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Black Bodies and Blue Histories: Exploring Embodied Trauma, Gender Anxieties and Spiritual Metanoia in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Pemi Aguda's *Ghostroots*

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Abstract

This paper titled "Black Bodies and Blue Histories: Exploring Embodied Trauma, Gender Anxieties and Spiritual Metanoia in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Pemi Aguda's *Ghostroots*" explores the entangled domains of trauma, gendered violence, conflicting identities, resistance, and theological reorientation. The selected texts are rooted in divergent cultural contexts and are published nearly four decades apart, 1982 and 2024 respectively. Hence, this paper delves into a comparative analysis of how both authors narrate the notions of pain, trauma, resistance and healing. Drawing on the chromatic symbolism of blue as melancholy, bruising, and memory of how pain is lived through generations, this paper navigates through Black trauma as affective, and embodied histories. As trauma extends beyond emotional and sensory dimensions, encompassing the social, cultural and historical elements, the paper evaluates the thematic intersections and the narrative forms of both texts. It foregrounds gender discrimination and trauma as a reality rather than an abstract idea, reinforced by years of social conditioning that has to be consciously unlearned. It examines the lives of Black women on how they navigate through suppression, trauma and how they reclaim their voices. The theoretical contributions of Alfred Adler, Cathy Caruth, Carl Jung, Simone de Beauvoir and Kimberle Crenshaw have informed the understanding of trauma and its transmission, and the intersectionality of race, gender and class as depicted in the select texts. By engaging in selected vital cultural texts with the aid of theories of collective trauma and gender, and the concept of spiritual metanoia the paper seeks a deeper understanding of the resilience and potency of Black womanhood.

Keywords: *Collective Trauma, Black Feminism, Spiritual Metanoia, Gender Anxieties.*

In the topography of Black women's literature, narratives often emerge from voices that were once suppressed by patriarchy and colonialism. These voices speak of the weight of unspoken memory, broken psyche and intergenerational trauma. These are also voices that address the struggle for survival against the dominant ideologies of oppression. It voices the spiritual ecology of liberation. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Pemi Aguda's collection *Ghostroots* (2024) are two such works that address oppression, trauma, transformation and healing. These narratives delve deeper into the themes of ancestry, spirituality, and the female body in Black women's literature. Written in different contexts, the two works, Walker's *The Color Purple* set in the conditions of rural Georgia in the early 1900s, and Aguda's *Ghostroots* set in contemporary urban Lagos, Nigeria, converge as they address the issues of gendered violence, suppression of indigenous spiritualities, and the longing for their ancestral lineage, and a connection across time. Both texts elicit the concept of the collective unconscious, enunciated by Carl Jung that highlights a repository of inherited experiences and trauma embedded in Jung's archetypes such as the Persona, the Shadow, and the Caregiver.

Alice Walker brought forth a new era in contemporary American literature with *The Color Purple* written in 1982, and consequently becoming the first Afro-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. This seminal work is considered to be the first of its kind - the black, feminist queer novel to receive global reach and appreciation. Walker, as a social activist, has intricately interwoven the social reflections of gender oppression with racism and class repression in her works. Walker endows the marginalised and the muted with a narrative voice and advocates gender equity, and freedom from the constraints of racial and cultural prejudices. Due to its outspokenness and the use of unequivocal language which depicts brutality, domestic abuse and homosexuality, *The Color Purple* topped the charts of the most banned books in the United States between 1984 and 2013. The novel is written as an epistolary work of fiction where the central character 'Celie' writes letters to God and at the end, it becomes a letter to everyone she knows. The novel deals with the events occurring over a span of forty years. The young black woman's novel approach on life while enduring systemic violence, religious repression and abuse, and her journey towards self awakening and spiritual empowerment highlights the transition of a victim to survivor, and invites an exploration of the theme of trauma and gender constructions entwined with religious beliefs, emphasizing on how it shapes the identity of the characters in the novel. *Ghostroots*, written by Pemi Aguda, was a finalist for the 2024 National Book Awards in Fiction. The twelve short stories in the collection weave the supernatural and the ordinary into the tapestry of life in Lagos. This paper would critically examine four select stories namely 'Manifest', 'Breastmilk', 'The Hollow' and '24, Alhaji Williams Street', that address ancestral trauma, through metaphors of historical wounds passed down through generations. When these traumatic memories phantom normal life and often resist healing through institutional frameworks, her characters are pulled deeper into mystical situations. This paper examines the fragments of trauma and

