is to acquaint the reader with these two notions as they can pave the path for understating the upcoming chapters.

1.2.1. Identity: A Problematic Concept

The word identity originates from the Latin root *idem*, which means sameness or oneness. The exploration of its meaning starts with Greek and Latin antiquity (Clarke & Foweraker, 2001: 333). Etymologically, identity denotes sameness; therefore, if an individual has common characteristics or similarities with a certain group of people or

community; he is considered as a member of the community. These characteristics can include, race, ethnicity, religion and so forth.

The concept of identity occupies a great deal of writing in literature and other disciplines. Currently, identity has become a preoccupation for scholars and critics. It has become a seminal theme in social, art, human sciences, and other disciplines. Nonetheless, this does not denote that the concept of identity was not a matter in the past. Clarke and Foweraker argue; “identity was something assigned by what the community defined and obeyed as its unifying principle” (2001: 334). In the past, identity was somewhat a fixed point. However, in current times, identity is much more multidimensional, and it “remains something of an enigma” (Fearon, 1999: 1). Defining who one is, is not an easy task. Rather, it is a complex and polygonal matter. Since identity carries different denotations, it is vital, for the purpose of this study, to provide some brief definitions of the term.

For Hogg and Abrams; “identity is people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (qtd. Fearon, 1999: 4). According to Hogg and Abrams, identity is related to how one perceives himself within a community with regard to their relations with others. Moreover, Chris Weedon argues; “identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others” (2004: 1). Chris Weedon underscores differences and similarities as the cornerstones for individual or communal identity. Furthermore, Stuart Hall states that identity is not fixed point; he claims; “identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself” (qtd. Ching, Buckely & Alonso, 2007: 82).

Each of the afore-mentioned definitions holds truth. The reader can understand that the concept of identity is quite multifaceted. As these sociologists and writers pointed out, identity implies different meanings based on the circumstances. Sometimes the concept of identity simply depends on people’s perceptions of who they are. At the same time, it is something socially constructed, depending on the social, political, and

economic conditions. In other words, the political and colonial hegemony can forcefully impose it upon the minority groups.

In literature, compared to other academic disciplines, identity is more widely explored. Authors portray this motif to unveil the aftermath of colonization, migration, inequality, globalization and so forth. In Black literature, identity has always been the focal point. The black community endured a plethora of catastrophes; the catastrophes and hardships have affected the way the black people perceive themselves in the white dominant society. At the same time, it has also affected how others perceive them.

Moreover, the political, social, and economic circumstances have profoundly attributed to the identity formation of black society. The blacks have been degraded and stripped from their language, culture, and origins. African American writers such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, and Alice Walker are preoccupied with the identity issues of their community. Through their works, they endeavor to raise public awareness about this issue.

1.2.2. Identity Crisis

Kobena Mercer, a cultural critic, asserts; “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis” (2015: 125). According to Mercer, nowadays identity has become such an intense topic because it is in crisis. The term identity crisis was coined by the German-American theorist Erik Homburger Erikson. He defines identity crisis as; “the condition of being uncertain of one’s feelings about oneself, especially with regard to character, goals, and origins, occurring especially in adolescence as a result of growing up under disruptive, fast-changing conditions” (qtd. Arora & Awasthy, 2007: 229). Erickson is mainly preoccupied with the concept of the identity crisis during adolescence. However, Charles Taylor states that this phenomenon is not specified to a certain age, as it has become a feature in the modern life of human beings (2008: 10). This is due to the rapid changes that take place in society and the changes affect the lives of people.

Moreover, in Oxford Dictionary an identity crisis is defined as; “a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person’s sense of identity becomes insecure,

typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society” (qtd. Rosenthal, 2015: 137). This definition highlights confusion and uncertainty as two essential factors for an identity crisis, as they affect an individual’s perception of identity and lead to self-doubt.

A closer glance at the above-mentioned definitions makes it clear that the identity crisis is the period of doubt, hesitation, and confusion. An identity crisis takes place at any time and age. Erikson’s definition of identity crisis gives details about the reasons that lead to an identity crisis. The world is changing rapidly. With these changes, identity changes as well, because it is not a fixed point. Besides, scholars agree on the fact that the identity crisis is a feature of modernity, which is characterized by rapid global changes (Woodward, 2002: 16). Therefore, globalization is regarded as one of the leading factors that contributes to the identity crisis.

Kevin Robins defines globalization as extraordinary transformations. The transformations can ensue on social, economic, cultural and political levels (qtd. Woodward, 2002: 16). Therefore, one observes that communities, individuals, and groups are exposed to an identity crisis in this era of globalism. Silviu Coposescu claims that these transformations and rapid changes result in the change of identity. Henceforth, new identities emerge and the existing ones change (2011: 19). The changes that take place due to globalization result in producing new identities. Individuals, groups, and communities may struggle to adapt to these social and cultural changes. And these changes lead to identity issues. Consequently, the traditional identities are changed and new ones are constructed.

Moreover, Coposescuc stresses the significance of the origins in humankind’s life and opines that when these origins disappear, one can claim that there is an identity crisis (2011: 20). The origins, which Coposescuc refers to include home, family, lifestyle, customs, culture, traditions, language and so on. The disappearance of these origins can cause an identity crisis for individuals and communities.

Kathryn Woodward in his book, *Identity, and Difference*, describes globalization as an effective factor that contributes to the acceleration of migration (2002: 16).

Migration is not a new phenomenon; however, in this era humanity eyewitnesses this phenomenon more than ever. It happens due to political, social, and economic reasons. People leave their homeland and reside in another country. Due to colonization, political unrest, social problems, and economic reasons individuals leave their homeland and settle in other countries. Henceforth, this phenomenon affects both countries in the context of identity. On one hand, the immigrants are regarded as minorities and are treated unfairly in a foreign country. Henceforth, as mentioned in Erikson's definition, in such situations, their roles or goals dramatically change; therefore, they are exposed to an identity crisis.

On the other hand, migration can result in multiculturalism, which leads to an identity crisis for both communities, in particular for the immigrants. Moving from one country to another causes a change in identity and "weakens our perception of who we are and where we belong" (Jelekäinen, 2015:16). In this case, the immigrants have to assimilate themselves to a new environment and culture. This assimilation is also problematic, as it leads to the loss of some cultural norms and origins, and it finally creates an identity crisis.

1.2.3. Identity issues in African American Literature

The history of African Americans is filled with numerous complex issues. Black people endured several sorts of brutalities, which are agonizing. Slavery was the beginning of several catastrophes for African Americans. Even after it was abolished, its consequences are still prevalent in the minds and thoughts of black people. One of the salient outcomes of slavery is prejudice. White Americans treat African Americans prejudicially. This unfair treatment brought several other problems.

After Africans were forcefully brought to America, they had to endure twofold problems in various ways including their ethnic, cultural, and personal identities. In other words, their identities are split between white and black identity. Sidney B. Jenkins, in his article, clarifies that the identity crisis of African American began when they had to assimilate to the white dominant culture of the United States. According to

Jenkins, this assimilation is “the destruction of the self-image and psychological assimilation for all the blacks” (1969: 422). Furthermore, Jenkins argues that when Africans were brought to America, the slave-owners stripped them from all their origins including language, culture, and identity (1969: 426).

The identity concern in African American literature is a salient topic. In Black literature, writers depicted identity in different epochs. In slave narratives, the reader can notice the depiction of identity issues plainly, particularly in the oeuvre of Fredrick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, and Boston King. During the slavery era, slaveholders changed the name of their slaves; they stripped them from their language, culture, values, and identity. In slave narratives, the themes of identity, self-awareness, and self-definition were prevalent. Through the narratives, the slaves endeavored to liberate themselves and voice their dilemma (Rubin, Casper & Boyer, 2013: 103). Hence, identity issue has a long history; from slave narratives until nowadays, it has been the preoccupation of the African American writers.

In current times, the identity issue is also the focal point for Black writes. The predicaments that faced African Americans put an abundant impact on their social, personal, cultural lives. Du Bois, one of the renowned figures of Black literature, coined the term Double Consciousness. In his theory, Du Bois describes the situation of African Americans as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of looking one’s self through the eyes of others (...) one feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (qtd. Cleveland, 2004: 183)

From Du Bois’s context, it is noticeable that being black in the white dominant society is painful. Owing to several reasons, the persons of color see themselves through the eyes of white hegemony. This sense of double consciousness is problematic for people of color; they are in a limbo between two identities.

For contemporary African American writers, the identity issue is still the focal point. Through their writing, they depict the distortion of the black identity, culture, and tradition. Jenkins underscores the situation of black people and states; “when the black man finds that he is rejected as a black-skinned white man (...) he becomes confused and lost. He knows no self” (1969: 426). The works of Afro-American contemporary authors are suffused with these struggles of black people.

1.2.4. The Concept of Trauma

A concept that is not peculiar to human beings is the concept of trauma. The history of humanity verifies that there have been continuous wars, violent acts, and several other miserable events have had influences on the life of human beings. The aftermaths of these events, constitute a traumatic experience for the survivors and the eyewitnesses. In recent years, the development of trauma studies, which conceptualizes the overwhelming events and sheds light upon the indelible impacts of these events, is predominant. To ensure clarity, it is indispensable to give some definitions of the concept of trauma, its emergence, and representation in literary works.

Etymologically, the word trauma comes from the Greek word meaning, “wound”. In the seventeenth century, the word trauma came into English. In its incipient, it was only used in medical fields to refer to a wound or an injury on the body of human being. However, lately, the word has been used in broader senses, especially in literary contexts. Its usage continued to develop, particularly in Sigmund Freud’s texts. Nowadays, the word does not literally denote a wound on the body, but on the mind, self and the world (Caruth, 2016: 3).

Paul Wake and Simon Malpas claim that trauma studies gained popularity in the 1990s, as an academic field in human science, due to the remarkable works of Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, and Shoshana Felman (2013: 87). These theorists developed trauma studies as a revolt against the overwhelming historical events that affected the world. Besides, scholars accredit Sigmund Freud’s works to the advent of trauma in the twentieth century.

The notion of trauma is multidimensional. It carries several interpretations, based on discipline and context. Cathy Caruth, one of the eminent pioneers of trauma theory in her acclaimed book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (2016) describes trauma as; “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearances of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (2016: 11-12). According to Caruth, trauma designates a shattering experience or event. The reaction to the traumatic experience is not at the time of its happening, but it lies in belatedness. Accordingly, it reappears constantly and belatedly.

Dominic LaCapra, an American theorist, supports Cathy Caruth’s argument and states; “traumatic events numb the sense to the moment of impact and therefore they cannot be registered at the time of their occurrence” (qtd. Duggan, 2012: 22-23). Thus, when any traumatic event takes place, the survivor’s reaction comes later in repetitive images or nightmares. This is due to the fact that at the time, the victim is unable to cope with the event as it is beyond his conscious understanding. Moreover, Paul Valent who is a specialist in trauma treatment argues:

Trauma is the nemesis of our lives. Sometimes it swamps us; at other times it haunts us. It is the fracture that stops us from running as we would wish (...) it always leaves a scar and a vulnerability (...) in traumatology, trauma refers to major upheavals and catastrophes that cause significant changes. (qtd. Figley, 2012: xxiv)

Furthermore, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004), trauma is described as a shattering event that affects individual and collective’s sense of well-being. The book also explains that traumatizing events intermingle with the nature of human beings. Humans need love, protection, safety, and security; if something happens against these qualities, it results in the traumatization of the persons (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser & Sztompka, 2004: 2-3).

Consequently, trauma is the outcome of an overwhelming event or series of events. The power of the event overwhelms the individual’s ability to cope with it. Then,

it leaves an indelible influence on the person's psyche and self-image. Besides, the reaction to a traumatic event oftentimes comes belatedly because the sufferer is unable to assimilate it at the time of occurrence.

1.2.5. Categories of Trauma

There are different types of trauma. A wound or an injury inflicted upon the body is labeled as physical trauma (Sharpe, Noonan, & Freddi, 2007: 2). On the other hand, psychological trauma is defined as; "the experience and effects of overwhelming stress" (Stavropoulos, 2018: 11). Overwhelming stress and threat lead to psychological trauma. Therefore, a person who is unable to cope with overwhelming stress, fear and threat suffers psychological trauma. The outcome of psychological trauma is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is worth noting that during wartimes, psychological trauma was known as shell shock. John P. Wilson reveals that psychological trauma results in a wound or an injury in the mind. The wound affects the functions of the mind and its inherent process. He also argues that the wound or the trauma affects identity, ego, and self-structure of the victim (2004: 12).

Cultural trauma is a type of trauma that has correlations with people who have gone through horrendous events. Ron Eyerman provides a clear definition of cultural trauma; he defines it as; "a dramatic loss of identity, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2001: 2). This happens when a group of people faces shattering events. Furthermore, in the words of C. Alexander, Bernard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka cultural trauma described as follows:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectively feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group's consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (2004: 1)

In this definition, one can understand the notion of cultural trauma and its effects on communities and identity formation of the survivors. This type of trauma takes place

when members of a group or community face shattering incidents such as subjugation, oppression, racism, discrimination and so on. The aftereffects of these events are horrendous; they affect the perception of the members and cause a change in their identity.

1.2.6. The Trauma of African Americans

Are African Americans traumatized? If they are traumatized what kind of trauma are they suffering from? The history of African Americans is riddled with various adversities including slavery, racism, oppression, and so forth. Each of these hardships constitutes a plethora of challenges and difficulties for individuals and black community as a whole. When one scrutinizes the history of African Americans, it would be inadequate not to touch upon slavery. Since its consequences left a remarkable impact on the lives of those who experienced it. Ron Eyerman states that slavery was a traumatic event for those who directly witnessed it (2001: 1). However, the question is; was slavery traumatic for those who did not directly witness it?

Recent researches attempt to unveil the aftermath of slavery on the lives of those who had not directly experienced it. Orlando Paterson clarifies that the children of the slaves may have not directly experienced the traumatic event of slavery; however, seeing their parents humiliated and degraded caused a psychological trauma (qtd. Edmunds & Turner 2002: 53). Scholars and critics agree that slavery was a trauma for those who experienced it directly. Besides, Paterson states that slavery was a psychological trauma for children of the slaves as it affected their well-being.

More importantly, some other scholars and theorists consider slavery as a cultural trauma or national trauma for African Americans, as it affected the constitution of their black identity. The scholars offer W. E. B. Du Bois's theory of "double consciousness" as a vivid example. In his theory, Du Bois asks; "What, after all, am I? Am I an American or a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American?" (1978: 244). Ron Eyerman's interpretations elucidate this theory of double consciousness as an aspect of the process of cultural

trauma. In addition, he points out that collective memory and past representations are central in such a dilemma (2001: 4).

Remembrance and memory can affect individual and collective's perception and identity. The relation between trauma and identity is grounded in the fact that trauma disorders memory, and therefore affects identity (Luckhurst, 2008: 1). Furthermore, Luckhurst argues that traumatic events are repetitively re-experienced through various ways such as "intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original" (2008: 1). Overall, slavery is the trauma for the African Americans, as Eyerman states; "the trauma in question is slavery, not as an institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity formation of a people" (2001: 1).

Moreover, Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary coined the term Posttraumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). This term elucidates the traumatic experiences of slavery on the psyche of the survivors. This is because slavery has shaped the multigenerational attitudes and behaviors of the persons of color (Lebron, Morrison, Ferris, Alcantara, Cummings, Parker & McKay, 2015: 12). Another study on the legacy of the slavery claims; "slavery goes beyond single generations, creating residual psychological effects" (Ramos, 2011:33). Ultimately, slavery is an intergeneration (multigenerational or trans-generational) trauma because it had transmitted from one generation to another.

Yellow H. Brave defines multigenerational trauma as; "the collective emotional and psychological injury both over the life span and across generations, resulting from a cataclysmic history of genocide" (qtd. Ramos, 2011: 33). Even though slavery was abolished a long time ago, it has affected the current generations of African Americans, mentally, psychologically and socially.

Another horrendous event in the history of black people is racism. Racism is another trauma that has shaped the everyday lives of the black community. The binary oppositions of white and black are still prevalent in American society. The whites consider themselves as superiors and blacks as inferiors. This binarism brought

degradation and dehumanization against black society in the United States. Researches reaffirm that this humankind hierarchy is a socio-political reality and its impacts have been devastating for the black community. The researchers also demonstrate that these cumulative degradations result in the trauma of racism (Lebron, Morrison, Ferris, Alcantara, Cummings, Parker & McKay 2015: 10). These researchers define racial trauma or the trauma of racism as follows:

The trauma of racism refers to cumulative negative impact of racism on the lives of people of color. Encompassing the emotional, psychological, health, economic and social effects of multigenerational and historical trauma, trauma of racism relates to the damaging effects of ongoing societal and intra-social-group racial micro aggressions, internalized racism, overt racist experiences, discrimination and oppression within the lives of people of color. (2015: 10)

African Americans are exposed to several race-based discriminations. The discriminations and degradations leave numerous physiological, social and health influences on their lives. A research conducted by the American Psychiatric Association on the negative impacts of racism on mental health, postulates that racism affects the mental health through weakening the confidence, optimal mental functioning and the self-image of the victims. The research also argues that racism and racial discrimination are the main factors for mental health disparities (qtd. Ramos, 2011: 37). Studies conducted on racism unveil that African Americans are scientifically discriminated and abused. For instance, a research argues; “the blacks are inherently and innately inferior to the whites” (Ramos, 2011:38). The study states the light-skinned blacks are smarter than the dark-skinned blacks.

1.3. Alice Walker’s Biography and Major Works

Walker was born to a sharecropper family in the rural South. She was blinded in an eye and grew up in violent and racist settings. Novelist, poet, short story writer, political and civil rights activist; Alice Malsenior Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, United States. Walker was born to poor black sharecropper

parents; Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Lou Tallulah Grant. She was the last child of her parents (Lauret, 2011: 5). Walker's parents, like most of the African Americans, were uneducated. They were mainly engaged in sharecropping and endured several handicaps. During the time, many African Americans, like Walker's parents, were deprived of education by the white racist society. However, her parents did not allow Walker to follow in their footsteps.