its transmission that are subtly portrayed in both the texts. While Alice Walker uses epistolary realism, Pemi Aguda uses speculative minimalism to explore trauma as a structure of feeling. This paper focuses on trauma echoing through both the cultural texts with the insights of trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth and Carl Jung. The paper also examines the lives of Black women with special focus on how they navigate suppression and trauma, and how they reclaim their voices. Spiritual metanoia becomes central to the transformation of these feminine subjectivities as they negotiate the tough terrains of patriarchy, tradition and religious beliefs.

First developed in the 1990s, trauma studies explores the aftermath of the disturbing experiences of individuals and communities in social, psychological, and emotional realms. The theories involved in Trauma Studies were evolved from Freudian studies on hysteria which was an experiment to develop an understanding of extreme trauma that expands beyond language, fragments memory and disrupts the psyche. It elaborates on the long lasting impacts of war, systemic oppression on the basis of gender, race and class. Researchers explore the ways in which literature and art bring forth the effect of trauma on individuals and communities, and understand how they resist, and heal from extreme suffering. The psychoanalytic theories developed by Sigmund Freud laid the groundwork for understanding human behaviour and psyche, and eventually for the emergence of the modern western paradigm of psychotherapy. Throughout the years, Freud's theories were critiqued for its lack of empirical evidence, validity and gender biased perspectives. To be inclusive and to address the limitations of Freud's theories, this paper mainly considers Alfred Adler's theory of Individual Psychology and Personality. Adler's theory of personality regarded individuals as whole beings. Hence, he believed that their personality is formed based on several major concepts like social interest, lifestyle, goal-directed behavior, feelings of inferiority, striving for superiority, fictional finalism, and birth order. The paper also considers the contributions of prominent figures in trauma theory like Cathy Caruth, Catherine Malabou, Michelle Balaev, and Judith Herman, who argue that trauma is a historical and social element that shapes both individual and collective identities.

The beginnings of understanding gender, sex and sexuality can be dated back to the eighteenth century. Gender Studies emerged as an interdisciplinary approach to understand the dynamics of gender identities, relations and socially constructed roles. The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949) laid the theoretical foundations of the discipline wherein she provides a clear explanation of the gender and sex dichotomy: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 301). The patriarchal othering of female identity that is rooted in the social construction of womanhood is emphasised by de Beauvoir. Deeply rooted in the theories of feminism, queer and poststructuralism, it challenges the traditional gender assumptions of individuals as strictly male and female. Gender theory emphasizes the fluidity of gender and social constructions. It evaluates how the existing norms and expectations of gender, shapes individual experiences and

identities, which often intersects with other structures of power in society such as class, sexuality, disability and race. Theorists such as Judith Butler, Bell Hooks, and Simone de Beauvoir, state that gender is not a biological fact; it is a social and cultural construct that is enacted through societal norms for power and suppression. It helps to understand and analyse how gender is both an individual and collective experience.

When the idea of feminism got integrated during the first wave, it primarily focused on the experiences of middle class, white women. It neglected the appalling experiences of coloured women who suffered both racism and sexism. Black feminism emerged as a response to this exclusion from mainstream feminism. It challenged the existing limitations of movements and brought forth an intersectional approach to attain recognition and liberation. It was Kimberle Crenshaw, one of the foremost figures in Critical Race Theory who coined the term ‘intersectionality’ in her 1989 paper, ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex’, thereby laying solid foundations for feminist intersectional approaches in cultural discourses. Black feminism looks at female subjugation as a unique, interlocked and compounded experience underscored by discriminations based on class, race and gender. Black feminist narratives investigate the trauma and discrimination inscribed on female bodies and psyche, and explores the intersections of socio-political identities in an attempt to articulate the muted and mutilated black female subjectivity. The theological regression expressed in both Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Pemi Aguda’s *Ghostroots* are tied to black feminist thoughts as it resists the dual oppression of race and gender incorporated in the patriarchal Christian framework.

The chromatic symbolism of the color ‘blue’ in this paper is a metaphorical archive of generational pain that is visible on the body, yet also submerged in memory and silence. It represents melancholy, bruising, and memory of how pain is lived through generations. ‘Blue’ depicts the connection of communal pain transformed into endurance of the Black community. The history of humanity from the seventeenth and early eighteenth century is intense with racial discrimination and prejudice. Beginning with the categorization of a community with specific skin tone as ‘Yellow’, ‘Brown’ and ‘Black’, the ‘Coloured’ race, this ‘othering’ led to exponential exploitation and the Whites, who considered themselves superior, rewrote history of the world through their eyes of privilege. The exploitation further transformed into slavery and slave trade along with the indivisible aftermath, ‘racism’. The inhumane traditions of slavery can be traced throughout the world, especially towards people of African origin, and mainly due to their slave identity throughout history, they were divested of basic civil rights and robbed of essential human dignity. The tussle between man and power that can be traced back to the extensive colonisation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries stained the pages of history with the blood of the oppressed. Prolonged decades of subjugation made them voiceless and powerless. The history of the oppressed remained veiled until the emergence of black narratives. The conventional form of these narratives provides a voice to the marginalized whose

stories got obscured at the time of categorisation. Black narratives bring forth appalling tales of miseries endured by the blacks, and raw accounts of their struggles. Similarly, black narratives also include the writings of Afro-Americans who endured these struggles in a nation dominated by the ‘whites’ or the glorified superior race. These works were a way of processing, resisting and healing from the years of suppression and slavery. It was also a way to express pent up emotions of racial othering. Although Walker foregrounds her book with purple to depict the protagonist, Celie’s pain, the emotional climate of both texts articulates sorrow that transcends beyond individual experiences. Thus the colour ‘blue’ becomes an affective register of lived trauma.

Trauma transcends beyond emotional and sensory dimensions. It alters brain chemistry that often results in memory loss and other severe psychological disorders. It keeps the body always on high alert, looking out for the next threat. This change in the brain chemistry makes the body remember trauma even after years, and is often passed on to successive generations. In the selected texts, all the protagonists belong to oppressed communities and races. “What would the scar say if it was able to speak? If the body could tell what it doesn’t process and doesn’t forget?” (Aguda 42-43). Their bodies are thus archives of historical violence and bear the scars of erasure, both individual and communal. They inherit not just trauma but also a spiritual inheritance of prayers, strength and wisdom. For instance, in *Ghostroots*, Aguda writes, “These are stories they leave behind so that their children can move on without the weight of trauma they carry” (Aguda 14). It illustrates the burden of trauma that holds back progress.

The identity crisis faced by the black community as a whole can be understood in the light of the work of Stuart Hall. In his 1996 essay ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, Hall argued that cultural identity is about becoming and not solely relying on the matter of “being”, “belonging as much to the future, as it does to the past” (225). With this theory, Hall establishes that identity is not static or immutable; it undergoes constant change according to circumstances. This kind of transformation in the identity is evident in the life of the protagonist whose identity keeps changing as her life progresses. Hall describes this identity transformation as a sense of belonging, a feeling of oneness that the people experience while being in a group sharing common history and ancestry. Hall acknowledges the commonality or the oneness in the black diaspora and how this unity is always at the core.

The theological elements subtly elevate the art of storytelling in both the novel and the short story collection. Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* begins with the central character Celie left raped and battered with neither hope nor a companion to lend her a shoulder to cry on. The story begins with a threat, “you better not tell anyone other than God” (Walker 1). She, in a moment of despair, seeks asylum in God. Eventually, all the initial letters begin to be addressed to God because of this disparity, as a mechanism of survival. As Celie pleads to God asking help, there are antithetical references to God as being an accomplice in the crime of oppression. Alphonso, the rapist (and her stepfather)

describes the role of God, “God had fixed her” (Walker 9). This is a case of bitter irony, as the saviour merges with the abuser. And the traditional dichotomy is dissolved, though ironically. Adding to the irony, traditionally accepted values are subverted as when the “fixing” of Celie is referred to as reward for her virtuous life. Alphonso, her stepfather states that ‘God’ is the one who fixed her while implying that she is good at hard labour, the epitome of ‘good woman’ even if she is an oppressed being who lives to clean, cook, be abused and raped every day: “As long as she can spell G-o-d, the desolate identity becomes God, the emptiness of a companion in her life” (Walker 18).