From an early age, Walker attended segregated schools and made her educational life a real success. Evelyn C. White describes the segregation that the Black children faced in that era. C. White states that children of color were not allowed to attend schools with white children. In addition, the school in Walker's birthplace, Eatonton was "burned down to the ground by landowners" (qtd. Lauret, 2011: 5). This violence was meant to deprive the colored children of education. However, these violence acts did not halt the black children from learning and schooling. Instead, the black community built another school so that their children could get an education. It is worth noting that Walker's parents played a great role in rebuilding the damaged schools in Eatonton.

At the age of four, Walker attended primary school and then continued to attend secondary school. In 1957, Walker attended Butler-Baker High School, which was the only school that African American children could attend in Eatonton. With the support of her community and family, Walker successfully finished primary, middle, and high school. More importantly, in high school, she graduated as valedictorian of her class (Lucas, 2011: 3).

Walker's childhood is suffused with a plethora of handicaps and miseries. In 1952, an incident leaves a permanent influence on her life. At the age of eight, his brother, Curtis, accidentally shot Walker in her right eye with a BB gun pellet. The incident took place while Walker was playing cowboys and Indians with her brothers, Curtis and Bobby. When she was fourteen, Dr. Morriss M. Henry removed the cataract. Nevertheless, her vision in the right eye could not return. The incident resulted in permanent blindness in her right eye with a minor facial disfigurement (Byrd & Walker, 2010: 1). Alice Walker recounts this traumatic incident as follows:

I am eight years old and a tomboy. (...) Then my parents decide to buy my brothers guns. (...) Because I am a girl, I do not get a gun. One day (...) holding my bow and arrow and looking out towards the fields, I feel an incredible blow in my right eye. I look down just in time to see my brother lower his gun. (qtd. Lauret, 2011: 6)

In the above context, Walker reveals how this event changed her life. It was hard for her to experience such a traumatic incident at this early age. The incident affected her; physically and psychologically. The physical result of the incident was the loss of vision in her right eye and facial disfiguration. The psychological outcome of the incident made her feel shy, alienated, and depressed.

On the other hand, the incident acquainted Walker with the realm of reading and writing. After the incident, her mother would read short stories and poems to her in order to ease the impact of the incident on her psyche and well-being. Besides, due to her solitariness, she started observing things differently. The incident made Walker a depressed and disappointed person. On the other hand, the incident urged her to “read stories and began to write poems” (Bloom, 2001: 79). Obviously, to deal with the distress of losing an eye at this early age, Walker delved deeply into the realm of reading and writing. She read stories about the life of successful people who underwent traumatic events. These activities awakened a stronger internal vision in her. Subsequently, these reasons set the cornerstones for Alice Walker to become a celebrated writer in Afro-American literature.

In 1961, after graduation from Butler-Baker High School, Walker got a scholarship and enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta. She became an active student at Spelman. She studied history, taught by Howard Zinn and Staughton Lynd. During her sojourn at Spelman, Walker became acquainted with Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Robert Allen. At this phase, with the help of these two instructors, a new chapter in Walker’s life starts. She gets involved in political activism through the Civil Rights Movement. She participates in nonviolent demonstrations, protests, and marches. During her years at Spelman, Civil Rights organizations held peaceful demonstrations. Walker actively took

part in these peaceful protests, which were against inequality and segregation. The consequence of Walker's involvements was that, after spending two years, Walker was transferred to Sarah Lawrence College (Byrd & Walker, 2010: 13).

Walker also attends Martin Luther King's famous speech entitled *I Have a Dream*. In one of her essays about Civil Right Movement, Walker sheds light upon her objectives in joining the movement:

Because of the Movement, because of an awakened faith in the newness and imagination of the human spirit, because of 'black and white together'—for the first time in our history in some human relationship on and off tv—because of the beatings, arrests, the hell of the battle during the past years, I have fought harder for my life and for a chance to be myself (...) Now there was a chance at that other. (qtd. Bloom, 2001: 80)

In 1964, Walker started studying at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Walker found the environment of New York helpful for her writing career. At Sarah Lawrence College, she was taught by two prominent poets; Jane Cooper, Muriel Rukeyser, and philosopher Helen Lynd. These professors were of prodigious help for Walker's embellishment. Through Cooper and Rukeyser, she came to understand that "it is possible to live in this world on your own terms" (Byrd & Walker, 2010: 14). In addition, through philosopher Lyn, she understood that "even loneliness has its use, and that sadness is positively the wellspring of creativity" (Byrd & Walker, 2010: 14). Ultimately, New York became a haven for the development of Alice Walker's writing career. Due to the help of these instructors and New York's free atmosphere, Walker's life profoundly metamorphosed.

During these years, another event left a huge impact on Alice Walker's life. After returning from a trip in Uganda as an exchange student, Walker realizes that she is pregnant from DeMoss, a white student, whom Walker had met at college in 1963 and met him again during her trip to Africa. This incident affects Walker's life profoundly. The pregnancy made her get away from college. Moreover, she suffered from disappointment and depression. To escape from this trauma, she decides to either

commit suicide or make an illegal abortion, as she states; “it was me or it” (Byrd & Walker, 2010: 17). In the end, she had an abortion.

This incident, like the loss of vision in her right eye, aroused another inner vision in her. After the abortion, Walker started writing poems, in which she expressed her struggles during the pregnancy. It is worth noting that at this stage, Walker’s teacher, Rukeyser supported her in publishing her poems. As a result, Walker’s series of poems entitled *Once* in 1968 was published. Walker’s writing career continued to flourish; by the end of her last year at Sara Lawrence, she wrote three short stories entitled *To Hell with Dying*, *Flowers*, and *Suicide of An American Girl*. Of these three short stories, the first two short stories were published; however, the last one remained unpublished. At this phase, Rukeyser and poet Langston Hughes were of great importance for Walker, as they encouraged and supported her in different ways.

Besides, Walker was able to finish her study at the Sarah Lawrence College. In 1966, she earned her BA degree. Her thesis was entitled “Albert Camus: The development of His Philosophical Position as Reflected in His Novels and Plays”. The study was conducted under the supervision of her teacher, Helen Lynd. Through the helpful comments and assistance of Helen Lynd, Walker’s philosophical ideas flourished (Lauret, 2011: 7).

Walker’s involvement in the Civil Rights Movement continued. During 1965 to 1968, Walker campaigns for voter-registration in her birthplace, Georgia (Bloom, 2001: 80). In addition, she took a teaching profession in Mississippi. In her rural South, Walker encouraged voter’s registration. In Mississippi, she taught history to adults. Walker found these activities as a sort of political activism. During these years, namely in 1967, she married a white-Jewish activist and lawyer in the Civil Rights Movement named Melvyn R. Leventhal. Their marriage caused challenges, as it was the first interracial marriage. At the time, interracial marriage was illegal; therefore, they moved to Mississippi.

Furthermore, their parents were against the marriage; however, neither the threats by violent groups nor their parents' disagreement could stop their marriage. Thus, Walker and Leventhal got married. In 1969, Walker gave birth to a daughter, Rebecca. One year after the birth of Rebecca, Walker's debut novel entitled *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* was published.

In 1976, Leventhal and Walker decided to get divorced. Walker points out that their divorce was based on a mutual understanding between them. For Walker, the divorce was meant to make a change, as she remarks; "as long as you exist, you are changing. I cared for Mel, but I didn't want to live with him anymore. I needed to be free" (Byrd & Walker, 2010: 42). The divorce was based on a friendly understanding. Walker assumed that she needs change and more freedom in her life. And for her marriage was a sort of restriction. In other words, marriage had circumscribed her freedom.

Even though during these years, Walker was deeply involved in Civil Rights campaigns, Walker found time to writing. In 1967, she had her first essay published, under the title *The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?*. In the essay, Walker depicted her experiences and struggles in the Civil Rights Movement. This essay won the first place in an American Contest and MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. After the assassination of Luther King, Walker's involvement in the movement ends. After that, she devotes all her time to writing and teaching. Subsequently, Walker took a teaching profession at Jackson State University. In 1972, she travels to Cambridge and teaches at Wellesley College (Lauret, 2011: 9).

While Walker was at Jackson, she became acquainted with the works of a prolific African American woman writer, Zora Neale Hurston. After reading one of her acclaimed novels entitled *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Walker falls under the influence of this celebrated novel and states; "it speaks to me as no other novel, past or present, has ever done (...) there is enough self-love in that one book-love of community, culture, traditions—to restore a world. Or create a new one" (qtd. Wintz, 1996: 451). Walker considered Hurston and her works as inspirations. Literary scholars

and critics claim that some of Walker's works are resuscitations of Hurston's literary works. Furthermore, they find parallels between two of their acclaimed novels; *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Gate declares that in *The Color Purple*, Walker depicts Hurston's personality, as he argues; "Shug Avery is meant to "Signify" on Hurston herself" (qtd. Bloom, 2001: 82).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Walker devotes time to her writing career. One can see that during these years, Walker wrote some significant works, which put her in the canon of African Americans prolific writers. In 1970, her debut novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* was published. In the novel, Walker depicts the life of a sharecropper family in her native Georgia. Three years later, Walker's second volume of poetry entitled *Revolutionary Petunias* was published. This book won an award and nominated for National Book Award. In 1973, Walker had her first collection of short stories published entitled *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*.

Additionally, in 1976, Walker's second novel entitled *Meridian* was published. In the novel, she unveils her experience in the Civil Rights Movement and sheds light upon the deficiency of the movement. Due to this novel, Walker won the Guggenheim Fellowship. Three years later, she had her third book of poetry, *Good Night Willie Lee, I Will See in the Morning* published. In 1981, Walker's second book of short stories entitled *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* was published. In 1982, Alice Walker's writing career reached the climax when she wrote her most acclaimed novel, *The Color Purple*. The novel was very significant; due to this, Walker won Pulitzer Prize as the first Afro-American woman and it won the National Book Award. The novel was also made into a movie and won several Academy Awards. Consequently, the novel "established her as a canonical figure in American letters and an iconic figure in American culture" (Byrd & Walker 2010: 35).

Other prominent works of Walker include *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens; Womanist Prose*, which was published one year after *The Color Purple*. In 1989, *The Temple of My Familiar* was published. Three years later, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* was published. It followed by *Anything We Love Can Be Saved and By the Light of My*

Father's Smile. In addition to these works, some of her recent works include *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, *Overcoming Speechlessness*, *Absolute Trust in The Goodness of Earth* and *Devil's My Enemy*. (Hajare, 2015: 11-12)

Finally, through reading Walker's biography, the reader realizes how prolific Alice Walker is. Though she has endured a plethora of difficulties and hardships, nothing could stop her. Her childhood is characterized by the trauma of losing vision in her right eye due to being accidentally shot by her brother. This incident inspired her to start writing from an early age. The depression and trauma of her pregnancy is another remarkable incident in her life. To get rid of this, she finds comfort and joy in writing. In addition to these traumatic incidents, the poverty, the dilemma of sharecropping, and racial segregation had huge influences on Walker's personal life and writing career. The reader can notice that Walker's oeuvre aptly delineates these themes and the predicaments of her community.

1.3.1. Alice Walker's Contribution to Black Literature

Walker is an eminent novelist, poet, short story writer, and social and political activist who has greatly contributed to the corpus of African-American literature. In 1983, Walker becomes the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for her famous novel, *The Color Purple*. Walker's employment of narrative techniques, the use of vernacular language and the depiction of her fictional characters reveal a lot about her contribution to black literature. Furthermore, Walker's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement is another contribution to Afro-American literature. This is because she mingles the political and social issues of her community in her fictional works. *Meridian* is one of her novels in which she recounts her experiences as a political and social activist in the movement.

Another vivid example that unveils Walker's influence on Afro-American literature is her acclaimed novel, *The Color Purple*. In the novel, Walker employs an epistolary style of writing with new practices. The use of the epistolary form is not a new technique in black literature, as Richardson and other Black writers previously used

it. Nevertheless, Walker's style gave a new procedure. Walker's epistolary novel has "offered uniqueness, directness and simplicity (...) which has taken Alice Walker far from other writers" (Hajare, 2015: 17). Hence, if Richardson's epistolary style represents a classic style, Walker's epistolary represents a contemporary epistolary style in Black literature.

Moreover, the use of vernacular black dialect is another salient feature in most of her works. Walker considers the vernacular dialect as a means of restoring the culture of her native south, as she asserts; "this was the way my grandparents spoke, this is the way my mother speaks today, and I want to capture that" (qtd. Lauret, 2011: 18). Walker observes the employment of African American vernacular English as a recuperation of black culture. Besides, through the vernacular English, Walker reveals the social and educational status of her fictional characters.

Another contribution of Alice Walker's to the Black literature is her new coinage of the term Womanist. This development enriches African American literature as it gives a new perspective to African American feminist movements. According to Walker, feminism is a divisive force in black society. Therefore, she calls herself a womanist, who "works for the survival and wholeness of her people, men and women both, and for the promotion of dialogue and community as well for the valorization of women and all of the varieties of work women perform" (qtd. Tyson, 2015: 97). Walker, as womanist, endeavors to depict the predicaments of her people, particularly women. Through reading her works, one can easily observe that Walker's oeuvre endeavors to epitomize the liberation and emancipation of her community, particularly women as they suffer from double-oppression.

Moreover, according to Hajare, the art of characterization is another field in which Walker has profoundly contributed to the development of African American literature (2015: 15). The way Walker presents her characters is interesting. On one hand, Walker aptly alienates the handicaps and predicaments of her character. On the other hand, she displays the metamorphoses of her characters. She employed this characterization in most of her works. For instance, in *The Color Purple*, she presents

Celie as an abused and self-negated character. Nonetheless, the end of the novel acquaints the reader with her inspiring metamorphosis. Similarly, Walker depicts the same feature in Grange's portrayal in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. The tale of the novel introduces the reader to an oppressed and traumatized character. However, at the end of the novel, Grange is able to recover, and triumphs over the oppression which he endured under the white hegemony.



CHAPTER II

Trauma and Identity as Reflected in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*

This chapter acquaints the reader with the reflection of trauma and identity in Alice Walker's debut novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. The chapter begins with an introduction of the novel and provides a summary of the historical context of the novel. Subsequently, it examines the themes of trauma and identity in the novel. Besides, it elucidates how race becomes a source of trauma for the characters. On the other hand, it indicates the aftermath of the trauma on the characters' psyche and identity. It also underscores the characters' healing process from the trauma.

2.1. Introduction: *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*

The Third Life of Grange Copeland is Alice Walker's debut novel, published in 1970. The novel is set in an impoverished place in Georgia; parallel to Walker's hometown. Through the characters, the novel illustrates the harsh conditions of African Americans from the 1920s to the early 1960s. The title of the novel refers to three different phases in Grange Copeland's life. In the course of the novel, Walker illuminates how economic and political oppressions, imposed on the black family, result in a plethora of societal and familial problems (Nelson, 1999: 458). Then, the author delves into the psyche of the characters and displays the aftereffects of these dilemmas on their everyday lives. Unable to bear the white hegemony and the economic depression, the characters take out their frustration and anger on each other.

Grange Copeland's first life begins in 1920 in Greenfield County, Georgia. Grange is a sharecropper; he works in Mr. Shipley's cotton fields (Cengage, 2016: 4). In his first life, Grange is subjected to several racial depressions, degradations, and dehumanization. Actually, his work becomes the site of misery, distress, and trauma. This is because in the sharecropping system his boss does not treat him like a human being, but like a robot or a machine. Poverty, inferiority, and bewilderment are plainly

grasped in Copeland's family. Walker pertinently depicts Grange's first life as a failure. Though he works from the sunrise to the sunset, he cannot afford a decent life for his family, because the more he works the more money he has to pay to his landowner. Consequently, the economic oppression and the miseries of the sharecropping system ruin Grange's first life.

To lessen his melancholy and depressions, Grange resorts to drinking at the Dew Drop Inn, owned by Josie. Thereby, he starts an affair with Josie. Furthermore, he starts ill-treating his son and maltreats his wife, Margaret. Likewise, his wife starts drinking alcohol, as a reaction against Grange's mistreatments. She further begins an affair with their landowner, Mr. Shipley. Consequently, the life of their son, Brownfield, is ruined. This is because he grows up in an environment which is devoid of parental love and family values. He is also deprived of education because of the severe economic situation of his family (Bloom, 2008: 12).

Brownfield, like his father, resorts to drinking alcohol at the Dew Drop Inn. Brownfield marries an educated girl named Mem, Josie's cousin. He has three children with her. In the beginning, they have a happy life; however, their life drastically changes due to the socioeconomic situations of the family. Consequently, Brownfield's attitude towards his wife and children change. He abuses his children and maltreats his wife. Besides, he drags "Mem away from school and teaching" (Walker, 1970: 54). Brownfield's life becomes a repetition of his father's life. Poverty and the degrading aspects of the sharecropping system ruin their lives. Brownfield, like his father, is entrapped in the sharecropping system. Thus, the system depresses him to the extent it depressed his father.

In his first life, Grange is "fed up with his existence" (Cengage, 2016: 11). Therefore, in 1926, he abandons his family and moves to New York City in the hope of improving his life. Grange, as a microcosm of Southern men, believes; "the North is a promised land (...) a dream of hope" (Sharma, 2018: 55). Nevertheless, his hopes and expectations dwindle as he realizes that bigotry is prevalent in the North as well. He

realizes that racial hatred and human suffering are widespread. Ultimately, he learns that the North is not a hospitable home for the black people (Cengage, 2016: 11).

In the North, Grange struggles to survive, as he cannot find a job that will not degrade him. In order to survive, he resorts to selling illegal drugs, stealing, murdering, and robbing. Subsequently, these degrading jobs increase his hatred towards the white community. This is because he assumes that the white community has deprived him of life values. Ratna Hasanthi concludes Grange's sojourn up in the North as "trying to make his invisibility visible" (2018: 104). Although Grange displays his visibility and gets away from the physical and psychological oppression of the sharecropping, its aftermath remains in his mind and thought.

Grange's third life begins with his return to his native home, Georgia. After his return, Grange learns that his family has been entirely dissolved. Brownfield has killed Mem, and Margaret has committed suicide. Grange feels responsible for some of these problems. Therefore, he endeavors to recompense for his past mistakes. He feels "partly responsible for his first wife's suicide" (Cengage, 2016: 7). In his third life, Grange learns from his past mistakes and feels responsible for the future of his family and society. He develops an ardent relationship with his granddaughter, Ruth. He teaches her how to survive in a hostile world where white racists do not treat black people as human beings. Through Grange's enchanting relationship with Ruth, Walker informs the reader about the opportunities of change and redemption in the lives of black community.

When Brownfield is released from prison, the court gives him custody of Ruth; therefore, Grange "shoots his son in the courtroom and then drives home, where he is killed by police" (Cengage, 2016: 10). This murder is partly for the sake of Ruth because Brownfield abuses her on a regular basis, and Grange knows that he would continue to do it after his release. On the other hand, this murder implies toppling down the power of the white judge, which is an emblem of racial depression for black community.

2.1.1. Historical Context of the Novel

In order to have a better understanding of the events that form the novel, the researcher finds it indispensable to provide the historical background of the novel. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* follows the life of Copeland's family from the 1920s to the early 1960s. This period is marked by some crucial movements and changes in American history. Through her fictional characters, Walker elucidates some historical facts about the black community during that time.

During the 1920s, African Americans suffered from a plethora of economic oppressions imposed by white supremacists. One of the means through which African Americans were oppressed was the sharecropping system. Trudier Harris in an article entitled *Violence in The Third Life of Grange Copeland* argues that during the 1920s to the 1930s African Americans did not have many options, but to work in the farms under "the new system of slavery emphatically called sharecropping" (1975: 239). Harris assumes that sharecropping was a new system of slavery, as it disfranchised black community in various different ways.

Moreover, Ratna Hasanthi asserts that the sharecropping system was; "a never ending slavery for generations of blacks without any hopes to come out of it. The white man's plantation was a death maze for blacks who worked on it" (2018: 103). Thus, the sharecropping was an institution that dominated and oppressed the black people; socially and economically. In addition, the white landowners treated the blacks as materials. Thus, the black sharecroppers were devoid of any rights and values.

Alice Walker's portrayal of a black sharecropping family represents a reality in the lives of black people. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the reader can grasp the economic disfranchisement of Grange Copeland's family. Under the sharecropping system, Copeland's family is subject to a plethora of oppressions. Their master, Mr. Shipley, controls them. They are economically oppressed as well, as Harries argues; "each year (...) He will find that his bill adds up to more than the price of his bales of cotton" (1975: 239). Moreover, Benjamin Quarles in his book, *Negro in the Making of*

American (1996) sheds light on the life of Negro farmers under the sharecropping system and argues; “the harder and longer they worked and the greater their output, the less their reward” (1996: 147).

Ultimately, the novel reveals that sharecropping was an oppressive and racial means, which disfranchised the blacks. In the story, this racial system results in the dissolution of Grange Copeland’s family. It also affects the psychological well-being of the characters. Furthermore, due to the fact that Alice Walker’s parents were sharecroppers, the novel graphically delineates the plight of the black family as a whole. Walker’s parents, like Brownfield’s parents, experienced a plethora of oppressions and dehumanization under the plantation system. Similarly, Grange Copeland’s family endures a plethora of difficulties under their white master. In the cotton fields, Grange is represented as a caged animal (Harris, 1975: 139). Thus, when he gets out, he pours his anguish against his son and wife. Eventually, this oppressive system ruins the life of the family entirely.

The economic oppression of black people cannot be merely summed up in the sharecropping system. Outside the plantation, the black characters are economically disfranchised. The novel presents the reader a vivid epitome of this deprivation through Brownfield’s husband, Mem. Before being dragged away from school, Mem worked as a school teacher and her husband worked in the cotton fields, yet they could not make the ends meet. Mem states; “I just done got sick and tired of being dragged around from dump to dump, traded off by white folks like I am a piece of machinery” (Walker, 1970: 86). Throughout the novel, the reader can notice these exploitations of black men and women.

Another crucial event that helps the reader to grasp the events more precisely is the social oppression of the blacks. Alice Walker, through Grange’s second life, allows the reader to learn about the social repression that the black Americans endured prior to the Civil Rights Movement. When Grange moves to the North, in the hope of escaping from the sharecropping and the economic disfranchisement, he abandons his family. He wants to live a life devoid of economic oppression and dehumanization. Nevertheless, he

finds out that the social conditions of black Americans in the North are similar to their conditions in the South. While Grange is in the North, he faces strong discrimination and bigotry. Consequently, under the whites he finds no future; therefore, he returns to the South.

In addition to the economic and social disfranchisement, Walker elucidates how black Americans are exposed to political and religious coercions. Walker as an activist, during the Civil Rights Movement, endeavored to raise public awareness about the political and social inequality, inflicted on the blacks. Religious concerns are also prevalent in the novel. According to Grange, the black preachers are under the influence of the white ideology of Christianity. As he asserts; “you want to keep on teachin’ your children Christian stuff from white headed Christ you go right on –but me, an’ later on you –is goin’ to have to switch to somethin’ new” (Walker, 1970: 155). Thus, through Grange’s depiction, Walker points out that the blacks are under the influence of white dominant ideology.

Moreover, Carter Godwin Woodson in *The Mis-education of the Negro* (2009) reminds the reader about religious oppressions in American societies. He opines; “theologians of our time defend segregation and the annihilation of one race by the other. They have drifted away from righteousness into an effort to make wrong to seem right” (2009: 56). Thus, Alice Walker’s narrative puts forth the reality of religious repression of black Americans under the white dominant ideology. Overall, the historical context of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* illuminates different forms of oppression that faced the black community. These oppressions affected the life of black community; mentally, physically and psychologically.

2.2. Race-based Trauma

While reading Alice Walker’s narratives, the reader can grasp the traumatized state of her black characters. In most of her works, the characters suffer from something they are not even responsible for such as race and gender. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the protagonist of the novel, Grange Copeland faces a plethora of

discriminations and degradations, mainly due to his race. On the other hand, in *The Color Purple*, the protagonist of the novel, Celie faces multiple oppressions due to her gender. In other words, her gender acts as a catalyst for the multifaceted traumas she endures.

To fathom out how race and discrimination impact the physical, mental, and psychological well-being of people, scholars have coined terms such as racial-trauma, race-based traumatic stress, or race-related trauma (Turner & Richardson, 2016: 1). To have a better understanding of race-based trauma, Maria Root's definition is significant in which she defines race-based trauma as; "insidious trauma [and] is usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different to what is valued by those who are in power" (qtd. Neville, Tynes & Utsey, 2008: 164).

Moreover, Robert D. Carter gives a more psychological definition of race-based traumatic stress. In his words, race-based traumatic stress is "emotional or physical pain or the threat of emotional or physical pain that result from racism in the form of harassment, discrimination or discriminatory harassment" (qtd. Neville, Tynes & Utsey 2008: 165). Although researchers assume stress and trauma as two distinct phenomena, yet no research has shown the distinction between these two concepts. The researchers use the concepts interchangeably (Truong & Museus, 2012: 227-228).

2.2.1. Race-based Trauma in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*

Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* allows the reader to grasp how race becomes a leading factor to experiencing trauma. Through the characters, Walker draws the reader's attention to fathom out how an individual's race can have negative psychological implications for the black community. Generally, Alice Walker's novel draws parallels between two communities; white community and black community. In the novel, Walker portrays the whites as masters and the blacks as servants. The white people have everything, in turn; the blacks have nothing; "even their blackness is not theirs" (Sistani, 2016: 39). Living in a racist society, the characters are

enormously affected by racial oppression. Obviously, their race is one of the leading factors for most of the oppressions they face in their everyday life.

2.2.1.1. Grange Copeland: A Traumatized Character

The agony of Walker's title character, Grange Copeland, is a vivid epitome of how raced-based trauma or racial trauma is depicted in literature. Grange Copeland is an African American sharecropper who works "planting, chopping, poisoning, and picking in the cotton field" (Walker, 1970: 7). Grange works for a white landowner named Mr. Shipley, in the rural South. Grange works in the cotton fields from sunrise to sunset. Nevertheless, he cannot provide a decent life for his family. The ruggedness of the sharecropping ruins his life. At the workplace, he faces racial oppression on a regular basis. Grange's life under the sharecropping system deprives him of any rights, values, and emotions. He seems like a non-human thing.

Through Grange's characterization, Alice Walker aptly conjures images of the socio-economic conditions of the black people in the South. To display the negative impacts of race and racial trauma, Walker describes the physical appearances of the characters, the tough jobs they are assigned to do, their feelings, and emotions. Besides, she gives a thorough description of the roads and the houses of the black family. Each of these descriptions allows the reader to grasp the depth of racial oppression and discrimination in the rural South. At the same time, the reaction of the characters elucidates the aftereffect of trauma and their traumatized emotions.

In one of the striking extracts, Walker draws the reader's attention to two different kinds of human beings who, due to their race, have different social and economic status, Shipley and Grange. When Mr. Shipley arrives at the cotton field, his presence spreads the feeling of "terror" among the workers. This feeling is clearly noticed in Grange's characterization. Shipley's presence could "turn his father (Grange) into something that might as well have been a pebble or a post or a piece of dirt, except for the sharp bitter odor of something whose source was forcibly contained in flesh" (Walker, 1970: 9). In this quote, Walker draws parallels between two different human

beings. Shipley, as a white man, has the God-like ability (Byerman, 1985: 130). On the contrary, Grange, as a black man, does not have any power. He is like an object. Shipley's presence has ultimate power that could turn Grange into something non-human. Therefore, sometimes Grange wears a mask. Through the mask, he can hide his traumatized feelings and emotions. Through Grange's reactions, the reader can realize the interminable consequence of trauma. According to Carter's model, racial harassment is a means in which a non-dominant racial group accepts their inferior status (Neville, Tynes & Utsey, 2008: 165). In Grange's case, this is aptly depicted. Whenever he encounters his master, he displays his inferiority.

The trauma that results from such a racial encounter is perceived as severe, which is clearly noticed in Grange's reactions and experiences. This is due to the fact that whenever Grange sees Shipley at the workplace, he shows his inferior status due to his race. Shipley's presence turns Grange into a pebble or a post. Such dehumanization and humiliation stem from the distinction between their races. Researchers identify humiliation and low self-esteem as two frequent consequences of race-based trauma (Truong & Museus, 2012: 228). In Grange's case, the reader can clearly observe both of these symptoms. In the presence of his white boss, Grange loses his self-esteem. Thus, his workstation becomes the site of humiliation and devaluation.

Another way in which Alice Walker displays the consequences of race-based trauma is through Grange Copeland's physical description. Walker describes Grange as follows:

He was thirty-five but seemed much older. His face and eyes had a dispassionate vacancy and sadness, as if a great fire had been extinguished within him and was just recently missed. He seemed devoid of any emotion, while Brownfield watched him, except that of bewilderment. (1970: 13)

Walker points out how sharecropping and the white hegemony have changed Grange's physical appearance. Through this description, the writer gives a clear-cut picture of exploitation and subjugation of the black people. The cotton field has made Grange age swiftly. The discrimination he witnesses has affected his physical appearance. One can

easily notice the melancholy in Walker's black characters. Walker indicates the psychological impacts of racial trauma in Grange's characterization. In fact, the atmosphere of his everyday life has made him seem emotionless. The only feeling is his bewilderment, which is the result of his destitute environment under the white hegemony.

Through the physical description of Grange Copeland, Walker depicts the psychological and emotional wounds of race-based trauma of the black community in the sharecropping system and in the white hegemony. During the time, sharecropping was the main source of livelihood for the black people, as Hassanthi states; "they had no other means of livelihood other than working as sharecroppers" (Hassanthi, 2018: 104). This drudgery system leaves a plethora of consequences on the lives of black Americans. Therefore, through such a system, Walker sets the stage for the depiction of racial trauma.

The Third Life of Granger Copeland delineates another scene in which Grange's fear of the white people reaches the peak. Walker describes Grange's feelings when he sees the truck, which comes to pick him up to the workstation:

When the truck came his father's face froze into an unnaturally blank mask, curious and unsettling to see. It was as if his father became a stone or a robot. A grim stillness settled over his eyes and he became an object, a cipher, something that moved in tense jerks if it moved at all. (1970: 9)

In this excerpt, Walker highlights the unbearable atmosphere of Grange's life in the cotton field. In the presence of the white people, he goes through some unusual changes. In fact, he does not perceive himself as a human, but as an object, cipher, robot or a stone. In the presence of his boss, his face displays a terrorized feeling.

Carter's race-based traumatic stress provides three categories in which the traumatic experience of racial trauma is indicated. One of the categories is the discriminatory harassment, which includes; "complex experiences and reactions that exhibit both elements of discrimination and harassment" (Neville, Tynes & Utsey, 2008: 165). In Walker's novel, Carter's approach of racial trauma is clearly noticed.

Grange endures discriminatory harassment at the hands of his white boss, Shipley. His reactions and experiences portray the elements of racial trauma. He becomes something non-human when he meets his boss.

Moreover, Maria Root argues that when an individual encounters devaluation due to race, he is likely to suffer from an insidious trauma (Neville, Tynes & Utsey, 2008: 164). The reader can realize that due to his race, Grange is always devalued in the white dominant society. Besides, according to Kenneth V. Hardy, devaluation is a hidden trauma wound (2013: 25). The constant exposures to devaluation affect the characters sense of self. The novel clearly reflects Grange's devaluations through his sojourn to the North.

The economic circumstance of Grange's family is excruciating. The more he works the more money he has to pay for his house rents. During the time, he has the idea of selling his wife, Margaret (Walker, 1970: 10). However, he resorts to abandoning his only son and Margaret as he heads to the North. The dehumanization and subjugation he endures in the south urge him to move to North. He leaves his family in the hope of starting a new life away from the terror of his boss and the white community. He is looking towards a new life devoid of devaluation and dehumanization. Nonetheless, his sojourn in the North, through the Central Park incident, reveals the depth of hatred, devaluation, and bigotry. Through this incident, Alice Walker allows the reader to grasp the apartheid in the North. She states the incident as follows:

He stretched out his arm and nearly touched her. She reached up and out with a small white hand that grabbed his hand but let go when she felt it was his hand. Grange drew back his dirty brown hand and looked at it. The women struggled to climb (...) finally she sank. She called "nigger" with her last disgusted breath. (1970: 161)

This incident takes place between Grange and a white woman in the Central Park, New York. Grange sees a woman who is about to sink in a lake. Grange is eager to help her; he wants to save her life. Nevertheless, the woman who is in a dire need of assistance rejects Grange's help owing to his skin color and race. Through this incident, Walker

reveals that in both poles; south, and north, people of color are subject to racial events. According to Carter's model of racial trauma and Maria Root's model of race-based trauma, the powerful degrades the powerless due to some inherent characteristics. In Grange's case, the reader can realize that Grange's race and skin color become the source of devaluation.

Baxter Miller points out that the woman is similar to Grange's white boss Shipley because the woman and Shipley reduce Grange's status to something non-human. He also asserts that Grange, once again, fails to regain his manhood (1981: 61). Paradoxically, this event is crucial in Grange's metamorphosis. Even though the white woman rejects Grange's help, yet he feels responsible for her death. This responsibility unshackles him from something non-human to something human. Another epitome that illustrates the depth of hatred and prejudice in the North is; "he found that wherever he went whites were in control; they ruled New York as they did Georgia; Harem as they did Poontang Street" (Walker, 1970: 141). Grange realizes that white prejudice is prevalent in both poles; south and north. Therefore, he decides to return to his native place, Georgia.

Another way in which Alice Walker portrays race-based trauma is through the descriptions of the social conditions of black community. Through these descriptions, Walker allows the reader to grasp the institutionalized system of discrimination and the destitute environment of the blacks in the South. Walker describes the roads as follows:

Their house was at the end of the long rugged road (...) this road looked to be no more than a track where it branched off from the main road, which was of smoothly scraped dirt. The road scrapper (...) never scraped their road which was why it was rough and pitted with mud holes when it rained. (1970: 6)

Walter Howard Smith in his article, *The Impact of Racial Trauma on African Americans* argues that one of the ways through which people of color experience racial trauma is through the social conditions. Owing to their race, the blacks live in tough social conditions; therefore, traumatic events occur (2010: 4). In Walker's novel, the reader can realize that these destitute social conditions of Grange Copeland's family

affect the psychological well-being of the family. One vivid epitome is depicted through the characterization of Brownfield. When his uncle and cousin visit them, Brownfield feels ashamed and embarrassed due to the destitute conditions of his family.

Moreover, Walker gives a clear-eyed picture of Grange's house. Walker uses Grange's environment to allow the reader to grasp Grange's melancholia in the South. She uses sturdy expressive words so that the reader can comprehend the destitute social conditions of the black community. Walker describes Grange's house as follows:

It was a cabin of two rooms with a brick chimney at one end. The roof was of rotting wood shingles; the sides of the house were gray vertical slabs; the whole aspect of the house was gray. It was lower in the middle than at its ends, and resembled a swaybacked animal turned out to pasture. A stone-based well sat functionally in the middle of the yard (...) where water was dashed behind the well, wild morning-glories bloomed, their tendrils reaching as far as the woodpile, which was a litter of tree trunks, slivers of carcass bones deposited by the dog and discarded braces and bits that had pained the jaws and teeth of many a hard-driven mule. (1970: 12-13)

This strong description of Grange's house allows the reader to realize the destitute circumstances of the black people in the rural South. Theodore O. Mason comments on this scene and argues that the "cabin" is a means through which Walker elucidates the entrapment of the Grange Copeland's family (1989: 297). Walker's description of the house in this way parallels Grange's physical appearance. She states that Grange seems much older than his age (1970: 13). Moreover, weakness and bewilderment are clearly noticed in Walker's depiction of the cabin. The depiction of the cabin and Grange convey a sense of marginalization and hopelessness (Mason, 1989: 298). Furthermore, Sue Smoak argues that this scene is a clear-cut picture of Grange's feelings; abandoned by the white society, he is like an animal; he is never acknowledged (2014: 29). Consequently, the reader realizes the fact that both Grange and his cabin convey a sort of isolation and marginalization. Grange is isolated from humanity. Similarly, his cabin carries a message of isolation and deprivation.

Likewise, Walker's description of Brownfield's house brings forth the reality of oppression and marginalization of the black community in the south. Walker states that Brownfield's house is a place where "no one could be warm in it" it also has "Holes in the roof" (1970: 69). Thus, the repeated images of Grange's cabin and Brownfield's house depict the ongoing deprivation and hopelessness of the black society.