The highlighted theological tradition in the novel is when Nettie visits the Olinka tribe. Nettie narrates the incident of the welcome ceremony and elaborates a story of a roofleaf plant, the leaves of which feature prominently in the welcoming ceremony. It was said that the people of Olinka tribe remained in the exact place as long as they can remember because that spot was good for them as they had all the resources there. Then the narration reaches a point where a greedy chief of the tribe took in most of the land for planting more cassava crops to make surplus trade with the white men. As his greed peaked, he bought up all the lands on which the roofleaf plant grew. The Olinka tribe used the leaves of this plant to make the roofs of their homes. Prior to this, they had an abundant amount of roofleaves, but the chief chopped off most of the plants. It was all positive until there was a great storm during the rainy season which destroyed all the roofs of the tribal huts. That is when people began to realize that there was no longer roofleaf anywhere but cassava. The story then narrates in detail the turbulent six months when they faced harsh weather which starved and made people sick. Consequently many died and most left the village in that unfortunate time. They forced the chief out of their village. When the rain stopped, they desperately ran to find the old roots of roofleaf and planted them again. It took five years for the roofleaf to reach the bare minimum of the Olinka tribe’s necessity. The day when all the huts had roofs again, the whole village celebrated and told the story of the roofleaf. From then, Roofleaf was considered a deity and everyone bowed to it. As Nettie states, “they know a roofleaf is not Jesus Christ, but then again, in its own humble way, it has protected them for years so is it not God? Nettie then narrates how they sat face to face with the Olinka God” (Walker 158-160). Nettie ends the story of roofleaf with this unconventional comparison. Since the dawn of time, humans have feared natural elements, elements that brought death. It was instinctive to worship these elements that were beyond human control. The concept of god as something that is beyond human control, and as one that helps to sustain life is ardently challenged, and deconstructed in this novel. This subversion continues as the novel progresses. In another letter, Nettie addresses generalised theological concepts as she states that the picture of Christ “generally looks good everywhere but not here in Ethiopia” (Walker 165). It might be a premonition that the Anglican Gods were powerless there as their whole village was about to get destroyed by the new development project. In the following letter, Nettie, as she confirms her identity as an aunt to Adam and Olivia,

Celie's children, she exclaims that " "God" has sent her to watch over, protect and nurture Celie's children" (Walker 139) settling shaken beliefs that one way or another, a positive thing happened.

When Nettie writes again, she addresses how the journey to Ethiopia changed her perception of Jesus drastically from the white man she had imagined all her life. She quotes that "even in the bible Jesus Christ is said to have had hair like lamb's wool and lamb's wool is not straight" (Walker 141). The subtle narrative of a black christian woman, whose entire life was buried in the belief of her God being a white man unlike her, the inherent inferiority towards the colonizer is an element of generational trauma here. She dares not to think of her God as Black until the day Nettie finds the pulpit saying "Ethiopia stretches forward her hands to God" (Walker 140). The realization of Ethiopia being in Africa and all Ethiopians being coloured indicated that people mentioned in the bible were not limited to white people. The reading of the bible was always misled by the pictures the white men provided. She writes that pictures illustrated in the bible were misinterpreted because all the people there were white, so people just think all the people in the bible were white too. When Celie gets to read the letters written by Nettie, the world she created for herself crumbles down as it triggers in her an identity crisis, but later she builds upon it and even shares this new knowledge with her love, Shug Avery, saying that "it is the white people's white bible" (Walker 201). In another instance, faith is used to test truth, for example "Nettie swears on the bible as she is asked to tell Corrine the truth" (Walker 190), as the bible is considered to be an absolute truth. Corrine uses it to make Nettie tell the truth. Towards the end of the novel, Celie begins the last letter addressing everything including God like "stars, trees, sky, people, everything and God" (Walker 292) marking the transformation of a vulnerable young woman to an independent woman at the end.

At the beginning of the novel, Celie's relationship with God is one of fear and estrangement; her desperate pleas mirror an indifferent God who allows her to suffer in distress without intervention. The patriarchal Christianity's initial framework of God, reflects the customs of faith imposed on Black people through colonial power and slavery. It is also used to justify both racism and sexism. The image of God slowly displays the societal belief that justifies the suffering, the double discrimination of Black women. A different perspective of faith that is not rooted in fear or submission but in love, empowerment, and self-acceptance is brought to Celie through Shug Avery, a free spirited woman. The transformed Celie challenges the benevolence of God, for how God could allow this suffering and ultimately rejects all the traditional religious structures as she embraces self worth and identity which can be construed as a radical departure from the institutional theological frameworks of society.

Similarly, in the short stories of Pemi Aguda the dominant ideologies that prevail through the span of twelve short stories address identity crisis and theological regression. In the first short story 'Manifest', the unnamed protagonist begins to develop pimples on her smooth face that she used to flaunt once, and this makes her resemble her grandmother, Agnes. Her mother, who is terrified of

Agnes, beats her daughter with bible upon seeing those pimples asking whether Agnes has possessed her daughter. The phantom experiences of the story begin with the appearance of the pimples which tend to disappear and reappear in increased numbers throughout the story. Later, the protagonist begins to exhibit belligerent tendencies and her mother begins to pray, as day by day, the protagonist was behaving more like Agnes, who was believed to be inherently evil. The image of God set in 'Manifest' is someone powerful enough to do miracles. Hence, the mother of the protagonist uses God's name to ward off Agnes at the beginning. Later as the story advances, there are hints about the existence of holy places such as shrines, but the protagonist later narrates how "there is evil all around now" (Aguda 23), which suggests that the powerful deity that they once believed in fails to protect them, highlighting a theological regression. At the climax, the protagonist loses herself as she becomes Agnes and commits murders. In Aguda's fourth short story 'The Hollow', the imagery presented of the house is analogous to 'the Roofleaf' in Walker's *The Color Purple*. The house takes in the role of a protector and a punisher in this story. The protagonist, Arit, believes that "buildings carry expressions of history" (Aguda 51-52). She is assigned to take measurements for renovation of Madam Oni's house. Arit finds the house ugly and she is unable to understand the logic of its layout at the beginning of the story. As she begins her work, the narration opens at a point in the past in Arit's life where her uncle tells her that only when she finds the right answer to questions like "what is a house and its purpose and what makes a house beautiful" (Aguda 50), she'll be given the opportunity to draw for her clients. Initially it is indicated that as Arit's parents were busy managing work, it was her uncle who used to watch her. The story also echoes that at a period of time, this uncle took advantage of fourteen year old Arit. He used to say to her that "what happens in the house should stay in the house" (Aguda 58) and further that "a vision's material realisation is architecture and she used to think why it doesn't work the other way around, like why the collapse couldn't be the material realisation of want" (Aguda 61). Towards the end, Arit receives news from her parents that her uncle had passed away in an unfortunate incident. His house just folded and collapsed while trapping him inside. Here, the house addresses Arit's wish. While Arit is working on the new project, the plot narrates the incidents of women who used to live in Madam Oni's house - how one woman with a son found shelter in that house from her abusive husband and how the house protected both the child and the mother. Later, when the son grows up and weds, the mother shares the experiences with her daughter-in-law. When the mother passes away, her son starts abusing his wife and the house gets him trapped within the house. Madam Oni tells Arit that "every angle, every corner in that house reminds her of her past and that's why she wants it renovated" (Aguda 62-63). Arit refuses this request by stating that as a collapsed house can't be undone, there's no fixing for this. The story ends in a narrative complexity of how a house is everything, "a pot, a bag, a prison, a weight, a child" (Aguda 63).