Through the description of Grange's cabin and Brownfield's house, Walker conjures up the image of poor social conditions of the black community. Due to their race, they live in dire conditions. According to Walter Howard Smith, living in such poor and isolated places results in "the risk of experiencing traumatic events like community violence, police incidents, and domestic violence, and it increases the risk of experiencing secondary traumas in witnessing these dangers" (2010: 4). Subsequently, through the portrayal of Grange's cabin and Brownfield's house, Walker unravels the fact that racial trauma is prevalent in every position in American society. The home is as a place of relaxation and comfortability; nonetheless, for Walker's characters, home is a place that deepens the wounds of trauma. It is as a place where pain, grieve, and bewilderment reach the peak.

Conversely, the opening pages of the novel allow the reader to grasp a fascinating world, which is completely different from the world of the blacks. Walker describes the house of the North dwellers as; "houses stacked one on top of the other until they nearly reached the sky" (1970: 5). This dichotomy between the two poles, North and South, elucidates the living conditions of the whites and blacks. In other words, it portrays the working power of bondage and freedom. The image of the cabin in contrast to the image of the house, which is about to reach the sky, gives the reader a vivid epitome of classism in American society.

2.2.1.2. Grange's Reactions and Feelings

One of the ways in which Walker indicates the aftereffects of race-related trauma on the lives of her black characters is through their reactions and feelings. Feeling inferiority, humiliation, hopelessness, fear, and inability, the black characters inflict rage

and frustration on their family. In other words, the characters direct their rage and helplessness toward their family members than the white power, Shipley. For instance, Grange inflicts his rage on his wife and son. Besides, when Brownfield grows up, he follows in his father's footsteps by repeating the same pattern of violence over his wife and his three children.

Grange Copeland, as a result of what he goes through, physically and emotionally hurt his family members. In other words, he inflicts violence on his wife and he denies parental love and affection to his only son, Brownfield. Lawrence Hogue in *Discourse and the Other* (1986) points out how the America social system turns the black man into a brute as depicted in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. He describes the American social system as follows:

The American social structure turns a black man into a beast, suppressing his human qualities and accenting his animal tendencies. The black man, in turn, reflects his violent relationship with his white landowner in his relations with his wife and son. He takes his anger and frustration, not on the social system (...), but on the black woman (...), and on his children. (1986: 91)

In the novel, Alice Walker's black characters face the harshness of the American social system. Its power, as practiced by the whites, degrades the black community in every possible way. It economically, socially, politically, and even religiously disfranchises the black society. Unable to reflect his anger and frustration on the system, Grange and Brownfield take their anger and powerlessness on their wives and children.

Walker, throughout the novel, gives a circle of the Copeland's family life that depends on Grange's traumatized mood. For instance, on Monday, as Grange suffers from a hangover and its aftermath, he is "morose, sullen, and deeply in pain (1970: 13). Thus, the entire family is in discord. In these circumstances, Margaret becomes nervous and tense. Brownfield loses his normal movements; he moves like a mouse in the house. However, on Thursday, Grange's temperament is simply quiet. As a result, his wife and son can relax and spend their day without any quarrel. Walker describes Grange's weekly temperament as follows:

On Wednesday, as the day stretched out and the cottons rows stretched out even longer, Grange muttered and sighed (...) He said things on Wednesday nights that made his wife cry. By Thursday, Grange's gloominess reached its peak and he grimaced respectfully, with veiled eyes, at the jokes told by the man who drove the truck (...). By Friday, Grange was so stupefied with the work and the sun he wanted nothing but rest the next two days before it started all over again. (1970: 13-14)

This circle of mental, emotional, and physical oppression stems from the cotton fields and his encounter with the white community. The cotton field reduces his status to a low position. His white boss does not respect and acknowledge him. The novel also asserts that on Saturdays, Grange would not work; however, he "would come home lurching drunk, threatening to kill his wife and Brownfield" (Walker, 1970: 14). Even though on Sundays Grange and Margaret go to the Baptist Church performing the prayer; nonetheless when they return home they would "begin a super quarrel which launched them into another week just about like the one before" (Walker, 1970: 14).

From the above excerpts, the reader can understand the tough life of Grange Copeland's family. Each day they face several problems. Lawrence Hogue asserts that Grange is frustrated by his low and powerless position; therefore, he resorts to drinking and abusing his family (1986: 91). Through such depictions, Walker presents a dissolved figure of black family. These predicaments are mainly due to the racial, physical, and emotional oppressions that the black men experience in their lives. The racial system ruins the feelings, hopes, and dreams of the black man; therefore, he exercises his masculine power on black women.

Grange's life indicates his low status under the white hegemony. Consequently, Women like Margaret and Mem become victims of their husbands' low status and powerlessness. Even though Margaret is oppressed by the white, it is the black man who ruthlessly oppresses her. Basically, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the white man becomes the figure of black man's oppression; in return, the black man becomes the emblem of the black woman's oppression (Hogue, 1986: 91).

In the course of the novel, Walker presents her black women; Margaret and Mem, as abused, violated, and hurt. They are hurt; emotionally, physically and psychologically. Margaret faces killing-threats from her husband, particularly on Saturdays (Walker, 1970: 14). This is because her husband is drunk. The reaction of women like Margaret and Mem is like the reaction of Grange and Brownfield toward their white boss. These men do not have any power under the whites and cannot fight them. Similarly, black women do not have any power under their black men. In other words, the black men have lost their power under the white hegemony. Therefore, through abusing their wives, they try to regain their lost power to show their masculine identity.

The novel expresses Margaret's emotional oppression through Grange's extramarital affair with another woman, Josie. Grange's affair with Josie hurts Margaret's feelings. In return, Margaret begins an affair with Grange's landowner, Shipley. Walker justifies that these affairs are the result of the economic, political, and social oppressions that the white people endured. Grange's affair with Josie and other women is as a sort of "self-respect and manliness" (Chylińska, 2009: 79). This is because, under the white society, Grange has lost self-respect and masculine identity. In addition, Grange tells Margaret; "if I can never own nothing (...) I will have women" (Walker, 1970: 29). This quote reveals the fact that Grange's affair with other women is a sort of compensation for his life failures.

Likewise, Margaret's sexual affair with Shipley is like a protest against his husband's affair with other women. Walker allows the reader to understand Margaret's feelings when she sees Grange goes to see other women. Walker asserts; "Margaret sitting alone in the doorway of their cabin. She would watch him leave in the wagon rolling determinedly, toward the Dew Drop Inn. Her bewilderment had changed to a feeling of inadequacy" (1970:29). Grange's affair hurts Margaret in various different ways. Margaret finds herself hopeless and helpless. She cannot prevent her husband from such affairs. Consequently, neither Grange nor Margaret can bear these extramarital relationships. For this reason, Grange, through going to the north, abandons

his family, and Margaret commits suicide. These images of a dissolved family are due to the multiple oppressions that the racist society inflicts upon the black family.

The lives of Brownfield and Mem are also a repetition of their ancestors. Although in the beginning their life is tranquil, the sharecropping system ruins their lives. Like his father, Brownfield “falls victim to the same dehumanizing social structure” (Hogue, 1986: 93). In return, he takes his rage and anger on his wife and children. He beats Mem every Saturday night; “trying to pin the blame for his failure on her by imprinting it on her face” (Walker, 1970: 55). Brownfield tries to treat his wife in the same way the white community treats him. Besides, these malicious acts make Brownfield feel good (Walker, 1970: 55). He finds joy and comfort in abusing his wife and children.

Brownfield also accuses Mem of disloyalty. As Walker asserts; “he (Brownfield) accused Mem of being unfaithful to him, of being used by white men, his oppressors; a charge she tearfully and truthfully denied” (1970: 72). However, these accusations, as the narrator argues, are not true; Mem does not make complaints. She always keeps silent. These violent acts of Brownfield toward Mem prove his powerlessness and inability within the white society. Like his father, Grange’s Saturday nights are riddled with drinking and violent acts:

Saturday night found Brownfield, as usual, liberally prepared for his weekly fights with Mem. He stumbled home full of whisky, cursing at the top of his voice. Mem lay with her face to the wall pretending to be asleep. “You think you better than me,” he cried. “Don’t you? DON’T YOU! You ugly pig!” (...) Mem said nothing, lay so silent it was as if she were no breathing or thinking or even being” (Walker, 1970: 121).

The Saturday nights are the worst nights in the lives of Margaret and Mem. They face the most brutal behaviors of their husbands. Om P. Juneja asserts that from a historical viewpoint the handicap of black man’s rage, which stems from the oppression of white man, is usually carried out by their women (2008: 81). Through a glance at the lives of men and women in the novel, this notion is obviously noticed. Their white boss burdens

Grange and Brownfield; therefore, they oppress their women and children. Moreover, Lawrence Hogue states that Brownfield establishes a master-servant relationship with his wife and children. This relationship is similar to his relationships with his boss.

What needs more emphasis is women's reaction in the face of these dominations. Unlike Margaret, Mem is a well-educated girl, but she still allows men to dominate and abuse her. During these abuses, silence is the only reaction the reader can notice from these women. On the contrary, in *The Color Purple* the reader can see that women overcome the obstacles and find their way toward liberation. Celie is a vivid epitome; she endures a plethora of abuses. However, in the end, she is able to transform from an abusive woman to a courageous and enlightened woman.

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Grange and Brownfield suffer from the race-related trauma wound of rage (Hardy, 2013: 26). The rage of the black characters' is a consequence of racial trauma, devaluation, inferiority, voicelessness and so forth. Unable to pour their rage toward the white hegemony, they take it on their wives and children. Consequently, Walker through the portrayal of her characters unravels the aftermath of racial trauma, inequality, and repression on the life of the black community. The novel reveals that black men are traumatized. They suffer from race-based trauma. In other words, race-based trauma has damaged their lives. This is due to the fact that racial trauma has several negative influences. As Hardy argues; "it can lacerate the spirit, scar the soul and puncture the psyche" (2013: 25).

2.2.1.3. Brownfield: Childhood Trauma

The opening pages of the novel introduce the reader to a vulnerable character named Brownfield. His agony from the moment of his birth until the day he is murdered is riddled with melancholy and bewilderment. He was born in "the vast cotton flats of southern Georgia" (Walker, 1970: 6). His name is a vivid epitome of a resentful life of the black children in the south. In fact, Grange and Margaret name their son Brownfield out of hopelessness and helplessness. After he was born, Grange asks Margaret to name him. Due to the fact that brownish color fields are the only thing they see in the

plantation, they name him Brownfield (Walker, 1970: 228). Louis H. Prat asserts that Grange and Margaret, finally “agree that no name can change the fate of the baby” (qtd. Bloom: 12). Thus, Brownfield’s name signifies the rigorous world of the black family in the white society.

Brownfield, who is the only child of Grange and Margaret, endures a tough childhood. Prior to the age of six, his parents leave him alone at home. This is because his father had to work in the cotton fields and his mother worked at the bait factory. When Brownfield is still a baby, his mother takes him to the bait factory. What he witnesses at his mother’s workplace terrifies him (Walker, 1970: 6). Then, at the age of six, his father takes him to the cotton fields where he witnesses the devaluation of his father and other black workers. In the cotton fields, he is taught how to be submissive to the white people, namely his boss. The novel portrays this submissiveness through Brownfield’s first encounter with Shipley. Granges advises his son to “Say ‘Yessir’ to Mr. Shipley” (Walker, 1970: 11). Thus, whenever his boss asks, Brownfield’s solo answer is yessir.

Brownfield’s situation indicates his parents’ negligence toward their son. In fact, from such an early age silence and negligence are what characterize his childhood life. From a psychological viewpoint, his home environment informs the reader about childhood trauma. In their home; “days passed sometimes without a sound” (Walker, 1970: 6). This is because their boss silences his father and mother. Likewise, in the cotton fields, he experiences “long periods of uninterrupted quiet” (Walker, 1970: 6).

Moreover, the opening pages of the novel indicate the lack of communication between Brownfield and his father. Walker asserts; “his father almost never spoke to him unless they had a company. Even then he acted as if talking to his son was a strain, a burdensome requirement (...) Brownfield was afraid of his father’s silence” (1970: 5-8). This father-son relationship is characterized by silence and negligence. Moreover, Grange never recognizes his son, as the novel reveals; “his father never looked at him or acknowledged him in any way” (Walker, 1970: 7). This extract, in some ways, resembles Grange’s relationship with his boss. Lawrence Hogue asserts that Grange

establishes the same relationships as his master or landowner had established with him, which is a master-servant relationship. Thus, the refusal of Brownfield's existence, by his father, affects his personhood (1986: 91).

Besides, the home environment is like a puzzle for Brownfield. In other words, he is unable to comprehend the predicaments of his family. The novel reveals this through Brownfield's cousins. When his cousins visit him, they tell him that his family is indebted by their white boss. They also inform him that Grange wanted to sell Margaret so that they can pay off their debts. Walker asserts that Brownfield is very young at that time that he cannot understand what does "selling" her mama mean (1970: 10). When Brownfield learns this information, he gets a headache because he is unable to grasp his parents' horrible situation. Furthermore, his cousins inform him of his father's submissive life. They state that Grange worked "for a cracker and that the cracker owned him" (Walker, 1970: 5). They also inform him of the fact that "his mother wanted him (Brownfield) to go to school, and that she was tired of his father and wanted to live him anyway" (Walker, 1970:5). All these things hurt Brownfield; emotionally and psychologically.

Through an emotional scene, the reader can grasp Brownfield's emotions and feelings at the time his father leaves him and goes to the North. The novel describes the scene as follows:

He saw him reach down to touch him. He saw his hand stop, just before it reached his cheek. Brownfield was crying silently and wanted his father to touch the tears. He moved towards his father's hand as if moving unconsciously in his sleep. He saw his father's hand draw back, without touching him. He saw him turn sharply and leave the room. He heard him leave the house. And he knew, even before he realized his father would never be back, that he hated him for everything and always would. And he most hated him because even in private and in the dark and with Brownfield presumably asleep, Grange could bear to touch his son with his hand. (Walker, 1970: 21)

As it is stated, Grange has never given Brownfield any fatherly love. Even when Grange leaves to North, he does not give his son any love. At this moment, Brownfield pretends to be asleep and waits for his father's hand to touch him. However, he realizes that his father's hand draws back and does not reach him. To express this denial, Brownfield has no way, but to cry silently. This denial affects Brownfield's personal development. This is because he is still a child, and he is in need of his father's love and care. Consequently, he grows hatred towards his father. Bożenna Chylińska asserts that due to this denial, Brownfield begrudges his father throughout his entire life (2009: 80). It is obvious that Brownfield is devoid of any motherly love as well. This is because his mother works at a factory and leaves Brownfield alone at home.

Brownfield's childhood is without any love; therefore, when he grows up, he is "very often depressed by the thought that his father had never really loved him" (Walker, 1970: 164). This profoundly affects his personal development. Louis H. Pratt argues that Brownfield's life is devoid of maternal love; therefore he "emerges as perhaps the most unredeemable degenerate of all of Walker's men" (qtd. Bloom, 2008:12). Even when Brownfield grows up, he still realizes the emptiness of parental love in his life. As Walker notes; "what Brownfield could not forgive was that in the drama of their lives his father and mother forget they were not alone" (1970: 20).

In addition, Yolanda Williams asserts that Brownfield's chances of making his own life are declined by his father's rejection and his mother's surrender. He is not equipped to handle his own mistakes. He simply makes the same mistakes as his parents (2011: 454). After Grange returns from the North, Brownfield pours out his heart and tells him "you wasn't no daddy to me" (Walker, 1970: 201). Overall, Brownfield in his childhood life undergoes physical, emotional, and psychological distresses as the result of the destitute milieu of his family and of the outside world. Then, he literally becomes a violent person. He is a character who finds comfort in abusing his wife and daughters. Moreover, he finds solace in hurting other creatures. As the novel states; "for fun he poured oil into streams to kill the fish and tickled his vanity by drawing cats" (Walker, 1970: 59).

Brownfield tends to establish the same relationships with his children as his father had established with him. He wants to see his miserable childhood in his children. This is clear in his confrontation with his father. He says his father “was no daddy” to him; therefore, he does not want to be a daddy to his children. Brownfield also asserts; “my trouble is I always could do without childrens” (Walker, 1970: 73). In the course of the novel, the reader can realize that the life of the black family is a repetition of their ancestors. Because his father did not have any fatherly relationships with him, Brownfield tends to employ the same pattern of relationship. Subsequently, as his childhood was devoid of any love and emotion, he employs the same circle in his children’s life. A researcher notes that Brownfield’s children were given “the slightest attention” (Bloom, 2008: 13). This slightest attention was given only when Brownfield was nearly drunk; otherwise, they were not even treated as human beings.

Consequently, the reader realizes the fact that father-children relationships in black society are miserable. The children yearn to have a father who cares for them; a father who loves them. However, they find their lives devoid of any love and value. Generally, in Walker’s novels, the children do not receive any love and attention from their parents. Neither Celie in *The Color Purple*, nor Brownfield in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, are able to witness any authentic communication with their parents. The life of Brownfield’s children; Daphne, Ruth, and Ornette is a repetition of their father’s childhood. They are scared of their father as their father was scared of his father. Thus, in Walker’s fictions, the reader realizes that the children are victims. They fall the victim of the low status of their parents.

2.3. Identity after Trauma in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*

The identity concern has always been a topic of discussion in Afro-American literature. The works of Alice Walker are the epitome of such a concern. In *The Color Purple*, Celie is depicted as someone who does not have any identity. However, as the story develops, the reader is made aware of the identity formation of the character. She is able to triumph over the odds and attains an identity. Likewise, in *The Third Life of*

Grange Copeland, most of the characters struggle to identify themselves in a society where they are judged by the color of their skin. Their everyday lives are riddled with degradation and dehumanization.

In American society, race is a leading factor for humiliation and degradation of the minority communities. For instance, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* the reader is made aware of the characters' entrapment in a racist society. The novel presents its characters as traumatized, degraded, and marginalized. Their race is presented as a leading factor for their physical, emotional, and psychological sufferings. The characters, as the microcosm of black society, endure degradation and oppression on a regular basis. Through the characters, Alice Walker demonstrates the deconstruction of black identity in a white hegemonic society. Walker probes race as one of the leading reasons for the deconstruction of the characters' identity.