Aguda's story of '24, Alhaji Williams Street' explores how a lively, bustling street gets tormented by a mysterious plague that takes lives and questions every belief. The story begins with the arrival of a mysterious fever at the fourth house, while the rest of the street braces for the fever by taking survival measures. All the deaths are mourned by the entire street. Initially the fever only took the lives of young boys within a family, so the mothers in this street gathered together frequently to discuss and try everything from medicine to superstitions to prevent these deaths. As each death happens, the tension in the street builds up, the street begins to change – the neighbourhood children play no more in the street turning it desolate, the entrance to the protagonist's home is covered in the sacrificial blood of chicken, a ritual his mother suggests. The deaths initially believed to take only the young boys change when Mrs. Fafunwa finds her two daughters dead with knives in their chests. These were the only deaths the entire neighbourhood did not mourn, as Fafunwa always used to say grace to God that she had daughters not sons whenever a young boy died. Later, at the end of the story the protagonist's aunt suggests a fake burial to let the protagonist survive the ordeal. She introduces a man who says that one among the boys' burial was make-believe and he is still alive in an unknown place. This revelation breaks the protagonist's mother's trust towards the neighbourhood who initially had inhibitions to betray her neighbours. The story ends with the protagonist being shut in a coffin-like box as darkness engraves his vision. Every death results in anxiety, fear and the failure of institutionalised doctrines that they used to follow which is abandoned towards the end. In Aguda's stories theological regression is a deliberate unlearning of colonial and Western notions of God. It helps to relearn morality, and in healing. The characters of the short story collection confront institutional dogma and address forces that are beyond the western narratives, forces that are older, mysterious and imbibed to African spiritual roots. Spiritual metanoia, a concept of profound change of mind, or consciousness, traditionally denotes spiritual conversion, but in Walker's and Aguda's works it extends beyond religious repentance. It signifies a radical reorientation of selfhood, belief, and embodied existence that marks the shift from internalized oppression to conscious reclamation.

Collective trauma, the shared experience of extreme suffering is often the consequence of a catastrophe such as war, slavery or racism. The unhealed collective trauma, if not dealt with, results in generational trauma affecting psyche and identity. Prominent theorists such as Michelle Balaev assert that collective trauma influences both the social and psychological dimensions of a community. It creates a cycle of inherited suffering and resilience. The characters of Walker and Aguda serve as templates to understand the dynamics of oppression founded on race and gender. The legacy of slavery and racism is pervasive in Walker's *The Color Purple*. The history of enslavement of the black people in the United States is the backdrop for the protagonists in the novel. The impact of collective trauma can be seen in Celie, as she endures her experiences of sexual abuse and disempowerment, the vicious cycle of being a victim for the power structures of the society. The majority of the female characters

that are of black origin portray the legacy of slavery and exploitation of both physique and psyche. For example, Celie's daughter-in-law, Sofia's refusal to accept the white society's attitude and patriarchal mistreatment depicts a resistance towards the history of oppression that is inherited. Similarly, Aguda's *Ghostroots* is set in the rich heritage of Lagos, Nigeria, during the period of post South Sudan Civil war. The South Sudan Civil war is one of the longest civil wars to be ever recorded, lasting over a period of twenty two years. The characters in the short story collection display symptoms of collective trauma suffered during the civil war. For instance, the narrator comments about "what the Nigerian parents say about their own parents to the next generation" (Aguda 8) or where it mentions "If there was a poll, majority would be ignorant of the histories, religions and curses left behind" (Aguda 8). Similarly, there are hints of poverty because of war as the unnamed protagonist's father in 'Manifest' "hates when the protagonist takes weevils out of the beans because he feels that they enhance the flavour of the dish" (Aguda 8).

According to Carl Jung's theory of the Collective Unconscious, all humanity shares the unconscious mind which contains archetype symbols and images inherited from generations, these shape the cultural and psychological behaviour of a group or community. "White people celebrate their independence from England on July 4th, most black folks don't have to work and can spend the day celebrating with each other" (Walker 294). The only day off work is the Independence day, July 4th, but black communities are still dominated and abused in the name of racism in the United States, so they use this day to celebrate themselves, which is a powerful representation of collective trauma. Another significant event of collective trauma is endured by the Olinka tribe when the white men destroy their homes to build roads. Initially they think it is for their benefit and they treat the workers as guests, giving them food and drinks but later when they betray them, the whole community suffers extreme consequences. "When the village is due for the rubber trees to be planted, the Olinka hunting territory gets destroyed" (Walker 179). The collective unconscious of the Afro-Americans bears the scars of suffering and resilience passed on by centuries of slavery and oppression.