Grange, as one of the most traumatized characters, has no knowledge of his personhood and identity. This is because he lives in a society where his status is reduced to the status of an animal or non-human. When he encounters his boss, he is like a cipher or stone. He literally loses his human characteristics. The main source of Grange's distorted identity is his race. This is because he endures several repressions under the white hegemonic society.

Walker's novel, through the depiction of Grange's family, presents the reader with a traumatized family. Grange's family is affected by their subservient status in the white-dominated society. The male characters like Grange and Brownfield are in a low and subservient position. Thus, through their portrayal, the novel unravels a fragmented identity of the black people. A research argues; "Walker centers on the male characters' distorted identity due to socioeconomic discomfort coupled with racial underpinnings" (Sedehi, Talif, Roselezam, Yahya & Kaur, 2015: 968). Walker interrogates socioeconomic and race-based issues as crucial for the identity struggle of the characters. The depiction of Grange and Brownfield are the embodiment of these struggles.

Grange and Brownfield face race-related issues and socioeconomic oppression on a regular basis. The fact that they are survivors of race-based trauma provides the reader with an understating of distorted identity of the characters. Researches point out that the survivors of racial trauma cannot have a positive sense of their identity. For instance, according to Kenneth Hardy, for racial trauma survivors; “it becomes very challenging to develop a healthy sense of self” (2013: 25). This stems from their exposure to race-related issues.

In fact, the emotional and psychological milieu of Walker’s black characters is suffused with race-based traumatic issues. Therefore, it becomes perplexing to have a healthy understanding of their identity. Kenneth Hardy adds that racial oppression is the assaulted sense of self (2013: 25). This is due to the fact that the victims endure devaluation and dehumanization. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the reader realizes the devaluation of the black characters. For instance, Grange is presented as a cipher or a stone when he encounters his white boss, Shipley.

Constant exposures to such devaluations shape the way the characters perceive themselves. This is clearly depicted in Brownfield’s perception of his mother; “he thought his mother was like their dog in some ways” (Walker, 1970: 5). Moreover, Brownfield identifies his wife through the eyes of the white people. Then, Walker provides how Brownfield, as a black character, is affected by the perception of the white hegemony:

He liked to sling the perfection of white women at her because color was something she could not change and as his own colored skin annoyed him he meant for hers to humble her. He did not make her ashamed of being black tough, no matter what he said (...) color was something the ground did to flowers, and that was an end to it. (1970: 58)

Due to their harsh circumstances, Grange and Brownfield take out their oppressions on their wives and children. In other words, to attain their masculine identity they inflict violence on their family. Ratna Hasanthi argues that in Walker’s novel “the masculine identity of black man has always been under question in white run system as

both the black man and women have been subjected to oppression” (2018: 105). Thus, black men endeavor to retain their masculine identity at the expense of women. Through *Brownfield*, the novel provides the reader with black men’s struggle for masculine identity:

You know how hard it is to be a black man down here, tears and blood and vomit ran together down his shaking legs. You knows I never wanted to be nothing but a man! Mem, baby, the white folks just don’t let nobody *feel* like doing right (...) you can’t stand up to them (...) what a man can do? (Walker, 1970: 27)

In addition to black men’s struggle for identity, the novel reveals that women are without any identity. *Brownfield*’s wife, at the onset of the story, possesses a self-identity, as she has a decent job and lives a tranquil life. Nonetheless, *Brownfield* erases her selfhood:

His crushed pride, his battered ego, made him drag Mem away from school teaching. Her knowledge reflected badly on a husband who could scarcely read and write. It was his great ignorance that sent her to domestic into white homes as a domestic, his need to bring her down to his level. (Walker, 1970: 55)

Moreover, the fact that Margaret and Mem are killed is the embodiment of women’s lack of identity within the black society. *Brownfield* annihilates Mem’s identity as he kills her. Margaret annihilates her identity as she poisons herself. In the novel, the only woman who can develop her identity is Ruth. Nonetheless, this is done at the expense of *Brownfield*’s life. In other words, Grange kills his own son so that Ruth can survive.

2.3.1. Grange and Ruth: Journey towards Self- identity

The Third Life of Grange Copeland indicates the beginning of Grange’s metamorphosis journey through the Central Park incident, New York, where he witnesses the drowning of a white woman. A deep glance at this event elucidates how Alice Walker attempts to acquaint the reader with the healing process of racial trauma and the journey towards self-actualization. Through this event, Granges regains what he

had lost in the South. He regains his masculine and racial identity. After the incident, Grange does not consider the whites as superior and the blacks as inferior. His fear of the white folks turns into courage. Such characteristics are clearly depicted in his fights with the whites in the North. As the writer asserts; “every white face he cracked, he cracked in his sweet wife’s name” (Walker, 1970: 221).

Through this encounter with the whites, Grange regains his freedom and manhood (Walker, 1970: 221). Henceforth, he does not have any fear of the white folks. The fear of his white boss disappears through this incident. While he was in the south, he would not dare to look into the eyes of his boss, but now he fights the white community. This reveals his metamorphosis journey. He has to fight them to recover from his trauma and to survive. The degradation and humiliation he suffered under the white hegemony are turned into rebellion and redemption. To recover from the racial trauma, he needs to be fearless. He has to turn his powerlessness into powerfulness so that he can retain his racial and masculine identity.

In addition, after his sojourn, Grange develops a strong relationship with his granddaughter, Ruth. Through this relationship, Walker allows the reader to notice the transformation process of Grange. Walker regenerates a lost love between the black families. This ardent relationship between Grange and his granddaughter is crucial in preparing a new generation of the black community to endure the harsh realities of their lives. Grange opines:

The white folk hated me and I hated myself until I started hating them in return and loving myself. Then I tried just loving me, and then you, and ignoring them as much as I could. You’re special to me because you’re a part of me; a part of me I didn’t even used to want (...) that it ain’t no use in seeing at all, if you don’t see straight. (Walker, 1970: 252)

Walker points out that Grange’s first life was devoid of any love and value. The whites hated him; in return, he hated himself. Under the white hegemony, he loses his identity. Conversely, in his last phase, Grange accepts the reality of his life. He has to embrace his blackness and he has to love himself. Consequently, he starts loving his

granddaughter, Ruth. In his last life, Grange is more experienced. He feels responsibility toward his family, as the novel asserts: “the older Grange got the more serene and flatly sure of his mission he became. His one duty in the world was to prepare Ruth for some great and herculean task, some magnificent and deadly struggle, some harsh and foreboding reality” (Walker, 1970: 279). Through Ruth, Grange tries to make up for his carelessness and neglect towards his only son, Brownfield. He tries to prepare Ruth for the challenges that she may face in the white society. The reader realizes that Walker tries to spread the hope of a better life in Ruth’s portrayal. Ruth is the epitome of a bright future for the black community. Grange’s love towards Ruth is an embodiment of presenting the power of love to achieve the survival of the community.

Overall, Walker points out that Grange is able to form his identity through his trip to the North and his relationship with Ruth. During his trip to the North, Grange realizes that he is not a machine or a robot. He also learns that “the white are not demi-Gods” (Hasanthi, 2018: 107). He realizes that blacks are not inferior to the white. Generally, his sojourn paves the way for his self-realization journey. Thus, Walker portrays social mobility as an important step for Grange’s identity formation.

In one of the passages, the novel states that redemption and self-actualization are possible if an individual accepts his responsibility:

By George, I *know* the danger of putting all the blame on somebody else for the mess you make out of your life. I fell into the trap myself! And I am bound to believe that that’s the way the white folks can corrupt you even when you done held up before. Cause when they got you thinking that they’re to blame for everything that have you thinking they’re some kind of gods (...) Then you begins to think up evil and begins to destroy everybody around you, and you blames it on the crackers. *Shit!* Nobody’s as powerful as we make them out to be. (Walker, 1970: 206-207)

The novel presents Grange’s self-realization in nurturing Ruth and accepting the responsibility of his family. Grange plays a significant role in the process of Ruth’s identity formation. Through Grange’s ardent relationship with Ruth, Walker endeavors

to reveal the construction of the family identity of black people. Grange takes responsibility for his past mistakes. He gives the love that Ruth needs in a cruel world. He provides her with everything she needs. Shahram R. Sistani argues; “Grange-Ruth relationship is the only constructive one that has helped Ruth in her process of self-affirmation. Grange plays a major role in establishing her identity” (2018: 41). He provides her with the things she needs for her identity. He provides her a place, away from the racial oppression of the white community, where she can feel safe. He becomes a surrogate father for her and sacrifices his life for her survival.

After securing a land, Granges builds a farm. The farm is vital for Grange’s identity, as it becomes the source of livelihood for the black family. Grange gets rid of the dehumanizing aspects of Shipley’s cotton fields. He becomes an independent man. Walker argues that the land makes Grange a newborn man (1970: 157). Consequently, Grange and Ruth help one another in their quest for identity. Through Ruth, Grange compensates for his carelessness and neglect towards Brownfield. Through working with the Civil Rights Movement, Walker reveals that Ruth is able to attain her identity. Moreover, in the Movement, Ruth endeavors to transform the black society, as she takes part in voter-registration campaigns. Overall, Ruth becomes the embodiment of a bright future for the black community. She gives the hope of social and political changes in the black community.

CHAPTER III

Trauma and Identity as Reflected in *The Color Purple*

This chapter familiarizes the reader with the reflection of trauma and identity in *The Color Purple*. It offers an introduction to the novel so that the reader can understand the novel's main story. Subsequently, it provides an in-depth analysis of the novel in relation to trauma and identity. It reveals the aftermath of the trauma on the characters' psyche and identity. In addition, it indicates the healing process of the characters from the trauma.

3.1. Introduction: *The Color Purple*

The Color Purple is a novel written in 1982 by the African American novelist, Alice Walker. The novel won numerous literary awards including Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for fiction. In addition, the novel brought popularity to Alice Walker and drew the attention of many scholars and critics. It was also adapted into a film and nominated for several academy awards. The novel was praised as a significant novel of emancipation and of cultural intervention (Lister, 2010: 1). Women critics are among those who praise the book, as it reflects their agony. On the other hand, it caused controversy within the black community, due to its portrayal of black men and their familial life (LaGrone, 2009: xiii). The novel conjures up a distorted image of the black family. It represents the black men as ruthless and cruel.

The Color Purple is written in epistolary form; in the form of letters. It consists of ninety-one letters, which are mainly written by the principal character, Celie. In addition, Nettie, who is Celie's younger sister, writes some of the letters to Celie. Up to the middle of the book, the letters are addressed to God, as He is the only outlet for Celie's trauma. Later on, the letters are exchanged between Celie and Nettie, because Nettie has moved away from the South.

The novel opens up by presenting Celie. It represents Celie as a "poor, ugly, uneducated black girl from rural Georgia" (Bloom, 2008: 89). The story is mainly set in

Walker's native place Georgia. It follows Celie's life from an early age until her forties. When Celie is an infant, she loses her father as he is lynched by "the white merchants just because he is a successful businessman" (Martín-Albo, 2017: 61). As a result, Celie's mother marries a man named Alphonso. During that time, Celie is only two years old; therefore, she presumes Alphonso as her biological father. Nevertheless, in the middle of the book, she learns that Alphonso is her stepfather.

Celie faces a plethora of abuses and miseries at the hands of her stepfather. From an early age, he forces her to drop out of school. Then, he rapes and abuses her several times. Moreover, he threatens her to hide all these abuses and violations. Consequently, Celie becomes a silent victim of her stepfather's abuses and oppressions. In addition to the brutality and oppression of her stepfather, she has to endure the psychological trauma of the loss of her mother, as she dies when Celie is only fourteen years. After her mother's death, Celie has to take care of her younger siblings. In other words, she becomes a substitute mother for her siblings as she performs domestic chores. Thus, her childhood life is suffused with several difficulties, which are not easy to bear at this early age.

At the age of twenty, Celie is married off to a widower named Mr ----. Their marriage poses several hardships for Celie. This is because Mr ---'s treatment toward Celie is not different from her stepfather's treatment. He repeatedly abuses and batters her. In fact, Mr --- marries Celie to take care of his three rotten children and to do the domestic chores. Consequently, Celie becomes a victim of her husband's abusive behaviors. Then, the novel reveals the aftermath of these abuses and oppressions on Celie psyche and identity.

In addition to Celie, some other female characters face abuses and oppression. Celie's sister, Nettie faces abuses in her society. Sofia is faces racial violence at the hands of white men and black men. Nonetheless, *The Color Purple* does not only depict the submissiveness of these characters. Walker also demonstrates how these characters are able to overcome these abuses and set themselves free. She exhibits how, under the toughest conditions, these characters triumph over a plethora of dilemmas. The novel

reveals several means for the characters' metamorphosis journey including writing, religion, and solidarity. Writing is one of the powerful tools that enables Celie to unearth her traumas and to break her silence. Religion is also crucial in Celie's self-discovery journey. In addition, sisterhood plays a significant role in their journey towards self-actualization and fulfillment. Finally, Celie "triumphs and comes into her own, despite the abuse, oppression and many obstacles she faces" (Humann, 2014: 62).

3.2. The Vernacular English in *The Color Purple*

Language is a means of communication. Most nations have their own language that identifies them as a community. African Americans, as an ethnic group, speak a language known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Vernacular English is a distinct dialect used by people of color. According to William Labov, AAVE is the dialect which is spoken by the majority of black people in the United States including urban and rural areas (Huber, 2016: 23). In the early 1950s and 1960s, several terms used to refer to AAVE such as Non-standard Negro English, Black English, Black folk speech, Ebonics, Broken English, Negro Speech, and Negro Dialect. However, nowadays the term African American Vernacular English is a more correct term among the other terms (Huber, 2016: 28-29).

Alice Walker, as one of the eminent African American contemporary writers, widely employs AAVE in *The Color Purple*. The narrator of the novel, Celie, is a black and an uneducated girl. She writes her letters by employing dialect features of Black English. As a result, her letters are suffused with spelling mistakes, lack of subject-verb agreement, fragmented sentences, incorrect verb tenses and so on. This black dialect resembles Celie's circumstances, as an uneducated and oppressed girl.

In one of the letters, Celie writes; "finally he leave her alone" (Walker, 1982: 3). In this sentence, there is no 's' for the subject he. Sophia Huber, in her book, argues that one of the features of AAVE is the omission of the third person singular 's' in the present tense form (2016: 120). Celie as the protagonist of the novel widely employs this feature in her letters, which is different from Standard English. Furthermore, in another

letter, Celie writes; “she says Naw, I ain’t gonna” (Walker, 1982: 3). In this sentence, the reader can see the misspelling in the word “Naw” for “No”. The same sentence indicates the use of “ain’t” which is used in AAVE to express isn’t, aren’t, hasn’t and haven’t.

Another noticeable feature of Black English is the misuse of personal pronouns such as em, us, dis, and dat instead of them, we, this, that. Besides, the usage of double negation is also prevalent. In a letter, Celie writes; “us plan to marry” (Walker, 1982: 30). In this sentence, the reader can notice how Celie uses “us” instead of “we”. The misuse of the personal pronoun is widely used in the novel. In another sentence, Celie sates; “us don’t say nothing to each other” (Walker, 1982: 34). Here, Celie employs double negations in the sentence. She employs double negation to stress a negation which is already expressed. In addition to the afore-mentioned features of AAVE, the novel contains several other characteristics of AAVE.

Several literary critics and scholars shed light upon the usage of Black Language in *The Color Purple*. Charles L. Proudfit argues that the language structure of Celie’s letters is:

Characterized by short, choppy sentences, halting rhythms, repetitive grammatical structures of the subject, verb, object, concrete physical descriptions in an ongoing present and matter-of-fact tone. It is a style that mirrors Celie’s traumatized cognitive processes and depressed emotional state. (qtd. Bloom, 2008: 93)

Thus, in Walker’s *The Color Purple*, the Black Language, which is employed by Celie, represents Celie’s traumatized mood. It represents the multiple oppressions and abuses she endures at the hands of her stepfather and husband. In relation to this elucidation, Sonja Lanehart in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language* (2015) points out that the AAVE mirrors the struggle and survival of slave descendants of African Americans in the United States (2015: 547). Therefore, the reader can realize that the use of Black Language in *The Color Purple* conveys the tough life of the black

community. A study asserts that Celie's language "serves to create an atmosphere of realism and as a very efficient means of characterization" (Abla & Ilhem, 2018: 35).

In contrast to Celie's employment of Black Language, Nettie uses Standard English. An example that indicates this contrast is when Nettie writes; "Pa is not our pa" (Walker, 1982: 254). Celie utters the same sentence but in a different way, she writes; "Pa not Pa" (Walker, 1982: 163). Thus, the reader can notice that, on one hand, Celie as a barely educated girl uses Black English. On the other hand, Nettie as an educated girl uses Standard English. Therefore, the language reflects their educational and social echelons. As a study notes:

The social position of standard speakers is reflected in the evaluations of their speech. Likewise, the fact that nonstandard speakers are less socially dominant — usually being members of the lower classes, less well educated, and so forth — gives rise to lower ratings of their speech along prestige and competence lines. (Abla & Ilhem, 2018: 36)

It is worth noting that Celie gradually shifts her Vernacular dialect to Standard English. According to some critics, this change is due to Nettie's influence on Celie as she educates her (Lister, 2010: 52). At the same time, Elizabeth Fifer argues that this shift in Celie's language occurs due to the political implications of the novel (2010: 53).

Overall, Celie's demonstration in *The Color Purple* is characterized by the employment of Vernacular language. Walker's purpose in employing this literary dialect is a means not only to indicate the educational and social echelons of Celie. However, Walker aims to indicate the social and educational status of all the African Americans, as they had been deprived of education, due to their socioeconomic and political circumstances. On the other side, through this literary dialect, Walker masterfully dramatizes the traumatized condition of Celie and Afro-Americans who became victims of a plethora of oppressions and inequalities in the white hegemonic society.

3.3. Trauma in *The Color Purple*

The Color Purple offers an exploration of the literary representation of trauma in literature. In the course of the novel, the reader can realize that trauma is one of the salient themes. Walker does not accentuate one source of trauma. That is, trauma is depicted in multifaceted ways. Nonetheless, gender acts as a catalyst for experiencing traumas for female characters.

The heroine of the novel, Celie, endures a plethora of traumas. Surprisingly, most of the traumas, inflicted upon her, are inflicted by the black men including her stepfather and her husband. Moreover, some other traumas are the result of the racial oppression, inflicted by the white hegemony. The events that surround Celie's everyday life are shattering and overwhelming. These events result in multiple traumas that affect Celie's psyche and identity. Violence is one of the evident sources of trauma in the novel.

3.3.1. Domestic Violence

When scrutinizing the history of humankind, one can observe that our history is suffused with several brutalities and forms of violence. In other words, violence has been part of human existence. There are a plethora of reasons that lead to violence. Among the most obvious ones is practicing power over one another. The binary oppositions such as powerful versus powerless, man versus woman, and white versus black, have a long history in humankind's life. Unfortunately, nowadays, this binarism is still prevalent. Today's world neatly portrays this dark-side of human beings. In *The Color Purple*, violence has multifaceted dimensions. On one side, the black men are constantly oppressed by the white community, due to the color of their skin as well as their race. On the other side, within the black community, the black men practice their power over women. Consequently, gender plays a significant role in the submissiveness of women. Similarly, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* the reader realizes that the

white hegemonic society oppresses black men; therefore, black men inflict violence on their women and children.

In *The Color Purple*, the focal point of the story is on Celie's life. Walker postulates how domestic violence creates multiple traumas for Celie. To have a better understanding of what domestic violence means, it is indispensable to provide a comprehensive definition of the term. The term domestic violence or abuse is defined as; "any incident of threatening behavior, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality" (Pearson, Harwin & Heste, 2007: 18). Consequently, when members of a family, partners, and lovers engage in any sort of violence, it is labeled domestic violence. While inspecting the history of humanity, one can observe different forms of domestic violence. However, its rate varies from one place to another or from one nation to another. Colored writers, as the representatives of their community, have demonstrated different forms of domestic violence within their society. Alice Walker, as a black writer, vividly explores such issues in her works, most obviously in *The Color Purple* and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*.

Walker's *The Color Purple* depicts the abusive life of Celie. She endures several forms of violence at the hands of her stepfather and later on by her husband, Mr ---. Celie is only fourteen years when she goes through these abuses. She lives in a family where the statue of the family is completely distorted. The relationship between family members is quite abnormal. The father has become a monster; the mother does not have any role. Consequently, Celie becomes a victim of her stepfather's violence

For children, parents are expected to be their saviors and guides. They are supposed to educate them and create a decent life for them. Conversely, in *The Color Purple* and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* parents are responsible for their children's violent lives. *The Color Purple* represents Celie's stepfather as brutal and careless because he perpetrates violence against her stepdaughter and drops her out of school. On the other hand, Celie does not have any help from her mother on the account that she is sick, and she is oblivious of Celie's abuses and humiliations. Similarly, *The*

Third Life of Grange Copeland, Brownfield is a victim of his parents' negligence. Grange does not allow his son to attend school, due to the socioeconomic situations of his family. Moreover, he suffers violence and humiliations at the hands of his father and the white hegemonic society.

In her first letter, Celie elucidates the ill-treatment of her stepfather, as she states; "he never had a kine word to say to me" (Walker, 1982: 4). It is obvious that from the very beginning of the novel, Walker underscores the mistreatment of Pa towards Celie. Consequently, Celie as a young black girl is emotionally hurt by the violent behavior of her stepfather. In the same letter, Celie allows the reader to get to know about one of the most disgusting and prevalent issues in the black community. To put it another way, Celie's stepfather commits an immoral act, as he rapes her stepdaughter. He states; "you gonna do what your mommy wouldn't" (Walker, 1982: 4). Her stepfather tells her to be a substitute for her mother.

In addition to these abuses, Pa silences Celie. After these abuses, Pa warns her to keep silent; "you better shut up and get used to it" (Walker, 1982: 4). Hence, Celie is silenced, and she is not allowed to talk about her traumas and abuses. In addition, her stepfather forces her to get accustomed to the sexual abuse. The abuse that Celie endures at the hands of her stepfather does not only include emotional and sexual abuses; rather, Pa also physically abuses her. Celie describes her physical abuses and asserts; "Dear God, he beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got somethin in my eye but I didn't wink. I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho I'm not scared of them" (Walker, 1982: 5). In this extract, Celie states that she was beaten by her stepfather due to something that she did not even do. Walker attempts to elucidate that there are no reasons for these violent acts against women. Women are beaten for no reasons. Pa batters Celie for only being a woman. Because of these irrational abuses, Celie is terrified of men; she does not look at men. Likewise, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the reader can witness the maltreatment of black men towards women. Grange and Brownfield abuse and oppress Margaret, Mem, and

Ruth. The novel reveals that black men take out their rage on women because they are oppressed by the white racist society.

Another maltreatment that Celie faces is the carelessness and negligence of her stepfather. Neglect designates; “the failure to meet a child’s basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include housing, food, clothing, education, and access to medical care” (Fortson, Klevens, Merrick, Gilbert & Alexander 2016: 8). In one of her letters, Celie reveals how his stepfather forces her to drop out of school:

The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never care that I love it. Nettie stood there at the gate holding tight to my hand. I was all dress for the first day. You too dumb to keep going to school, Pa say. Nettie the clever one in this bunch. But Pa, Nettie say, crying, Celie smart too. Even Miss Beasley say so. (Walker, 1982: 19)

Consequently, Celie becomes a victim of parental neglect, as her stepfather does not allow her to get an education. Subsequently, Celie becomes a complete victim of the different forms of domestic violence perpetrated by her stepfather. Firstly, she is emotionally abused, as her father does not speak to her or if he speaks to her, he never utters any compassionate word. Secondly, her stepfather sexually abuses her. Lastly, she is also physically abused by her stepfather as he batters her for “winking” which she did not even do.

The domestic violence that Alice Walker sheds light upon in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple* conveys the reality, not only in the African American society but in the entire world. Rita A. Webb argues; “domestic violence is not limited to any one socioeconomic, ethnic, racial or religious group” (2011: 1). The phenomenon of domestic violence can take place in any nation. However, its rate varies from one community to another. According to Rita A. Webb, the rate of domestic violence in minority women is much higher, compared to their white counterparts.

What needs emphasis in Walker’s *The Color Purple* is the role of Celie’s mother. Walker does not even introduce her to the reader. Her name is unrevealed. What the reader knows about her is that she is sick because of giving birth to several children.

Thus, all these abuses are committed in the absence of Celie's mother. Through this, Walker wants to indicate the powerlessness of black women within their society. On the other hand, Walker reveals the innocence of women in the face of these hardships.

As the story develops, the reader learns that Celie's predicaments and abuses are continued. After the death of Celie's mother, Pa marries a girl of Celie's age. Then, at the age of twenty, he marries off Celie to a man known as Mr ----. Celie's stepfather describes Celie's potentials to Mr --- as if he is selling a property. He states; "She good with children, Pa says, rattling his paper open more. Never heard her say a hard word to nary one of them. Just give 'em everything they ast for, is the only problem. Mr ----- say, that cow still coming? He say, Her Cow" (Walker, 1982: 13). Realizing her potentials, Mr ---- finally accepts the deal and marries Celie.

Celie's marriage to Mr ---- has been the focal point of several critics and scholars. Phanael Akubueze Egejuru, in his book *Womanbeing and Womanself*, points out that at this time "Celie is subjected to the treatment of a slave on the auction block" (2011: 15). Both, her stepfather and her husband, treat Celie like a slave. In Mr ----'s house Celie works as a servant, as Egejuru argues; "throughout her life with Mr, Celie served as a housekeeper, a field hand, a work horse, a sex partner and a punching bag for her husband" (2011: 15). This so-called marriage makes Celie's life much worse. In addition to the house chores, she has to put up not only with the maltreatment of her so-called husband, but his rotten children as well.

In another letter, Celie elucidates the moment she arrives at her husband's home. She writes; "Dear God, I spend my wedding day running from the oldest boy (...) He pick up a rock and laid my head open (...) his daddy says Don't do that! But that is all he says" (Walker, 1982: 13). Celie's husband "has got four children, instead of three, two boys and two girls" (Walker, 1982: 13). When Celie arrives there, she is mistreated and abused by Mr ----'s oldest boy, named Harpo. He is only twelve years; however, he acts as a master. He tries to murder Celie for no reason. Thus, Celie endures endless abuses and vilifications (Egejuru, 2011: 15). At this point, Celie is a victim at the hands of a child who is only twelve years. Henceforth, Walker demonstrates the

submissiveness of African American women. The author unveils how women of color are exploited within black society. At the same time, Walker also verifies the innocence of black women; as she does not give any reason for these exploitations and abuses. Furthermore, Walker underscores the reaction of Harpo's father. He only warns his son not to do that. Walker tries to point out the educational background of the African American family. Later in the novel, Harpo repeats the same brutality towards her husband, Sofia. However, he is unable to beat her because Sofia fights back against him.

In addition to Harpo's abuses against Celie, his father is another man who constantly beats Celie. Celie describes Albert's inhuman treatment as follows:

He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them. He says, Celie, git the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know tree fear men. (Walker, 1982: 22)

In this excerpt, Walker elucidates the maltreatment of Celie's husband known as Mr --- or Albert. When Harpo asks his father about why he beats Celie, he says; "cause she is my wife. Plus, she is stubborn" (Walker, 1982: 22). Albert regards Celie as her slave. He beats her and exploits her because she is his wife. Celie turns herself into wood when she is battered. She compares herself to wood or tree because she has no reaction against the physical abuses perpetrated by her husband. Likewise, nature has not any reaction against the brutality of human beings against her. Yoshinobu Hakutani comments on this scene and states; "regarding her body as a piece of wood is equating a living being with a material thing" (2017: 219). Walker symbolizes Celie's beatings and sufferings to a tree because both the tree and Celie are innocent victims of human being's cruelty. Through such an eco-feministic stance, Walker raises consciousness about the viciousness of men against women and nature. Walker perceives women and nature as the victims.

Robert A. Baron and Deborah R. Richardson in their book, *Human Aggression* (1996) unveil some figures about the phenomenon of violence in the United States. They state; "physical violence between spouses occurs in almost a third of marriages in the

United States” (1994: 1). This phenomenon is quite prevalent in the African American community. Alice Walker, through her novel, enables the reader to realize the presence of such issues within the black community. For instance, the life of Celie with her husband is mainly characterized by violence and oppression. In addition to Celie, some other characters endure abuse and oppression such as Sofia and Nettie. Similarly, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the reader can notice that the relationship between spouses is characterized by violence and oppression. Grange and Brownfield beat their wives on a regular basis.

Thus, what Walker attempts to reveal in both novels is a reality within the African American community. According to Heather D. Humann, the issue of domestic violence has been a concealed plight for a long time within the black society. She also points out that it is because of Walker’s artistic oeuvre and some other black writers that such issues have attracted public attention (2014: 1).

3.3.2. Trauma in Relation to Violence

Alice Walker neatly explores the plights of the black community via her characters. Generally, *The Color Purple* is suffused with a plethora of plights surrounding the Afro-American people. These plights include personal, social, political and cultural ones. At the onset of the novel, the reader learns about the predicaments of the main character, Celie, who suffers from different forms of domestic abuse. These abuses and humiliations result in trauma. Therefore, one can claim that in *The Color Purple* the violence results in trauma. In other words, the trauma is derived from multiple forms of violence. When scrutinizing the circumstances of Celie, the reader learns how Walker vaguely bonds the theme of violence with trauma.

As the story unfolds, the reader is acquainted with Celie’s different abuses. The several violent acts, she goes through, result in several traumas. *The Color Purple* indicates that Celie is the victim of domestic violence. During her childhood, she is beaten by her stepfather and later on by her husband and stepson. Overall, Walker portrays that the female characters such as Celie, Sofia, Nettie, and Squeak are subject to

violence and oppression. Walker argues that, due to their gender and race, the female characters endure violence. Consequently, violence leads to trauma. For instance, when Celie is battered by her stepfather, she states; “I don’t even look at mens. That’s the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them” (Walker, 1982: 7). At this point, the reader understands the traumatized psyche of Celie, due to the violence she endured.

In *The Color Purple*, another source of trauma is the sexual assaults perpetrated by men against women. When Celie is only fourteen years old, she endures a plethora of sexual abuses perpetrated by her stepfather and later on by her husband. Several studies reveal the consequences of sexual violence on the victims. For instance, Heather D. Humann points out that the physical and sexual abuses that face Celie put her in a traumatized state and result in shame and fear (2014: 67). These psychological and mental outcomes of violence are more destructive than the physical ones. Moreover, another research entitled *Rumination and Effects of Trauma in Women Experiencing Domestic Violence*, states; “one of the consequences of experiencing violence is posttraumatic stress disorder” (Oginska-Bulik, 2016: 645).

In *The Color Purple*, Celie endures a plethora of violence. These abuses cause psychological trauma. Walker neatly indicates the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on the victims. In the first letter, Celie writes to God and states; “maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me” (Walker, 1982: 4). This statement from the very beginning of the story enables the reader to understand that Celie is traumatized to the extent that she even does not understand what is happening to her. In this regard, Harold Bloom states; “with Celie’s first anguished letter to God, Walker enables the reader to enter the private thoughts and emotional states of her traumatized, guilt and shame-ridden and depressed fourteen-year-old” (2008: 93).

Moreover, Robin E. Field clarifies; “Celie’s incomprehension demonstrates the psychological trauma she endures from being raped by her stepfather” (qtd. LaGrone, 2009: 162). Furthermore, he adds that Walker’s portrayal of the psychological trauma of

Celie is depicted through “the *absence* of representation” (2009: 162). Walker uses Celie’s lack of understanding as a tool to depict her reaction to the trauma she endures at the hands of black men.

The first letter in the novel indicates another exposure to trauma. Celie writes; “~~I am~~ I have always been a good girl” (Walker, 1982: 4). By crossing the word ‘I am’, Walker demonstrates that this change in Celie’s sense of self is because of her exposure to the trauma (LaGrone, 2009: 162). This reveals that traumatized people cannot develop a healthy sense of their identity and personhood.

The novel clearly indicates the symptoms of PTSD in Celie’s daily life. When Alphonso batters Celie, she turns herself into wood or tree (Walker, 1982: 22). This reveals her powerlessness, which is an aftermath of trauma. Furthermore, Celie’s sexual experience with her husband is characterized by numbness. She declares; “most times I pretend I ain’t there. He never know the difference” (Walker, 1982: 81). This state of numbness is “one very telling sign of her psychological distress” (LaGrone, 2009: 162). Judith Herman, one of the pioneers of trauma theory, explains the state of traumatized people as follows:

When a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system of self-defense shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness. (2015: 11)

In the light of Herman’s quotation, the reader can grasp all these symptoms in *The Color Purple*. When her stepfather batters Celie, she turns herself into wood or tree. This is because she is powerless, and she is in a state of surrender. Furthermore, his sexual affair with her husband is characterized by the lack of feelings and emotions. Through her consciousness, she endeavors to escape from her unwanted circumstances.

3.3.3. Imposed Silence: A Neglected Dimension of Trauma

Suzanne B. Phillips argues; “What makes silence dangerous in the aftermath of violence is that it invites and intensifies trauma” (2015: 65). This situation is neatly

reflected in Walker's *The Color Purple*. After she endures several abuses, Celie is forced to keep silent about her trauma. In the novel, the epigraph that precedes Celie's first letter contains a threat. Alphonso warns Celie, as he tells her; "*You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy*" (Walker, 1982: 1). Consequently, Celie is abandoned to talk about the violent acts perpetrated against her. In this regard, Heather Duerre Humann states that this threat puts the young and naïve Celie in an impossible situation. This threat prevents Celie from sharing her agony with her community. Furthermore, Kouadio Germain reveals that due to this threat, Celie chooses to suffer silently (2015: 73). If she intends to speak, her Pa would kill her sick mother. In order to avoid her mother's death, Celie remains silent, because she believes that if she talks about her situation her stepfather would kill her mother.

Furthermore, according to Charles L. Proudfit, the style of Celie's letters depicts "Celie's traumatized cognitive processes and depressed emotional state" (qtd. Bloom, 2008: 93). Moreover, other scholars and critics consider the epigraph of great prominence to understand Celie's trauma. For instance, Lauren Berlant states that the epigraph contains a cautionary message and "the disembodied voice pronounces a death threat against Celie's mother, and holds Celie hostage" (qtd. Bloom, 2008: 25). Henceforth, through the epigraph, Walker allows the reader to understand Celie's depressed and lacerated soul.

Another threat is followed by the epigraph, which forces Celie to "shut up and git used to it" (Walker, 1982: 4). Accordingly, the death threats by Celie's stepfather set the stage for a plethora of traumas. Due to these threats, Celie is unable to talk about her abuses with people around her. This silence deepens Celie's trauma. In this regard, psychiatrist Alice Miller, states that those trauma victims who are unable to talk about their trauma are among the most damaged people (qtd. Lewis, 2017: 29). Thus, Walker reveals that silence deepens the trauma and leaves several scares in the minds and thoughts of the victims.

In the novel, Celie is not the only silenced character. Henry Louis Gates states; "no one speaks in this novel" (qtd. Bloom, 2008: 114). Overall, the reader can realize

that most of the characters are silenced. For instance, when Nettie runs away from Albert's home, she is silenced, too. Nettie sends letters to Celie, but Albert hides her letters and this reveals type of silence. As Shug Avery asserts:

He been keeping your letters, say Shug. Naw I say. Mr --- mean sometimes, but he not that mean. She say, Humpf, he that mean. But how come he to do it? I ast. He know Nettie mean everything in the world to me. Shug say she don't know, but us gon find out. Us seal the letter up again and put it back in Mr ---- pocket (Walker, 1982: 115).

It is apparent that Celie's husband, Albert, has hidden Nettie's letters from Celie. Because of this, Celie presumes that her sister is dead. This affects her, because Nettie is her sister, and she helped her in several tough situations. Thus, Albert and Alphonso silence and cut them off communication with one another. In this regard, a research reveals; "by hiding Nettie's letter from Celie, Albert metes out the same punishment to Nettie that Alphonso does to Celie; the denial of communication" (Sedehi, 2014: 428).

The aftermath of the silence is depressing, owing to the fact that "it precludes the safety, remembering, grieving and connection necessary to heal from traumatic event" (Phillips, 2015: 65). It creates several challenges for the victim. In *The Color Purple*, the reader learns that the healing process from trauma begins after breaking the silence. Up to the middle of the novel, the silenced characters cannot transform, they need to break their silence so that they can heal from the trauma.