In addition to collective trauma, both works foreground another significant realm of trauma studies that is gender trauma founded on gender oppression, especially of Black women: "How men are often so childish, but what's more dangerous, is a grown child" (Walker 172). It is believed that Olinka men have the highest authority and a woman's life and death is decided by her husband, he can even have as many wives as he wants and the women have to share their husband. Forcibly taking an individual's complete authority and giving it to another person is oppression. Though not all violence leads to trauma, the origin of trauma can be traced back to a violent event. "She has the same eyes like me, the eyes that have seen everything and are pondering" (Walker 14). This could imply a silent recollection of a traumatic memory as Celie looks upon the eyes of her daughter and she says she sees everything that Celie has seen, an indication of gender trauma passed on to the next generation: "Most

of the time, men look the same to me” (Walker 15). On account of her being a victim to systemic abuse and rape, Celie is indifferent to men, they all feel like her abusers and she repels them. “When a woman marries into a family, she is demanded to keep the house and family clean” (Walker 15). According to Celie’s sister in law, it is a woman’s duty to keep her house and family clean and fed. Celie’s initial submission to power as a voiceless victim is portrayed through this statement “I don't say anything because as she thinks of Nettie who fought, ran away and ended up being dead. So if I don't fight and stay where I'm told to stay at least I'll be alive” (Walker 22). She adds that being alive is all that matters. The elements of gendered trauma in the novel are not only subjected to women but also men. The character of Harpo is a case in point, initially he is in love with his wife and wants to support her with everything but his childhood and family views are shaped by seeing his father beating his mother; the role of a man ingrained in Harpo’s mind is that of a figure strong enough to beat his wife. The idea of not being masculine enough makes Harpo insecure, which subsequently leads to a rift between him and his wife. The suppressed sexuality is also poignant in the novel. In her early life, Celie is violated and abused, her ignored desires and aversion to men makes her find comfort and solace in women like Shug Avery. In Aguda’s narratives, gendered trauma is not only personal but historical. In ‘Breastmilk’, Aguda writes about a new mother’s emotional dilemma when she is unable to produce breastmilk. The young mother claims how “the only bond that connects a baby to the mother is missing as her breasts are empty” (Aguda 30-31). The patriarchal norms on gender are visible when her mother-in-law comments about how “she doesn’t understand why her son is helping around in the house and shares financial decisions with his wife. She believes these are acts of women and is not very pleased with this attitude” (Aguda 30-31). The story later reveals her husband’s cheating and how emotionally tormented she is as she was raised by a mother who resisted patriarchal suppression and fought for the rights of women while she, although angry, forgives her husband. She feels ashamed for being so meek and tamed. She questions why there was no ounce of her mother’s spirit in her, who screamed “We carry this society, so don’t you dare belittle the women of the society” when the Governor, Mr. Olusegun Adetula asks her “to leave politics to men” (Aguda 34). The emotional turmoil also creates an emotional distance between her and the new born son as she believes “a son would grow up to be a man, a man who will hurt others no matter how well he is raised, even the best man is only a man, like how her husband has shown her” (Aguda 29-30)

In Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), she states that when Freud addresses trauma, he describes a pattern of suffering that is a peculiar way in which the events repeat, this pattern is what he later calls as ‘repetition compulsion’. The unconscious ways to repeat past trauma is an attempt to gain control over it. This repetition compulsion is seen throughout the short stories of Aguda as the characters break away from patriarchal institutions and embrace spiritual ecology while they strive for liberation. Trauma and pain extend beyond emotional

and perceptual dimensions while incorporating social, cultural and historical elements. Alice Walker and Pemi Aguda through their works reimagine Black and African femininity as powerful, rooted, and regenerative breaking away from Western paradigms and institutionalised doctrines. Their works offer a profound exploration of collective trauma, gender anxieties, and theological questions which are integral to comprehending the complexity of multifaceted human expressions and identities by Black women in a racist and patriarchal societal structure. Spiritual metanoia, in both the selected texts acts as a bridge between collective trauma and reclaimed agency within the framework of trauma and Black feminism. Based on the theories of trauma and gender, this paper has sought to highlight the portrayal of ways in which trauma is inherited from generations and how they in turn influence gender constructions. The paper has illuminated the theological ramifications within the novel to comprehend the importance of spiritual transformation in reclamation of self-identity. The oppression faced by the characters in both the works is deeply personal and is part of a collective struggle of Black women throughout history. It depicts intricately how trauma, gender and spirituality are inextricably linked. It also portrays how Black women, despite the historical oppression and suffering, have always found ways to resist, transform and heal. By engaging in these vital cultural texts with the aid of theories of collective trauma and gender, it brings forth a deeper understanding of the resilience and strength of Black womanhood. It also portrays a vision of hope, survival and liberation that transcends beyond the horizons of race, gender, and religion.

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