3.3.4. Loss of Loved Ones as a Trauma

The difference between a child who is in her parents' embrace and a child who is deprived of her parents' love and affection is unparalleled. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the reader learns that the death of Brownfield's mother affects Brownfield profoundly. Due to this, he becomes one of the cruelest characters in Walker's fictions. Likewise, in *The Color Purple*, before the narrative starts, Celie's biological father has already died. Moreover, when she is still a child her mother dies. According to Charles

L. Proudfit, several traumas that face Celie are the consequence of the loss of her loved ones; her biological father and mother (qtd. Bloom, 2008: 95).

At the onset of the novel, the reader is acquainted with Celie's unsolicited turmoil. It becomes obvious that Celie's mother is sick, and she dies when Celie is in need of her help. Celie writes; "my mama dead. She die screaming and cussing" (Walker, 1982: 3). At this phase, the reader is unconscious about the death of Celie's biological father. However, it is in the middle of the book that Nettie informs Celie about the fate of her real father. In fact, Celie's father had been lynched. As Celie states; "my daddy lynch" (Walker, 1982: 163). Henceforth, Walker enables the reader to grasp another trauma that faces Celie, which is the loss of her beloved parents.

Giving a closer inspection to Walker's novel, the reader can grasp Walker's intention in shedding light upon the lynching of Celie's father. The novel elucidates that some of Celie's traumas are caused by her parental loss. Thus, Walker draws the reader's attention to the history of lynching and hanging of Afro-Americans in the United States. The lynching of African American was an act of racial terror. This phenomenon traumatized and victimized the lives of thousands of African Americans, Miller and Faux claim; "between 1882 and 1900 there were at least 100 lynchings a year. By 1968, more than 3500 African Americans would be lynched, mostly in the South. The record year was 1892, when 161 African Americans were lynched (qtd. Nodari, 2010: 15).

These figures reveal the horrendous history of African Americans. Lynching as one of the racial acts was perpetrated against the colored people after the abolishment of slavery. Walker, through her artistic oeuvre, interweaves the history of black folks with her fictional works to portray the reality of the black community in the United States. In Walker's novel, it is not only Celie and her siblings that suffer from the trauma of the loss of their parents. However, Celie is the microcosm of the black community and the voice of many African Americans who lost the love of their fathers due to several inhuman acts including lynching and hanging.

The Color Purple unveils that Celie's biological father was lynched. The reason behind his lynching is also mentioned. As Pa informs Celie; "your daddy didn't know how to git along [...] White folks lynch him" (Walker, 1982: 164). At this point, Pa is an archetype of the racial groups and perpetrators who lynched African Americans not because of being criminals. Nonetheless, they were lynched due to their ethnic identity (Nodari, 2010: 15). Thus, lynching was used to be an effective tool against the black community for political, social, and economic factors.

Throughout Walker's novel, the reader can grasp that Celie's biological father lynched because of his property. The novel asserts; "one night, the man's store was burned down, his smithy destroyed, and the man and his two brothers dragged out of their homes in the middle of the night and hanged" (Walker, 1982: 174). This also becomes obvious in the following conversation between Pa and Celie:

I know who (white folk) is. The key to all of 'em is money. The trouble with our people is as soon as they got out of slavery they didn't want to give the white man nothing else. But the fact is you got to give 'em everything. Either your money, your land, your women. (Walker, 1982: 182)

In this context, it is apparent that Celie's father was not lynched for committing any crimes. He was lynched due to economic factors; he did not give the white merchants any money, land or women. Celie's stepfather also elucidates that he escaped lynching because he "give 'em money" (Walker, 1982: 182).

Consequently, the novel asserts that the agony of the death of Celie's biological father is "too sad a story to tell pitiful little growing girls" (Walker, 1982: 163). Therefore, until the middle of the book, this agony remains unrevealed. Due to the loss of their father, Celie and Nettie suffer from the trauma of parental lose. According to a study conducted by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, the children who lose their parents undergo psychological trauma. The study reveals that it is because "when someone special dies, it can be very sad and painful experience for the child. When the death occurs as a result of a traumatic event (...) the child may show the signs of trauma

and grief” (Goodman, Cohen, Epstein, Kliethermes, Layne, Macya & Ward-Wimmer, 2004: 4).

In addition to the loss of her parents, Celie is also deprived of motherhood. During her childhood, Celie underwent several hardships including sexual assaults, perpetrated by her stepfather. These assaults result in the birth of two children, a daughter and a son. Alphonso immediately takes away the children from their mother, Celie. Therefore, Celie believes that her children were killed. When her mother asks her about the child, she says; “he took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods” (Walker, 1982: 12). Kheven LaGrone comments on Celie’s sufferings and claims; “Celie cannot experience any joy of motherhood not only because her children are born out of rape but because they are immediately removed by her father” (2009: 212). Due to the fact that the children are taken away from her, Celie is deprived of the pleasure of motherhood.

On the other hand, the novel illuminates that Celie is forced to play a compulsory motherhood role at an early age. When Celie is only fourteen “she is forced into the role of mother to her younger siblings” (Egejuru, 2011: 12). This is because her mother is sick and cannot take care of her children. In one of the letters, Celie states; “I am big. I can’t move fast enough. By time I git back from the well, the water be warm. By time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By time I git all the children ready for school it be dinner time (Walker, 1982:3). Ultimately, the novel presents Celie in two different ways. On one hand, she suffers from psychological trauma as her children are taken away from her. On the other hand, Walker presents Celie as being forced into the role of motherhood due to the loss of her mother which deepens her trauma.

3.4. Identity after Trauma in *The Color Purple*

For African writers, portraying the hardships of their community is one of their main preoccupations. The identity issue, as one of the ongoing problems, has always been among the most prevalent themes in Black literature. This is because Africans struggled with their identity from the time they were enslaved. Slavery as one of the

ugliest institutions stripped off African American from their cultural, ethnic, and personal identities. Even after slavery was abolished, its aftermath continued to affect the lives of black people.

In *The Color Purple*, identity is one of the predominant themes. The novel portrays the characters in a way that they do not possess their real identity. Neither the males nor the female characters possess any authentic identity. The novel presents black men as brutal and oppressor. On the other hand, it presents black women as oppressed, traumatized, and tortured at the hands of black men. Consequently, the reader can realize that the identity of male characters resembles the identity of slaveholders. On the other hand, the identity of female characters resembles the identity of the enslaved people.

The fact that *The Color Purple* covers the events of 1910s to 1940s is of profound importance. During these years, several movements appeared in the history of the United States. One of these movements was the Harlem Renaissance. This movement was essential for the black people in several aspects. It was significant for the reconstruction of black identity. Similarly, the reader can realize that *The Color Purple* endeavors to reconstruct a new identity for the characters. At the onset of the novel, none of the characters has an authentic identity. Nonetheless, as the story develops, Walker acquaints the reader with the identity formation of her characters.

In the story, most of the female characters struggle with their identity. This is because of some stereotypical negativities and patriarchal ideologies that confine their role in society. Celie's struggle for identity arises from her multiple traumas. The several trauma she faces shape up her early life. Furthermore, most of these traumas are the consequence of male-dominant and white-centered ideology.

Throughout the novel, Walker brings to light two different portraits of black people. On one hand, the female characters have lost their self-identity. Rama Kundu argues that the identity crisis of the female characters stems from the violence within the black family (2005: 72). Thus, the reader can understand that the identity crisis of the female characters is the result of a plethora of violent acts perpetrated by black men. On

the other hand, the male characters do not have an authentic identity. This stems from the racial oppression that they suffer in the white hegemonic society. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the reader can witness the same situation. The black men take out their rage and frustration on their women. They are unable to direct their frustration against the white hegemony; therefore, they take it on women. Through this, the black men endeavor to regain their masculine identity at the expense of the women.

3.4.1. Celie's Quest for Identity

At the onset of the novel, the novel presents Celie as a fragmented character. Her identity is distorted by the several traumas she endures, during her lifetime. Celie's struggle for identity, on one hand, is shaped on a personal echelon. On the other hand, it is shaped on a social level. The trauma she endures affects her personhood. In addition, the patriarchal scheme she is confined in has abandoned her from any human possessions.

According to Charles L. Proudfit, due to the loss of her parents, Celie lacks a "safe and nurturing family environment" (qtd. Bloom, 2008:95). The loss of her parents affects Celie's identity formation during her early life. This is because; "identity depends initially on good parental care" (Bloom, 2008: 95). Consequently, the psychological aftereffects of losing her parents affect Celie's identity formation during her childhood.

Moreover, Celie endures several forms of domestic abuse at the hands of her stepfather and husband. Priya K. argues that the violence acts play as a "destabilizing agent of identity, subjectivity and selfhood" (2014: 53). As a result, these domestic abuses affect the character's sense of identity. Nonetheless, Celie is able to recover and retain her identity. The novel introduces the reader with different means that help Celie in her journey towards self-discovery and emancipation. Among the most essential factors are letter-writing, female bonding, and religion. Through letter-writing, Celie provides the reader with her everyday life and expresses her traumas. In this way, Walker gives voice to an invisible and voiceless character. Consequently, writing becomes a crucial means for Celie's self-discovery process. Besides, Walker

underscores two other vital factors for Celie's journey towards identity; religion and sisterhood. The fact that Celie addresses her letters to God reveals the importance of religion in Celie's life. This is because God is the only outlet for Celie expression. Later, Walker indicates the importance of female bonding in the development of Celie's identity. The female characters urge one another to break the imposed silence and patriarchal rules. Eventually, the characters are able to regain their self-identity.

3.4.2. Writing: A Means towards Healing and Self-discovery

Having been traumatized, lost, prohibited, and oppressed Celie, apart from writing, does not have any other means to resort to for her self-discovery journey. The novel accentuates writing and education as crucial resources to know one's identity and value. Throughout the novel, the writer portrays writing as the only tool for Celie's recovery from her several traumas and predicaments. Robin E. Field argues that *The Color Purple* reifies the significance of writing to heal, in the healing process from trauma (2009: 166). Moreover, another writes argues; "the health benefits of writing or talking about the traumas [...] are twofold. People reach an understanding of the events, and once this is accomplished, they no longer need to inhibit their talking any further" (Pennebaker, 2012:103).

In Alice Walker's real life, writing was a means of survival, healing, and self-discovery. When Walker was blinded in her eye, she resorted to writing to ease her traumatic experiences. Furthermore, when she had her child aborted, she started writing so that she could stay alive. Walker states; "writing poems is my way of celebrating with the world that I have not committed suicide" (Walker, 2011: 250). In addition, Langston Hughes considers writing as a means of survival, too. He asserts that during his sad times he resorts to writing. Walker also asserts; "I write essays, short stories, and novels. Poems---even happy ones----emerge from an accumulation of sadness" (Walker, 2011: 250). Consequently, writing in Walker's real life has been a means of survival and healing from trauma.

The fact that *The Color Purple* was written in epistolary form or in the form of letters verifies the power of writing as a vital means toward emancipation and self-realization for the main characters, Celie and Nettie. Valerie Croisille describes the importance of letter-writing as follows:

Through this epistolary form, this trauma narrative bears witness to the power of the written word to overcome a painful experience and bring redemption. As a pregnant means of exploration, discovery and the development of one's self, the letters give form to a revising impulse enabling Celie to reappropriate her own past and to literally write herself into being. (2013: 98).

Through the epistolary form, Celie is able to voice her traumas to God and later on to her sister, Nettie. Through letter writing, Walker gives voice to a voiceless and powerless character. Judith L. Herman sheds light upon the importance of talking and writing about trauma, as she argues; "remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of social order and for the healing of individual victims----when the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery" (2015: 1).

Walker, through letter writing, enables Celie to voice her traumatic experiences. For Celie, writing is an approach through which she can comprehend her past and establish her future. When she writes, she becomes the agent of her future. Martha J Cutter postulates that letter writing in Celie's life is the reconfiguration of rhetorical situation (2009: 166). When Celie writes, she is in control of her own narrative. When she writes, she forces people around her to acknowledge and recognize her trauma. Such recognitions is an important step for Celie's recovery process. At the same time, for Nettie writing is healing as well. In one of her letters to Celie, Nettie states; "when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I feel when I don't pray, locked up in myself and chocking up my own heart" (Walker, 1982: 110). Letter writing does not only guide Celie and Nettie towards self-realization and redemption. However, it is a means employed by Walker to unveil the fact that "black community has historically been barred access" (Andermahr, 2013: 98).

The epistolary form also reaffirms that through education individuals and communities can make changes in their lives. Walker portrays Celie as an uneducated girl. However, as the story progresses, Walker acquaints the reader with the educational development of Celie with the help of Nettie, as Celie asserts:

She [Nettie] be sitting there with me shelling peas or helping the children with they spelling. Helping me with spelling and everything else she think I need to know. No matter what happened, Nettie steady try to teach me what go on in the world. And she a good teacher too. (Walker, 1982:17)

The novel describes education and writing as two vital tools for overcoming the predicaments of individuals as well as society. This is indicated in one of Celie's letters, as she states; "us both be hitting Nettie's schoolbooks pretty hard, cause us know we got to be smart to git away" (Walker, 1982: 19). They know that through education they can get away from the oppressive world. Overall, in Walker's novel Celie finds writing as a significant tool to overcome her trauma and re-shape her identity.

Heather D. Humann asserts; "the act of writing becomes not only a coping mechanism but it later proves to be an essential means toward self-discovery" (2014: 63). Through writing letters, Walker gives voice to a voiceless and powerless character. Furthermore, Walker's intention in portraying writing in such an effective way is to raise consciousness about the situation of black women in their community. Through letter-writing, Celie retells the story of thousands of colored girls who are silenced in their society and white hegemonic society. Consequently, Walker regards writing as a means of survival and recovery. On the other hand, through such a narrative, Walker revisits the slave narratives of African Americans. Celie, like the slaves of the 19th century, provides the readers with her everyday accounts, which are riddled with a plethora of traumas and hardships.

3.4.3. Religion: A Vision of Hope

Different perceptions exist about religion. For some people, religion is perceived as an institution whereas for some others it is perceived as a torch in the darkness. In

Walker's novel, religion is represented as guidance. It is a means towards Celie's metamorphosis journey and spiritual identity. Zsófia Kovács and László B. Sári in their book, *Space, Gender, and the Gaze in Literature and Art* claim that in Walker's novel "religion appears to be another central element in Celie's journey of self-discovery" (2017: 41). Though Celie's perception of God and religion goes through changes, religion plays an ample role in Celie's transformation and spiritual identity.

The Color Purple is composed of ninety-one letters. Most of the letters are addressed to God, and then to Nettie. The letters, which are addressed to God, begin with "Dear God". This is a declaration of the significance of God and religion in Celie's life. Celie's writing to God is a means of survival and healing from her trauma. God becomes the solo outlet for Celie's survival. As Guo Deyan argues:

The only way for Celie to retain the power of staying alive is to establish a communication with God in the form of letters. In this way, she could somewhat pour out her suppressed emotions on the one hand and keep those embarrassing days from being known on the other hand. (2015: 85)

Celie's communication with God is a means of existence. She has to write to God to understand her traumas. In the novel, Celie reaffirms that God is her solo outlet. He is the one who can help her to comprehend her troubles and predicaments. In one of the letters, Celie writes; "but I just say, Never mine, never mine, long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along" (Walker, 1982: 43). Thus, in the necessary times, Celie identifies God as her solace and community. Moreover, Nettie also reaffirms God's presence as a community and a reliable source. When Celie does not answer her letters, she still keeps writing. Nettie states:

I remember you one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it (...) Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will keep on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. (Walker, 1982:110)

Thus, the reader can comprehend the significance of God and religion for Celie and Nettie. When Nettie realizes that Celie does not read her letters, she still keeps

writing them because she believes that God is always there and reads them. What needs more emphasis is that the characters' conception of God and religion goes through several changes. In Celie's case, Shug Avery is the one who helps her to redefine her perception of God and divinity:

The thing I believe. I believe God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God (...) I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it. (Walker, 1982:195)

When Celie's prayers are not answered, she doubts God as she asserts; "Dear Nettie, I don't write to God no more, I write to you" (Walker, 1982: 175). Celie writes to her sister because she believes that God does not listen to her. Progressively, Celie's observation of God changes several times. This is obvious in her last letter; she begins her letter as; "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God" (Walker, 1982:249). This quote clarifies Celie's perception of God. In the beginning of the novel, she only writes letters to God. Thus, her notion of God is monotheistic. However, at the end of the novel, she addresses her letters to others. Thus, her notion of God changes from monotheistic pantheistic.

Accordingly, Celie perceives God in everything as she writes; "I never truly notice nothing God make. Not the blade of corn (...) not the color purple" (Walker, 1982: 168). As a result, the reader can realize that Celie's perception changes. In the beginning, she would associate God with men. However, as the story develops, this perception changes, she believes that God is Almighty and has power over the entire universe and nature. In addition to Celie and Shug Avery's vision of God, Nettie who works as a missionary in Africa asserts her vision of God. She states:

God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone-a roofleaf or Christ- but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us. (Walker, 1982)

Through Nettie, Walker reminds the reader about the perception of African Americans about religion and divinity. She believes that God is a source of reverence. She does not attach any form to God. She believes that God is a source of liberation.

3.4.4. Solidarity: A Journey towards Healing and Self-identity

In spite of several traumatic experiences, the female characters in *The Color Purple* can liberate and recover from trauma. Walker vividly reveals the recovery journey of the traumatized characters. She highlights the significance of female bonding as a vital means in their healing process. According to contemporary trauma theories, traumatized people need a community to recover. Judith Herman affirms; “In the aftermath of traumatic life events, survivors are highly vulnerable. Their sense of self has been shattered. That sense can be rebuilt only as it was built initially, in connection with others”. (2015: 61)

The women who undergo traumatic events need a community in their healing process. Walker provides such a community for her traumatized characters. In the novel, approximately all the female characters endure traumatic events. However, the rate of the traumatic event changes from one character to another. Overall, the female ties between the characters play a magnificent role in their recovery process and their self-realization journey. Robin E. Field argues; “Walker very effectively uses the story and characters of *The Color Purple* to illustrate the importance of the female community in healing from trauma” (qtd. LaGrone, 2009:166). The black female characters such as Nettie, Sofia, Shug, and Celie have been abused. Nonetheless, they muster up the courage to rebuild their damaged self-sense by connecting with each other. Thus, through these characters, Walker depicts the power of female bonding in the journey of African American women towards self-actualization and healing from trauma. Women need to support each other to set themselves free from the confines of the patriarchal culture and to rebuild their damaged sense.

Celie is one of the most traumatized characters. She undergoes a plethora of brutalities and mistreatments. Consequently, she loses her power and cannot stand up

against the repressive behavior of the black men in her society. However, in connection with other female characters, Celie is able to regain her lost power and rebuild her shattered sense. Daniel W. Ross points out that Celie “begins to find an identity through a network of female relationships” (2008: 6). Thus, female bonding is one of the essential means for Celie’s journey towards healing and self-identity.

Shug Avery is one of the influential characters who initiates Celie’s yearning to selfhood and to rebuild her identity. Shug is a singer. She is Albert’s mistress. Above all, she is a brave woman who can fight back against the repressiveness of black men. Celie, for the first time, sees Shug through a picture. Shug’s attractiveness and beauty fascinate her. In one of the letters, Celie describes Shug as follows:

Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful women I ever saw. She prettier than my mama. She bout ten thousand times prettier than me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like something tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motorcar. Her eyes serious tho, sad some. (Walker, 1982:6)

In this quote, Celie associates Shug with her mother. In Celie’s eyes, Shug is more beautiful than her mother and even herself. Celie’s identification of Shug reveals her desire for bonding with others. To put in another way, it shows that Celie is in need of an ‘Other’ to recover from her trauma and find her real identity.

Shug and Celie meet each other when Shug falls ill. In addition, Albert brings her to their home, as Celie writes; “she is just sick. Sicker than anybody I ever seen. She sicker than my mama when she die” (Walker, 1982: 47). During this time, Celie nurses her and aids her in her recovery. This nursing is of great importance for Celie. Through this, Celie recompenses the maternal role of her lost babies as they were taken away. Daniel W. Ross notes the importance of nursing in Celie’s metamorphosis. W. Ross believes that when Celie helps Shug in her recovery, she allows her to take the nursing role and motherly role that had been deprived of her by her stepfather (2008: 10). Furthermore, when Celie sees Shug in such a bad condition, it reminds her of her mother’s condition, as she was sick. In one of the letters, Celie describes her maternal and nurturing role as follows:

Dear God, Shug Avery sit up in bed a little today. I wash and comb out her hair (...) I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia----or like she mama. I comb and pat, comb and pat (...) that feel like mama used to do. Or maybe not mama. Maybe grandma. (Walker, 1982:57).

In this excerpt, Celie elucidates her motherly and nursing roles during Shug's illness. Such a connection between these two characters is of great importance for Celie's metamorphosis. Daniel W. Ross points out that by connecting the doll to Olivia, her lost daughter, and to her mother, Celie reifies a new transformation. Furthermore, according to the psychoanalytic theory, the doll aids Celie to recover from the traumatic loss of her daughter as well as her mother (2008: 10). Ultimately, Shug's sickness becomes an influential transformation for Celie. This is because, through this, Celie is able to practice her role as a mother. In other words, it restores her role as a mother. On the other hand, the healing process from the trauma of the loss of her loved ones begins to develop. Consequently, this process helps Celie to grow and rebuild her identity.

Shug's role as an artist and as a blues singer is significant in Celie's journey. The novel reveals this when Celie attends one of Shug's performances. Shug calls Celie's name several times and dedicates one of her songs to her. Celie asserts; "Shug saying Celie, Miss Celie. And I look up where she at. She say my name again. She say this song I'm bout to sing is call Miss Celie song" (Walker, 1982: 75). This is the first time someone acknowledges Celie in public. Celie significantly declares; "first time somebody made something and name it after me" (Walker, 1982: 75). Thus, this song is of great importance for Celie's metamorphosis journey. This is because Shug sings the song in front of the man who abused Celie. Furthermore, according to Daniel W. Ross, this song awakens Celie's desire for identity (2008: 10). This act of naming is instrumental for Celie's self-worth. This is because she always felt worthless when men abused and battered her.

Furthermore, Shug displays her love for Celie, as Celie claims; "nobody ever love me, I say. She say, I love you, Miss Celie" (Walker, 1982: 105). This bond is peculiar for Celie because she was deprived of it. She was deprived of the love of her

parents, her sister, and her husband. Therefore, Shug's presence recompenses all these losses. This strong relationship between Shug and Celie unearths a desire for identity. The fact that Celie's body has been fragmented is obvious. When Celie was battered she turned her body into a tree. However, through this strong bond with Shug, Celie's perception of her body changes. Thus, Celie's desire for 'ego-formation' is achieved through such a strong bond (Bloom, 2008: 10).

Moreover, another factor that empowers Celie is Shug's personality, who has typical characteristics. Shug is different from most of the black women who are entangled within racist and patriarchal societies. She is able to stand up against the repressive and racist behaviors. Shug's characteristics pave the way for Celie to fight back against the oppression and subjugation she endured. Shug urges her to believe in herself. According to Lindsey Claire Smith, this help is "crucial for her psychological freedom from Albert's colonization of her mind and body" (2008: 115).

Shug's leadership endorses Celie to set herself free from male domination. Shug tells Celie "man corrupts everything (...) He try to make you think he everywhere (...) tell him to git lost" (Walker, 1982: 197). Through Shug's guidance, Celie is able to get away from the repressive behaviors of men. Henceforward, Celie can stand against the men who oppressed her. Shug's influence on Celie's emancipation is also ostensible when she informs her that Nettie is still alive. Celie believed that Nettie is dead because Albert had hidden her letters. However, Shug informs her that Nettie is still alive. Ultimately, Celie is able to meet her sister again.

Shug also helps Celie in her spiritual journey towards identity. She guides her to redefine her understanding of God that is an essential step for Celie's development. Celie's perception of God was affected by patriarchal culture. However, Shug tells her; "God is inside you and inside everybody else" (Walker, 1982: 195). Consequently, Shug awakens Celie's spirituality. Eventually, Celie comes to know that God is not a white man whom she had inherited from her traditional culture.

Moreover, Shug helps Celie to be an independent woman. She urges her to go with her to Memphis. In Memphis, Shug supports her to learn the art of quilting. Quilting is of great importance; it shows the creativity of women. Walker's intention in highlighting such a trope in Celie's journey is an obvious epitome of women's ability to transcend and overcome the obstacles. Judy Elsley underscores the significance of quilting and argues; "a woman makes the world her own by taking apart the patriarchal ways of being to create a space for herself. That space allows her to accept her own fragmentation, embrace those fragments, and thus validate herself" (1994: 69). In *The Color Purple*, Celie's self-empowerment is underscored through the art of quilting. Patricia Andujo writes; "with the help of Shug, Celie enhances her creative sewing skills so well that she is able to become self-sufficient" (qtd. LaGrone, 2009: 72). Such independence is crucial for Celie's liberation and self-identity. She states; "I am so happy, I got love, I got work, I got money, I got friends and time" (Walker, 1982: 194). The financial support is a means through which women, like Celie, can set themselves free.

The Color Purple portrays another strong relationship between the two sisters; Celie and Nettie. They both suffer from the stereotypical negativities of their community. However, they depict different characteristics and roles. Celie is like a substitute mother for Nettie in the absence of her mother. She protects her from the brutality of her stepfather and her husband. This is obvious when Celie writes; "Dear God, Mr --- finally come right out and ast for Nettie hand in marriage" (Walker, 1982: 25). Albert intends to marry Nettie because she is prettier than Celie. Nonetheless, Celie does not allow him to take her, as she reveals it in one of her letters; "Dear God, I ast him to take me instead of her" (Walker, 1982: 26). Consequently, Celie victimizes herself so that she can protect her younger sister, Nettie.

On the other hand, Nettie helps Celie in her education. Alphonso forces Celie to drop out of school. However, Nettie finishes her education and she educates her sister. This is obvious when Nettie tries to teach her about the Earth as Celie states; "she try to tell me something bout the ground not being flat. I just say, Yeah, like I know it. I never

tell her how flat it look to me” (Walker, 1982: 12). Through these two characters, Walker indicates the importance of education and knowledge in the life of the Black community.

Furthermore, when Nettie escapes from her stepfather’s home, she accompanies Celie in Albert’s home. She observes Celie’s terrible circumstance; therefore, she urges her to stand for herself. She warns her, as she says; “don’t let them run over you, Nettie say” (Walker, 1982: 29). Nettie, as an educated girl, knows Celie’s weakness. Therefore, she encourages her to stand up against the repressive behaviors of her husband. Nettie goes on and tells Celie; “you got to fight back. You got to fight back” (Walker, 1982: 29). Thus, Nettie encourages her sister to fight against the diversities she faces.

Moreover, Nettie’s letters from Africa are crucial for Celie’s journey. When Nettie is forced to leave her sister and Albert’s home, she travels to Africa with Samuel and Corrine who are missionary couples. They have adopted Celie’s two children, Adam and Olivia. In Africa, Nettie learns that Adam and Olivia are Celie’s children. She also learns that “Pa” is not their biological father. Through her letters, she informs Celie of this information. Although Albert had intercepted the letters, with the help of Shug, Celie is able to retrieve them. Consequently, the letters between these two sisters become instrumental for Celie’s metamorphosis. Through Nettie’s letters, Celie develops her cultural identity as Nettie shares her life experience and African culture with her.

According to Om P. Juneja, Nettie’s letters from African unravel her hidden story and broaden Celie’s understanding of African history on a wider level (qtd. Bloom, 2008: 85). Nettie’s letters from African increase Celie’s political, social, and historical consciousness. In one of the letters, Nettie states; “Listen, Celie, New York is a beautiful. And colored own a whole section of it, called Harlem” (Walker, 1982: 135). These letters broaden Celie’s knowledge, which is vital for understanding her ethnic identity. Furthermore, through reading Nettie’s letters, Celie is able to realize her kinship with the African community, which is “the first step in Celie’s journey toward a collective, empowering identity that transcends personal isolation” (Lister, 2010: 82).

More importantly, through Nettie, Celie is able to reunite with her two children in Africa. They both feel safe and adore African culture. This discovery is a crucial step in Celie's transformation.

In addition to the role of Shug and Nettie, Sofia's role is also prevalent in Celie's metamorphosis. Sofia is Harpo's wife. Sofia, unlike Celie, has a rebellious and revolutionary spirit. Therefore, she plays an important role in the identity formation of Celie. She reverses the subordinated images of black women in the Afro-American community. In Celie's words, Sofia is "big, strong, healthy girl" (Walker, 1982: 32). Her portrait is not of a submissive woman. Rather, she deconstructs the traditional roles of women dictated by society.

Celie is jealous of Sofia's strong character and rebellious spirit; therefore, she advises her stepson to beat her. This is obvious when Sofia confronts Celie and asks her why she would want Harpo to beat her, Celie responds; "I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I cant. What that? She say. Fight, I say" (Walker, 1982: 42). However, the novel portrays that Sofia becomes a role model for Celie. From Sofia, Celie learns to stand up for herself and fight back. Unlike other characters, Sofia uses humor and jokes to encourage Celie to fight back, as Celie reveals; "this life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways. You ought to bash Mr ---- head open, she say. Think bout heaven later. Not much funny to me. That funny. I laugh. She laugh. Then us both so hard so hard us flop down on the step" (Walker, 1982: 47). According to Tracy L. Bealer, this conversation between Celie and Sofia, in such an open and authentic way "thaws Celie's emotional numbness and creates an ally against her abusive husband" (2009: 32). This relationship is developed through quilting. As Celie states; "me and Sofia piecing another quilt together" (Walker, 1982: 54). Eventually, the sisterhood between Celie and Sofia becomes transcendental for Celie's metamorphosis. From Sofia, Celie learns that the relationship between men and women should be built on mutual respect. Through her bonding with Sofia, Celie is able to realize that women can stand for themselves. In addition, she learns that women can be autonomous, strong, and audacious.

Eventually, the novel demonstrates Celie's outstanding journey from self-negation to self-realization, and from trauma towards healing. Through writing, she breaks the silence and makes a community to acknowledge her traumas. The community's presence is a turning point in the story. Through sisterhood, she is able to fight back against the men who oppressed her. Consequently, all the characters go through reconciliation and redemption. In the final letter, Celie reclaims her voice and self-identity, as she declares; "I am poor, I am black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I am here. Amen, say Shug. Amen, amen" (Walker, 1982: 214).

Conclusion

The history of black people is suffused with several predicaments. Alice Walker, as a black writer, aptly depicts the predicaments of her community through her literary works. Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple* expose the dilemmas of two black families in the South of the United States. The novels demonstrate how the white dominant society shapes the psyche and identity of African Americans. On one hand, the novels unravel the racial coercion of the whites against the black community. On the other hand, they reveal how black men abuse their women and children as a result of their fragmented psyche and frustration under the white hegemony. Generally, the novels depict a dysfunctional family through generations in the South. They bring about a diverse range of traumas and unearth their consequences on the psyche of the characters.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland draws the reader's attention to fathom out how an individual's race can have destructive psychological implications. To demonstrate this, the author draws parallels between the whites and the blacks. The whites are presented as masters and the blacks as servants. The whites have everything; on the contrary, the blacks have nothing. On the other hand, *The Color Purple*'s thematic thrust is on gender-based stereotypes and its psychological implications on colored women. It demonstrates how an individual's gender can act as a catalyst for experiencing traumas. It posits how black men abuse their women and children as a result of their traumatized well-being.

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the author draws the reader's attention to Grange's three different phases in his life. In his first phase, Walker depicts Grange's traumatized well-being. The novel uses different ways to allow the reader to understand Grange's fragmented psyche and his lack of identity. His workplace is depicted as the source of racial trauma. This is explicitly displayed in his encounters with his white boss. When Grange meets his boss, he literally loses his human characteristics and turns into something non-human. In his first life, several symptoms of racial trauma are

indicated such as devaluation, humiliation, and frustration. On the other hand, in *The Color Purple*, the reader can realize that the novel depicts Celie's different phases in her life. At the onset of the novel, Celie is depicted as a traumatized, silenced, and abused girl. Unlike Grange, Celie's troubles are due to vicious behaviors of black men, her stepfather and husband. Celie endures several abuses and violent acts at the hands of black men. Like Grange, when she is abused and battered, she turns into something non-human.

In both novels, women and children are depicted as victims of black men's frustration and rage. Grange and Brownfield abuse their wives and children. Likewise, Alphonso and Albert abuse and batter Celie. Walker unravels that black men are unable to cope with their powerlessness and their subservient position under the white hegemony; therefore, they take out their rage and frustration on women and children. The black men establish a servant-master relationship with their women and children.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland reveals the healing process of traumatized characters and the construction of their identity. Through the main character, Walker reveals how the victims of racial trauma can recover and construct self-identity. In his second life, Grange abandons his family and migrates to the North. In the North, he undergoes some metamorphoses, which pave the path for his healing process. Grange witnesses the death of a white woman. However, he tries to save her; the woman rejects his help and calls him a nigger. This rejection makes him realize that white folks and blacks are both humans. This incident, symbolizes the death of his oppressor, Shipley. After this incident, his fear of the white community disappears. He no longer considers himself as inferior to the whites.

Another vital means for the healing process is Grange's return to his homeland, the South. This return makes Grange's metamorphosis and self-actualization journey possible. He returns home with a new mode of awareness, which renovates his life and the lives of others in the black community. After his return, he tries to recompense for his carelessness toward his family and son. Therefore, he directs all his efforts toward providing a decent life for his granddaughter, Ruth. He gives Ruth love and affection,

which are basic needs for children's transformation. He nurtures and educates her so that she can stand up for herself and set herself free from the institutionalized oppression. She teaches her how to survive in a hostile world, where humans are judged by their skin color. Eventually, Grange and Ruth reconstruct the distorted identity of black community. In his third life, Grange becomes the embodiment of survival. Moreover, Ruth becomes the epitome of hope for the black community as she starts working in the Civil Rights Movement.

Similarly, *The Color Purple* unearths the healing process and transformation journey of Celie and other characters. Religion is depicted as a crucial tool in Celie's transformation and identity formation. This is due to the fact God becomes the solo means of expression and survival for Celie. Another crucial means is letter-writing or the epistolary form of the novel. This narrative technique enables Celie to write about her diverse traumas in her rural idiomatic language. It enables her to retain the power and the voice she had lost. In addition, it enables her to establish communication with God, her sister, and the black community.

Another vital means, which enables Celie to recover and establish an identity, is female bonding. Celie as a trauma victim and as a girl without an identity needs a community in recovering from trauma and constructing an identity. Shug, Nettie, and Sofia play a significant role in Celie's metamorphosis. Nettie educates her and teaches her everything she needs to know, so that she can realize her role in the society. Sofia teaches her to fight back against the exploitations she receives at the hands of men. Shug's role is the most crucial role. Shug enables Celie to attain her physical, economic, and spiritual liberation.

Eventually, in both novels most of the characters are able to recover from trauma. However, the means that help the characters to recover are different. In Grange's case, social mobility and amending family relationships are crucial in healing from the trauma. In Celie's case, letter-writing, religion, and female ties are portrayed as the most powerful tools that help Celie to heal from trauma.

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Yayımlar

- 1- Shwana Perot, Görmez Aydın “War and Identity in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” The Journal Of Social Sciences Institute Yıl/Year: 2018 Sayı/Issue: 41 Pp.9-20
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Hobiler

Reading books, traveling around the world, and playing football.



10/04/2019

Tez Başlığı / Konusu:

ALICE WALKER'IN ÇALIŞMALARINDA TRAVMA VE KİMLİK YANSIMALARI

“ The Reflection of Trauma and Identity in Alice Walker’s Works”

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu belirlenen tez çalışmamın Kapak sayfası, Giriş, Ana bölümler ve Sonuç bölümlerinden oluşan toplam 119 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 10/4/2019 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin intihal tespit programından aşağıda belirtilen filtreleme uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 13 (onüç) dür.

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- Alıntılar hariç,
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Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Tez Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılmasına İlişkin Yönergeyi İnceledim ve bu yönergede belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal içemediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini bilgilerinize arz ederim.

10/4/2019
Shwana Qadir PEROT

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